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Lorna Doone

R. D. BLACKMORE

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

LORNA DOONE

A Romance of Exmoor

R. D. Blackmore

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth Classics are inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students. We commissioned teachers and specialists to write wide ranging, jargon-free introductions and to provide notes that would assist the understanding of our readers rather than interpret the stories for them. In the same spirit, because the pleasures of reading are inseparable from the surprises, secrets and revelations that all narratives contain, we strongly advise you to enjoy this book before turning to the Introduction.

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INTRODUCTION

Every one who comes here brings Mr. Blackmore's romance with him [. . .] Nearly everywhere in the neighbourhood there is something to remind us of Lorna Doone and John Ridd. The visitors go forth in the morning, book in hand, and make it the gospel for the day. They climb the Foreland at Countisbury, explore the caves at Ley Abbey, and try to construct hollows in the Cheese Ring to hold a witch. In the churchyards they find more than one John Fry and John Ridd sleeping in sight of the moor and the sea, though there is no John Ridd at Oare and no farm called Plover's Barrows. But Oare itself can have changed very little, and answers to the novelist's description [. . .] Nicholas Snowe still lives in the parish; and less than two miles away from Oare the Badgeworthy Water rushes down under the old bridge at Malmsmead, and we stand at the portals of the Doone Valley, holding

our breath in anticipation of the chasms, the sombre crags, the sinister bogs and the treacherous 'Waterslide' that we are to see.[1]

Exploring 'The Land of Lorna Doone', in words and photographs, for the North American readers of *The New England Magazine* in 1894, W. H. Rideing could take for granted that the novel itself needed no introduction. Published in 1869, *Lorna Doone: A Romance of Exmoor*, was, by the 1890s, an established household classic on both sides of the Atlantic; and was mentioned by some critics as one of the most influential English books of the century. Thomas Hardy, reading *Lorna Doone* in 1875, had exclaimed in a letter to Blackmore that it was 'almost absurd that I had never read it before, considering the kind of work I attempted in Far from the Madding Crowd'; he was 'astonished [. . .] to find [. . .] exquisite ways of describing things which are more after my own heart than the "presentations" of any other writer I am acquainted with'; and averred that it must be their common West of England origin that made them kindred spirits. Gerard Manley Hopkins compared Blackmore's writing with Elizabethan drama, and praised his Shakespearian word-painting;[2] and Edith Wharton placed a bound copy in her library. The novel appeared in sixpenny versions and illustrated 'editions de luxe' ('we have faith to believe that there are a sufficient number of lovers of the peerless maiden, *Lorna*, to greet her appearance in this new dress with an enthusiasm that will in time repay us,' announced the publisher's preface to a lavish, unauthorised, American volume of 1890);[3] and, having reached its thirty-eighth edition in 1893, it showed no signs of diminishing

1 Rideing, pp. 612, 617–18. For full details of this and other references turn to the Bibliography at the end of this Introduction. Whenever possible the surname and page number will follow in parentheses after the quotation.

2 Thomas Hardy's letter of 8 June 1875 is quoted from *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* Volume I (1840–1892), ed. Richard L. Purdy and Michael Millgate, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1978, p. 37; Hopkins mentions Blackmore in letters to Robert Bridges, 28 October 1886 and 6 May 1888, *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, ed. Claude Coleer Abbott, Oxford University Press, London, 1935, p. 239; and *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Including His Correspondence with Coventry Patmore*, rev. 2nd edition, ed. Claude Coleer Abbott, Oxford University Press, London, 1956, p. 390. (Blackmore himself would have disliked such praise: he thought the term, 'word-painting' was 'affected fop's cant' ('Sicilian Hours', *Dublin University Magazine*, No CCLXII, Vol XLVI, August 1855, p. 201).

