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## LORD BYRON AND SCANDALOUS CELEBRITY

The Regency period in general, and the aristocrat-poet Lord Byron in particular, were notorious for scandal, but the historical circumstances of this phenomenon have yet to be properly analyzed. *Lord Byron and Scandalous Celebrity* explores Byron's celebrity persona in the literary, social, political, and historical contexts of Regency Britain and post-Napoleonic Europe that produced it. Clara Tuite argues that the Byronic enigma that so compelled contemporary audiences – and provoked such controversy with its spectacular Romantic Satanism – can be understood by means of “scandalous celebrity,” a new form of ambivalent fame that mediates between notoriety and traditional forms of heroic renown. Examining Byron alongside contemporary figures including Caroline Lamb, Stendhal, Napoleon Bonaparte and Lord Castlereagh, Tuite illuminates the central role played by Byron in the literary, political, and sexual scandals that mark the Regency as a vital period of social transition and emergent celebrity culture.

CLARA TUITE is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Melbourne. She is the author of *Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon* (Cambridge, 2002); co-editor with Gillian Russell of *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770–1840* (Cambridge, 2002); and co-editor with Claudia L. Johnson of *A Companion to Jane Austen* (2009).

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*To Susan*

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## Abbreviations

<i>BB</i>	[John Cam Hobhouse] <i>Byron's Bulldog: The Letters of John Cam Hobhouse to Lord Byron</i> , ed. Peter W. Graham (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984).
<i>Blackwood's</i>	<i>Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine</i>
<i>BLJ</i>	<i>Byron's Letters and Journals</i> , ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 13 vols. (London: John Murray, 1973–1994).
<i>CMP</i>	Lord Byron, <i>The Complete Miscellaneous Prose</i> , ed. Andrew Nicholson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).
<i>Considerations</i>	Germaine de Staël, <i>Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution</i> , ed. Aurelian Criatu (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2008).
<i>CPW</i>	Lord Byron, <i>The Complete Poetical Works</i> , ed. Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980–1993).
<i>Edinburgh</i>	<i>Edinburgh Review</i>
<i>EHD</i>	<i>English Historical Documents, 1783–1832</i> . Eds. A. Aspinall and E. Anthony Smith. Vol. II. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1959.
<i>HVSV</i>	<i>His Very Self and Voice: Collected Conversations of Lord Byron</i> , ed. Ernest J. Lovell (New York: Macmillan 1954).
Marchand	Leslie A. Marchand, <i>Byron: A Biography</i> , 3 vols. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957).
<i>PD</i>	<i>Parliamentary Debates</i>
<i>PW</i>	Benjamin Constant, <i>Political Writings</i> , trans. and ed. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge University Press, 1988).
<i>Rambler's</i>	<i>The Rambler's Magazine</i>
<i>Recollections</i>	[John Cam Hobhouse] <i>Recollections of a Long Life</i> , by Lord Broughton, 6 vols, ed. Lady Dorchester (1909–1911).

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## *Prologue* *Proverbially notorious*

We have heard of a tribe of Indians, who were extremely ingenious in sculpture, but the only image which they could carve, was that of the devil. Thus it is with our noble author.

*British Critic* review of *Lara*, October 1814

Lord Byron, George Gordon, is proverbially notorious, his fame a compound of genius and bad behavior. Contemporaries called him a “cool unconcerned fiend,” “unsex’d Circe,” “wild siren charming,” “apostle of infidelity,” “spoiled child of fame,” “a Man of Genius whose heart is perverted,” “England’s best Poet, and her guiltiest Son”; his writing was a “perpetual monument of the exalted intellect, and the depraved heart” and “the very suicide of genius.”<sup>1</sup> The scandal that is “Byron” also names Byron’s scandalized readers, like the *Blackwood’s* reviewer who becomes a spurned lover in his “Remarks on Don Juan”:

Every high thought that was ever kindled in our breasts by the muse of Byron – every pure and lofty feeling that ever responded from within us to the sweep of his majestic inspirations – is up in arms against him. We look back with a mixture of wrath and scorn to the delight with which we suffered ourselves to be filled by one who, all the while he was furnishing us with delight, must, we cannot doubt it, have been mocking us with a cruel mockery. (*Blackwood’s*, V, August 1819, 517)

So intense is the reader’s identification that it can turn back upon itself to “make us wish that no such being as Byron had ever existed” (515). Except that it is too late. Such are the wages of fatal attraction. The reviewer’s doomed attempt to let Byron go, to keep “majestic inspirations” free from “perverted degraded genius” (517), stages the power of the ambivalent force I call scandalous celebrity.

