General analytical and historical introduction

This is a book of "double reflection," as we used to say twenty-five years ago (early 1970s), when the earliest of the writings gathered here was first published. In a moment I'll try to explain why it is, and also why I'm putting this book together now.

Double reflection, perhaps one has to recall, is a Hegelian/Marxist phrase that named the kinds of theoretical passions driving so much of everyone's work in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It seems slightly quaint now – a sort of kangaroo among the beauties of current scholarship.

"Return with me now to those thrilling days of yesteryear!" That was how the narrator introduced *The Lone Ranger* radio program, a passion of mine twenty-five years before I wrote anything in this book: "The Lone Ranger," that is to say another (mid twentieth-century) avatar of The Giaour, The Corsair, Mazeppa. Beyond Baudelaire, Berlioz, Kierkegaard, Melville, Nietzsche, etc., the Byronic generations do go on.

But in 1964, when I began my research on Byron and Romanticism, those generations had been dispersed almost entirely into popular cultural venues. A first reflexive move for me was therefore my graduate research: a doctoral thesis on Byron and the theoretical problems of "biographical criticism." I wanted to study why Byron, who for nearly a hundred years fairly defined, in the broadest international context, the "meaning" of Romanticism, had all but disappeared from the most serious forms of academic and professional attention. It seemed odd that such a glaring historical anomaly, not to say contradiction, should not be at the very center of scholarly attention. For the problem raised crucial theoretical issues.

I am writing this very sentence in January 2000, in the same room – the Rare Books Room of the British Library (erstwhile, "The North Library") – where I wrote my doctoral thesis in 1965. *Non sum qualis eram* – but more importantly, neither are Romantic studies. Byron does not loom across the European scene as he did in the nineteenth century

but there has clearly been a return of the repressed. (Would that the same could be said for another figure of immensity, Walter Scott! But even as I write this "the dawn is red," so to say.)

Why this book, then? If the essential reflexive point was to rethink Byron and, through him, the history and forms of Romanticism, surely the past thirty-five years testify to an achievement of that project. And I'm uninterested in simply gathering a certain record of my written work, especially since my sense of time has grown, alas, somewhat more acute. The digital revolution has set in motion, especially in the past ten years, movements and changes that are upheaving humanities studies at every level. Making sure that scholars and educators, not technocrats and administrators, have a hand in guiding and – in Shelley's sense – "imagining" these changes has become a daily educational concern. Under those circumstances, what is the point of a book like this?

So, double reflection. The academic history that these essays entered and sought to influence has developed along various dynamic lines, many of them conflicting lines, during the past twenty-five years. Reading the essays in the context of the distinguished series of books they are now joining, I am most struck by the differences between nearly all of these books and nearly all of the essays.

Of course all exhibit a "turn to history," a turn taken in the essays and exhibited in the series' books. But the latter engage a much more various socio-cultural order of materials than the essays do. An objective reporter – myself, for instance – might say that Michel Foucault, Raymond Williams, and Pierre Bourdieu are the books' presiding deities whereas Mark Pattison, Millman Parry, and Galvano della Volpe haunt the pages of the essays. "Byron and Romanticism" orbits in a universe of textual theory, literary-critical method, and a certain history of scholarship and education.

It is this difference that interests me and makes me believe these essays have something new to say.

– But they're the same essays. Or have you made some kind of radical changes to them?
– Some changes to the texts, yes, but nothing that alters the semantic content in an appreciable way.
– What's new then?
– What's new is the way we live now. Take any literary work, preserve its semantic – even its documentary – identity as best you can, and then track its changes of meaning as it passes through the attention of different places, times, circumstances. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, taking his cue

> directly from Dante, commonly handled his works in this way. He shuffles "the same" poem into different contexts again and again, as if he knew it was not a self-identical "thing," as if he were determined to expose its many-mindedness – how it is many-minded – in concrete and determinate ways. Rossetti's works are interesting partly because, more clearly than many artists and poets, he makes a drama of artistic meaning as performative and eventual. We still often seem to think that art's multiple meanings are a function of something they possess on their own, inherently or essentially as it were. But the truth is that meanings multiply like lives, through intercourse.