3 *Lorna Doone: A Romance of Exmoor* (with many drawings), Burrows Brothers, Cleveland 1890, [p. x].

popularity. It was a perennial favourite with the men of Yale – the top work of fiction for the 'Modern Novels' class which sent Richard Doddridge Blackmore its short papers on *Lorna* in 1896, and the winner by nine votes (over *Vanity Fair*) in 1906; and such fame seemed set to last – as one contributor affirmed in the prestigious North American *Atlantic Monthly*, 'there are few novels by living authors which seem so likely to keep a secure, distinguished place in literature'.[4]

Becoming a novelist: R. D. Blackmore (1825–1900)

Lorna Doone's success surprised and pleased its author, especially as the first edition in the conventional three-part format, had, in his own words, 'narrowly shaved the brink of Lethe.'[5] Blackmore's earlier books had been less fortunate. Although he had been publishing verse and prose for some fifteen years, he had yet to see his efforts attract any recognition; and on occasions, he seems to have lost heart. As he explained to John Blackwood in a letter in March 1871: 'A writer, I think, is much like a singer; he may do his best, but cannot enjoy it, unless he believes that his audiences will. The mere thought of a cold reception takes half the calories out of him'.[6]

Blackmore's early career

But persistence was clearly one of Blackmore's qualities – indeed, Dunn, his major biographer, found 'inspiration' in his 'courage, patience, trust and resignation in the face of many ills' (p. 19); and he sustained his writing, through various changes of profession and in spite of numerous difficulties. Even in the wild realm of the Doones, in the seventeenth century, John Ridd observes of life, 'everything went quietly, as the world for the most part does with us' (p. 76); and Blackmore generally presented his own life, in the Victorian home counties, as retired and without incident. (He requested there should be no biography.) His earliest youth, however, had been far from easy. He had lost his mother, Anne, to typhus fever, in October 1825, a few months after his birth (on 7

4 The Contributor's Club, *Atlantic Monthly*, 65/ 388, February 1890, p. 284.

5 Letter to Mrs William Halliday, 7 November 1876 (Dunn, p. 130).

6 Letter to John Blackwood, 13 March 1871, National Library of Scotland, Blackwood papers, ms. 4270, folio 99/100. From now on, references to this correspondence will be given as 'NLSB'.

June, at Longworth in rural Berkshire); his childhood was spent, first with his aunt, in Oxfordshire and Glamorganshire, then with his father and new step-family in the West Country; and he spent long periods away at school, where bullying distressed him. In November 1853, he married secretly, though without lasting family recriminations, Lucy Macguire, an Irish-Catholic. The marriage was happy, but shadowed by Lucy's long-term ill health, and she remains a vague picture in biographies (Blackmore's 'odd good humoured insipid little wife',[7] as his friend, the poet Arthur Munby, referred to her). Blackmore himself was troubled by illness and financial difficulties; and was involved in some bitter lawsuits: over the railways' threats to his land, and over the circumstances of his brother's death, from cyanide in 1875 – Blackmore suggested that he had been deliberately poisoned after changing his will to benefit his fiancée (see Sutton, p. 25). He was deeply grieved by Lucy's death from pneumonia in January 1888, but worked until illness and pain became too debilitating, publishing his final novel in 1897; he suffered from cancer in his last years, and died of influenza on 20 January 1900. A brief line, after the signature, in his final letter remarked: 'Frost coming, I fear – don't like the look of it.'[8]

References to the rewards and excitements of literature are a constant theme, from his earliest letters; unlike John Ridd, he loved Greek and Latin, and his academic success seemed to promise a scholarly career. In January 1834, aged eight, he reports to his aunt that, though he does not like his school : 'We have been through the Latin grammar twice, and we have begun the Greek grammar. I have got a prize book; it is about the Crusades, the Trojan War, the lives of Hercules and Theseus'. In 1837, he proceeded, like John, to Blundell's School in Tiverton; but, unlike him, completed his education, and, as a senior pupil in the early 1840s, won prizes for recitations from Milton. After graduating from Exeter College, Oxford, in 1847, he was, briefly, a coach to a wealthy and (as he remembered fifty years later) 'hopeless' student; he was called to the bar in 1852, but, perhaps because he worried about his epileptic attacks, he worked in conveyancing, avoiding court appearances; and, from 1855, he spent three years teaching Classics in a Grammar

7 Sutton, p. 21. Munby's slighting adjectives need qualifying, perhaps, in the light of what is now known of his own secret marriage to Hannah Cullwick, a domestic servant; his colourful diary of their long liaison; and his more general interest in the photography of robust working-class women.

