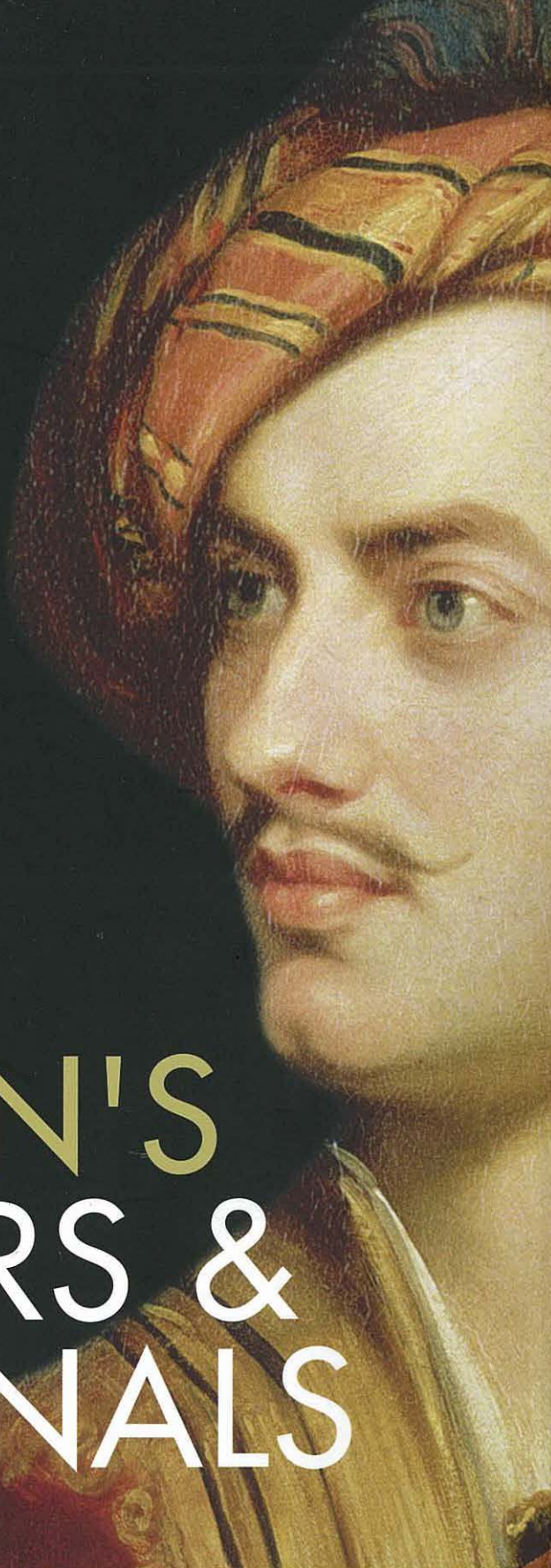


Richard
Lansdown

A New Selection

BYRON'S
LETTERS &
JOURNALS



BYRON'S LETTERS AND JOURNALS

Byron's Letters and Journals

A New Selection

From Leslie A. Marchand's
twelve-volume edition

Edited by

RICHARD LANSDOWN

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Two generations of Byron scholars, biographers, students, and readers have acknowledged the debt they owe to Professor Leslie A. Marchand (1900–99), of Rutgers University, and Jock Murray (1909–93), the sixth generation to run the famous London publishing house of that name since it was founded in 1768. Together they established two of the four pillars of contemporary Byron scholarship: Marchand's three-volume *Byron: A Biography*, published in 1957, and the twelve-volume edition of *Byron's Letters and Journals*, published between 1973 and 1982 (with a supplementary volume in 1994). The other two pillars are Jerome McGann's edition of *Byron's Complete Poetical Works*, published in seven volumes by Oxford University Press between 1980 and 1993, and Andrew Nicholson's edition of *Byron's Complete Miscellaneous Prose*, also published by Oxford, in 1991. Without these books, Byron would perhaps still be regarded as he often was in the first half of the 20th century, as the poor cousin of the English Romantic movement.

Marchand's colossal achievement over a lifetime speaks for itself from library shelves around the world. Jock Murray worked closely with him tracking down unpublished Byron letters from all over the world; he also welcomed hundreds of researchers to the Byron archive at Albemarle Street—now held at the National Library of Scotland—and so nurtured the ongoing scholarship that Leslie Marchand inspired. As a result of that scholarship, Byron is now regarded as one of the wonders of English literature, and a creative force to stand alongside Jane Austen and William Wordsworth.

To the current John Murray, the seventh in succession, I owe a more personal debt. His wife Virginia helped me at Albemarle Street when I visited as a doctoral student in the mid-1980s, and I still have copies of letters to Byron from various theatrical types that she pinned together for me all those years ago. More particularly, John inherited the copyright of Leslie A. Marchand's edition of Byron's letters and journals, and he gave me permission to reproduce freely from it in the selection that follows, for which I am profoundly grateful. Without that generous gesture this book would not have been possible. It is a pleasure and a privilege to have helped bring the OUP and the John Murray

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strands in the Byron publishing story together, and I thank John Murray VII for allowing it to happen.

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INTRODUCTION

'Byron's letters appeal on three special grounds to all lovers of English literature,' their editor suggested at the close of the nineteenth century. 'They offer the most suggestive commentary on his poetry; they give the truest portrait of the man; they possess, at their best, in their ease, freshness and racy vigour, a very high literary value.'¹ The great monuments of English Romantic prose are Jane Austen's novels, Hazlitt's essays, Keats's letters, Coleridge's notebooks, and De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*. Byron's letters and journals match these and go further, to provide, taken as a whole, one of the three great informal autobiographies in English, alongside Samuel Pepys's diary and James Boswell's journal.

