

The Curse of Minerva
 edited by Peter Cochran



The Marbles would have gone in the vertically-lined section beneath the upper part.

Built between 447 and 432 BC, the Parthenon symbolises, not Greek civilisation, so much as Athenian political hegemony over the rest of Greece (which the Athenians would have said was the same thing). It is a statement of imperialist triumph. The metopes around its border symbolise (or symbolised) the triumph of Athenian order over barbarian chaos: battles against the Amazons, between the Lapiths and the Centaurs, between the Gods and the Giants, and between the Greeks and the Trojans.



Athens in Byron's day

In Byron's time Athens was technically the fiefdom one of the Black Eunuchs at Constantinople,¹ and neither the town nor its archaeological treasures was much valued by either its Greek inhabitants or its Turkish rulers; though Byron does record in a note to *Childe Harold II* that as Lord Elgin's servants lifted yet another marble from the building, a Turkish officer witnessing the depredation wept, and said "enough!". This observation was made not by Byron, but by his friend Edward Daniel Clarke, and Byron put it into later editions.²

By the time Lord Elgin and Byron arrived in Greece, the building was in an advanced state of decay. A major disaster had occurred in 1687, when the Venetian general Francesco Morosini besieged the place, and, knowing that the Turks had gunpowder stored in it,

¹: See *The Giaour*, 151, Byron's note.

²: See *CHP* II stanzas 11-14, and Byron's prose notes, for more thoughts about the marbles.

bombarded it, and blew most of the roof off. It was because he felt the building to be in danger of being lost that Thomas Bruce, seventh Earl of Elgin (1766-1841), English ambassador to Constantinople, in 1801 obtained a firman, or letter of permission from the Turks, to remove any sculptures or inscriptions which could go without endangering the structures. Elgin removed, not just the metopes, but a caryatid, many inscriptions, and hundreds of vases. His activities continued until 1810, and the British Museum bought the marbles from him for £35,000 in 1816 (he lost a lot of money in the transaction): but the justice of what he did, and what the future of the marbles should be, remains controversial to this day.³



Byron arrived in Athens with Hobhouse on Christmas Day 1809, left on March 5th 1810, and came back without Hobhouse on July 18th, not departing until April 22nd 1811. He began *The Curse of Minerva* in March 1811, and finished it in London on his return from Greece in November of that year. It's possible that the anti-imperialist lines 202-65 were written in London. Only eight copies were printed with his authority, of which only three survive, though there were piracies. This small number makes *The Curse of Minerva* the rarest of all Byron first editions, beating *Fugitive Pieces* by a fragment of an edition. Byron recycled lines 1-54 at the start of the third canto of *The Corsair*.

The goddess Minerva (her Latin name), is also known by her Greek names Pallas, and Pallas Athene. She is the Greek goddess of wisdom, strength, victory in warfare, and handicrafts – a broad and useful combination.

Byron's satirical polemic in *The Curse of Minerva* concedes no point to the other side: no-one would suspect from reading the poem that Elgin's motives in removing the marbles were anything other than mercenary. Elgin's nationality allows Byron the strongest anti-Scots diatribe he ever wrote: one would not know from lines 125-56 that he would later write of his love the land of "Mountain and of Flood" (*Don Juan*, X, 19, 8).

Byron is not interested in the artistic value of the marbles: it's not even clear that he knows which pieces they consist of, still less what they look like. He never was much of an art critic. A long antiquarian and artistic debate ensued when the marbles came to England, of a kind which could never have happened in contemporary Athens. Byron took no part in the debate while it was in progress (though he seems to have seen the marbles, perhaps accompanied by some of his friends from the world of pugilism: see his note to 182), and his poem adds nothing to it. Those English people who admire the marbles (lines 175-98) are, he

³: See William St Clair, *Lord Elgin and the Marbles*, new edition (Oxford 1998).

asserts, ignoramuses and sexually-fantasising dullards. If those who see them do have brains, they simply lament their theft. We would find out little about the argument which has raged about them ever since if we had only *The Curse of Minerva* as our evidence.