This book argues that the enigma of Byron that so compelled contemporary readers can be understood by means of “scandalous celebrity,” a new form of fame that mediates between notoriety and older forms of

heroic fame within Regency public culture. Scandalous celebrity is predicated on the ambivalent charm of the celebrity figure and the affective ambivalence of the fan and reader. Sir Walter Scott mused of Byron that “Never . . . has that which is properly called *notoriety* been so intimately united with the more noble essence of true *fame*.”<sup>2</sup> Scott had tried this formula himself in *Marmion* (1808), but his version lacked a vital ingredient that Byron modeled: the overlapping of the author’s personality with that of his notorious protagonist. In her pioneering history of Romantic literary cults and cultures, Marilyn Butler observes that “Scott rose to fame with *Marmion*, which again features a villain-hero, compellingly free from law and from conventional ethics. . . . Byron went one better than Scott because his heroes appeared to be at least in part spectacular self-projections.” The scandal that led to his exile from England in 1816 “identified him for all time in the popular mind with his Satanic, guilt-ridden creations.”<sup>3</sup>

The tendency to identify Byron as author with his heroes swerved between desire and ostentatious boredom. As the *Critical Review* remarks in a review of *The Corsair*, “[w]e are therefore becoming weary of Marmions . . . and sincerely hope, that high-souled villainy, will shortly become as vulgar, as spiritless virtue.”<sup>4</sup> Byron jubilantly referred to *Don Juan* as “the thing,” but his own contrary celebrity – as seducer and scandal, charmer and monster – can also be understood as a more ambivalent form of “the Thing.” As Peter Poiana elaborates in his psychoanalytic account of the interrelations between scandal and seduction: “the Thing presents itself as the object of a prohibition *and* as the object of desire.”<sup>5</sup> Performative weariness marks both desire and prohibition. What animates the reception of the Byronic thing after 1816 is the sense that these high-souled villains are authorial self-projections, hence particularly intriguing, wearying. By 1822, reviewing the dramas, John Gibson Lockhart is so outraged, bored by Byron that he can barely muster a charge of plagiarism, “a thing perfectly notorious, but at the same time perfectly unimportant” (*Blackwood’s*, XI, January 1822, 92).

The potent mix of genius and vice that is “Byron” is marked by the incantatory force of repetition. The combination of the majestic and the perverted is never really renounced – however energetically it is denounced, over and over again. This is the pattern of habit, the ritual invocation, renunciation, and reinvestment that is a vital practice of celebrity culture and informs a new affective styling of reading and reception. No longer occupying separate poles, the famous and the notorious become newly intimate; the rites of reception that celebrate and denounce this intimacy are the subject of this book.

What is the difference between *Childe Harold* IV and *Don Juan* – between the majestically inspired and the scandalous? For the *Blackwood's* reviewer, it was “humiliating” to think that the same pen could write *Childe Harold* IV and “this loathsome Don Juan” in the same year (515). In “Some Observations upon an Article in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*” (comp.~1820), Byron responds to the review:

If I depict a Corsair – a Misanthrope – a Libertine – a Chief of Insurgents – or an Infidel – he is set down to the Author – and if in a poem by no means ascertained to be my production – there appears a disagreeable, casuistical, and by no means respectable female pedant – it is set down for my wife. – Is there any resemblance? if there be it is in those who make it; – I can see none. – . . . of real circumstances I have availed myself plentifully both in the serious and in the ludicrous – they are to poetry – what landscape is to the painter – but my *figures* are not portraits.<sup>6</sup>

Byron's question is rhetorical, for even while insisting that “my *figures* are not portraits,” he maintains a complex traffic between figuration and referential portraiture, between “real circumstances” and “poetry.” What else are *figures* except transformative mediations of the real? His insistence on the separation between them draws attention to how closely imbricated they are and underscores the challenge to the reader, continually renewed by the poems themselves, to keep the traffic alive.