Like those other two works, the occasionally risqué content of Byron's letters assured them a complex publishing history. (Pepys's diary—deposited by him at Magdalene College, Cambridge after his death in 1703—was first decoded in 1825, but had to wait another 150 years for an unexpurgated edition. Boswell's journal was discovered in Ireland in the 1920s, 130 years after he finished it, and complete publication only came to an end in 1989.) Byron's informal prose has been revealed in three great publishing ventures, stretching over 150 years, all emanating from the English publishing firm of John Murray, with which the poet was associated for almost the whole of his writing life. The first was the *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: With Notices of his Life*, published in 1830 by his friend and fellow poet Thomas Moore, only six years after the poet's death, which made 561 letters available—albeit in a bowdlerized form. The second was the six volumes of *Letters and Journals*, edited by R. E. Prothero, which supplemented Byron's poems in the great edition of his *Works* published between 1898 and 1904, and which printed nearly 1,200 letters. The treasure was hauled completely into the light in the twelve volumes of *Byron's Letters and Journals*, edited by Leslie Marchand between 1973 and 1982 (a supplementary volume was published in 1994), which brought the total up to 3,000—at last reproduced in

¹ *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals*, ed. Rowland E. Prothero, vol. i (London: John Murray, 1898), vi.

an unexpurgated text.² Three hundred of those letters are reprinted in this selection: about twice as many as Marchand reprinted in his *Selected Letters and Journals* of 1982.

Despite this complex history, each generation of readers has responded to Byron's letters in a strikingly similar way. Moore was certain that the correspondence he printed 'will be found equal, if not superior, in point of vigour, variety, and liveliness, to any that have yet adorned this branch of our literature', and when the historian Thomas Babington Macaulay came to discuss Moore's documentary biography in the *Edinburgh Review* he emphatically concurred. 'The extracts from the journals and correspondence of Lord Byron', he wrote, 'are in the highest degree valuable—not merely on account of the information which they contain respecting the distinguished man by whom they were written, but on account, also, of their rare merit as compositions.' 'If the epistolary style of Lord Byron was artificial,' Macaulay concluded, 'it was a rare and admirable instance of that highest art, which cannot be distinguished from nature.'³ John Churton Collins reviewed Prothero's edition in similar terms in 1905. 'Byron's letters', he wrote in the *Quarterly Review*,

will probably live as long as his poems. Voluminous as they are, they never weary us. Social sketches dashed off with inimitable happiness; anecdote and incident related as only a consummate *raconteur* can relate them; piquant comments on the latest scandal or the latest book; the gossip and tittle-tattle of the green-room and the boudoir, of the clubs and the salons, so transformed by the humour and the wit of their cynical retailer that they almost rival the dialogue of Congreve and Sheridan; shrewd and penetrating observations on life, on human nature, on politics, on literature, dropped so carelessly that it is only on reflection that we see their wisdom, keep us perpetually amused and entertained.⁴

Collins's attitude to the writer he calls a 'consummate *raconteur*' and a 'cynical retailer' of 'gossip and tittle-tattle'—someone who even drops the penetrating observations on life he has to offer 'carelessly'—is a condescending one. (In the past Byron has frequently suffered from similar forms of literary-critical condescension—his poetry often being regarded as facile and slapdash compared with that of, say, Wordsworth and Keats.) But Collins also set Byron's letters alongside his poems as sources of literary value, and Arthur Symonds, writing in 1909, did the same. 'In his letters,' Symonds wrote, 'with their brilliant common sense, their wit, their clear and defiant intellect, their intolerant

² I draw these statistics from Marchand himself: see *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 12 vols. (London: John Murray 1973–82), i. 24; cited below as LJ.

³ Thomas Moore, *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: With Notices of his Life*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1830), i. n.p., and Andrew Rutherford (ed.), *Byron: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 296.

⁴ John Churton Collins, *Studies in Poetry and Criticism* (London: George Bell, 1905), 80.

sincerity, as in his poems, it is not what we call the poet who speaks, it is what we call the natural man. Byron is the supreme incarnation of the natural man...'⁵ When the Marchand edition appeared seventy years later, many readers were prepared to go still further in considering the relative merits of Byron's prose and verse. 'No one...need doubt', Michael Ratcliffe wrote in the *London Times*, 'that the letters, perhaps even more than *Don Juan*, are the beginning, middle, and the end of Lord Byron.'⁶

But just what the characteristic qualities of Byron's informal prose are remains difficult to say. 'The letters and journals together give a vivid impression of a fascinating character, who with all his faults, and they were many, insinuates himself into the sympathies of a reader by his transparent humanity,' Leslie Marchand suggested.⁷ 'In journals and letters alike,' John Jump commented,

Byron allows his natural mobility of temperament to reveal itself in rapid and sometimes subversive fluctuations of mood; vigorously and racily, he sets down what he has observed; and he comments wittily, sympathetically, humorously, or mockingly upon whatever has excited his interest. He is one of the most versatile and provocative of our letter-writers and diarists; and more than any other he has left us a collection of writings that constitute a brilliant and incisive self-portrait, above all a dramatic self-portrait, of one whom we can never know too well.⁸

No reader is likely to disagree with such views; but they are essentially those of Moore, Macaulay, Prothero, and Collins, with their stress on 'vigour, variety, and liveliness'. The aesthetic features and moral implications of Byron's dramatic self-portrait still await our understanding.

'I have but an indifferent opinion of the prose-style of poets,' Hazlitt wrote in 1822: 'not that it is not sometimes good, nay, excellent; but it is never the better, and generally the worse from the habit of writing verse. Poets are winged animals, and can cleave the air, like birds, with ease to themselves and delight to the beholders; but these "feathered, two-legged things," when they light upon the ground of prose and matter-of-fact, they seem not to have the same use of their feet.'⁹ If there is one thing we can say of Byron's letters it is that they are the exception that tests Hazlitt's rule. (To be fair to him, it was probably poets' formal prose Hazlitt had in mind, and he rightly said that Byron's prose of that variety is, as a rule, 'heavy, labored, and coarse'.) 'Their style halts, totters, is

⁵ Rutherford, *Byron: The Critical Heritage*, 501.