8 22 December 1899; see *Lorna's Author: Letters by R. D. Blackmore to his Sister*, ed. and introd. by David Blackmore.

School in Twickenham, a period he seemed to enjoy, and which brought him better health.[9] However, although his marriage certificate in 1853 identified him as a 'writer for the press', literature never became his main occupation.

By the time he wrote *Lorna Doone*, he had been settled for a decade in what proved to be his life-long métier, as a fruit grower and market-gardener; a career move enabled by an uncle's legacy in 1858. Tending and improving the sixteen acre plot he had purchased at Teddington was a richly satisfying, though (increasingly) a massively unprofitable enterprise;[10] and Blackmore remained a dedicated horticulturalist, achieving considerable repute for his experimental cultivation of pears and peaches. He served as Vice-Chairman of the Royal Horticultural Society's Fruit and Vegetable Committee (1889–92); and in September 1894, stirred up a vigorous correspondence in *The Times* over the ('utterly contemptible') low price of fruit. In his letters to friends from 'Gomer House' (named after a favourite dog), any visions of pastoral perfection are often qualified by references to the frosts, droughts, hail-stones, or birds which spoil his crops; and the blights of trade and markets that wreck his profits. Descriptions of fruit-growing feature in his novels: as in chapter 17 of *Lorna Doone*, when John takes time to lament, in several remarkably observed paragraphs, the effects of a forward spring on the Ridds' 'fine, upstanding pear trees' (pp. 108–09). As Blackmore told *The Times*: 'In the forty years of my experience only twice have I made both ends meet' (20 September 1894). Visitors' descriptions, however, often emphasise the idyll, as in this account by Arthur Munby: 'Found him in his gardens, among (for instance) five acres of strawberry beds: & he took me through his vineries, and fed me on luscious grapes' (Sutton, p. 23); and Blackmore's writings, too, are full of the pleasures of gardening. He is in no hurry to resume work on his current novel, he explains to John Blackwood in February 1871, 'For in the Spring, & Summer, glorious outdoor work invites me; trees to train, & roses mostly gorgeous, to attend to. – '; and a few days later, 'How little time one has to read, who works with pen and pruning-knife! [. . .] Grafting begins this week; & I have hundreds to put in – '; and again, in March 1872, 'I yearn for outdoor work, & all my trees are calling me'.[11] Temptations

9 See Dunn, chapters 9–12, and Sutton, pp. 20–23.

10 An early biographer, Stewart March Ellis, estimates that the farm lost Blackmore cumulatively around £20,000 (Ellis, p. 126).

11 22 and 27 February 1871, and 9 March 1872, NLSB, ms. 4270, folios 93 and 95; and ms. 4285, folio 21.

notwithstanding, pen kept pace with pruning-hook, in a steady crop of publications: among them, in 1862, *The Farm and Fruit of Old* – Blackmore's translation of books I and II of Virgil's *Georgics* (his complete translation followed in 1871); and between 1864 and 1897, his fourteen novels. Blackmore's literary harvest eventually offset some of his losses; but in both spheres, his labours, as he liked to pun, long proved 'fruitless'.