The exchanges I seek are with the scholarship and educational scene around me, and that is represented in a distinguished way by the books in this series. In this respect I have two general subjects I want to raise here as a preface to the essays. One has to do with the relatively narrow methodology that characterizes these essays (as opposed to what we find in the series' books). The second concerns the stances we may take as scholars or teachers – as educators – toward our work.

THEORY AND METHOD

There is a history here that must be briefly replicated. In 1970, by a sequence of odd chances, I began the project to edit Byron's complete poetical works. To that point I had no interest in or knowledge about editing. My work had been dominated by "theoretical" and philosophical pursuits. I wrote a long MA thesis on the theoretical conflict between the Chicago Neo-Aristotelians and the New Criticism, and a doctoral thesis on the theoretical problem of biographical method (in the general context of the formalist and structural models of criticism that were dominant at the time).

Editing Byron brought a nearly complete deconstruction of my thinking about literature, art, and culture generally. The subject is too large for this place. It's sufficient to say, I think, that the editorial work threw me down to where all our literary ladders start: in the concrete circumstances of those material and ideological histories that engage the production and transmission of "texts" (in the pre-Barthesian sense of that term): texts as documents made and remade in a theoretically endless series of stochastically generated feedback loops, all very particular.

Like so much cultural criticism of recent years, the books in this series illustrate just how intricate that stochasis is – at how many levels it operates, in what remarkable ways these levels connect and interact. Placed

alongside it, as these essays now are, my work seems – *is* – limited and restricted in focus. The objective reader, myself, easily sees in the essays the permanent influence of New Critical "close reading" methods.

We shall have to reconsider the current relevance of such methods for a scholarship and pedagogy that has recommitted itself to historicist models of criticism – models specifically cast off by the New Critics who promoted the practices of "close reading." Let me set that matter aside for a moment, however, in order to comment on textuality and editing. These subjects and their practices are profoundly important at this specific historical moment.

For some years now "Theory" has lapsed as a driving force in literary and cultural scholarship. The main lines of the work have been felt as complete (for the time being) and we observe a widespread process of implementation and refinement.

"Theory" remains volatile and exploratory in one area, however: in textual and editorial studies. This remarkable situation is the effect of an historical phenomenon affecting every level of society, not least of all education and the humanities: the breakthrough of Internet and digital technology into our normal practices of work and living. Digital media are ultimately forms of textuality. It is therefore unsurprising that the first practico/theoretical explorations of these technologies in the humanities should be made, as they are, at the foundational levels of literary scholarship and education: in the libraries and archives and in the work of editors, linguists, and textual scholars of all kinds. One has to return to the fifteenth century to find a situation comparable to the one we now witness and participate in.

None of the scholarly works in this series has been significantly marked by these notable events. None makes use of the technology and none engages the theories and methods being experimented with and developed out of this technology. Yet digitization and intermedia are already altering the way we perceive and understand cultural phenomena. The recent explosion of "History of the Book" studies is a direct function of the nexus of historical studies and humanities computing, for the new technology has driven our view of books and texts to a higher level of abstract perception.[1] The moment when one can make a virtual book, when you can reconstruct it according to the design protocols of computer technology, you realize that you "understand" the book in a new way and at another level of consciousness. Similarly, recent years have shown remarkable explorations into the structure and relation of image and text. The most dynamic (not to say the most volatile) developments in these

areas are being driven by digital technologies. Indeed, we are beginning to realize how and why we can deal with (analyze, read, interpret) text as image and vice versa. The realizations emerge, however, not from the reflections of "Theory" in the traditional sense, but from people actually building and implementing computerized tools and instruments.