⁶ Michael Ratcliffe, 'Byron: Minus the Asterisk', *London Times*, 4 October 1973.

⁷ Byron, *Selected Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand (London: John Murray, 1982), 16.

⁸ John D. Jump (ed.), *Byron: A Symposium* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 34.

⁹ William Hazlitt, *Complete Works*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols. (London: J. M. Dent, 1930-4), xii. 5.

loose, disjointed, and without expressive pauses or rapid movements,' Hazlitt went on: and perhaps of no prose in English outside Shakespeare's plays is this less true than Byron's in his letters. 'Never, we feel, can written utterance have been less premeditated, less rehearsed, less inhibited, less controlled,' John Jump remarked. Leslie Marchand, too, spoke of the 'bounding spontaneity' of Byron's epistolary style.¹⁰

Examples of Byron's 'bounding' are never far to seek. 'I am glad you like it,' he wrote to Moore in January 1817 about the recently published third canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, the poem that had made him famous overnight in the spring of 1812:

it is a fine indistinct piece of poetical desolation, and my favourite. I was half mad during the time of its composition, between metaphysics, mountains, lakes, love unextinguishable, thoughts unutterable, and the nightmare of my own delinquencies. I should, many a good day, have blown my brains out, but for the recollection that it would have given pleasure to my mother-in-law; and, even *then*, if I could have been certain to haunt her—but I won't dwell upon these trifling family matters. (*LJ* v. 165)

Unpremeditated this may very well be, but it is 'inhibited'—if that is the word for the poetic employment of language—by Byron's capacity to anticipate, control, and exploit the patterns of speech he is unleashing. In this example (and dozens of parallel passages could be cited from the letters) alliteration begins the process: his 'piece of poetical desolation' introduces the 'mad...metaphysics, mountains' sequence, which gives place to lakes and love, themselves immediately supplanted by a negative-adjectival pattern ('love unextinguishable, thoughts unutterable') itself fused together with an assonantal pattern capped off by 'the nightmare of my own delinquencies'. (Discussing Byron's prose in his autobiography, John Ruskin compared it to 'the serene swiftness of a smith's hammer-strokes on hot iron'.¹¹) The bathetic humour in the next sentence, in which Byron resolves to continue his existence if only to plague his wife's mother, is only a different tack in a wonderfully intense form of responsiveness to what preoccupied and distracted him as he wrote—itsself an irreverent commentary on the moodily solipsistic and quintessentially Romantic poem ostensibly under discussion. This was exactly the 'same use of his feet' that Byron brought to, and from, his poetry—especially his comic poetry: 'that highest art,' as Macaulay put it, 'which cannot be distinguished from nature.'

Byron's letters exploit dramatic insights as well as linguistic inventions. In November 1818, two and a half years after leaving England in disgrace after the

¹⁰ Jump, *Byron: A Symposium*, 17, and *LJ* i. 1.

¹¹ John Ruskin, *Praeterita*, chapter 8, in *Works*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols. (London: George Allen, 1902–12), xxxv. 144; this chapter is one of the most astute critical discussions of the poet that we have.

collapse of his marriage, he was reluctantly visited at Venice by his xenophobic, valetudinarian, and miserly lawyer, John Hanson, on business relating to the sale of Newstead Abbey, the poet's country seat. As if this was not enough, Hanson had forgotten to bring the latest Walter Scott novel and a supply of Byron's favourite toothpaste. 'I'll be revenged on Spooney', Byron wrote to his friend, John Cam Hobhouse:

—five men died of the Plague the other day—in the Lazaretto—I shall take him to ride at the Lido—he hath a reverend care & fear of his health—I will show him the Lazaretto which is not far off you know—& looks nearer than it is—I will tell him of the five men—I will tell him of my contact with [Dr] Aglietti in whose presence they died—& who came into my box at the (St. Benedetto's) Opera the same evening—& shook hands with me;—I will tell him all this—and as he is hypochondriac—perhaps it may kill him.—The Monster left my books—everything—my Magnesia—my tooth powder—&c. &c. and wanted me besides to go to Geneva—but I made him come.—He is a queer fish—the Customs House Officers wanted to examine or have money—he would not pay—they opened every thing.—'Ay—Ay—(said he) look away—*Carts Carts*' that was his phrase for *papers* with a strong English emphasis & accent on the s and he actually made them turn over all the Newstead & Rochdale—& Jew—& Chancery papers exclaiming '*Carts Carts*' & came off triumphant with paying a *Centime*—the Officers giving up the matter in despair—finding nothing else—& not being able to translate what they found.—But I have been in a damned passion for all that—for this adventure nearly reconciled me to him. (LJ vi. 77–8)

Here is the eternal British citizen submitting obstructively to a continental *douanier*; and the contrast Byron finds between Hanson's '*carts*' (that is the French *cartes*, meaning maps or papers), of such powerful but temporary significance, and the parties squabbling over them in so futile but legalistic a spirit, is typical of his appetite for the life going on around him. This appetite for life frequently surprised his acquaintances, who expected to meet Childe Harold in person, and found someone wholly different: 'Byron's suavity of manner surprised and delighted me,' wrote one such witness, who met the poet on his last voyage to Greece; 'my own previous conceptions, supported by common rumour, having prepared me to expect to find in him a man of morose temper and gloomy misanthropy, instead of which, from his fecundity in anecdote, he was a most delightful associate.'¹²

Byron was at least as fecund and sure-footed narrating events as he was analysing characters. 'We have had a deluge here', he wrote to his half-sister from Italy in November 1822:

¹² James Hamilton Browne, 'Voyage from Leghorn to Cephalonia with Lord Byron', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 35 (Jan. 1834), 57.