Lorna Doone*'s reception*

Lorna Doone was Blackmore's third novel, and the first to bring him any return. While eager to find a public, he was not a hack – one of his angriest letters, written towards the end of his career, refuted the charge that he wrote 'pot-boilers' (14 May 1896). Skill and technique (pruning, grafting, as well as choosing a market) mattered to writer, as to farmer; and he described *Lorna Doone* to potential publishers as 'a carefully written tale'.[12] Other letters substantiate this. He records his struggles in composition ('I threw it by in ill content, four or five times'); in finishing it, amid constant interruptions; in persuading a publisher to accept it ('It must be remembered that my two first books expired promptly upon their birth'), and its initial failure. Of the five hundred printed, about three hundred sold, and the remainder were shipped off to the Colonies ('the doom of unsaleable books', as Blackmore remarked). In spite of this discouraging start, Sampson Low, his publishers, brought out a cheaper one-volume edition in October 1870, which, the writer said, 'went off as if by magic'.[13] *Blackwood's Magazine* printed a positive review by the novelist, Margaret Oliphant, in January 1871; and John Blackwood, who had refused *Lorna Doone* two years earlier, encouraged Blackmore to consider sending him *The Maid of Sker*, as a possible *Blackwood's Magazine* serial (an invitation that Blackmore accepted keenly). Writing his thanks for a copy of the review ('very kind, & very well written'), Blackmore concluded with one of his typically good-humoured reflections on the vagaries of literary fortunes: 'There is a great run upon Lorna; what a haphazard lot the public are! "Clara Vaughan" is in some [points] better (though as a whole inferior) but nobody ever read it. – And nobody's ghost ever read "Cradock Nowell".[14]

12 11 November, 1868, NLSB ms. 4228, folio 100.

13 Letters to Nelson Fedden, 18 June 1873, and Mrs. William Halliday, 7 November 1876 and 24 September 1879 (Dunn, pp. 128, 130).

14 31 January 1871. NLSB, ms. 4255 folio 64/65. [The letter is catalogued with

He sometimes attributed this reversal to 'the merest fluke', surmising that the public had been stirred to sudden interest by a rumour that his lovers' story was a topical tie-in with a true-life royal romance: the engagement that same October between Queen Victoria's daughter, the Princess Louise, and the non-royal, Marquis of Lorne. The connections were tenuous and somewhat confused – a Marquis, while of lesser degree than a Princess, is hardly of the same level of lowliness as John Ridd when he first admires Lorna: 'Here was I, a yeoman's boy, a yeoman every inch of me, [. . .] and there was she, a lady born, and thoroughly aware of it' (p. 51). Nevertheless, as Dunn concludes, the main ingredients – a match between a high-born lady and a lover from outside her rank, coloured with the history of Lorna's and the Marquis's shared Scottish ancestry – offered similarity enough between Blackmore's romance and the society news of the day, to capture the public's attention.

Once readers had been gripped by the story, there seemed no check to their enthusiasm. Although its early financial returns disappointed its author, a print-run of one hundred thousand six-penny copies sold out within a week in 1897; and in 1898, Blackmore remarked that, 'She has brought me a greater return in money, than all my other children, ten times over' (Dunn, p. 137). Many of these 'children' (Blackmore's thirteen other novels) were critically well-regarded, and a number attracted their own champions – among them, *The Maid of Sker* (1872), a tale of the Glamorganshire coast, which Blackmore sometimes called his own favourite, *Eréma: Or My Father's Sin* (1877), set in California, and *Springhaven: A Tale of the Great War* (1887), a story of Sussex in the Napoleonic era. But the general public maintained a single-minded attachment to *Lorna Doone*. To the end of his life, Blackmore would confess himself puzzled by the adulation, frequently allowing himself a dismissive remark about its merits: the novel was 'absurdly overrated', even 'rather childish' (Dunn, p. 133). As he was often self-deprecating about his literary work in general, we should set such comments alongside his frequent expressions of pleasure in the novel's reception. Publishers who short-changed him, or pirated the novel, clearly tested his patience, as did professional literary critics: 'there has been little in our language worthy of the name of "criticism." They have

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the 1870 papers; given Blackmore's handwriting, this is understandable.] These letters are mainly concerned with Blackmore's work on *The Maid of Sker* which Blackwood would begin to serialise in August 1871.