Instead, Byron uses Elgin's supposed larceny (the firman allowing him to take the marbles was legal),⁴ as a parallel to such disparate crises as the attack on Copenhagen (213-20); an army mutiny in India (221-8); the victory by starving English soldiers over the French at Barossa in Spain (229-38); and incipient famine and disorder at home (239-44) – things in which imperialist cultural expropriation figures only remotely. Is the guilt Britannia should feel for them the *same* as she should feel about Elgin's despoliation of the Parthenon, or are they a *consequence* of Minerva's anger at the despoliation? Logic is not the poem's strong point, and we search for an answer with difficulty. It looks as though Elgin's model for his crime is the behaviour of his burglarious motherland – even though the problems of the Baltic, India, and Spain, are English, not Scots, as in consistency they should be.

In 1821, from Ravenna, Byron wrote *A Letter to John Murray Esq^{re}*, which includes the following thoughts about how the presence of art affects the face of nature:

There are a thousand rocks and capes – far more picturesque than those of the Acropolis and Cape Sunium – in themselves, – what are they to a thousand Scenes in the wilder parts of Greece? of Asia Minor? Switzerland, – or even of Cintra in Portugal, or to many scenes of Italy – and the Sierras of Spain? – But it is the “*Art*” – the Columns – the temples – the wrecked vessel – which give them their antique and their modern poetry – and not the spots themselves. – Without them the *Spots* of earth would be unnoticed and unknown – buried like Babylon and Nineveh in indistinct confusion – without poetry – as without existence – but to whatever spot of earth these ruins were transported if they were *capable* of transportation – like the Obelisk and the Sphinx – and the Memnon's head – *there* they would still exist in the perfection of their beauty – and in the pride of their poetry. – – I opposed – and will ever oppose – the robbery of ruins – from Athens to instruct the English in Sculpture – (who are as capable of Sculpture – as the Egyptians are of skating) but why did I do so? – the *ruins* are as poetical in Piccadilly as they were in the Parthenon – but the Parthenon and it's rock are less so without them. – – Such is the Poetry of Art. –⁵

It's his last recorded thought about the Elgin Marbles.

I feel the poem's most powerful rhetorical part is the distaste expressed for Scotsmen, of most if not all kinds, in lines 125-56 (“some soft lines on ye Scotch,” Byron called them).⁶ Given that Byron was himself half-Scots (“bastard of a brighter race”: 168) they may be autobiographical. They resemble in their energy and animus the amusing flood of jocose self-distaste we find at *Hints from Horace* 219-62, written at the same time. Is Byron using Elgin's (arguable) crime as a cover for something he's done in Greece himself? Throughout his life he was skilled at doing bad things and making it look as if someone else had done them – his ejection of Annabella from Piccadilly Terrace being the most glaring example, for the world has thought ever since that she went of her own independent will. The publication of *The Giaour* and *The Vision of Judgement* are two more, for he insists that Murray, Hunt, Kinnaird, and his friends put them before the public against his will.⁷

Byron never met Elgin: but he did meet Giovanni Battista Lusieri, Elgin's draughtsman; and, through Lusieri, Lusieri's young brother-in-law Niccolò Giraud, who became the most intimate of his lovers. Niccolò expressed the fondest affection for him; but he left him at Malta, having provided for him,⁸ and they never met again. Is it his relationship with Niccolò (“A barren soil, where Nature's germs, confined / To stern sterility, can stint the mind”: 133-4) that he is signalling, so covertly that no-one can see his ruse?

In this edition, Byron's prose notes are placed in red italics in the margin.

4: Ibid, pp.88-90.

5: CMP 133.

6: BLJ II 136.

7: See BLJ III 62 and 63 for *The Giaour*; X 47 for *The Vision*.

8: BLJ II 46.

