BYRON IN CONTEXT

George Gordon, the sixth Lord Byron (1788–1824), was one of the most celebrated poets of the Romantic period, as well as a peer, politician and global celebrity, famed not only for his verse, but for his controversial lifestyle and involvement in the Greek War of Independence. In thirty-seven concise, accessible chapters, by leading international scholars, this volume explores the social and intertextual relationships that informed Byron’s writing; the geopolitical contexts in which he traveled, lived and worked; the cultural and philosophical movements that influenced changing outlooks on religion, science, modern society and sexuality; the dramatic landscape of war, conflict and upheaval that shaped Napoleonic and post-Napoleonic Europe and Regency Britain; and the diverse cultures of reception that mark the ongoing Byron phenomenon as a living ecology in the twenty-first century. This volume illuminates “Byron” not only in context but also as context.

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BYRON IN CONTEXT

EDITED BY

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University of Melbourne
In memoriam Rolf P. Lesenich (1940–2019)
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Notes on Contributors

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Clara Tuite is Professor of English at the University of Melbourne, a Co-Director of the Research Unit in Enlightenment, Romanticism and Contemporary Culture, and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. Her books include Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon (Cambridge, 2002) and Lord Byron and Scandalous Celebrity (Cambridge, 2015), which was awarded the Elma Dangerfield Prize of the International Association of Byron Societies.

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Chronology

1788  January 22: Born George Gordon Byron in London to Captain John Byron (1756–91) and his second wife, Catherine Byron, née Gordon (1765–1811).
1789  Mrs. Byron takes son to spend his early years in Aberdeen, Scotland.
      July 14: Storming of the Bastille marks beginning of French Revolution.
1790  Captain Byron abandons family and moves to Valenciennes, France.
1791  Captain Byron dies in France.
1794–8  Attends Aberdeen Grammar School.
1796  Matthew Lewis’ The Monk published.
1798  Inherits baronetcy and title of 6th Baron Byron of Rochdale through the death of his great-uncle, Lord William Byron, the fifth Baron Byron.
      May: Napoleon leads French invasion of Egypt.
      August: Accompanies mother to ancestral estate at Newstead Abbey.
1799  Enrolled at Dr. Glennie’s School in Dulwich.
1800  Falls in love with first cousin, Margaret Parker, during summer holiday in Nottingham and Newstead.
1801–5  Enters Harrow School.
1801  Thomas Moore’s Poetical Works of the Late Thomas Little, Esq. published.
1803  February: Newstead leased by Lord Grey de Ruthyn.
      September–November: Falls in love with Mary Ann Chaworth.
Chronology

November: Lives at Newstead under the care of Lord Grey de Ruthyn.

1804
Breaks with Lord Grey, returns to Harrow.
December: Napoleon crowned Emperor of France.

1805
June: Charlotte Dacre publishes *Hours of Solitude*.

1805–7
Goes into residence at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he meets John Edleston, John Cam Hobhouse and Charles Skinner Matthews.

October 21: Admiral Lord Nelson defeats French and Spanish naval forces at the Battle of Trafalgar.

1806
November: First volume of poetry, *Fugitive Pieces*, privately printed by John Ridge of Newark; Byron immediately suppresses it.

1807
January: *Fugitive Pieces* reworked and privately published as *Poems on Various Occasions*.
June: *Hours of Idleness* published by Ben Crosby in London.
June: Joins the Cambridge Whig Club.
October: Returns to Trinity.

Germaine de Staël publishes *Corinne, ou l’Italie* and Thomas Moore publishes the first of his *Irish Melodies*, to appear in ten parts 1807–34.

1808
Leaves Cambridge and is awarded his MA.
Engages Robert Charles Dallas as intermediary with his publishers.

1809
March: Takes his seat in the House of Lords.
March: *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* published by James Cawthorn.
June: Commences grand tour to Portugal, Spain, Gibraltar, Malta, Greece, Albania and Turkey, accompanied by Hobhouse.

1810
July: Hobhouse returns to England from the Continent, while Byron remains in Greece.

1811
February: The Prince of Wales is installed as Prince Regent after his father, King George III, is afflicted permanently by mental illness.
May: Learns of the death of his Harrow school friend John Wingfield.
June: Returns to England.
August 1: Death of Byron’s mother, followed two days later by his Cambridge friend Charles Skinner Matthews.
Chronology

October: Learns of the death of his close Cambridge companion John Edleston.
November: Meets Thomas Moore at dinner with Samuel Rogers.
November: Offers *Hints from Horace* to James Cawthorn before requesting its suppression. The work is eventually published posthumously.