—which has carried away half the country between this and Genoa—(about two miles or less distant) but being on a hill we were only nearly knocked down by the lightning and battered by columns of rain—and our lower floor afloat—with the comfortable view of the whole landscape under water—and people screaming out of their garret windows—*two bridges* swept down—and our next door neighbours—a Cobbler a Wigmaker—and a Gingerbread baker delivering up their whole stock to the elements—which marched away with a quantity of shoes—several perukes—and Gingerbread in all its branches.—The whole came on so suddenly that there was no time to prepare—think only at the top of the hill—of the road being an impassable cascade—and a child being drowned a few yards from its own door (as we heard say) in a place where Water is in general a rare commodity. (*LJ* x. 28–9)

Both these passages demonstrate that mobility of temperament John Jump describes: the further Byron goes in humiliating and ridiculing his lawyer, the more likely he is suddenly to forgive him; the more surrealistic his account of a flood, the more likely he is suddenly to remember the human tragedies it might involve.

Nothing seems to miss this alertness to sensation and its corollary expression. Byron was much more interested in art than he pretended to be, for example, but he was as opinionated on the topic as amateurs usually are. ‘As for Rubens’, he wrote after a visit to Antwerp:

he seems to me (who by the way know nothing of the matter) the most glaring—flaring—staring—harlotry imposter that ever passed a trick upon the senses of mankind—it is not nature—it is not art—with the exception of some linen (which hangs over the cross in one of his pictures) which to do it justice looked like a very handsome table cloth—I never saw such an assemblage of florid night-mares as his canvas contains—his portraits seem clothed in pulpit cushions. (*LJ* v. 73)

As an exercise in criticism, this is wilfully and transparently unfair; but once the reader has been exposed to a tablecloth flipped over a crucifixion, and to this cruel but brilliantly unstudied climactic characterization of the artist’s adipose sitters, it is hard to think about Rubens with the reverence he no doubt deserves. The attitude is certainly reductive, but its instinctive antipathy to critical veneration is something that we cannot help but appreciate. Impertinent and intolerantly sincere lines like this about pulpit cushions, it should be noted, are a Byronic speciality: ‘I am a length joined to Bologna’, Byron wrote to a friend from that city of gourmands in the summer of 1819, ‘where I am settled like a Sausage—and shall be broiled like one if this weather continues’ (*LJ* vi. 146).

The women in Byron’s life were memorialized repeatedly, from what one can only call an unapologetically and intransigently masculine point of view. A long-term Venetian mistress of 1816–18, Marianna Segati, was displayed to readers back in London with proprietorial exhibitionism:

My goddess is only the wife of a 'Merchant of Venice'—but then she is as pretty as an Antelope,—is but two & twenty years old—has the large black Oriental eyes—with the Italian countenance—and dark glossy hair of the curl & colour of Lady Jersey's—then she has the voice of a lute—and the song of a Seraph (though not quite so sacred) besides a long postscript of graces—virtues and accomplishments—enough to furnish out a new Chapter for Solomon's song. (*LJ* v. 133)

This is too full of admiration, *joie de vivre*, and blasphemy to be boorish or coarse, and it is sharpened by Byron's exultant comparison with the women of his native land, whose '*virtues and accomplishments*' (even in the person of a Regency toast like Lady Jersey) can only aspire to this draper's wife from the warm south. What, such a passage asks us, in its ironic fashion, is the difference between a 'grace' and a 'virtue', even if we were to take such terms at face value?

The last and greatest love of Byron's life, Teresa Guiccioli, comes in for the kind of affectionate drollery that is itself testimony to the regard in which he held her. Byron was an excellent horseman, and during his residence in Ravenna of 1820–1, he often rode in the *Pineta* forest outside the town. Teresa sometimes insisted on accompanying him. 'She is an Equestrian too,' he wrote to his half-sister Augusta in July 1819,

—but a bore in her rides—for she can't guide her horse—and he runs after mine—and tries to bite him—and then she begins screaming in a high hat and Sky-blue habit—making a most absurd figure—and embarrassing me and both our grooms—who have the devil's own work to keep her from tumbling—or having her clothes torn off by the trees and thickets of the Pine forest. (*LJ* vi. 186)

Such a picture would be mean-spirited if Byron did not at the same time find the human picture behind the individual one. His mistress screaming in fright is one thing; screaming in fright in the latest *fashion*—'a high hat and Sky-blue habit'—brings her before us as a human just like us, most discomfited when most prepared to appear at our best.

At the other end of the amative scale is the unfortunate Claire Clairmont, who initiated an affair with the poet just before he left London in 1816, and came all the way to Geneva to resume it later that year. 'I am not in love', Byron told Augusta,

nor have any love left for any,—but I could not exactly play the Stoic with a woman—who had scrambled eight hundred miles to unphilosophize me—besides I had been regaled of late with so many 'two courses and a *desert*' (Alas!) of aversion—that I was fain to take a little love (if pressed particularly) by way of novelty. (*LJ* v. 92)

Once more, this seems harsher than it is. Clairmont was something of tragic figure, certainly, but then so was Byron at the time ('I breathe lead' he told his sister earlier in the letter). Furthermore, the notion of someone 'scrambling' half

way across Europe to un-philosophize a stoic (which clearly was *not* her primary intention, but rather to show off her lover to Percy Shelley and her stepsister Mary Godwin) when some physical affection was all the 'stoic' ever needed, once again brings their loveless affair back into an emotional realm we cannot help but recognize.