The Curse of Minerva

Pallas te hoc vulnere, Pallas
 Immolat, et poenam scelerato ex sanguine sumit ... *Aeneid*, lib. xii.⁹

Slow sinks, more lovely ere his race be run,
 Along Morea's hills¹⁰ the setting sun;
 Not, as in northern climes, obscurely bright,
 But one unclouded blaze of living light;
 O'er the hushed deep the yellow beam he throws, 5
 Gilds the green wave that trembles as it glows;
 On old Ægina's rock and Hydra's isle¹¹
 The God of gladness sheds his parting smile;
 O'er his own regions lingering loves to shine,
 Though there his altars are no more divine. 10
 Descending fast, the mountain-shadows kiss
 Thy glorious Gulf, unconquered Salamis!¹²
 Their azure arches through the long expanse,
 More deeply purpled, meet his mellowing glance,
 And tenderest tints, along their summits driven, 15
 Mark his gay course, and own the hues of Heaven;
 Till, darkly shaded from the land and deep,
 Behind his Delphian¹³ rock he sinks to sleep.
 On such an eve his palest beam he cast
 When, Athens! here thy Wisest¹⁴ looked his last; 20
 How watched thy better sons his farewell ray,
 That closed their murdered Sage's latest day!*

** Socrates drank the hemlock a short time before sunset,
 (the hour of execution) notwithstanding the entreaties of
 his disciples to wait till the sun went down.*

Not yet – not yet – Sol pauses on the hill,
 The precious hour of parting lingers still;
 But sad his light to agonising eyes, 25
 And dark the mountain's once delightful dyes;
 Gloom o'er the lovely land he seemed to pour,
 The land where Phœbus¹⁵ never frowned before;
 But ere he sunk below Cithæron's¹⁶ head,
 The cup of Woe was quaffed – the Spirit fled; 30
 The soul of Him that scorned to fear or fly,
 Who lived and died as none can live or die.
 But, lo! from high Hymettus¹⁷ to the plain
 The Queen of Night¹⁸ asserts her silent reign;*

9: "It is Pallas who sacrifices you with this stroke, and Pallas who makes your guilty blood pay atonement!" Aeneas's words as he kills Turnus at the very end of the *Aeneid*. Pallas Athene is Minerva.

10: The Morea is that part of Greece south of the Gulf of Corinth. The medieval name for the Peloponnesos.

11: Hydra (Idra) is an island off the eastern coast of the Morea, between the gulfs of Ægina and Nauplia.

12: Naval battle (480 BC), in which the Greeks beat the Persians.

13: Delphos, site of one of the most important oracles.

14: Socrates, who drank the hemlock just before sunset.

15: Phœbus Apollo, the sun god.

16: Mount Cithæron is near Corinth.

17: Hymettus is a hill overlooking Athens.

18: The moon.

** The twilight in Greece is much shorter than in our own country; the days in winter are longer, but in summer of less duration.*

No murky vapour, herald of the storm, 35
 Hides her fair face, or girds her glowing form,
 With cornice glimmering as the moonbeams play,
 There the white column greets her grateful ray,
 And bright around with quivering beams beset,
 Her emblem sparkles o'er the Minaret: 40
 The groves of olives scattered dark and wide,
 Where meek Cephisus¹⁹ sheds his scanty tide,
 The cypress saddening by the sacred mosque,
 The gleaming turret of the gay kiosk,*

** The kiosk is a Turkish summer-house; the palm is without the present wall of Athens, not far from the Temple of Theseus, between which and the tree the wall intervenes. Cephisus' stream is indeed scanty, and Ilissus has no stream at all.*

And sad and sombre 'mid the holy calm, 45
 Near Theseus' fane,²⁰ yon solitary palm;
 All, tinged with varied hues, arrest the eye;
 And dull were his that passed them heedless by.
 Again the Ægean, heard no more afar,
 Lulls his chafed breast from elemental war: 50
 Again his long waves in milder tints unfold
 Their long expanse of sapphire and of gold,
 Mixed with the shades of many a distant isle
 That frown, where gentler Ocean deigns to smile.
 As thus, within the walls of Pallas' fane, 55
 I marked the beauties of the land and main,
 Alone, and friendless, on the magic shore,
 Whose arts and arms but live in poets' lore;
 Oft as the matchless dome I turned to scan,
 Sacred to Gods, but not secure from Man, 60
 The Past returned, the Present seemed to cease,
 And Glory knew no clime beyond her Greece!
 Hours rolled along, and Dian's orb²¹ on high
 Had gained the centre of her softest sky;
 And, yet unwearied still, my footstep trod 65
 O'er the vain shrine of many a vanished God:
 But chiefly, Pallas! thine, when Hecate's²² glare,
 Checked by thy columns, fell more sadly fair
 O'er the chill marble, where the startling tread
 Thrills the lone heart like echoes from the dead. 70
 Long had I mused, and treasured every trace
 The wreck of Greece recorded of her race,
 When lo! a giant form before me strode,
 And Pallas hailed me in her own Abode!