1812
February: Delivers maiden speech in the House of Lords on the Frame Work Bill.
March 10: *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (Cantos 1 and 11) published by John Murray.
March 25: First sees future wife, Annabella Milbanke.
April: Begins relationship with Lady Caroline Lamb.
May 11: Prime Minister Spencer Perceval assassinated in the lobby of the House of Commons.
June: Lord Castlereagh appointed Foreign Secretary.
July: Considers eloping with Lady Caroline Lamb.
October: Proposes to Annabella Milbanke, but is rejected.

1813
January 23: Coleridge’s *Remorse* premieres at Drury Lane.
January: Jane Austen publishes *Pride and Prejudice*.
May: Visits Leigh Hunt in Surrey Jail, Southwark, where he has been imprisoned for libelling the Prince Regent in the *Examiner*.
June 1: Gives final speech to House of Lords, presenting Major John Cartwright’s petition for liberal reform.
June 5: *The Giaour* published, the first of Byron’s Eastern tales.
June 20: Meets Madame de Staël.
December: *The Bride of Abydos* published.

1814
February 1: *The Corsair* published, sells 10,000 copies in a day.
April: Napoleon abdicates and is exiled to Elba.
July: Walter Scott’s *Waverley* published.

1815
January 2: Marries Annabella Milbanke.
March: Napoleon escapes from Elba and rallies forces in France.
April: *Hebrew Melodies* published.
May: Elected to Committee of Drury Lane Theatre.
June 18: Napoleon defeated at the Battle of Waterloo, marking the end of the Napoleonic Wars.
October: Napoleon abdicates a second time and is exiled to St. Helena.
December: Birth of Ada, Byron’s child by Annabella Milbanke.
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Chronology

December: Jane Austen's *Emma* published.

1816

January 15: Annabella leaves Byron, and Byron agrees to a legal separation (formalized on April 21), leading to the public controversy of the Separation scandal.

February 13: *The Siege of Corinth* and *Parisina* published together.

April 23: Leaves Britain for the Continent.

May: Lady Caroline Lamb publishes *Glenarvon*.

May: Coleridge's *Christabel* published with *Kubla Khan* and *The Pains of Sleep*.

May 27: Meets Percy Shelley at Sécheron.

June: Rents Villa Diodati in Geneva. An evening with John Polidori, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Shelley leads to the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819).

October: Arrives in Italy, at Milan.

November 10: Arrives in Venice.

November 18: *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (Canto III) published.

December: *The Prisoner of Chillon* published.

1817

January 12: Birth of Allegra, Byron's daughter by Claire Clairmont.

March–May: Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh* published.

June 16: *Manfred* published.

July: Jane Austen dies.

July: Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* published.

November: Newstead Abbey sold to Major Thomas Wildman.

December: Shelley's *Laon and Cythna* published and immediately suppressed. Revised and published as *The Revolt of Islam* the following year.

December: Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* published posthumously.

1818

February 28: *Beppo* published.

April 28: *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (Canto IV) published.

July: Begins writing *Don Juan*.

September: Finishes writing first canto of *Don Juan*.

1819

January 22: First encounter with Countess Teresa Guiccioli (*née Gamba*), with whom he begins an affair.

June 28: *Mazeppa* published.

July 15: *Don Juan* (Cantos 1–11) published anonymously. John Murray declines to be identified as publisher.

August 16: Peterloo massacre in Manchester.

October: Gives Moore his “Memoirs.”
Chronology

1820

January: Death of George III. The Prince Regent is crowned George IV the following year.
February: Moves into the Palazzo Guiccioli, Ravenna, home of Count and Countess Guiccioli.
March: Becomes the Cavaliere Servente of Teresa Guiccioli.
March 15: Begins Some Observations Upon an Article in Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine.
July: Meets Teresa’s brother, Count Pietro Gamba.
July: Count and Countess Guiccioli separate; she leaves the Palazzo and moves into her father’s country house in Filetto.
July: Keats publishes Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems.
August: Becomes involved in the Carbonari revolutionary society through his friendship with the Gambas.
August: Shelley’s Prometheus Unbound published.