not often been harsh to me; & I have no complaint against them, except that they know not whereof they write. I know my strong & weak points (in a humble way, of course) pretty well by this time. But I never had a critic who has hit on either."[15] Yet he responded generously to admirers. When invited to introduce yet another reprinting, he would oblige with a lively new preface: he rang the changes with personal commentary, affectionate speeches to the book as if it were Lorna herself ('What a lucky maid you are, my Lorna!'), and even a verse dialogue between Lorna and 'Gentlemen of the West' in an American edition of 1890.[16]

Busy with his fruit at Teddington, Blackmore distanced himself from fashionable 'literary circles'; but he replied appreciatively to fan letters and requests for autographs and inscriptions, welcomed visitors, and showed interest in other people's creative interpretations of his work. He praised Francis Armstrong's water-colours of *Lorna Doone*'s Exmoor scenes, which later featured among the engravings in the 1883 edition; and was remarkably cordial to W. H. Rideing, the writer of the Doone travelogue above, when, in 1879, he asked consent to adapt the novel for the stage. Blackmore gave permission, saying that he respected Rideing's talents; and requested merely that he should confine production to the United States, leaving the English theatre clear for any future dramatization of Blackmore's own – to be written 'if leisure ever comes'. Rideing later reported that his own ambitions had foundered; not least, because any actor cast as John would need intelligence, 'histrionic capacity' and 'colossal height, girth, and muscle' – a near impossible combination, it seemed. (Representing John defeated many illustrators, too, producing some ludicrously disproportioned pictures of the lovers.) Blackmore saw, and disliked, at least one other adaptation; but his own stage version never appeared; and when, in 1891, his play was rumoured to be in progress, he explained that he had stuck fast after one act; and had now abandoned the attempt.[17] There is no evidence that he ever planned a sequel to the novel, but *Tales from the Telling House* (1896), stories published in his late career, had a Doone connection and, to Blackmore's displeasure, were published in the United States under the explicit title *Slain by the Doones.*

15 27 January 1871 NLSB, ms. 4270, folio 91/92.
16 Reprinted in Dunn, pp. 136–7.
17 Dunn, p. 237: for an account of Armstrong's work, see pp.138, 178; for the Blackmore/Rideing correspondence, pp. 236–7.

Alongside the adaptations and specially illustrated editions, *Lorna Doone* inspired namesakes. As the novel introduced into the repertoire a popular new name for girls,[18] Blackmore found himself sent tidings of numerous real-life young Lornas;[19] and though without children himself, took an interest in following their progress. He became godfather to the Lorna born to his illustrator, Francis Armstrong, and in 1892 wrote to the family: 'I could get a little roomful of them now – all nice girls, according to their photos and parents' (12 December 1892). In the twentieth century, long after Blackmore's death in January 1900, the book continued to generate other progeny. The 'Lorna Doones' that followed included china patterns (Royal Staffordshire produced a Lorna Doone 'chintz' design of surprisingly colourful birds and flowers), paddle steamers (Lorna Doone II, built as a minesweeper in 1916, survived as a pleasure boat until the 1950s), cross-stitch kits, cigarette cards, a floribunda rose, a lake and park in Orlando, Florida, and – recalling Lorna's Scottish ancestry – a Nabisco shortbread cookie.

Lorna Doone: The Power of the Romance

That *Lorna Doone* had such an extraordinarily wide appeal is perhaps because, as its first sentence announces, it offers a 'simple tale told simply'. It contains humour and high adventure, romance and history, lyricism and violence, in settings ranging from the domestic to the demonic – often, as in 'John is John no Longer', within a single chapter. Blackmore fuses such materials through the voice of John Ridd, his hero. Writing in his later years, pipe in hand at his fireside, John looks back to his youth in the 1670s and 80s, in a meditative memoir, which at times distances, but more often revives, the heat of past actions and emotions. If John's tale seems simple, Blackmore took pains to make it so: his own was more complex. Setting his narrative in seventeenth-century Exmoor and

18 More locally, in Devon and Somerset, 'Jan', too, was found as a boys' name, after 'girt Jan Ridd'. E. G. Withycombe, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973.