19: Cephisus and Ilissus (see Byron's note) two Athenian streams which had by 1811 almost run dry.

20: Theseus' fane, or Theseion, famous Athenian building of 449 BC; in fact a temple to Hephaisteion.

21: The moon.

22: Hecate is an evil moon-goddess, companion of ghosts.

Yes, 'twas Minerva's self; but ah! how changed, 75
 Since o'er the Dardan field²³ in arms she ranged!
 Not such as erst, by her divine command,
 Her form appeared from Phidias'²⁴ plastic hand:
 Gone were the terrors of her awful brow,
 Her idle Ægis²⁵ wore no Gorgon now; 80
 Her helm was dented, and the broken lance
 Seemed weak and shaftless e'en to mortal glance;
 The Olive Branch,²⁶ which still she deigned to clasp,
 Shrunk from her touch and withered in her grasp;
 And, ah! though still the brightest of the sky, 85
 Celestial tears bedimmed her large blue eye:
 Round the rent casque her owlet²⁷ circled slow,
 And mourned his mistress with a shriek of woe!
 "Mortal!" – 'twas thus she spake – "that blush of shame
 Proclaims thee Briton, once a noble name; 90
 First of all the mighty, foremost of the free,
 Now honoured *less* by all, and *least* by me:
 Chief of thy foes shall Pallas still be found.
 Seek'st thou the cause of loathing? – look around.
 Lo! here, despite of war and wasting fire, 95
 I saw successive Tyrannies expire.
 'Scaped from the ravage of the Turk and Goth,
 Thy country sends a spoiler worse than both.
 Survey this vacant violated fane;
 Recount the relics torn that yet remain: 100
These Cecrops²⁸ placed, *this* Pericles²⁹ adorned,*

** This is spoken of the city in general, and not of the Acropolis
 in particular. The temple of Jupiter Olympius, by some supposed
 the Pantheon, was finished by Hadrian; sixteen columns are
 standing, of the most beautiful marble and architecture.*

That Adrian reared when drooping Science mourned.³⁰
 What more I owe let Gratitude attest –
 Know Alaric³¹ and Elgin³² did the rest.
 That all may learn from whence the plunderer came, 105
 The insulted wall sustains his hated name:³³
 For Elgin's fame thus grateful Pallas pleads,
 Below, his name – above, behold his deeds!
 Be ever hailed with equal honour here
 The Gothic monarch and the Pictish peer: 110
 Arms gave the first his right, the last had none,
 But basely stole what less barbarians won.

23: The Dardan plain was where the Trojan War was fought.

24: Phidias was the greatest Greek sculptor. A statue of Pallas by him was the centrepiece of the Parthenon, covered with gold and ivory.

25: Minerva's breastplate, decorated with the Gorgon-head of Medusa.

26: Minerva carries an olive branch in her left hand, symbol of peace after victory.

27: Minerva is always accompanied by a wise owl.

28: Cecrops founded Athens, and was its first king.

29: Pericles (490-29 BC), Athenian statesman at the time the Parthenon was built.

30: Adrian (76-138 AD), is the Roman Emperor Hadrian, who had the Pantheon built.

31: Alaric, King of the Goths (370-410 AD), famous for destroying centres of civilisation, including Rome.

32: Thomas Bruce, seventh Earl of Elgin (1766-1841).

33: The names of Lord and Lady Elgin were carved into a column of the Parthenon.

