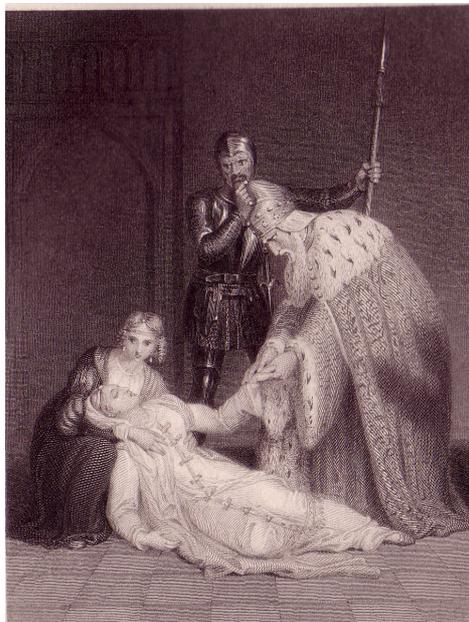


**FALIERO'S WIFE**  
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. . . he taught us a great deal which it is desirable and agreeable to know . . . his authority is worth quoting in questions of fact and points of detail. – E.H.Coleridge.<sup>1</sup>

Shakspeare, in all his master creations, has not conceived a more noble soul than that of Angiolina... – Teresa Guiccioli.<sup>2</sup>

Will it not be ranked as your best? I think so – It requires to be almost learned by heart to feel it's merits. – Douglas Kinnaird, May 4, 1821, on seeing *Marino Faliero* for the second time.<sup>3</sup>



The Latin women of my original title ('Byron's Latin women') are the women in the dramas Byron wrote when he was in Italy in the 1820s. The more varied general group of Latin women in his work would include the feisty Laura, who forms a sort of bridge between the thoughtful quiet women of the plays and the sexy women of Seville and the seraglio in *Don Juan*. Laura too is a celebration of

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**My thanks to Bernard Beatty who thought my defense of Angiolina was worth a paper.**

**1:** '. . . the one point on which all might agree has been overlooked, namely, the fact that he taught us a great deal which it is desirable and agreeable to know . . . he read widely and studied diligently, in order to prepare himself for an outpouring of verse, and . . . his authority is worth quoting in questions of fact and points of detail.' E.H.Coleridge, *The Works of Lord Byron: Poetry*, Volume IV, 1901.

**2:** 'Shakespeare, in all his master creations, has not conceived a more noble soul than that of Angiolina, or a more tender one than Marianna's or even one more heroic than Myrrha's' (Teresa Guiccioli, *My Recollections of Lord Byron and Those of Eye-Witnesses of His Life* (1869). <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/25977/25977-h/25977-h.htm> [18. 5. 2011]

**3:** Peter Cochran, ed. *Byron's Letters to Douglas Kinnaird and Lord Kinnaird*, p.117. <<http://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/byron-and-kinnaird-1814-to-18212.pdf>>[1. 6. 2011].

a Latin married woman, but my paper is not about Byron's 'Latin Married women.' It is about some women in the dramas who happen to be married, a limited and useful category. It does not include Myrrha (*Sardanapalus*) or Olimpia (*The Deformed Transformed*), who are admirable but made mildly ridiculous – one has a mixed response to Myrrha, directing battle traffic from a dining room, or to Olimpia, standing on an altar and wielding a crucifix to defend herself against gang rape by enemy soldiers. The married women in the plays are of another sort. They are unwaveringly loyal wives of the protagonists, gentle, independent-minded, never abjectly submissive, true to their beliefs, suffering but not swayed by the tempests their husbands stir up. Angiolina and Marianna foresee that they will be widowed and live in the shadow of the knowledge that their men will destroy them, yet none of these Latin women<sup>4</sup> thinks like a victim, or out of sense of 'I.' Their husbands are preoccupied in many ways but not with other women. Byron neither mocks his Latin women, as he mocks Julia in *Don Juan*, nor does he slather them in sweetness.