Perhaps it was this alchemical convergence of art and nature, distance and empathy, in Byron's letters that George Wilson Knight had in mind when he commented that 'there is no more Shakespearian writing in England than the prose of Byron's Letters and Journals'.¹³ In fact, of all the writings of their era, Byron's letters best deserve the kind of estimation and appreciation that Romantic critics habitually accorded to what the dramatist Coleridge called 'our *myriad-minded* Shakespear', who 'darts himself forth, and passes into all the forms of human character and passion, the one Proteus of the fire and the flood'.¹⁴ 'Nothing is made out by formal inference and analogy, by climax and antithesis', Hazlitt wrote of Shakespeare, as he might have written of Byron's letters had he known them: 'all comes, or seems to come, immediately from nature. Each object and circumstance exists in his mind, as it would have existed in reality: each several train of thought and feeling goes on of itself, without confusion or effort.'¹⁵ Shakespeare 'unites in his soul', the German critic August Wilhelm Schlegel announced, 'the utmost elevation and the utmost depth; and the most opposite and even apparently irreconcilable properties subsist in him peaceably together.'¹⁶ These qualities of sympathy, transparency, and integrity Byron's letters share with Shakespeare, and when Ruskin said that Byron wrote 'as easily as a hawk flies and as clearly as a lake reflects' that is itself to judge him by a Shakespearian standard.¹⁷

By their nature, letters generally produce a heterogeneous image of their authors, and Byron responded to a collection of Robert Burns's correspondence in terms strikingly similar to those we might employ in considering his own. 'What an antithetical mind!—tenderness, roughness—delicacy, coarseness—sentiment, sensuality—soaring and groveling, dirt and deity—all mixed up in that one compound of inspired clay!' (*LJ* iii. 239). The raciness and vigour that

¹³ George Wilson Knight, *Byron's Dramatic Prose* (Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 1954), 15. Dryden, Addison, Swift, Johnson, Gibbon, and Burke 'have all gone into the melting pot, like one of Medea's victims', Knight said of Byron's letters, 'and something comes out, young, valiant, resilient...' (*Byron's Dramatic Prose*, 12).

¹⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), ii. 19, 27.

¹⁵ Hazlitt, *Complete Works*, v. 50.

¹⁶ August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, trans. John Black (1816; London: George Bell, 1909), 368.

¹⁷ Ruskin, *Works*, xxxv. 145.

readers have continually found in Byron's letters—as well as their 'intolerant sincerity'—surely have their origin in this Shakespearian, 'protean' zest for opposite and irreconcilable qualities—ironically enough, given that Byron frequently scorned Shakespeare's achievement even while he was saturated by it. ('That he threw over whatever he did some flashes of genius, nobody can deny', he wrote: 'but this was all'; *LJ* iv. 85.) 'This journal is a relief,' he noted in December 1813:

When I am tired . . . out comes this, and down goes every thing. But I can't read it over;—and God knows what contradictions it may contain. If I am sincere with myself (but I fear one lies more to one's self than to any one else), every page should confute, refute, and utterly abjure its predecessor. (*LJ* iii. 233)

This is a paradoxical statement from a great Romantic, combining as it does a devout belief in the ultimate incommensurability of human experiences with a rationalist suspicion of intellectual self-sufficiency. 'I have no consistency,' he noted of himself elsewhere, 'except in politics; and *that* probably arises from my indifference on the subject altogether' (*LJ* iii. 242). Consistency is indifference for Byron, in prose as in verse, just as in Shakespeare's drama the figures that attracted the playwright's deepest attention, from Falstaff to Cleopatra, and Coriolanus to Malvolio, are ones we can never regard other than ambivalently.

Byron's journals, five in number (in London from November to April 1813; in the Alps in September 1816; at Ravenna during January and February 1821; the 'Detached Thoughts' at Ravenna and Pisa in October and November 1821; and the short journal kept at Cephalonia in September and October 1823), are a comparatively small but vital element in this protean display: whales' backs in a sea of prose, as Keats said of Hazlitt's sentences. Like all correspondents, Byron oriented himself to whoever he was addressing: his mother, wife, half-sister, or last mistress; his publisher, the unfortunate 'Spooney' Hanson, or his intimate friends. The journals, however, are written fundamentally for himself, and so give us a peculiarly intimate sense of revelation. 'A dose of salts has the effect of a temporary inebriation, like light champagne, upon me,' he wrote in the wintry January of 1821 in Ravenna:

But wine and spirits make me sullen and savage to ferocity—silent, however, and retiring, and not quarrelsome, if not spoken to. Swimming also raises my spirits,—but in general they are low, and get daily lower. That is *hopeless*: for I do not think I am so much *ennuyé* [bored] as I was at nineteen. The proof is, that then I must game, or drink, or be in motion of some kind, or I was miserable. At present, I can mope in quietness; and like being alone better than any company—except the lady's whom I serve. But I feel a something, which makes me think that, if I ever reach near to old age, like Swift, 'I shall die at top' first. Only I do not dread idiotism or madness so much as he did. On the contrary, I think some

quieter stages of both must be preferable to much of what men think the possession of their senses. (*LJ* viii. 16)

This was written by a person with a preternatural capacity to access not only himself and the compartments of his own mentality but, even as he does so, humanity at large, its need for stimulation, and the pride it takes in its intellectual pre-eminence. A Montaigne-like leisure in self-analysis is another facet of Byron's antithetical mind.

Byron's Alpine journal was intended for Augusta, in the aftermath of his scandalous separation from Lady Byron—in which she herself had played a role as sister and lover combined. But its addressee also gets forgotten at times, as Byron gives vent to his grief and depression:

I am a lover of Nature—and an Admirer of Beauty—I can bear fatigue—& welcome privation—and have seen some of the noblest views in the world.—But in all this—the recollections of bitterness—& more especially of recent & more home desolation—which must accompany me through life—have preyed upon me here—and neither the music of the Shepherd—the crashing of the Avalanche—nor the torrent—the mountain—the Glacier—the Forest—nor the Cloud—have for one moment—lightened the weight upon my heart—nor enabled me to lose my own wretched identity in the majesty & the power and the Glory—around—above—& beneath me. (*LJ* v. 104–5)

Here is a case of Byron's prose as commentary upon or stablemate of his poetry, as Prothero suggested, for clearly this was the mood that inspired *Manfred*, his guilt-ridden but vindictory drama concerning his relations with Augusta. 'I have kept this record of what I have seen & felt,' he closed to her: 'Love me as you are beloved by me.'