Why do I raise these matters here? Because these studies of Byron and Romanticism were all shaped in a trajectory of textual and editorial work that reached its fruition only in the hypermedia theory and electronic scholarship that has dominated my work since I went to Caltech in 1981. At that point several things began to become clear. First, that textual theory and editorial practice were and had to be the foundation of all literary studies; second, that all synthetic and interpretive operations – what used to be called "The Higher Criticism" – were implicitly shaped "in the last instance," as the Marxists would say, by these forms of so-called "Lower Criticism" (the processes of language and document transmission; or, the materials, the means, and the modes of production); and finally, that at certain critical historical moments the only theory that could serve as such would have to be some kind of particular, goal-driven practice.[2]

When I began my work as a scholar, Byron and editing were both marginal literary concerns. To work on Byron in 1965 was perforce to work on a subject of "purely/merely/largely historical interest." By 1980 the adverb in that phrase would be replaced by others. But to *edit* Byron between 1970 and 1992 was to drive the historical issues in special directions. For one thing – I will come back to this – it focused my attention on the field of the closely read text. For another, it made me aware as I had never been that the literary works descending to us have been made and remade by specific people and in particular institutional settings. Finally, I saw quite clearly that all these makings were historically relative and relevant, and that the edition I was making was of the same kind. "Romanticism" itself was objective and determinate only because (and as) it had been made, revised, and refashioned under different conditions by different people with different agendas and purposes. (A relativist perspective had of course been fairly widespread in the academy since the early 1960s at least, and it would grow more acute during the 1970s and 1980s. The perspective did not develop robust historicist forms and methods until the 1980s and 1990s.)

Those last two effects of my editorial work changed everything since they led me to execute the edition under a regular attention to its circumstantial character. Editing *Lord Byron. The Complete Poetical Works* (1981–1992) thus became a continual reflection on the limits of its own

design, and on the material and historical determinants of those limits. Eventually I found myself needing, seeking after, critical and scholarly instruments that could incarnate, so to speak, those kinds of reflexive and experimental demands. History would become the lover of necessity. Editing Byron in codex form passed over to editing Rossetti in online hypermedia: from editing as a closed system to "Editing as a Theoretical Pursuit."

THINKING AND WRITING

These essays tell that history, I think, more clearly than the edition of Byron – which was constructed during the period when these essays were written and which created the conditions, if not all the conditions, that made the essays possible and even necessary. The clarity of the essays is in certain ways greater than the edition because of a difference in form and genre. Nothing appears more monumental, more *finished*, than a large scholarly edition. The volatile history I summarized in the previous section of this Introduction is latent but largely invisible in *Lord Byron. The Complete Poetical Works*. The forms of such things wear robes of authority, order, and a massive *integritas*. They lend themselves not to openness and self-reflection, least of all to change. Narrativity, even in a discursive mode, has greater flexibilities.

Under the horizon of a literary practice that has idealized the standard critical edition, however, critical commentary itself reflects that aspiration to – that apparition of – finishedness. Walter Pater, M. H. Abrams, Harold Bloom: all are pilgrims of the absolute, more or less modest, more or less imperial. Even writing in the essay form we have wanted to get things right, to say something *definitive* (the supreme quality, we used to imagine, of the critical edition). And while we can achieve this under certain limitations and conditions, we can never know that we have done it. (Alas, we often *imagine that we do know such things*.)

In certain disciplines – engineering for example, perhaps the hard sciences – aspiring to correctness is a needful thing. But in humanities I think the aspiration is misguided and finally misleading. The aspiration should rather be toward thoroughness, clarity, candor. Being clear, open, and as meticulous as possible are goals exactly as problematic as being correct and complete. They are goals, however, resting in an initial reflection on the self and its uncertainties.

As I read these essays now (objectively) I recall some of the stories they tell, some of the histories – Lilliputian, intramural – they reflect. One

of these I've already told. Another interests me as well and seems worth retelling here. It's the history of the (failed) pursuit of a satisfying form of critical commentary, a form to mirror or index the editorial instruments I also grew to need. As I said earlier, when I began trying to make a critical edition of Byron I knew virtually nothing about editing. Making the edition was a passage from the utter dark. I have put "Byron and Milton" at the beginning of this book because as an essay it appears to me the least successful in the collection. It's in *fact* the earliest of the essays, but that's not why it comes where it does. I initially thought not to include it at all, it seemed so unsatisfactory. But in *truth* it did not seem unsatisfactory to me when I wrote it in 1972, it only seems so now. So now it also seems an effective, even a satisfactory way to begin a story of failure. It's also satisfying to admit that my first impulse was to exclude it. That's an important element in the story too.