So when the Lion quits his fell repast,
 Next prowls the Wolf, the filthy Jackal last:
 Flesh, limbs, and blood the former make their own, 115
 The last poor brute securely gnaws the bone.
 Yet still the Gods are just, and crimes are crossed:
 See here what Elgin won, and what he lost!
 Another name with *his* pollutes my shrine:
 Behold where Dian's beams³⁴ disdain to shine! 120
 Some retribution still might Pallas claim,
 When Venus half avenged Minerva's shame."³⁵ *

** His lordship's name, and that of one who no longer bears it,³⁶
 are carved conspicuously on the Parthenon; above, in a part not
 far distant, are the torn remnants of the basso-relievos, destroyed
 in a vain attempt to remove them.*

She ceased awhile, and thus I dared to reply,
 To soothe the vengeance kindling in her eye:
 "Daughter of Jove! in Britain's injured name, 125
 A true-born Briton may the deed disclaim.
 Frown not on England; England owns him not:
 Athena, no! thy plunderer was a Scot.³⁷
 Ask'st thou the difference? From fair Phyle's towers³⁸
 Survey Bœotia; – Caledonia's ours.³⁹ 130
 And well I know within that bastard land*

** "Irish bastards," according to Sir Callaghan O'Brallaghan.⁴⁰*

Hath Wisdom's goddess never held command;
 A barren soil, where Nature's germs, confined
 To stern sterility, can stint the mind; 135
 Whose thistle well betrays the niggard earth,
 Emblem of all to whom the Land gives birth;
 Each genial influence nurtured to resist;
 A land of meanness, sophistry, and mist.
 Each breeze from foggy mount and marshy plain
 Dilutes with drivel every drizzly brain, 140
 Till, burst at length, each wat'ry head o'erflows.
 Foul as their soil, and frigid as their snows.
 Then thousands schemes of petulance and pride
 Despatch her scheming children far and wide:
 Some East, some West, some – everywhere but North! 145
 In quest of lawless gain they issue forth.
 And thus – accursed be the day and year!
 She sent a Pict⁴¹ to play the felon here.
 Yet Caledonia claims some native worth,
 As dull Bœotia gave a Pindar birth;⁴² 150

34: The moonbeams.

35: Elgin's nose had come away, a symptom of syphilis: thus Venus revenged Minerva's shame.

36: Lady Elgin, from whom Elgin had been divorced in 1808.

37: Elsewhere Byron expresses pride in his Scots ancestry.

38: Phyle's towers were a fortress on the north coast of the Gulf of Corinth.

39: Bœotia is the barbarous world north of Greece – what, Byron asserts, Scotland ("Caledonia") is to England.

40: Sir Callaghan O'Brallaghan is a mad Irish character in *Love à la Mode* by Charles Macklin.

41: Picts were the savage inhabitants of Scotland in Roman times.

So may her few, the lettered and the brave,
 Bound to no clime, and victors of the grave,
 Shake off the sordid dust of such a land,
 And shine like children of a happier strand;
 As once, of yore, in some obnoxious place, 155
 Ten names (if found) had saved a wretched race.”

“Mortal!” the blue-eyed maid resumed, “Once more
 Bear back my mandate to thy native shore.
 Though fallen, alas! this vengeance is yet mine,
 To turn my counsels far from lands like thine. 160
 Hear then in silence Pallas’s stern behest;
 Hear and believe, for Time will tell the rest.

“First on the head of him who did this deed
 My curse shall light, – on him and all his seed:
 Without one spark of intellectual fire,⁴³ 165

Be all the sons as senseless as the sire:
 If one with wit the parent brood disgrace,
 Believe him bastard of a brighter race:
 Still with his hireling artists let him prate,
 And Folly’s praise repay for Wisdom’s hate; 170

Long of their Patron’s gusto let them tell,
 Whose noblest, *native* gusto is – to sell:
 To sell and make – may shame record the day! –
 The State-Receiver of his pilfered prey.