Twice, in Ravenna and Cephalonia, Byron kept journals relating to liberal uprisings, whether against the Austrian or Ottoman empires. Both bring out another level of that moral ambivalence that I have related to Shakespeare in this discussion. Rhetoric has a vital place in politics, and Byron felt this instinctively. The Ravenna journal is a peculiarly downbeat record, though none the less compelling for that. ('Fine day—a few mares' tails portending change, but the sky clear, upon the whole. Rode—fired pistols—good shooting. Coming back, met an old man. Charity—purchased a shilling's worth of salvation'; *LJ* viii. 35.) It memorializes winter slush, lonely rides, solitary dinners, and moody retrospectives, but it is punctuated by moments of revolutionary excitement and intellectual agitation:

Dined—news come—the Powers mean to war with the peoples [that is, the Austrians with the Italians]. The intelligence seems positive—let it be so—they will be beaten in the end. The king-times are fast finishing. There will be blood shed like water, and tears like mist; but the peoples will conquer in the end. I shall not live to see it, but I foresee it. (*LJ* viii. 26)

The nearer Byron got to a real war the more his anticipatory relish became tempered by a humanity that never abandoned him for long. The Greeks were the inheritors of a deeply troubled history, and no one should expect them to constitute a nation of saints:

Whoever goes into Greece at present should do it as Mrs Fry went into Newgate—not in the expectation of meeting with any especial indication of existing probity—but in the hope that time and better treatment will reclaim the present burglarioussness and larcenous tendencies which have followed from this General Gaol delivery.—When the limbs of the Greeks are a little less stiff from the shackles of four centuries—they will not march so much ‘as if they had gyves on their legs’.——At present the Chains are broken indeed—but the links are still clanking—and the Saturnalia is still too recent to have converted the Slave into a sober Citizen. (*LJ* xi. 32–3)

Among Byron’s journals there is a famous empty chair: the memoirs he wrote in Venice in 1819 (and later supplemented), relating to his marriage, which were destroyed in his publisher’s fireplace some months after his death in Greece in April 1824. They are a woeful loss, but something in the way Byron described them to the man who would later burn them suggests that they may not have possessed the unpremeditated, uninhibited quality that John Jump valued in the prose that we have. ‘You will find many opinions—and some fun’, Byron wrote to John Murray, ‘with a detailed account of my marriage and it’s consequences—as true as a party concerned can make such accounts—for I suppose we are all prejudiced’ (*LJ* vi. 236). This does sound like a more rehearsed, studied, or considered kind of writing, concerned with cause and effect, balance, and what Hazlitt called ‘formal inference’. At their best, the journals we possess give us a sense of participatory eavesdropping that is rare indeed.

Whether Byron’s letters and journals are ‘the supreme incarnation of the natural man’, as Arthur Symonds proposed, is not for me to say; but they are the works of an everyman. Byron was no saint, but then neither did he pose as an apostate, a sinner, or an infidel. He was a reckless and complex individual, but he also exercised a normal degree of temporal self-interest. Far from being the communications of a philosopher, a prophet, a critic, a soldier, or a politician—even a poet: ‘what are *they* worth? what have they done’ (*LJ* viii. 41)—his letters and journals speak to us all. So it is that Byron’s prose is something more than a commentary on his poetry or a self-portrait, and so it is that the value it has for us is deeper than a merely literary one in terms of style and expression—inimitable as those are in his case. Nor does it lie in the statement of ideas or points of view, which in his case are often of a strictly stoical nature. ‘All history and experience—and the rest—teaches us that the good and evil are pretty

equally balanced in this existence', he wrote: 'and that what is most to be desired is an easy passage out of it.—What can it give us but *years*?' (LJ ix. 45). Again: 'What a strange thing is the propagation of life!—A bubble of Seed which may be spilt in a whore's lap—or in the Orgasm of a voluptuous dream—might (for aught we know) have formed a Caesar or a Buonaparte' (LJ ix. 47). Again: 'When one subtracts from life infancy (which is vegetation),—sleep, eating, and swilling—buttoning and unbuttoning—how much remains of downright existence? The summer of a dormouse' (LJ iii. 235). Such attitudes, being ultimately passive, are ultimately those of a Kent, a Horatio, or an Enobarbus; but Byron's informal prose taken as a whole is Shakespearian in a deeper sense than that, and his response to life more worthy of a Lear, a Hamlet, or an Antony, which is why the claim it makes upon us is fundamentally moral (in the broadest sense of the term) rather than aesthetic—insofar as these factors can be divided from each other. 'No portrait of Byron can equal that which he himself gives in his letters and journals,' John Jump has argued:

Nor is this their only source of interest. They provide glimpses of life in England of his time and in the foreign countries through which he passed; they record his views on literature and politics and religion. But, in so far as they compose a bold and vivid self-portrait, they claim something of the status of a work of art. For they do not merely inform us; they coerce our imaginations as we read, until we seem almost to be in the presence of a living and speaking man.¹⁸

'The letters are not just conversational and self-revealing,' David Perkins suggests, in terms that complement Jump's discussion peculiarly well:

In the best of them Byron was engaged in vivifying his life by writing it down, reliving his experience under the conditions of art and style—the special art and style he created for his letters. This meant that experience took on an incomparable clearness—character, energy, and idea caught in a bright foreground, the shadowy depths eliminated—accompanied by unpredictable shifts of feeling and ripples of irony.¹⁹

To vivify life by recording it, and to relive experience under the conditions of art and style, and by such means 'coerce' the imagination of the reader: that, surely, is the fundamental aim of literature. 'How I do delight in observing life as it really is!', Byron wrote, '—and myself, after all, the worst of any' (LJ iii. 240). Many other English writers—Keats, the Carlyles (Thomas and Jane), Dickens, Henry James, Robert Louis Stevenson, D. H. Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf, in particular—have left remarkable collections of letters, but the 'special art and style' Byron brought to a life itself far more extensive and various than any lived

¹⁸ John Jump, *Byron* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 48.