Byron rarely used the word 'woman' before 1816. After 1816, he used it most frequently in his plays,<sup>5</sup> suggesting a new preoccupation in what for him was a new form. Yet his dramatic women are not discussed much.<sup>6</sup> What is their place in the dramas? Why are they ignored? Angiolina in *Marino Faliero* and Josephine in *Werner*, the alpha and omega of the women in these plays, may show us why, but in the twenty minutes allowed to us, we only have time for Angiolina, the first of Byron's Latin women, and – I will argue – a new literary type.<sup>7</sup>

Jealous and angry men like Marino Faliero abound in literature, but who is like Angiolina?<sup>8</sup> We can see what she is not. She is obviously not Desdemona, despite their similar stories (unequal marriage, unmerited slander). We cannot believe Desdemona when she asks Emilia in surprise if married women really have lovers because we've heard her sexual banter with Iago. Byron's Angiolina is more consistent and convincing. Neither haughty, naïve, nor prurient about women who sleep around, 'O is that so?' she implies through her disinterested replies to her friend Marianna, and the conversation is over. Her incurious reaction explains why Steno's graffiti – that she is kept by other men – is false. Angiolina is a faithful wife honoured by her husband, unlike poor Desdemona who is pulverized by all that male gossip.<sup>9</sup> Byron is kinder to Angiolina – his kindness to women is far too underrated. Except for Steno, he has no one badmouth her, and he makes her husband trust her absolutely. He altered the terms of the marital tragedy, changing it from a domestic tragedy into a public one sparked off by a public figure (Steno) invading the Falieros' private world. The form of his play reverses the trajectory of Othello, moving from the private to the public, whereas Othello leaves the public world of war and politics to end in the entirely narrow and private space of the marriage bed.

Byron decided against hinging his play on Faliero's jealousy because there was 'no foundation for this in historical record,' yet as he says in the Preface, for four years he had thought of focusing on jealousy. Had he done so, it would have made Angiolina the cornerstone of the drama.<sup>10</sup> When he

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**4:** Not even Myrrha and Olimpia.

**5:** He also used it in *The Island*, *Beppo*, and *Don Juan*. Before 1816, it's found only in the Tales. See *A Concordance to the Poetry of Byron*, ed. Ione Dodson Young (1965; rpt. Texas: Best Printing Company, 1975)

**6:** Peter Cochran's website places Byron's works under many useful headings but he has none for women. In *Byron and Women [and Men]*, ed. Peter Cochran, there is no mention of Angiolina, or of Josephine. E.H. Coleridge does not mention Angiolina in his introduction to *Marino Faliero*.

**7:** Critics find Angiolina cold and narrow-minded. Martin Corbett, otherwise sympathetic to her, says she cannot understand her husband's idealism (see Martin Corbett, *Byron and Tragedy* (Macmillan, 1988). For Angiolina as conservative, see Anne Barton, "A Light to Lesson Ages": *Byron's Political Plays*, in *Byron: A Symposium*, ed. John D. Jump (London: Macmillan, 1975), 138-62, 148-9.

**8:** Portia? 'Angiolina cannot play Portia to Faliero's Brutus. . .' (Barton, op. cit., 148).

**9:** 'Your quotation from Shaks – humph – I believe that is applied by Othello to his wife – who by the way was innocent – the Moor made a mistake. . .' (BLJ V 160-3).

**10:** 'It is now four years that I have meditated this work . . . and was rather disposed to made it turn on jealousy in Faliero,' besides, he said, 'jealousy is an exhausted passion in the drama' (Preface, *Marino Faliero*).

finally wrote *Marino Faliero*, he retained Angiolina's importance: 'The first motive [for the Doge's conspiracy] was the gross affront of the words written by Michael Steno' he said in the Preface.<sup>11</sup> Byron makes Angiolina not just good; he makes her loyal to her husband in way that the Doge is wholly aware of it, so that he need not waste his time with jealousy (been there done that / who could possibly write another jealousy play after Shakespeare anyway).

Donizetti missed this point in his 1835 opera, *Marin Faliero*, which he based on Byron's play, turning the bare bones of the personal story into a love triangle. The dogaressa – Donizetti called her Elena<sup>12</sup> – loves Faliero's friend Fernando; Faliero is unhappy at the light punishments given to Steno for his repeated insults to Elena, but it is Fernando who fights Steno to defend her honour; the Doge joins the conspiracy not because Elena is abused but because Steno kills Fernando. In his more historical drama, Byron retained Faliero's hasty temper to make the better dramatic point—Steno's first insult to Angiolina makes Faliero join the conspiracy.

The problem is that if Angiolina is so important, why do people like us not talk about her? After all, the play's premise is that people talk about her, nastily like Steno, or in admiration of this 'faultless,' young, beautiful, pure, and 'worthy daughter of Loredano.'<sup>13</sup> Admittedly, this is to talk about her, to see her from the outside like the historians,<sup>14</sup> whereas Byron did something different. But is any part of his representation of Angiolina responsible for the critical silence about her?