That the *figure* of “Byron” presents a challenge to conventional separations between the life and the work has been recognized by the most important critical studies of Byron, which take that challenge on. An animating principle of Jerome Christensen's *Lord Byron's Strength* (1993), to take a particularly powerful example, is that it “presumes no dualism of . . . poet and work.”<sup>7</sup> Engaging the category of the career, which straddles the life and the work, Christensen's magisterial analysis engages “Byronism” as a system of commodification and celebrity that coded “the residual affective charge that still clung to the paraphernalia of aristocracy in order to reproduce it in commodities that could be vended to a reading public avid for glamour.”<sup>8</sup> Paradoxically, the power of that coded commodity is bound up in Byron's very resistance to commercialism.

Following Christensen in identifying Byron as the first famous author “to belong to a fully commercial society,” Andrew Elfenbein distinguishes the celebrity from the merely famous person as “a figure whose personality is created, bought, sold, and advertised through capitalist relations of production.”<sup>9</sup> What is so “strange” about Byron's celebrity, Elfenbein suggests, is that “the equation between Byron and his heroes was



established *before* the details of his personal life became public property. His scandalous aura arose almost as if to justify the qualities of his poetry. Biography was not read back into poetry; from the start, his poetry was understood to be confessional.”<sup>10</sup> This enigma, I suggest, marks the particularly imbricated relation between Byron and celebrity culture at this vital historical moment; it renders “Byronism” a generative form of celebrity in its power to confound the protocols that ordered existing understandings of the relations between the authorial life and the work.

Jerome McGann puts the relationship between Byron’s life and work at the center of the formal elements of the poetry itself: “[i]n Byronic masquerade we have difficulty distinguishing figure from ground because the presumptive ground, ‘the real Lord Byron’, becomes a figural form in the poetry.”<sup>11</sup> Byron’s scandalousness marks his life, but it also marks the rhetorical sophistication by which his poetry transacts that life. A feature of that sophistication is how Byron’s poetry, to borrow McGann’s memorable formulation, “is always, at whatever register, elaborating reciprocities with its audiences.”<sup>12</sup> Another way of thinking about this reciprocity is to engage it through the category of celebrity.

Celebrity studies has emerged as a distinctive interdisciplinary field over the last fifteen years or so.<sup>13</sup> Before then, celebrity was understood almost exclusively in relation to twentieth-century “mass” culture, and engaged for the most part in censorious accounts of new, supposedly synthetic forms of fame. Celebrity is now far more productively understood as a specifically modern form of fame, implicated in but not limited to capitalist technologies and economies, and an important category of analysis in examining modern cultures of production and reception. As such, it has been the organizing focus of vital recent work in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature and cultural history,<sup>14</sup> and on Byron in particular.

Tom Mole’s *Byron’s Romantic Celebrity* (2007) is both the first monograph-length work devoted to Byron and celebrity, and the first systematic application of the contemporary theory of celebrity and commodity culture to Romantic-period literary production and reception. It relates a compelling account of Byronic celebrity as a feature of literary commodification to the materialities of print culture and the history of the book. The study predicates its argument upon a cogent distinction between “two kinds of poetic agency . . . the agency of a poet over the production and distribution of his poems” and “the agency of a text in the world,” both of which are complicated by another distinction: the “two poles” of “Lord Byron the cultural producer and Lord Byron the cultural

product.”<sup>15</sup> Mole’s study steadily focuses its account of Byron’s career by honing these tricky distinctions in ways that illuminate Byron’s changing engagement with the processes of his own celebrity.