Meantime, the flattering feeble dotard, West,⁴⁴ 175
 Europe’s poor dauber, and poor Britain’s best,
 With palsied hand shall turn each model o’er,
 And own himself an infant of fourscore.*

** Mr. West, on seeing the “Elgin Collection” (I suppose we shall hear of the “Abershaw” and “Jack Shephard”⁴⁵ collection), declared himself a “mere tyro” in art.*

Be all the Bruisers culled from St. Giles’,
 That Art and Nature may compare their styles; 180
 While brawny brutes in stupid wonder stare,
 And marvel at his Lordship’s ‘stone shop’ there.*

** Poor Crib⁴⁶ was sadly puzzled when the marbles were first exhibited at Elgin House; he asked if it was not “a stone shop” – He was right; it is a shop.*

Round the thronged gate shall sauntering coxcombs creep,
 To lounge and lucubrate,⁴⁷ to prate and peep;
 While many a languid maid, with longing sigh, 185
 On giant statues casts the curious eye;
 The room with transient glance appears to skim
 Yet marks the mighty back and length of limb;
 Mourns o’er the difference of *now* and *then*;

42: Pindar, the Greek lyric poet, was born in Bœotia.

43: The phrase “any spark / Of heavenly intellectual fire” occurs at *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, IV iv 118-19.

44: Benjamin West (1738-1820), American painter.

45: Jerry Abershaw and Jack Shephard were famous highwaymen.

46: Tom Cribb (1781-1848), heavyweight boxer and Byron’s friend.

47: To lucubrate is to work into the night at a literary problem. See *Beppo*, 47, 3.

Exclaims “These Greeks indeed were proper men!” 190
 Draws slight comparisons of *these* with *those*,
 And envies Laïs all her Attic beaux.⁴⁸
 When shall a modern maid have swains like these!
 Alas! Sir Harry is no Hercules!
 And last of all amidst the gaping crew, 195
 Some calm spectator, as he takes his view,
 In silent indignation mixed with grief,
 Admires the plunder, but abhors the thief.
 Oh, loathed in life, nor pardoned in dust,
 May Hate pursue his sacreligious lust! 200
 Linked with that fool that fired the Ephesian dome,⁴⁹
 Shall vengeance follow far beyond the tomb,
 And Eratostratus and Elgin shine
 In many a branding page and burning line;
 Alike reserved for aye to stand accursed, 205
 Perchance the second blacker than the first.
 “So let him stand through ages yet unborn,
 Fixed statue on the pedestal of Scorn;
 Though not for him alone revenge shall wait,
 But fits thy country for her coming fate: 210
 Hers were the deeds that taught her lawless son
 To do what oft Britannia’s self had done.
 Look to the Baltic – blazing from afar,
 Your old Ally yet mourns perfidious war.⁵⁰
 Not to such deeds did Pallas lend her aid, 215
 Or break the compact which she herself had made;
 Far from such councils from the faithless field
 She fled – but left behind her Gorgon shield;
 A fatal gift that turned your friends to stone,
 And left lost Albion hated and alone. 220
 “Look to the East, where Ganges’ swarthy race
 Shall shake your tyrant empire to its base;
 Lo! there Rebellion rears her ghastly head,⁵¹
 And glares the Nemesis of native dead;
 Till Indus rolls a deep purpureal flood 225
 And claims his long arrear of northern blood.
 So may ye perish! Pallas, when she gave
 Your free-born rights, forbade you to enslave.
 “Look on your Spain! – she clasps the hand she hates,
 But boldly clasps, and thrusts you from her gates. 230
 Bear witness, bright Barossa!⁵² thou canst tell
 Whose were the sons that bravely fought and fell.
 But Lusitania,⁵³ kind and dear ally,
 Can spare few to fight and sometimes fly,
 Oh glorious field! by Famine fiercely won,⁵⁴ 235
 The Gaul retires for once, and all is done!
 But when did Pallas teach, that one retreat

48: Laïs was a Greek courtesan.

49: Eratostratus set fire to the Temple of Diana at Ephesus in 356 BC.

50: Refers to the bombardment of Copenhagen by English naval forces, September 2nd-8th 1807.

51: Not a prophecy of the Indian Mutiny, but a reference to an army officers’ mutiny at Madras in 1809.

52: English victory over the French in Spain, March 5th 1811.

53: Portugal.

54: The English troops at Barossa had been starving.