19 Robert Louis Stevenson, for example, reported from Samoa in a letter of October 1890: 'I sailed up here last trip from Sydney with a missionary; his little daughter was called Lorna – after Lorna Doone', and requested a message for the child and her father. *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, Volume VII (September 1890–December 1892), ed. Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1995, pp. 18–19.

London, he merged national events, public anecdotes, local Doone legends, and 'the nurse-tales of his childhood', on a dense and detailed canvas. John encounters a spectrum of fictional and historical characters (from John's favourite sheep to Judge Jeffreys and James II), presented with a solidity that commands readers' belief in the 'real-life' origins of all his personages. Blackmore had tried a first-person narrative in *Clara Vaughan*, his previous novel (told by the eponymous heroine); and writing to John Blackwood about his efforts on *The Maid of Sker*, his next, he explains:

> You can hardly tell, without trying it, how difficult it is to present, in clearly consecutive order, all the incidents of a story related in the first person; & (in a great measure) extraneous to that person. And this difficulty grows of course, with every stage of progress, as more people have to be dealt with, & more incidents occur. And tenfold so, if one keeps the narrator as closely as possible to his own seeings and concludings. [. . .] Wilkie Collins avoids this difficulty by the clumsy contrivances of diaries, correspondence & so on.[20]

The works are not entirely parallel – David Llewellyn, the ancient Welsh fisherman who tells the story of *The Maid of Sker*, does so reluctantly, for an advance of £50 down, and expenses paid ('Notwithstanding this, the work of writing must be very dull to me', Chapter 1); and he is a less sensitive observer, narrating from a position outside the main action. With *Lorna Doone*, Blackmore's challenge was in some ways even greater: to present, as a charismatic hero, a reticent speaker, who 'do hate brag the most' (p. 443); to layer his perspectives, so past and present reflect on, and enrich each other; and to tell both an inner and an outer history. He also exploited, largely for their humour, the further gaps between subjective and 'extraneous' viewpoints – for example, John's casual revelations of his (most stereotypical) heroic qualifications (rescuer of a drowning child, admired by women, adored by children); and between John's period outlook, and that of the modern Victorian reader (for example, his indignant defence of what counted as a modest day's drinking for a healthy Englishman in the mid-1680s [p. 401]).

20 9 March 1872, NLSB, ms. 4285, folio 21.

John Ridd as story-teller

Blackmore plays such 'simplicity' to complex effect. While the novel never turns into a thorough-going exercise in metafiction, Blackmore's own interests in how to tell a story come to the foreground in many of John's self-reflexive glances at his manuscript. He anticipates the exhaustion of the reader, 'whosoever thou art' (p. 121); sometimes summarising for us, sometimes elaborating, talking us through difficulties, explaining his own position. He recognises when he has taken longer to tell, than an action took to happen; and which details he needs to heed as 'part of my life', which to ignore as 'not part of my tale' – among them, the progress of his wheat (p. 346). Attuned to the dynamics between teller and listener, he describes the impact of an oral tale – John Fry's deadpan delivery (p. 260) or Lorna's 'sweet voice and manner; and if ye find it wearisome, seek in yourselves the weariness' (p. 122); and is careful to discriminate information long assimilated and its effects at first hearing: 'my thoughts were then dark and hazy, like an oil-lamp full of fungus' (p. 400). As the very act of autobiography, to some degree, cannot avoid signalling an immodest self-regard, Blackmore gives John a public purpose for his personal chronicle: to set the record straight, on behalf of Oare Parish, of its loyalty to the King through turbulent and rebellious times. Within this, John can write his inner story: 'the tale of Lorna's fortunes' (p. 433); and, within that, indulge the inmost story of his own obsession. He finds himself, nevertheless, perplexed by the paradoxes of narration; of how to keep 'bare truth' (p. 433) and self-effacement in proportion. John's characteristic ways of thinking pass into his prose style – 'I liked to pass it through my fingers, as if my fingers shaped it' (p. 459) – and he never loses touch with the sense that writing and papers are physical objects, that documents have readers. (As in many nineteenth-century plots, some of the plot's major crises and revelations hinge on hidden letters.) He lets slip his fame at wrestling even as he tries to erase it, scratching out 'written pages' which 'must seem (even to kind people) to magnify myself' (p. 433); keen to conceal Lorna's note, he all but gives away its contents: 'will I not expose it to every man who buys this book, and haply thinks that he has bought me to the bottom of my heart' (pp. 489–90). All too aware of the tricks, treacheries and temptations of story-telling, he tries to minimize their dangers. As he frequently reassures us, he sticks to his own 'seeings and concludings': 'I make a point of setting down only the things which I saw done' (p. 483), creating an