¹⁹ David Perkins (ed.), *English Romantic Writers*, 2nd edn. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1995), 985.

by these other poets and novelists puts his contribution in a special place. They are the most entertaining and engrossing private documents in the language.

The selection that follows seeks to explore each of Rowland Prothero's observations. It will, hopefully, capture some of the high literary value of Byron's prose, and also produce something like a self-portrait (if not a true portrait, could such a thing ever exist) of this singularly magnetic individual. I have selected the most compelling specimens I could find from the cornucopia Leslie Marchand supplied us with, but always with the aim, also, of telling the story of Byron's life—and each chapter is prefaced with a brief biographical summary to allow the reader to follow that sequence. Furthermore, since Byron's letters on his poetry are some of his most scintillating ('As to "Don Juan"', he wrote to a friend, 'confess—confess—you dog—and be candid—that it is the sublime of *that there* sort of writing—it may be bawdy—but is it not good English?—it may be profligate—but is it not *life*, is it not *the thing?*'; LJ vi. 232), what is reprinted here will constitute a commentary on his artistic output, though hardly an objective one. The letters also, of course—as all letters must—shed light on the history and society of their time, from however personal a perspective. In the end, I trust the reader will agree, the elements must overlap: life and art, whether poetic or prosaic, once formed an indivisible experience for the author set at their intersection, and so they always will when we read the record of his creativity—read it, and wonder at it, too.

NOTES ON THE TEXT AND SHORT TITLES

This selection is drawn in its entirety from Marchand's edition of Byron's letters and journals, and basically follows its editorial principles in their entirety, too. Nine principles are stated in full in the Editorial Note added to each volume in the edition, and I summarize them here, using Marchand's own words, and adding a few additional clarifications in square brackets:

1. The place and date of writing is invariably placed at the top right in one line if possible to save space and to follow Byron's general practice.
2. Superior letters such S^r or 30th have been lowered to Sr and 30th. The & has been retained, but &^c has been printed &c.
3. Byron's spelling has been retained, and [sic] has been avoided except in a few instances when an inadvertent misspelling might change the meaning or be ambiguous.
4. Although Byron was inconsistent and eccentric in his capitalization, Marchand felt it better to have him have his way, to preserve the flavour of his personality and his times. If clarity has seemed to demand a modification, Marchand used square brackets to indicate any departure from the manuscript.
5. Obvious slips of the pen crossed out by the writer have been silently omitted. But crossed out words of any significance to the meaning or emphasis are enclosed in angled brackets <>.
6. Letters undated, or dated with the day of the week only, have been dated, when possible, in square brackets. If the date is conjectural, it is given with a question mark in brackets. Undated letters have been placed within the chronological sequence when from internal or external evidence there are reasonable grounds for a conjectural date. Where a more precise date cannot be established from the context, these letters are placed at the beginning of the month or year in which they seem most likely to have been written.
7. In Marchand's edition the salutation was given on the same line as the text, separated from it by a dash. In order to open up the documents from a reading perspective, I have resorted to the standard letter layout, and entered

a line break after the salutation. The complimentary closing, often on several lines in the manuscript, is given in one line if possible. The PS, wherever it may be written in the manuscript, follows the signature.

8. Byron's punctuation follows no rules of his own or others' making. [His abuse of the apostrophe in expressions like 'wont' and 'it's' will infuriate purists.] He uses dashes and commas freely, but for no apparent reason, other than possibly for natural pause between phrases, or sometimes for emphasis. He is guilty of the 'comma splice', and one can seldom be sure where he intended to end a sentence, or whether he recognized the sentence as a unit of expression. He did at certain intervals place a period and a dash [or two dashes], beginning again with a capital letter. These larger divisions sometimes, though not always, represented what in other writers, particularly in writers of today, correspond to paragraphs. He sometimes used semicolons, but often where we would use commas. Byron himself recognized his lack of knowledge of the logic or rules of punctuation. It is not without reason then that most editors have imposed sentences and paragraphs on him in line with their interpretation of his intended meaning. It was Marchand's feeling, however, that this detracts from the impression of Byronic spontaneity and the onrush of ideas in his letters, without a compensating gain in clarity. In fact, it may arbitrarily impose a meaning or an emphasis not intended by the writer. Marchand felt that there was less danger of distortion if the reader may see exactly how he punctuated and then determine whether a phrase between commas or dashes belongs to one sentence or another. Byron's punctuation seldom if ever makes the reading difficult or the meaning unclear. In rare instances Marchand inserted a comma, or a semicolon, but enclosed it in square brackets. [Note that Marchand did supply some paragraphing in Byron's letters beginning with Volume Seven of his edition, for ease of proof correction and reading: letters of 1820 and afterwards.]
9. Words missing but obvious from the context, such as those lacunae caused by holes in the manuscript, are supplied within square brackets. If they are wholly conjectural, they are followed by a question mark. The same is true of doubtful readings in the manuscript.

The letters to Thomas Moore, first published in his *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron* (1830), were printed with many omissions and the manuscripts have since disappeared. [Marchand noted—but his comment is also true of some letters to other recipients, published by Moore, for which we have no other source.] Moore generally indicated omissions by asterisks * * *, here reproduced as in his text.

Each volume of Marchand's edition listed letters and sources at the end, and included valuable biographical sketches of important figures in the ongoing story, as well as an index. Volume Twelve was first and foremost an index to the edition as a whole.