Mole’s study also engages celebrity in relation to intimacy. However, despite the opening claim that celebrity “must be understood in relation to a history of private life and the public sphere,” Mole’s interest is more focused upon the economic and technological features of celebrity culture than on intimacy understood as a social formation. In this regard, where Mole’s “hermeneutic of intimacy” tends to enclose intimacy within a textual model, my book elaborates intimacy in relation to a socialized model, offering a conceptual account of celebrity as a social and affective form.<sup>16</sup>

Ghislaine McDayter’s deft psychoanalytic approach to Byron’s poetry and its reception illuminates the affective dynamics of Byronic celebrity culture and the erotics of the Byronic persona, linking the mass-cultural phenomenon of “Byromania” with radical political enthusiasm. Focusing on Byron’s early Oriental romances, McDayter explores “how the production of Byromania parallels the evolution of modern popular culture itself.”<sup>17</sup> My account differs from McDayter’s in seeing Byron’s work as dynamically positioned between popular culture and an emergent high-literary culture. The contaminating traffic that Byron’s work sustained between these domains alarmed Byron’s orthodox readers.

A notable “counterintuitive” insight informing McDayter’s analysis of the erotics of “Byromania” is that Byron’s work is not about excessive indulgence but repressed desire, of which there “can be no satisfaction or fulfillment.”<sup>18</sup> But this is not only a Freudian insight; it is also an assumption on which modern commodity culture is predicated. What makes Byron’s work such an apt response to the commercial society it seduced and satirized so strenuously is its perverse insight into – and ability to manipulate – an economy of desire. This perversity is central to scandalous celebrity.

My category of scandalous celebrity refines Zygmunt Bauman’s claim that “fame, that premonition of immortality, has been replaced by notoriety, that icon of contingency and the capriciousness of life.”<sup>19</sup> It also refines Chris Rojek’s treatment of celebrity, in which notoriety appears as merely “a sub-branch of celebrity culture,” though “an increasingly important one.” And it speaks to Graeme Turner’s suggestion that “we might need another term to organize our discussion of the specificity of the notorious or criminal figure, even though many aspects of this impact reflect the workings of celebrity.”<sup>20</sup>

This study reads celebrity under the sign of Byron's notorious worldliness. Edward Said points out that texts are "worldly" in the sense that they are "always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society." Far from being trivial features of inconsequential texts, "worldliness, circumstantiality, the text's status as an event having sensuous particularity as well as historical contingency, are . . . an infrangible part of its capacity for conveying and producing meaning."<sup>21</sup> So too, I argue, does Byron's worldliness inhere in the poetry's awareness of its own sensuous particularity, historical contingency, and circumstantiality. A similar emphasis on the poetry's formal worldliness informs Eric Eisner's argument that "the structure of mass-mediated celebrity is a formal problematic of the works . . . not simply a condition of their reception" and that "scandalous celebrity is not lyric intimacy's opposite but rather its very ground."<sup>22</sup>

The analytical category of scandalous celebrity offers a systematic way of thinking about the worldliness that informs "the ensemble of life and work we call 'Byron,'" to adopt Peter Manning's suggestive formulation.<sup>23</sup> To the ensemble of life and work, I add a third category, reception, as a principal component of the text's worldliness. I engage this ensemble of life, work, and reception in its transactions across literary and popular print culture, social culture, politics, and law, and in its functions as an ambivalent spectacle and forum of public opinion. Oscar Wilde, a vital "after-warrior" of Byronic celebrity, famously wrote in *De Profundis*: "I was a man who stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age." So too did Byron, as Wilde notes (if somewhat ungraciously): "Byron was a symbolic figure, but his relations were to the passion of his age and its weariness of passion. Mine were to something more noble, more permanent, of more vital issue, or larger scope."<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, Jason Goldsmith's luminous analysis of John Clare's conflicted appropriation of Byron enables us to "begin to think of Romantic authors as not merely writers but also as powerful cultural fields through which individuals and communities looked to contest and consolidate the dramatic cultural changes with which they were faced."<sup>25</sup> Goldsmith too emphasizes both this symbolic component of celebrity and its generative capacity for ambivalent appropriation.

The Byronic "ensemble" of life, work, and reception bears a powerful relation to Byron's place and time. Seeking to articulate and illuminate this relation, *Lord Byron and Scandalous Celebrity* is therefore a book about Regency Britain and post-Napoleonic Europe as much as a book about one author, his work, and its reception. In this sense, I read Byron as profoundly figurative and allegorical. Just as Marjorie Levinson's study

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*Prologue*

*Keats's Life of Allegory* (1988) undertakes "to read the meaning of a life in the style of a man's writing, and then to read that man's writing, that style, and that life back into their original context,"<sup>26</sup> my study seeks to analyze the movement in Byron's work that turns out to the world and then to relay it back into and through the poetry.