1821

January: Begins the “Ravenna Journal.”
February: Planned Carbonari uprising fails.
March 31: Publishes Letter to John Murray Esqre, the first installment of the Pope–Bowles controversy.
April 21: Marino Faliero and The Prophecy of Dante published together.
May 5: Napoleon dies on St Helena.
June: Lady Morgan’s Italy published.
July: Teresa’s father, Count Gamba, arrested and banished, followed by her brother Pietro.
July: Teresa leaves Ravenna to join her brother and father.
August: Shelley arrives in Ravenna.
August: Don Juan (Cantos 11–v) published.
October 15: Begins Detached Thoughts.
October 29: Leaves Ravenna with Shelley to join Teresa and the Gambas in Pisa.
December 19: Sardanapalus, The Two Foscari and Cain published together.

1822

January: Article by Robert Southey (then Poet-Laureate) attacking Byron appears in the Courier.
February: Replies to Southey’s attack.
February: Challenges Southey to a duel in an undelivered note.
April: Byron’s five-year-old daughter by Claire Clairmont, Allegra, dies in a convent at Bagnacavallo (near Ravenna), where she had lived since March 1821.
July 8: Shelley drowns in Bay of Spezia.
Chronology

August: Attends Shelley’s cremation at Viareggio.
August: Lord Castlereagh commits suicide.
October–November: Breaks with John Murray after Murray refuses to publish further cantos of *Don Juan*. Subsequent cantos and other works are published by John Hunt.
November 23: Murray publishes Byron’s *Werner*,

1823

1823

1824

January 1: *Heaven and Earth* published in the *Liberal*, no. 2.
April 1: *The Age of Bronze* published.
April 26: *The Blues* published in the *Liberal*, no. 3.
Byron’s friend John Cam Hobhouse is involved in the creation of the London Greek Committee.
May–July: Learns that he has been formally elected a member of the London Greek Committee.
June 26: *The Island* published.
July 15: *Don Juan* (Cantos vi–viii) published.
July 16: Sails for Greece on the brig *Hercules*, along with Pietro Gamba and a small fighting force under his command.
July 30: Byron’s translation of Luigi Pulci’s *Morgante Maggione* published in the *Liberal*, no. 4.
August 3: Arrives in Greece.
August 29: *Don Juan* (Cantos ix–xi) published.
November: Lends £4,000 to the Greek government.
December 17: *Don Juan* (Cantos xii–xiv) published.
December 29: Sails for Missolonghi.

January 22: Writes “On this day I complete my thirty sixth year” to mark his birthday.
February 15: Suffers fits, supposed to be epileptic convulsions.
February 20: *The Deformed Transformed* published.
March 26: *Don Juan* (Cantos xv–xvi) published.
April 19: Dies of fever in Missolonghi, aged thirty-six.
July: Hobhouse and others destroy the manuscript of Byron’s “Memoirs.”

The fragment of *Don Juan* Canto xvii is found among Byron’s papers after his death, and is published in 1903.
Modern literary criticism has united the world into one great mental community. The man who knows his art understands the world of art. He is a citizen of the world, and the poet who cannot think of the world as one is an illiterate. The poet who can think of the world in what has been called the international style, as a great field of enterprise, is a great poet. The poet who can think of the world in that way is a great poet, and he is the poet who is the friend of the world. The poet who can think of the world in that way is the poet who is the friend of the world.

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Abbreviations and Note on the Text

ER        *Edinburgh Review*


Liberal   *The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South*
OED       *Oxford English Dictionary*

QR        *Quarterly Review*


All quotations from Byron’s poetry, unless stated otherwise, are taken from the *Complete Poetical Works* (*CPW*), ed. Jerome J. McGann. They are indicated by in-text references to *CPW* followed by page number and line number. Block quotations are indicated by canto, stanza and line number (followed by page number). All other editions are noted in the individual chapters. Block quotations from dramas are by act, scene and line number. Quotations from prose writings are by volume and page number for *BLJ* and *CPW* and by page number for *CMP*. 
Figure I.1  Thomas Phillips, *Portrait of a Nobleman*, 1813. 88 x 70.5 cm, oil on canvas. Newstead Abbey Collection, Nottinghamshire, inv. no. NA 532 BLDIDNA000454-1.