A modest number of errors did creep into the original edition: Marchand issued corrections in Volume Eleven (incorporated here), which also included some letters of 1809–19 discovered among Scrope Berdmore Davies's papers in 1976, and some additional letters which came to light during the publishing process. The supplementary volume *What Comes Uppermost* (1994) contains new letters discovered to that date.

To all intents and purposes I have left Marchand's text entirely untouched, and only selected from it. Changes—intentional ones, that is; any errors in transcription are another matter, and I hope are not too common—are as follows:

1. I have used single quotation marks where Marchand used double ones.
2. I have glossed short expressions in foreign languages in square brackets, unless I thought an English speaker would recognize them. (Thus I have glossed '*coute qui coute*', '*on dit*', and '*mirabile dictu*', but not '*dama*' or '*amanté*'.) I hope readers will forgive me if I have either insulted their intelligence or left them high and dry. I have also used [sic] a little more than Marchand did to indicate occasions on which Byron simply misspelled a word—rather than spelled it in a way we no longer do.
3. Where abbreviated names—'H', 'M', 'DK', or 'Ly B', for example—are clear in context, I have not followed Marchand's custom of always spelling them out; wherever there is any doubt, I have followed his practice.
4. I have employed the ellipse in square brackets [...] on as few occasions as possible, in fact only twenty-one times in reproducing 304 letters: where a vital letter drifts off into highly detailed and less interesting matters, or where an extensive PS slows the reading experience. Generally, the principle has been to provide letters in their entirety. Byron hardly used the ellipse at all; the two occasions below are his own, and are not within square brackets.
5. Marchand brought Byron's five journals together, and I have followed suit where his 'Alpine' journal of September 1816, his 'Ravenna' journal of January–February 1821, and his 'My Dictionary' and 'Detached Thoughts' journals of May 1821 and October 1821–May 1822 are concerned. But the November 1813–April 1814 journal and the 'Cephalonia' journal have been broken up amidst and around his letters, with the aim of reflecting their historical presence alongside his correspondence and events at large. The

Alpine journal is kept intact (and reprinted in its entirety) because it was designed as an extended letter to his half-sister. Extracts from the Ravenna journal have been kept together, and so have 'My Dictionary' and 'Detached Thoughts': the Ravenna journal because it occupies a fairly brief period of time, the second two because they are themselves generally undated. The Cephalonia journal is in only two parts anyway (and is reprinted in its entirety); so the 1813–14 journal (much the longest of the five) is the one most significantly re-presented in this way. The reader will decide whether the experiment was worth making.

6. The majority of Byron's letters in Italian were to Teresa Guiccioli, and Marchand reprinted them from Iris Origo's invaluable study *The Last Attachment: The Story of Byron and Teresa Guiccioli*. Other Italian texts were variously translated by Nancy Dersofi, Ricki B. Herzfeld, and Antony Peattie. Sometimes the translators 'tidied up' Byron's punctuation and paragraphing, and I have silently sought to return these letters to their informal state by comparing the translation to the Italian original.
7. All footnotes are my own, but I have of course depended on Marchand a great deal, and sometimes quoted him directly when his comment could not be improved upon. Where a personal identity, historical fact, or literary allusion is unknown to me I have passed it over, rather than say 'unidentified' in each case. The edition of Shakespeare cited is the *Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

The following short titles are employed:

CMP	Byron, <i>Complete Miscellaneous Prose</i> , ed. Andrew Nicholson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)
CPW	Byron, <i>Complete Poetical Works</i> , ed. Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980–93)
<i>Hobhouse Letters</i>	Peter W. Graham (ed.), <i>Byron's Bulldog: The Letters of John Cam Hobhouse to Lord Byron</i> (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984)
<i>Life</i>	Leslie A. Marchand, <i>Byron: A Biography</i> , 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1957)
<i>LJ</i>	<i>Byron's Letters and Journals</i> , ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 12 vols. (London: John Murray, 1973–82)
<i>Murray Letters</i>	Andrew Nicholson (ed.), <i>The Letters of John Murray to Lord Byron</i> (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007)

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(Place of publication is London unless otherwise noted.)

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The Aristocrat and the Abbey (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001); Paul Elledge, *Lord Byron at Harrow School: Speaking Out, Talking Back, Acting Up, Bowing Out* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Michael and Melissa Bakewell, *Augusta Leigh, Byron's Half-Sister: A Biography* (Chatto and Windus, 2000); Michael Joyce, *My Friend H.: John Cam Hobhouse* (John Murray, 1948), and Hobhouse's own *Recollections of a Long Life* (John Murray, 1909–11); T. A. J. Burnett, *The Rise and Fall of a Regency Dandy: The Life and Times of Scrope Berdmore Davies* (John Murray, 1981); Terence de Vere White, *Tom Moore: The Irish Poet* (Hamish Hamilton, 1977); Jeffery W. Vail, *The Literary Relationship of Lord Byron and Thomas Moore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Paul Douglass, *Lady Caroline Lamb: A Biography* (Macmillan, 2004), and *The Whole Disgraceful Truth: Selected Letters of Lady Caroline Lamb* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Ethel Colburne Mayne, *The Life of Lady Byron* (Constable, 1929); Malcolm Elwin, *Lord Byron's Wife* (Macdonald, 1962), *The Noels and the Milbankes* (Macdonald, 1967), and *Lord Byron's Family: Annabella, Ada and Augusta* (John Murray, 1975); Robert Gittings and Jo Manton, *Claire Clairmont and the Shelleys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Charles E. Robinson, *Shelley and Byron: The Snake and the Eagle Wreathed in Flight* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); Iris Origo, *The Last Attachment: The Story of Byron and Teresa Guiccioli* (John Murray and Jonathan Cape, 1949), and *Allegra* (Hogarth Press, 1935), a life of Byron's natural daughter; Teresa Guiccioli, *Lord Byron's Life in Italy*, trans. Michael Rees (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005); and William St. Clair, *Trelawny: The Incurable Romancer* (John Murray, 1977).

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