Satanism, a touchstone of Byron's notoriety, offers a leading example of one such assemblage of symbolic transactions between Byron and his historical moment. In *Romantic Satanism*, Peter A. Schock notes that "[b]y the end of the eighteenth century, among the literate classes in England, belief in the existence of the Devil had all but vanished. Yet if in one sense this supernatural figure was killed off, then in another it is resurrected in the form of a modern myth."<sup>27</sup> This observation confirms Byron's significance not as authoring the Satanic myth or embodying it as a singular perversion (as some of his contemporaries claimed), but rather as standing (*à la* Wilde) in symbolic relations to a central cultural phenomenon of his moment. *Don Juan* embodied Romantic Satanism as an epic affront to institutional Christianity. William Hazlitt, one of Byron's most perceptive early critics – and bitter rivals – remarked of Byron: "He hath a demon: and that is the next thing to being full of the God."<sup>28</sup> Indeed, ingeniously adapting what many Romantics celebrated as Milton's heroic republican conception of Satan in *Paradise Lost* (1667), the Devil functions in Byron's work as a potent figure for cultural mediation and figuration itself, and as the initiating allegory of scandalous self-reflexive celebrity. For celebrity, I suggest, is primarily a form of mediation: the social mediation of the literary text.

The *Blackwood's* reviewer attempts (and fails) to convert Byron to the forces of good and the divine, and is compelled to bear witness to Byron's frustrated potential: "a spirit in which there breathes so much of the divine, cannot always resist the Majesty of its Maker" (V, 513), except that, once again, it is too late, for Byron will always resist. Moreover, the reviewer misrecognizes as "divine" what is actually so much of the human. The "spirit" has already left the building of the Almighty and reconstituted divine power in human form. Celebrity is the name we give that secular reconstitution. Throughout this study, I articulate scandalous celebrity in relation to the fall of the gods occasioned by the celebrity phenomenon of Byronic Satanism.

The "contagion of Byronism" extended into Europe, as Byron himself reports in 1821: "Moore wrote to me from Paris months ago that 'the French had caught the contagion of Byronism to the highest pitch'" (*BLJ* 8: 114). Byronism is a new mode of enchantment that not only solicits

people to resist divine majesty and teaches them how, but also displaces divine majesty with what became known by its contemporaries as Byron's "Satanic Majesty."<sup>29</sup> Analyzing this ambivalent mode of cultural charm is the purpose of this book.

The book is divided into three parts, "Worldlings," "Writings," and "After-warriors,"<sup>30</sup> which correspond to the three realms of the socialized institution of literature: the world or context; the text "itself"; and the text's reception in the world. These realms, while notionally distinct, are profoundly interrelated and intermediating. The book seeks to illuminate the transactions that occur as part of the dazzling rhetorical field that we name "Byron" as work, life, and reception.

The scandalous celebrity that enunciates itself across these realms combines social effrontery, sexual transgression, emotional affect, religious impiety, political dissent, and scandals of literary form and propriety. It would be easy to celebrate all this scandalousness as the natural irruption of misunderstood genius, the sign of innovation waiting to be discovered, or the shock of the new confronting the old; but this is only part of the story. To leave it at that would be to underestimate the power of this scandalousness, to essentialize a complex historical process, and to minimize the historical, social, and political claims upon Byron's life and work in the age when they first lived and breathed and astonished. Here, I read the early reviews of Byron's work, not as examples of misunderstanding – though they are sometimes that – but as powerful witnesses to the novelty and danger of Byron's first appearance.

To cast Byron's scandalousness as a portent of posthumous fame misunderstood by contemporaries is to naturalize and reproduce a particular cultural effect rather than to historicize and analyze it. (It is also to ignore the legions of contemporaries who recognized Byron as a portent in their own historical moment.) This study seeks to read Byron's scandalousness and make it culturally legible. It focuses on the constitutive contemporaneity of this scandalous celebrity, and seeks to be attentive to the differences – as much as the similarities – between celebrity and posthumous fame or canonicity.