Consider the evidence. The historical Steno did not insult the 'Dogaressa' herself, for, as Byron said in his Preface, 'against [her] fame not the slightest insinuation appears.' However, he did not say explicitly that he had changed the story to make Steno insult only Angiolina, and that just once. By not underlining the change, he inadvertently implied that it was unimportant.<sup>15</sup> Another striking thing he did in the Preface was to introduce Angiolina first through a pronoun, and only then by name, as if pushing her away yet drawing attention to her.<sup>16</sup> Finally, he brought her into the play only after an entire Act devoted to Marino Faliero as Doge and incipient conspirator. In Act I, she is spoken about as the object of Steno's insult, no more. We hear nothing of what she is like. It would be easy and not entirely wrong to see this delayed introduction as an image of her status (women and private life in second place). I believe, however, that delayed appearance is a dramatic principle in *Marino Faliero* and *Werner*. Here, for example, we move from the antechamber and relatively unimportant characters of the opening of Act I, to the inner room and Angiolina in Act II, from the less to the more important dramatic focus, which in itself suggests that Angiolina is the foundation

**11:** My emphasis. It allowed him to look at something else, such as the barely stressed elements of *Othello* which he was free to lengthen, shorten, turn into the main theme, or create another counterpoint as the jazz saxophonist John Coltrane might have done had *Othello* been a pop song.

**12:** For the significance of naming in Byron's plays, see my *Byron's Drama: A Critical Study*, unpublished PhD thesis (Delhi: University of Delhi, 1994), especially Chapter 6.

**13:** She is 'in the ripest bloom / Of womanhood,' say Marianna and Faliero; Faliero has pride in her 'conduct;' she has his 'friendship and faith,' even though Marianna thinks she has 'strange thoughts for a Patrician dame.' *Marino Faliero* II i 75, 31, 275, 279, 332-3, 362-4.

**14:** Dr. Moore, whom Byron quotes in his Preface to the play as misrepresenting Faliero, felt this was too flimsy a reason for a Doge's treacherous rage. Of all that Byron had read about Faliero and his wife, this annoyed him the most. He appended a portion of *A View of the Society and Manners in Italy* by John Moore, M.D., 1781, to the play. In i. 144-152, ' "The 'stale jest' is thus worded: "This lady imagined she had been affronted by a young Venetian nobleman at a public ball, and she complained bitterly ... to her husband. The old Doge, who had all the desire imaginable to please his wife, determined, in this matter, at least, to give her ample satisfaction"' ( *The Works of Lord Byron*, ed. E.H.Coleridge, vol. IV (London: John Murray, 1901). <[http://www.gutenberg.org/files/20158/20158-h/20158-h.htm#Footnote\\_368](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/20158/20158-h/20158-h.htm#Footnote_368)> [15. 8. 2011].

**15:** In his 1887 drama, Swinburne has Steno insult the women of the court and annoy Lioni who doesn't want anything to do with him, but Steno is undeterred. Swinburne kept to the sources, weakening the causality between the insult to Angiolina and the Doge's anger. Byron on the other hand strengthened it by removing Steno's interest in the Dogaressa's 'damsels' (Byron's word, in the Preface to *Marino Faliero*).

**16:** 'The attentions of Steno appear to have been directed towards one of her damsels . . .' (my emphasis).

of this play. Byron changed her from a historical cause into a woman by showing her relationship with her 82-year-old husband, and this is what we witness in Act II.<sup>17</sup>

I am interested in something that is less talked about than Byron's marriage and mistresses – in how he went beyond platitudes in his celebration of married women in the plays.<sup>18</sup> He actually invented Angiolina, transforming the nameless dogaressa of the sources into a woman worthy of being 'praised for her beauty and remarked for her youth.'<sup>19</sup> 'Youth and beauty' is so obviously a formula, and could have sunk Angiolina, but formulae and clichés seemed to fire Byron's imaginative energy. He revitalized this one when he imagined Angiolina into life as a woman, making her the still centre of turbulent Venice, 'this scorpion-nest of vice,' Faliero calls it in relation to Angiolina's vulnerable purity.<sup>20</sup>

How did Byron do it? We are used to his subversions of a commonplace but not perhaps this one. Here is a marriage between a very old man and a young attractive woman which Byron presents not as unnatural, but filled with grace, love, and a peculiar dignity. It is not what readers of Byron then or now might expect.