Retrieved three long Olympiads of defeat?
 “Look last at home – ye love not to look there;
 On the grim smile of comfortless despair: 240
 Your city saddens: loud though Revel howls,
 Here Famine faints, and yonder Rapine prowls.
 See all alike of more or less bereft;
 No misers tremble when there’s nothing left.
 ‘Blest paper credit;’* ⁵⁵ who shall dare to sing? 245

* *Pope.*

It clogs like lead Corruption’s weary wing.
 Yet Pallas plucked each Premier by the ear,
 Who Gods and men alike disdained to hear;
 But one, repentant o’er a bankrupt state,
 On Pallas calls, – but calls, alas! too late: 250
 Then raves for Stanhope,⁵⁶ to that Mentor bends,
 Though he and Pallas never yet were friends.
 Him senates hear, whom never yet the heard,
 Contemptuous once, and now no less absurd.
 So, once of yore, each reasonable frog 255
 Swore faith and fealty to his sovereign ‘log’;⁵⁷
 Thus hailed your rules their patrician clod,
 As Ægypt chose an onion for a God.
 ‘Now fare ye well! enjoy your little hour;
 Go, grasp the shadow of your vanished power; 260
 Gloss o’er the failure of each fondest scheme;
 Your strength a name, your bloated wealth a dream.
 Gone is that Gold, the marvel of mankind,
 And Pirates* barter all that’s left behind.

* *The Deal and Dover traffickers in specie.*⁵⁸

No more the hirelings, purchased near and far, 265
 Crowd to the ranks of mercenary war.
 The idle merchant on the useless quay
 Droops o’er the bales no bark may bear away;
 Or, back returning, sees rejected stores
 Rot piecemeal on his own encumbered shores: 270
 The starved mechanic breaks his rusting loom,
 And, desperate, mans him ’gainst the coming doom.
 Then in the Senates of your sinking state
 Show me the man whose counsels may have weight.
 Vain is each voice where tones could once command; 275
 E’en factions cease to charm a factious land:
 Yet jarring sects convulse a sister Isle,
 And light with maddening hands the mutual pile.
 “’Tis done, ’tis past – since Pallas warns in vain;
 The Furies seize her abdicated reign: 280
 Wide o’er the realm they wave their kindling brands,

⁵⁵: Pope, *Epistle to Bathurst*, 69.

⁵⁶: Charles, third Earl of Stanhope (1735-1813), proponent of paper money.

⁵⁷: Refers to the Æsop fable in which the frogs choose a log as their king.

⁵⁸: Money-changers at Channel ports charging exorbitant rates.

And wring her vitals with their fiery hands.
 But one convulsive struggle still remains,
 And Gaul⁵⁹ shall weep ere Albion wear her chains. 285
 The bannered pomp of war, the glittering files,
 O'er whose gay trappings stern Bellona⁶⁰ smiles;
 The brazen trump, the spirit-stirring drum,⁶¹
 That bid the foe defiance ere they come;
 The hero bounding at his country's call,
 The glorious death that consecrates his fall, 290
 Swell the young heart with visionary charms,
 And bid it antedate the joys of arms.
 But know, a lesson you may yet have taught,
 With death alone are laurels cheaply bought:
 Not in the conflict Havoc⁶² seeks delight, 295
 His day of mercy is the day of fight.
 But when the field is fought, the battle won,
 Though drenched with gore,⁶³ his woes are but begun:
 His deeper deeds as yet ye know by name;
 The slaughtered peasant and the ravished dame, 300
 The rifled mansion and the foe-reaped field,
 Ill suit with souls at home, untaught to yield.
 Say, with what eye along the distant down
 Would flying burghers mark the blazing town?
 How view the column of ascending flames 305
 Shake his red shadow o'er the startled Thames?
 Nay, frown not, Albion! for the torch was thine
 That lit such pyres from Tagus to the Rhine:
 Now should they burst on thy devoted coast,
 Go, ask thy bosom who deserves them most. 310
 The law of Heaven and Earth is life for life,
 And she who raised, in vain regrets, the strife."

59: France.

60: Another war-goddess. See *Macbeth*, I ii, 55.

61: *Othello*, III iii 356.

62: *Julius Caesar*, III i, 274.

63: Echoed at *TVOJ* 44, 8.