Note that I still think I'm correct about many things I wrote in the essay. Certain matters of fact are beyond dispute, like the clear literary allusions. But the essay isn't satisfying because of those matters of fact. However, it seemed satisfactory in 1972 – it was written, I now think I remember, to make a show of myself at the English Institute – in January 2000 it's satisfying to put it at the head of this book and to wrap it in this commentary.

I would grow dissatisfied with that kind of essay and would try to escape it. For a while I was much taken with the style of the polemical pamphlet, and after that with the dialogue. I tried the latter early on, in 1970, and wrote a book in dialogue. It won a prize from a society of poets (!) but seems to have had no other success at all, nor any impact on scholarship.[3] When I returned to the form in the late 1980s I tried to crossbreed it with Poe's hoaxes and then stage the writing as a Wildean truth of masks. These are the critical works I get greatest pleasure from having done.[4] As Wilde wisely said, "Give a man a mask and he will tell you the truth."

– But Jerome, we're always wearing masks.
– This is true, I now see. But once upon a time I thought otherwise. Byron, that masked man and lone ranger, helped to free me from the illusion.
– Because?
– Because I'm a Romanticist and hence completely involved with a "poetry of sincerity." With ideals of the Self, and of self-discovery through a dynamics of spontaneous overflow and reflexive turns. Nor do these operations cease to interest me. But Byron, a great practitioner of such manoeuvres, was also – not always but often, and often enough – their clear-eyed student.

Reading Byron's romantic spontaneities and overflows one came to see that they were masked forms, rhetorical strategies. All gods reside in the human breast, Blake said. So do all poems. They are dictated from the eternity of embodied mind.

– So?
– "Sincerity: if you can fake that you've made it." So goes one of the most notorious proverbs of post-Modernism. It's an X Generation's version of Baudelaire's wonderful address to *his* readers: "Hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère." The source, for Baudelaire at any rate, is Byron.
– It's grotesque, cynical – hopeless and helpless.
– If you say so, perhaps. But not necessarily. The problem lies in the ways that culture – that is to say *ideology*, that is to say *false consciousness* – enlists works of imagination to its causes. Culture is always seeking to turn poetic tales into forms of worship, "the Wastes of Moral Law" as Blake called these things.
– So the ironist Byron is good, the "sincere" Wordsworth is bad.
– *Please*. I confess I *am* tired of answering that kind of remark. It's just a way to maintain some kind of moral ground as the measure of art. Blake was perfectly right, art has no truck with morality, it's a field of revelations and imitations. Wordsworth is splendid, Byron is splendid. Byron is in fact Wordsworth's salvation, his way away from being possessed by the demons of culture. They are to each other what Blake called Corporeal Enemies – that is to say, they are Spiritual Friends.
– Each others' masks.
– Just so. Each is the other's limit state and "bounding line." But in our day – in this Blakean "State" we are passing through, Byron has been the salvific Voice of the Devil – because our Heaven and our Law have been – in the terms I've been using here – "Wordsworthian."
– At least they have been for *you*.
– Yes, that's right. What I'm saying is only objectively – it's not generally – true.
– (You keep insisting on this matter of your *objectivity*! What's all that about?)
– (Think about it. Anyhow, you're digressing.)
– OK. A key problem here surely lies in the way critical and theoretical writing – commentaries and reflections on primary acts of imagination – commit themselves to perceiving, defining, and even acquiring "general" truth. "To generalize is to be an Idiot" Blake declares. Of course it isn't at all idiotic to generalize – unless you're an artist! But from the artistic point of view, works of culture will always be regarded with suspicion. For works of culture do and must aspire to general authority, and the greatest of these works achieve some degree of that authority.

But artists and works of art occupy an equivocal position in the world of culture, as Plato saw very clearly. His view was that the poets and artists should be expelled, that they were at best charmingly unreliable.