In the first of Angiolina's three scenes (Act II, Scene i), she and her friend Marianna (another Byron invention)<sup>21</sup> discuss love and marriage, the first of many such discussions in *Marino Faliero* and *Werner*. Angiolina's dying father had suggested that his friend Marino Faliero marry her, but she says that had she not loved Faliero, she would have refused him. She chose to marry for love. Josephine says something similar in *Werner*, in the same confident but not aggressive tone. Sharing personal truths about her marriage without exaggerated sentiment or aggression, Angiolina is poised enough to hold back as Marianna becomes inquisitive.<sup>22</sup> When Marianna says that 'assuredly' Faliero won't suspect her on the basis of Steno's graffiti, she is astounded: 'Suspect me?' In this marriage, neither partner suspects the other of disloyalty. Angiolina knows that Faliero tends to be emotionally obsessive – revenge lingers within him – but she loves him nevertheless, for he is 'noble / Brave, generous;' she also knows that she 'alone [has] power upon his troubled spirit.'<sup>23</sup>

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**17:** Also in *Werner*, where Ida is introduced via the conversation of the socially unimportant, then Ulric and his companion in crime, Rudolph. We then see her in a public pageant, and only then are she and Josephine alone together, and she confesses that she fears Ulric: 'A cold comes o'er his blue eyes suddenly / Yet he says nothing' (V i 53-4). She is not being naïve. They have political differences: Ulric likes Tilly, whom Ida thinks is a 'monster' (IV i 273). She prefers the Protestant Swedish Gustavus. The Venetian political system has a comparable annular structure, with its inmost circle of the Ten, surrounded by the Forty, then other patricians, their wives, and the populace outside the gates when the Doge is beheaded.

**18:** All the unmarried women in the drama are unnatural in some way. Astarte is Manfred's sister and a ghost; like Seth's daughters she hovers between the human and the non-human (or metaphoric, as I think of it), who are protagonists rather than appendages of the male protagonists – thus not in my present purview. The other two unmarried women are a concubine and kept woman: Myrrha, whose name suggests death, and Olympia in *The Deformed Transformed*, who is 'the Pope's niece.' Both are admirable in that Myrrha urges soldiers to fight, and Olympia defends herself against gang rape by an invading army, but Byron makes them slightly absurd as well. Myrrha stands in the dining room during battle, talking non-stop, directing traffic as soldiers rush in and out; Olympia stands on an altar using a cross as a weapon while the 1527 Sack of Rome swirls about her. Both women are most absurd when they are literally in the middle of battle. Is Byron implying that women warriors are absurd? That battle and war are male preserves? Possibly. But in *Don Juan*, women in battle are the slaughtered Muslims and Leila. They are not absurd but they are extremely vulnerable.

**19:** Preface.

**20:** *Marino Faliero* II i 300.

**21:** The sources only mention the Dogaressa's ladies, not a friend. The two parts of the scene merge yet remain distinct, like episodes in a Greek drama.

**22:** Referring to *Marino Faliero* II i 26-9, Anne Barton says ' . . . Angiolina's rebuke causes ice crystals to form in the room' (Barton, op. cit., 148). I don't agree.

**23:** *Marino Faliero* II i 99-100; 24-5.

She doesn't gloat about this as power over him. Byron's Latin women are loving partners in the marriage, not ego-driven competitors.<sup>24</sup>

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**24:** Marianna. And do you love him?

Angiolina. I love all noble qualities which merit  
Love, and I loved my father, who first taught me  
To single out what we should love in others,  
And to subdue all tendency to lend  
The best and purest feelings of our nature  
To baser passions. He bestowed my hand  
Upon Faliero: he had known him noble,  
Brave, generous; rich in all the qualities  
Of soldier, citizen, and friend; in all  
Such have I found him as my father said.

. . . .

Doge. Your father was my friend. . .  
. . . when, oppressed  
With his last malady, he willed our union,  
It was not to repay me, long repaid  
Before by his great loyalty in friendship;  
His object was to place your orphan beauty  
In honourable safety from the perils,  
Which, in this scorpion nest of vice, assail  
A lonely and undowered maid. I did not  
Think with him, but would not oppose the thought  
Which soothed his death-bed.  
(*Marino Faliero* II i 92-101; 292-303)

And

Angiolina. I am too well avenged, for you still love me,  
And trust, and honour me; and all men know  
That you are just, and I am true: what more  
Could I require, or you command?  
(*Marino Faliero* II i 281-4)

And again

Angiolina. You're ever kind to me.  
I have nothing to desire, or to request,  
Except to see you oftener and calmer.  
Doge. Calmer?

Angiolina. . . . there is something at your heart  
More than the mere discharge of public duties,

. . . .

Your feelings now are of a different kind;  
Something has stung your pride, not patriotism.

. . . .