air of solidity, even in the wildest flights of the romance. He is like a lumpy and mottled sausage, he tells us: 'I am good inside, and not a bit of rue in me; only queer knots, as of marjoram, and a stupid manner of bursting' (p. 32).

John and Lorna

It is this first-person voice that helps give such life to the story. To present his chronicle, John describes a series of journeys, actual and metaphorical, as he grows from boy to man, impulsive lover to 'stout churchwarden' (p. 57), 'Girt Jan Ridd' to famous knight. Rooted in his neighbourhood, his own patch of ground at Plover's Barrows, he returns in memory to strange and dangerous territory: Glen Doone, the Wizard's Slough and its dreadful mine, the Devil's Cheese-ring, the 'hideous and dirty' streets of London (p. 152), the marshes where 'none can tell the boundaries' (p. 470), the nightmare battle field of Sedgemoor which haunts him life-long – 'Would that I had never been there!' (p. 471).

Throughout, his tale holds the reader through the power of his loyalties and passions – for his murdered father, his family, his farm and his land; and, above all, for the 'aching ecstasy, delicious pang of Lorna' (p. 110), whether as child, outlaw, lady or bride. Leaving her fate unknown all through a first reading, Blackmore keeps Lorna as the ideal and solace of John's first vision: 'And since that day, I think of her, through all the rough storms of my life, when I see an early primrose' (p. 50). When John finds her again, Blackmore represents the lovers' physical encounters with appropriate decorum: Lorna is modest, ethereal, innocent; John restrained, respectful, trustworthy. While for some modern readers, Lorna has scarcely more life than the pressed flowers in Victorian memento books, from the point of their first meeting, on St.Valentine's Day, John remembers, 'the air was full of feeling' (p. 43); and feelings, not plot, impel the narrative forward. In his letters, Blackmore chafed at the need to bowdlerize, complaining to John Blackwood, 'My own opinion is that if a book is to be read aloud by young ladies, it shd. be written by them. Especially, when trying to describe the manners of the last century, a writer is crippled if he has to consult the fashion of this alone – a far more deeply wicked age of delicate hypocrisy.'[21] This does not imply, that released from restraint, Blackmore would have treated *Lorna Doone's* readers to an erotic romp – indeed, he seems to have been, in Dunn's words,

21 16 January 1872, NLSB, ms. 4285.

'ultra conservative' (p. 225); but his words reinforce the sense of a strongly passionate undertow in much of his writing.