In his analysis of Romantic aestheticism, James Chandler illuminates "the moment of the Lake School" as the occasion when "the maxim that 'it is the fate of genius . . . to be unpopular' was itself established – chiefly by Wordsworth – in the popular domain."<sup>31</sup> I take the moment of the Satanic school to involve opposing this maxim, as Byron does in his attack on Wordsworth and Southey. The corollary of that maxim was the cult of posthumous acclaim, the domain of "the foster-babes of Fame," as Byron

dubbed them (*DJ* IV. 100. 794). In his important account of how the Romantic cult of posterity functions as compensation for contemporary neglect, Andrew Bennett argues that by “traducing the cult of posterity,” “Byron’s deconstruction of posterity also articulates, in reverse, the cultural centrality of posterity in Romantic writing.”<sup>32</sup> I argue that Byron’s attack not only traduces the cult of posterity but also counters it with an appreciation of contemporaneity that, while “sceptical about the value of contemporary renown,” as Bennett argues, nevertheless confronts and solicits contemporaneity as a force.<sup>33</sup>

A foundational insight of Marlon Ross’s important account of Regency scandal is that “scandal has both a theory and a history.”<sup>34</sup> We can start to historicize Byron’s scandalousness by reading it as an encounter between aristocratic Whig libertinism and a modern commercial marketplace where that libertinism is recast, publicized, and commodified in the form of vendible print. Byron’s notoriety is a scandal-effect marked by the sensational shock of the new, but also by the banality of its repetition, from its originating moment through its ongoing history. Byron’s effrontery, transgression, and impiety enact a thrilling attack on post-Napoleonic Torydom, but one that is also constrained by the anachronisms and contradictions that inform Whig libertinism.

Indeed, what Byron’s contemporary critics called Satanism also went by the name of libertinism, a political and philosophical ethos that had long promoted free-thinking and experimentation in fields as diverse as science, religion, politics, and sexuality.<sup>35</sup> Byron might have been channeling the spirit of Francis Dashwood’s Hell-Fire Club and its notorious guest John Wilkes, the most famous Whig libertine, when he fantasized in 1808 about establishing a “temple of Venus, of which I shall be Pontifex Maximus” (*BLJ* I: 160–1).

The scandalous styling of the radical Whig libertinism embodied in Byron’s texts electrifies readers across the lines of class, gender, and political sympathy, but it is a privileged, specifically masculine, and often misogynistic form of transgression. Many women have nevertheless identified with and appropriated it, despite (or perhaps perversely because of) this exclusivity and misogyny. They include Caroline Lamb and Anne Lister amongst Byron’s contemporaries, and later poets of the mid-nineteenth century such as L.E.L., Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Caroline Norton.<sup>36</sup> Later Byronic women include the two Dorotheys: Dolly Wilde, niece of Oscar, and the late Australian poet, Dorothy Porter. In her sonnet “Is it Not the Thing?,” Porter takes up Byron’s rhetorically questioning defense of *Don Juan* to launch her own identification with the

Byronic Satanic thing: “Every poet wants to write the poem / that penetrates / with the ice-cold shock / of the Devil’s prick.”<sup>37</sup>

Byron’s scandalousness is not simply a portent of misunderstood innovation. It is charged with an ambivalent power of anachronism – a kind of “rearguard revolutionary movement,” to adopt Brigid Brophy’s characterization of nineteenth-century Decadence.<sup>38</sup> Only by understanding these contradictions – these straddlings of the old and the new – can we understand how the poetry and the life have continued to have such a charge.

In 1881, Matthew Arnold asserted: “The hour of irresistible vogue has passed away for him; even for Byron it could not but pass away. The time has come for him, as it comes for all poets, when he must take his real and permanent place, no longer depending upon the vogue of his own day and upon the enthusiasm of his contemporaries.”<sup>39</sup> But Arnold’s “real and permanent place” is a canonical fiction implicated in the desire to establish English literature as an academic discipline, and depends upon a distinction between the posthumous and the contemporary long outdated by the terms of Byron’s celebrity. Understanding Byron’s “hour of irresistible vogue” suggests why an hour that had supposedly “passed away” by 1881 has persisted into our time.