Doge. I had the pride of honour, of your honour,  
Deep at my heart—But let us change the theme.  
Angiolina. Ah no!—As I have ever shared your kindness  
In all things else, let me not be shut out  
From your distress: were it of public import,  
You know I never sought, would never seek  
To win a word from you; but feeling now  
Your grief is private, it belongs to me  
To lighten or divide it. Since the day

Angiolina and Faliero talk about love and marriage with a curious directness and a moving practicality, as if Byron had taken the world and rejuvenated the language of love with it. Faliero says that he had wanted to absolve this ‘lonely and undower’d’ maid from her death bed promise to her father; nor did he marry her out of male solidarity (I gave my friend my word, he could have said). At the same time, like her father, ‘His object was to place her orphan beauty / In honourable safety.’<sup>25</sup> She speaks with loving gratitude of this:

I have not forgotten  
The nobleness with which you bade me speak  
If my young heart held any preference  
Which would have made me happier; nor your offer  
To make my dowry equal to the rank  
Of aught in Venice, and forego all claim  
My father’s last injunction gave you.<sup>26</sup>

Her generosity of thought is matched by the long vowels which require slow, careful articulation and attention to meaning, enfolding Angiolina in their quiet unforced authority.<sup>27</sup> The scene does not further the action. It sets out views about love and marriage through which we understand something of Angiolina’s poise.

But then Faliero wants to fight the Patricians, while Angiolina thinks the ‘absurd lampoon’ of a ‘false and flippant libeller’ isn’t worth it.<sup>28</sup> The first sign that their views have begun to diverge is in the quality of their speech. Byron deliberately contrasts Marino Faliero’s ranting speeches about how he has been repeatedly insulted by the Ten with Angiolina’s relative serenity. It is more than a local distinction.<sup>29</sup> Her position as the calm centre of the play became a significant aspect of Byron’s Latin women. Composed women at the heart of the action would recur in his drama, their demeanor linked ever more clearly with innocence, and sometimes with godliness, as in the case of Aurora at the heart of the comic drama in Norman Abbey. The Abbot’s remarkable simile in *Werner*, ‘calm as innocence,’ could well describe Angiolina whose ‘calm as innocence’ is evident in her tone.<sup>30</sup>

When foolish Steno’s ribaldry detected  
Unfixed your quiet, you are greatly changed,  
And I would soothe you back to what you were.  
(*Marino Faliero* II i 172-4, 189-90, 204)

In *Werner*, we have this:  
Josephine. Whate’er thou mightest have been, to me thou art  
What no state high or low can ever change,  
My heart’s first choice;—which chose thee, knowing neither  
Thy birth, thy hopes, thy pride; nought, save thy sorrows:  
While they last, let me comfort or divide them:  
When they end—let mine end with them, or thee!  
(*Werner* I i 143-7)

**25:** *Marino Faliero* I i 301, 298-9.

**26:** *Marino Faliero* II i 303-9.

**27:** Compare Othello who doesn’t know the first thing about being in love beyond gushing.

**28:** *Marino Faliero* II i 241, 240.

**29:** He does not pause for a response, nor does he seem to listen to anyone but himself, which makes it really tough to like him. But that is probably irrelevant. He gives no details about how exactly he has been slighted by the Patricians. We are expected to be moved by his generalizations as he builds up his rage against the Ten whose light sentence for Steno is the last straw. Byron put details of Faliero’s achievements in the appendix, but he doesn’t say anywhere that Faliero, who fought Zara in his 70s, had been Doge for only a year when the Steno episode occurred. For a man to be this resentful in so short a time makes him seem unfit to rule.

**30:** *Werner* IV i 535.

Byron had pondered over unruffled dramatic language since at least 1815, when he advised Maturin to lower the hysterical pitch of his play *Bertram*.<sup>31</sup> The ‘exaggerated nonsense’ of his own ‘younger productions’ had shown how easy it was to “‘to rant as well as thou,’” he told Murray, but the ‘avoidance of rant’ in his plays was ‘intentional.’<sup>32</sup> Avoidance, not obliteration. His characters do rant sometimes. In *The Deformed Transformed*, for example, Arnold rants about Homeric heroes while Caesar is calmer. Here’s a rule of thumb: The good guys in Byron’s drama speak in measured tones; others rant. By this rule, Angiolina is among the ‘noble,’ as Teresa Guiccioli called her.