He went on to say – it's important to recall this – that they might come back if they "or their friends" could make a case for their work *in other-than-artistic terms*.[5] It never occurred to Plato that artistic work *as such* – not art as mediated by philosophers or critics – possessed intellectual or cognitive authority – or that this authority rested exactly in the peculiar intellectual character of artistic work: that it embodied a reflexive form of unmediated knowing. For Plato – and the view remains widespread, if much less lucidly held – art is a craft, not a method of knowing the world and reflecting on the self. Building on the empiricism of Enlightenment, Romanticism installed "The Aesthetic" as a form of knowing. The institutions of culture have always resisted this claim of art, and in our own epoch, when the claim has been so powerfully advanced, the resistance took an accommodating form. So "the function of criticism at the present time" has been to translate works of art into other cultural terms – as if they could not speak on their own behalf and authority. (That "present time" isn't just Arnold's specific Victorian time, it is the period of the past 200 years *in general*.)

The clearest way to see how an Aesthetic form works is by comparing it to the operational procedures of a different form of knowing. Logic, for example. Peter Ochs has recently exposed with remarkable clarity the development of Peirce's work by tracing the history of its errors and its attempts to correct those errors. Most important, Ochs tracks the work in the context of Ochs's own self-reflexive thought. The Peirce we encounter in Ochs is a special creature developed from a kind of double helix, one strand "Peircean," the other "Ochsian," with each strand fused to the other in order to generate this new intelligent creature, this study of Peirce by Ochs. Here is Ochs's general description of what he is doing:

> My thesis is that pragmatic definition is not a discrete act of judgment or classification, but a *performance of correcting other, inadequate definitions of imprecise things*. Pragmatic reasoning is thus a different sort of reasoning than the kind employed in defining things precisely. It is a corrective activity . . . My thesis is therefore not a thesis in the usual sense. Since my claim is that to define pragmatically is to correct and that to correct is to read, my "thesis" is better named my "corrective reading." But that is not quite right, either, since my claim is that reading cannot be done "in general," or "for everyone," but only for someone: for some community of readers . . . And this is not to correct Peirce *per se* but *to correct problems in the way Peirce would be read by a given community*. The point is not that Peirce is wrong and I can see better! Not at all. Only that his pragmatism can show itself to another thinker only in the way that thinker acquires the practice of corrective reading . . . To exhibit

the meaning of pragmatism will therefore be *to perform some way of correcting the meaning of pragmatism*. For this study, I read Peirce's writings on pragmatism as his corrective performance *of* pragmatism, and I offer the following chapters as one way of pragmatically and thus correctively studying his performance.[6]

I regret having to set aside so much of this interesting work in order to attend upon one matter: the issue of intellectual generality. Ochs says his reading is not "in general," and while this is the case in the sense he means, that is no sense that would make sense to an artist. Ochs proposes to engage Peirce's work at a secondary level of generality – not "in general" (universal) but "under the horizon of generality" (for a certain "community"). To do that is to make something other than an aesthetic commitment to the work being done, it is to make a moral or social commitment. (Let it be said that artists themselves make such commitments all the time, as they should, but that in doing so they are putting their art to some social use – for better and/or for worse.)

Of course it might be objected that I am merely pointing out how we distinguish an abstract or ideal "form" in all forms of thought, and hence that Aesthetic Form is merely a way of referring to that entity (what Aristotle called the "formal cause" of anything). In this sense Logic, Theology – whatever: all forms of thought may have their formal causes distinguished.

(Who is making this argument, who is writing these sentences?)

But Aesthetic Form cannot be subsumed by formal cause. It is formal cause perceived and functioning as material cause – to stay with Aristotle's categories. And its final cause is indeterminable from any perspective available to us. In this sense Aesthetic Form is like that fabulous medieval "circle whose center is everywhere but whose circumference is nowhere" – but only *like*, because this will always be a circle with a determinate material form, what Blake called (playing with his words) a "Bounding Line." Blake and all artists *can* thus play with their words, or whatever they work with, exactly because their primary care is to operate with their ideas through their *materials* (for an artist – Shelley and Byron illustrate this unmistakably – to think is to make something, to make something concrete). Material forms, articulations like "Bounding Line" (or the artist's physical marking of some such line), are physically determinate but cognitively flooded. Underdetermined cognitively, overdetermined materially.