The first two parts of this book are structured according to the distinction between worldly activity and writing that was so central to Byron’s conception of career and heroic action, and to his stylings of contemporary fame and immortality – even as that distinction was re-evaluated by his writing and career. Poetry and politics are profoundly imbricated in Byron’s work. The republican poet Algernon Charles Swinburne, one of Byron’s most brilliant Victorian critics, suggested that Byron wrote out of “political emotion.”<sup>40</sup> A certain compound, then, of politics, affect, and aesthetics is the base of Byron’s writing, I suggest – charged, libidinal, cranky, contradictory, and ultimately unobservant of political party or ideology, for all its high-handed and freewheeling radical Whiggery. *Writing* here encompasses different forms of print culture and textual practice, not simply the high aesthetic ground of literature, though the study does focus on the emergent category of literature as an aestheticized and self-reflexive mode of imaginative writing.

Following an Introduction that outlines the historical, conceptual, and methodological foundations of the study, the book’s first part, “Worldlings,” elaborates four Regency-period case studies of celebrity: Caroline Lamb, Stendhal, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Lord Castlereagh. Each is a key figure within the Byronic cultural field, vital to the historical, social, and



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cultural contexts within which the celebrity persona of Byron developed. The first two are contemporary literary figures who were also fans of Byron, while Napoleon and Castlereagh are contemporary political figures with whom Byron engaged imaginatively in his work.

Chapter 1 introduces scandalous celebrity by analyzing a key episode of early Byronic fame — the affair between Byron and Caroline Lamb in 1812. I use the affair, that summer's *succès de scandale*, to illuminate a moment of transition between older aristocratic modes of heroic fame and newer modes of celebrity, marked by genres such as the fan letter and Lamb's *roman à clef*, *Glenarvon* (1816). Against the background of a comparative reading of Byron's and Lamb's modes of scandalous celebrity, I examine Lamb's significance as a key protagonist — and critic — of Byronic celebrity and as a powerfully central figure of Regency celebrity culture in her own right.

Chapter 2 explores the scene of Byronic exile in 1816 by analyzing a vital moment of transnational cosmopolitan sociability: the meeting in Milan between two exiles, Lord Byron and the star-struck Henri Beyle (Stendhal).

Chapter 3 examines celebrity as a modern democratic social and political form ushered in by the French Revolution, exploring Byron's ambivalent engagement with Napoleon, from his critique of the first abdication in the *Ode To Napoleon Buonaparte* (1814), through the complex identifications and dis-identifications produced in *Childe Harold III* (1816), *Don Juan* (1819–1824) and *The Age of Bronze* (1823), to the letters and journal entries.

Chapter 4 focuses on Byron's obsessive dis-identification with Robert Stewart, Lord Castlereagh. It explores how the scandals of Castlereagh's career erupt throughout Byron's œuvre, with the notorious Byron playing scandal-breaker to Castlereagh's scandal-maker. It examines this reversal of roles in the context of the radical culture that bore testament to the legend of "Bloody Castlereagh."

In Chapter 5, which shifts to Part II, "Writings," I argue that *Childe Harold IV* stages the transition of Byronic fame from an older heroic form to a new mode of celebrity that mixes glamor with notoriety. I focus on Byron's reworking of the ruin genre in *Childe Harold IV* in the form of what I call the melodrama of celebrity.

The distance traveled between *Childe Harold IV* and *Don Juan* is measured by scandal. Chapter 6 argues that *Don Juan's* scandalousness is about the self-referentiality by which the poem comments on itself, its reception, and the act of writing, but also on the public scandals of the author's private life. I analyze how the worldly scandals of Byron's



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celebrity – the separation scandal, materialist libertinism, and revolutionary political sympathies – are imbricated with the formal scandals around the self-reflexivity of the work.

In the third and final part, “After-warriors,” Chapter 7 examines the figure of the celebrity author in relation to property, piracy, libel law, and the body. It considers how scandalous celebrity reconfigures the distinction between crime and scandal by counterpointing two contemporary spectacles of Byron’s scandalous authorial body: the radical William Benbow’s appropriation of “Byron’s Head” for his press and bookshop, and Robert Southey’s scandalized Tory fantasy of stringing Byron up at the gibbet as punishment for *Don Juan*’s “high treason upon English poetry.”