A linked rule: Those who say bad things about women in Byron’s plays may be bad guys. Lioni, for instance, implicitly distinguishes between the women at the revel he has just left and Angiolina, who, though sharply aware of her youth is unaware of her beauty. Her heart is in her ‘many, / But never difficult’ duties, whereas the women at the revel are either old harridans trying to look young, or bridal beauties sallow-cheeked before their time.<sup>33</sup> The old women paint themselves; the young don’t celebrate the beauty their youth confers on them, and they age prematurely because of their life-style. Both kinds of women are unnatural.<sup>34</sup> There is nothing lovely in Lioni’s image of women, no honour for them in his heart, whereas Byron contrasts two kinds of women (faithful and unfaithful), and two attitudes to them (loyalty and honour, or cynical dismissal).<sup>35</sup>

The merging of the public and private is vividly apparent in Act V. Imagine the scene. Angiolina enters the Council chamber filled with the men who have condemned her to widowhood. Among them is the man who insulted her, causing her husband’s imminent death (‘within an hour’). How will she conduct herself in this deeply humiliating situation? Though faint, she refuses a chair: ‘I sit not / In presence of my prince and of my husband, / While he is on his feet.’<sup>36</sup> The Ten want her to ask him whether he is guilty, which she does, but more than that, she upholds his choice of

**31:** If only ‘for the sake of the physical powers of the actor’ (BLJ IV 336). Except for saying that in *Sardanapalus* and *The Two Foscari* he had ‘broken down the poetry as nearly as [he] could to common language,’ he did not often comment on the language of his drama (BLJ VIII 152). Maturin’s tragedy was *Bertram*, which on the recommendation of Scott and Byron was produced at Drury Lane in May, 1816, with great success’ (footnote, BLJ IV 336). It opened on 9 May, and ran for 22 days, with Edmund Kean as Bertram. See <<http://charles-maturin.co.tv/>> [18. 5. 2011].

**32:** To Murray in 1821 (BLJ VIII 218).

**33:** *Marino Faliero* II i 90.

**34:** In *Werner*, Stralenheim speaks slightly about Josephine and worse still, about her marriage. *Werner* II ii 396-8, 399.

**35:** Like an older Steno? Lioni expresses an apparently simple contrast between the ‘goodly night [in which] the cloudy wind from the east has died, when ‘the broad moon hath brightened’ and the revels he has just left, in which there was nothing beautiful. He speaks of a generalized Age and Youth but is obviously remembering women:

...Age essaying to recall the past,  
After long striving for the hues of youth  
At the sad labour of the toilet . . . .

Prank’d forth in all the pride of ornament. (*Marino Faliero* IV i 35-9).

**35:** If Byron used the word *Prank’d* in all its senses of adornment, malicious mischief, and to set in order, he only made Lioni a confused man. The one thing clear about Lioni is that he images the world’s beauty in terms of not just women but actual or potential young brides (youth’s ‘bridal beauty’). Is he thinking of Angiolina? We don’t know, but Byron may have. Lioni links together youth, beauty, the Orient, all of which make him ill: beauty that is ‘An India in itself’ makes him ‘giddy’ ‘as the parched [pilgrim] on Arab sands’ (IV i 56, 64-6). But this is not real ‘othering’ for Venetian architecture is oriental (‘porphyry pillars ... / ... architecture . . . Which point in Egypt’s plains to times that / Have no other record’ [IV i 78, 84-6].) The obvious binary opposites here are nature and men, noise and quiet, the present and the imminent future. Lioni is equally derogatory of women in conversation. When Bertram advises him to stay indoors in view of the conspiracy, Lioni wonders why he must ‘keep the house / Like a sick girl’ (*Marino Faliero* IV i 255-6). It was the only time in his poetry that Byron used the analogy of a ‘sick girl’ for an ‘unmanly’ man, so that we may assume it didn’t come out of a habit of mind but was created for Lioni.

**36:** *Marino Faliero* V i 337-9.

action without self-pity, even though its consequence will leave her bereft. She tells her husband, passionately:

I would have sued to them, have prayed to them,  
Have begg'd as famish'd mendicants for bread,  
Have wept as they will cry unto their God  
For mercy, and be answer'd as they answer,-  
Had it been fitting for thy name or mine.<sup>37</sup>

A characteristic of Byron's drama is to clarify convoluted thought with sudden short bursts of speech, like the one between Angiolina and Benintende, Chief of the Council of Ten. The Ten have gone on about how they had to change the law because of extenuating circumstances, but in fact they changed it to legalize their illegal actions. Angiolina cuts through with 'Is he condemned?' 'Alas!' says Benintende. 'And was he guilty?' she asks before he can say more, whereupon Benintende accuses her of treacherous insanity: 'Lady! The natural distraction of / Thy thoughts at such a moment makes the question / Merit forgiveness.'<sup>38</sup>

We see Steno for the first time here — a brilliant delayed action. Supposedly 'in rivalry with Byron's *Marino Faliero*,' Swinburne also wrote a play called *Marino Faliero*, in which Steno is present on stage from the beginning. Byron's restraint cannot be praised enough. He allows Steno to fester in our imagination until he brings him face-to-face with Angiolina at a time when, thanks to him, Faliero is to die. Steno meanwhile continues to perform his duties as one of the Forty, and is in the Chamber as one of the Forty who have judged and condemned Faliero. Faliero's conviction that the Patricians gang together against justice is made visible.