Some readers felt such a pulse within the prose itself. As a contributor to *The Atlantic Monthly* pointed out in February 1890, the author (or John) has a 'tendency to fall into rhythmical forms of expression', and points out three 'brief passages which are strictly metrical in construction – passages which are really verse, although printed as prose' (p. 284) – and each reader will find more. Blackmore, Dunn points out, became annoyed when reviewers implied that he did not know his craft; and emphasised his care for the rhythm of every sentence. But Blackmore also works through image, scene and emblem. The episode at the pump in chapter 3, as Sally Shuttleworth observes, is a 'clearly sexualized encounter' (Shuttleworth, p. xv); and Peter Merchant emphasises how Blackmore carefully marks each stage of John's passage through adolescence, in the 'folk-tale patterning' of the St. Valentine's Day meetings (Merchant, p. 245). John himself looks back with some confusion: 'The slight and graceful shape was gone; not that I remembered anything of her figure, if you please; for boys of twelve are not yet prone to note the shapes of women' (p. 401). John restrains himself with Lorna, keeping her pure through metaphor; she is child-like and delicate – images at their extreme when he brings her home, 'happy as an infant in its bed', with 'her precious breath, hung frozen, like a silver cobweb' (pp. 298, 299). With Ruth Huckaback, his affections are more human – 'the room always looked so different without her' (p. 415); and his appetites more earthy: 'her white arm shone, [. . .] as round and plump and velvety, as a stalk of asparagus, newly fetched out of ground' (p. 445). This relation, into which we see further than John does, interestingly offers other possibilities for the ending, complicating our own sympathies and hopes for resolution. Ruth's summary of John's story (the 'Lorna Doone' he tells her) is that it is 'a very nice romance' (p. 353); and her characterisation suggests a more realistic future union: her presence until the last, lets Blackmore keep the option open – that, at the time of writing, when we know John is a grand-father, it is Ruth who is his wife, and Lorna his lost vision. Ruth's name, after all, signals her workaday function – 'Huckaback', as Lorna reminds us in one of her few spiteful moments, is a strong, hard-wearing fabric 'something like a towel' (p. 492).[22]

22 In the first edition, Blackmore made John more confident about her eventual prospects, writing of the 'worthy' man mentioned in the book's closing paragraphs, 'It is *my* firm conviction, that in the end he will win her.'

But Lorna has her own vitality, Blackmore allowing her, as Shuttleworth remarks, 'a warmth of physical response which was unusual for his time' (Shuttleworth, p. xix). Throughout his career, Blackmore was cautioned by his publishers; and after *Lorna Doone's* first edition, he toned down some of the language. He softened the profanities that he had used to convey the spirit of a more robust and wilder age; and he also returned to some of John's most ardent declarations. As Sutton points out (p. 60), in the first edition, John's rhapsody in the final pages, placed more stress on his sexual than his spiritual revival; Blackmore moderated this, and Lorna's eager part in it (the 'challenge' of her lips becomes in revision, the gentler, and more passive, 'caressing'): "I felt my life come back, and warm; I felt my trust in woman flow; I felt the joy of living now, and the power of doing it." Blackmore revised the passage to express more pious dimensions of John's experience: "I felt my life come back, and glow; I felt my trust in God revive; I felt the joy of living and of loving dearer things than life" (p. 550).

As there is vigour and energy in Lorna, John, too, lacks 'delicate hypocrisy'. He is all energy, all desire. He seeks Lorna in country and in city, in the stronghold of the Doones and in the prisons of social rank; and he battles water, cold, fire, rock and quagmire to rescue her. Resolving that none shall read his story until after he is dead and gone (p. 346), John confesses to the reader what he hides from friends and family: 'you may well believe that my quick replies to Jeremy Stickles' banter were but as the flourish of a drum to cover the sounds of pain' (p. 377). Opening his heart, John can speak the language of a giant striding the earth. Certain ' – as in a glory – ' that Lorna has begun to love him, he celebrates his strength: 'Hill and valley scarcely seemed to be step and landing for me; [. . .] even rooted trees seemed to me but as sticks I could smite down, except for my love of everything' (p. 181). Parted from her, 'distraught in mind, and desperate in body' (p. 169), he shrugs off in a sentence the mere six days it takes him to walk from London to Somerset. After a later parting, in a scene surely awaiting its screen moment, he receives the letter which renews his hopes, and, mad with joy: 'to the river Thames, with all speed, I hurried; and keeping all my best clothes on [. . .] into the quiet stream I leaped, and swam as far as London Bridge' (p. 490). For readers of popular romance, such electrifying passion always holds images of its opposite: the threat of cruel force, the dream of strength transformed to tenderness. In John, Blackmore provides both. John is a fighter, a champion wrestler, whose body can surge with anger, 'a glowing of