In another brilliant move, Byron makes Steno apologize to Angiolina, unleashing a controlled fury in her against this charnel house maggot. This is what she says:

. . . some men are worms  
In soul more than the living things of tombs.<sup>39</sup>

In her three-part speech, a magnificent ode of contempt, she sets out what Steno has done, the history of the wars caused by insults to women, and what Steno has achieved.<sup>40</sup> She speaks for her

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**37:** *Marino Faliero* V i 384-8.

**38:** *Marino Faliero* V i 384-8.

**39:** *Marino Faliero* V i 450, 464-5.

**40:** Angiolina: To me the scorner's words were as the wind  
Unto the rock: but . . . there are—alas!  
Spirits more sensitive, on which such things  
Light as the Whirlwind on the water; souls  
To whom dishonour's shadow is a substance  
More terrible than death, here and hereafter  
(*Marino Faliero* V i 420-5).

Angiolina: A wife's Dishonour was the bane of Troy;  
A wife's Dishonour unkinged Rome for ever;  
An injured husband brought the Gauls to Clusium,  
And thence to Rome, which perished for a time  
An obscene gesture cost Caligula  
His life, while Earth yet bore his cruelties;  
A virgin's wrong made Spain a Moorish province. . .  
(*Marino Faliero* V i 437-43)

Angiolina: . . . Steno's lie, couched in two worthless lines,  
Hath decimated Venice, put in peril  
A Senate which hath stood eight hundred years,  
Discrowned a Prince, cut off his crownless head,  
And forged new fetters for a groaning people!

husband, his logos, as it were, reasoned, angrily restrained, telling the Council what he has not told them, that they may have arrested him for his conspiracy against the state, but the real reason for his antagonism was Steno's insult. Byron uses her like an Inductor in a Ben Jonson play, to instruct us how to read the situation.

Despite the angry onslaught, no one responds to Angiolina, which isn't surprising. As Faliero built up his rage against the Ten, Angiolina (and Steno) vanished from his rhetoric; she is not mentioned all through the conspiracy and its discovery, which is most of the play. It is as if Byron had dramatized the truism behind so-called 'honour killings,' that when a woman is sexually insulted, men get their knickers in a twist. Marino Faliero certainly seems to, barely stopping to think that if he is killed, his beloved Angiolina will be on her own. He's told her she can marry again, but she loves *him*. Like the historians, he reduces Angiolina to a mere first cause in the recovery of his Zara-like honour, not seeing her as his victim, only as the victim of Steno's insult. Byron's presentation of her story is the start of his newly developing thoughts about women in situations where the consequences of men's actions are visited upon their wives because their husbands don't think domestically. The men act upon a principle, which is grand, but – as Byron shows – it is not possible to pursue knowledge, honour, political power, or heroic glory without adversely affecting the family.

There is some truth in such a reading, but it is not the only one. Perhaps it was not Byron's chief purpose to show this for it would be inconsistent with what has gone before, and Byron is not inconsistent in his drama. Had Faliero believed in honour killing, and had he thought Angiolina's reputation had been stained, he would have killed her. From his first sojourn in Europe, Byron knew this is what happened. He had rescued a victim from an imminent honour killing. But Faliero does not succumb to a masculinist stereotype of defending his honour supposedly sullied because of the slander against his wife. Instead, Byron shows him clearly not doing this, not suspecting his wife, not thinking his manhood has been dishonoured, even though Steno's graffiti that Angiolina has been kept by other men implies this. Byron deflects the dishonour / honour issue away from the woman into the political and public aspect of Faliero's life. Consistent with Byron's exasperation at historians for mocking the December-May marriage, and especially targeting the old husband, he makes Faliero interpret Steno's words as an insult to his public self and his position as Doge. It is for this that he is tried and sentenced, as if it was merely a law and order problem neatly resolved by sentencing him, except that Angiolina disrupts it by her presence and words.

Byron gives a brief yet clear glimpse of a woman without a man's protection as Angiolina is passed from her father to his friend, but Marino Faliero isn't an object for her. Their relationship – for her – depends on esteem, affection, concern, respect for what he was and is, and on choice. Not only did she choose to marry him, she chose to be unlike the Venetian women of Lioni's experience.<sup>41</sup> Byron – who often structured his verse around binary oppositions – contrasts his Latin women's steadfast continuity of feeling with masculine aggression. The men break the peace; they are discontented and long for things they cannot have (like Cain); they are wantonly destructive like Steno and Ulric; or they practise their power because they have it (like Stralenheim in *Werner*). The women are not scheming, malicious, or destructive.

Obviously, we can only know the Latin women through their speech, and there seems to be nothing remarkable about their language.<sup>42</sup> They don't have Beatrice's wit; they are not George Eliot's 'silly women;' and all of them are sidelined in their worlds. So how did Byron imagine them? In the manner of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron sometimes moves abruptly from one piece of stage business to the next, hiding the links between them but occasionally inserting a lyric that floodlights 'meaning' especially with regard to the women.<sup>43</sup> For example, at the dramatic

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(*Marino Faliero* V i 444-9)

**41:** The old women paint themselves; the young don't celebrate the beauty which their youth confers on them, aging prematurely because of their life-style. Both kinds of women are unnatural.

**42:** For years I have felt that Angiolina's speech, her tone, is unusual, even for Byron's myriad-toned verse, and wondered which of his many styles of language he had used for Angiolina. It's been a pleasant (it meant reading a lot of Byron) but frustrating search – till now.

**43:** In *Marino Faliero*, some transitions are as sudden as in *CHP*. e.g. while thinking of the great events of the next day when he is arrested, Faliero says almost immediately in an aside, 'There now

climax of Werner, Werner and Ulric speak of marriage and love in truncated sonnets which are paired like an Elizabethan pastoral and anti-pastoral love lyric, foregrounding the place of love in a good life. Werner wants Ulric to marry Ida for love or not at all, while cynically realistic Ulric says what's love got to do with a useful marriage?<sup>44</sup>

In *Marino Faliero*, Byron extended his representation of love to include the honour due to the old – to Angiolina's father, the dying Loredano, and to Faliero. He defended Faliero against historians' slander, plotting his play to show a life and marriage lived according to other rules, and he made Angiolina marry out of regard for her father as well as for love.<sup>45</sup> In a long cadence, of the sort he used often in *Childe Harold* to bind his poem in secret narrative threads, the similarity between Byron and Angiolina starts in the Preface and concludes in her ode of contempt which is simultaneously an implicit hymn of love praising her husband for defending her. Faliero's fate proceeds according to the Patricians' plan as if Angiolina had not spoken but her historical knowledge about slandered women, forming a structurally symmetrical conclusion to the multiple instances of upheavals caused by insults to women that Byron mentions in his Preface.

Anne Barton, who has written so perceptively about Byron's plays, found Angiolina cold, 'a perfect refrigerator,' and that she was locked in moral certainties which she does not question.<sup>46</sup> That doesn't sound right, for this Latin woman and her creator – who questioned everything – speak as one. Like Byron, Angiolina can see that Steno is not unique, and that he is only a historical type who has imperiled a state. Meanwhile, the Ten are suddenly tender towards Angiolina. 'Twill move her much to witness' her husband's sentence, so she should leave, they say. Her refusal baffles them. Angiolina is not a disorderly woman, but she does resist. In her final appearance, Angiolina stands *Othello* on its head for the last time. She is the cause, she says, for had Faliero not honoured her father's wish, he wouldn't be facing death. When Marino Faliero is beheaded, she faints, the only

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is nothing left me save to die' (IV ii 261). The fall of the hero takes 5 Acts in *Macbeth*, but here it is as if one CHP Spenserian has ended and another has started with a new idea, focus, and emphasis.

**44:** Siegendorf / Werner: She's young—all-beautiful—adores you—is  
Endow'd with qualities to give happiness,  
Such as rounds common life into a dream  
Of something which your poets cannot paint,  
And giving so much happiness, deserves  
A little in return. I would not have her  
Break her heart for a man who has none to break;  
Or wither on her stalk like some pale rose  
Deserted by the bird she thought a nightingale . . .  
According to the Orient tale.

. . . . .  
Ulric. Count, 'tis a marriage of your making,  
So be it of your wooing; but to please you,  
I will now pay my duty to my mother,  
With whom, you know, the lady Ida is.----  
What would you have? You have forbid my stirring  
For manly sports beyond the castle walls,  
And I obey you; you bid me turn a chamberer,  
To pick up gloves, and fans, and knitting needles,  
And list to songs and tunes, and watch for smiles,  
And smile at pretty prattle, and look into  
The eyes of feminine, as though they were  
The stars receding early upon our wish  
Upon the dawn of a world-winning battle---  
What can a son or man do more?  
(Werner IV i 372-82, 398-411)

**45:** See *Marino Faliero* II i 92-101.

**46:** See Barton, op. cit., 148.

weakness she shows. In *The Island*, written at the same time as *Werner*, Byron set the peace of the married love of Torquil and Neuha against war and colonialism. But that is another paper.