A poetic canvas: Byron and visual culture

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A POETIC CANVAS: BYRON AND VISUAL CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

A Poetic Canvas: Byron and Visual Culture

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A Poetic Canvas: Byron and Visual Culture argues for a reading of Byron’s poems within the cultural context of the sister arts of poetry and painting. In addition, the theatre and sculpture were also influential as visual inspiration for Byron. This study reveals the poet’s substantial knowledge of the visual arts; consequently, informed by images he knew, readings convey a richer context of significance. The influence of drawings, print caricature, and paintings is found to be substantial, and the research challenges Byron’s own statements, often repeated, that he knew nothing of painting. Although Byron is regarded as a poet of the Romantic Period, he was a reluctant Romantic. This study will show the lingering validation of the Augustan Period in the first decades of the nineteenth century, even as poetry was changing in both theme and form. Byron regarded his contemporary poets as writing “upon a wrong revolutionary poetical system.” Despite his assertion that Pope was the epitome of British poetry, Byron was extremely proud of Don Juan, his unique masterpiece, and insisted that the poem was part of a literary tradition, a work that extends the heritage of poetic satire.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study traces for the first time the way in which Byron’s poems intersect with visual culture, offering an analysis of the manner in which painting, drawing, print caricature and the theatre figure in Byron’s poems. Although references to Byron and the visual arts exist, the depth of research is superficial, possibly due to Byron’s own statement: “Of painting I know nothing.”1 Despite this self-critical comment, made more than once, Byron obviously did know a great deal about painting and visual culture. This study explores Byron’s interest, understanding, and use of paintings, prints, and art theory. Moreover, Byron was extremely familiar with the theater and sculpture; both arts were sources of influence. This study also presents an analysis of Christopher Anstey’s *The New Bath Guide*. This amusing satire has been forgotten but played an important role in Byron’s penchant for witty satire.

To begin, Byron was a friend of Richard Payne Knight, a prominent aesthetician, whose extensive writings were highly regarded by Byron. Byron owned a copy of Knight’s *An Analytical Inquiry Into the Principles of Taste*. Knight believed that sculpture was the highest form of art, an aesthetic position that Byron adopted. Byron also read and approved of artist Martin Archer Shee’s *Rhymes on Art*, as evident in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. Byron recognized the painter as an equal. The study concludes that *Don Juan* may be understood in the context of Augustan satire, both

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visual and literary; in fact, the work may be read as a satirical print, not unlike the
etchings of Hogarth, Rowlandson, Gillray, and Cruikshank. In addition, Byron was well
aware of the emotional power of the theatre. He was able to adopt visual special effects
from the stage and purposely modeled Don Juan on the lowly pantomime. The
pantomime provides affinity with the classic Commedia Dell’Arte, a medium rich in
bawdy humor. Byron, like a theatrical impresario, develops a strong narrative voice that
directs the reader to both himself and Don Juan.

Byron appears as a reluctant Romantic in the pages that follow, an intellectual
whose tastes were anchored in tradition but whose creativity allowed him to chart his
own course and dazzle the reader with a stunning poetic canvas. This study will trace
Byron as a conventional poet, a young writer whose poems are solidly within the
Augustan tradition; a need for sensation was at the same time a crucial component of
Byron’s psychological makeup. The external world, what he experiences and observes,
will become a part of his creative work as he matures.

As literary historians have asserted, the historical term Romanticism is a
posthumous invention. The Romantic period is usually dated from 1798 to 1832, the
years between the publication of Lyrical Ballads and enactment of the Reform Bill of
1832. Although precise dates are contested, the Romantic Period is indeed a
transformative period. But this study observes that this era could just as easily be termed

Post-Augustan. Whereas students often assume that the great poets of Romanticism were

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The Norton Anthology, seventh edition, dates the period from 1785-1830, vii. As late as 1860, The Hand-
book of Universal Literature (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1860) by Anne Botta, a text for colleges,
made no reference to Romanticism. Botta wrote: "There are four who have gained greater fame than the
others, and exercised greater influence on their contemporaries. These are Coleridge, Wordsworth, Scott
and Byron," 512. Seamus Perry points out in Wu’s Companion, 5, that “romantic poems” were defined by
Thomas Arnold in A Manual of English Literature, 1862, as those resembling “the old romances of
chivalry.”
hailed in their own day, the truth is somewhat different, as scholars remind us. Many poets, like Shelley and Keats, did not have a wide audience. Even Wordsworth and Byron, both of whom were popular poets, failed to fully convince contemporaries of their literary value. *Town Talk* expressed its dislike of both poets in November 1812: “Child Harold will float down the stream of oblivion in company with its brother traffickers in bathos and absurdity, the Wordsworths, the Cottles, and the Colmans of the day.”

Indeed, Byron himself asserted that his generation of poets was inferior to the Augustan poets. His great literary hero was Alexander Pope. Byron eagerly defended the writers of the Augustan Age, even the now-forgotten James Montgomery: “His ‘Wanderer of Switzerland’ is worth a thousand ‘Lyrical Ballads.’” Byron asserted that the ideal contemporary poets, those of “the best school,” were Samuel Rogers, William Gifford, Thomas Campbell, and George Crabbe. But Byron was not the only reader who lacked enthusiasm for the new schools of poetry. A secondary theme of this study will document the deeply entrenched values of the Augustan Period that existed with the rise of burgeoning Romanticism during the first decades of the nineteenth century.

Would writers of this period appreciate being called *Romantics*? Unlikely. Joan Pittock gives a reasonable indication concerning how they viewed themselves:

The Romantics of course saw themselves extending the concept of the possible on the widest fronts, both individually and socially: political radicalism has from the beginning a central significance in the movement. This certainly led to injustice towards the achievements of the previous age. In *The Spirit of the Age* Hazlitt

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3 *Town Talk*, November 1812, 302-05.
4 Byron defended Montgomery in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. Francis Jeffrey had savaged Montgomery’s *The Wander of Switzerland* in 1807. See Byron: *Poetical Works*, 864.
conveys both the largeness of aim of the Romantics and the
unfairness which it entailed; the poetry of Wordsworth 'is founded
on setting up an opposition (and pushing it to the utmost length)
between the natural and artificial; between the spirit of humanity
and the spirit of fashion and the world! It is one of the innovations
of the time. It partakes of, and is carried along with, the revolutionary
movement of our age: the political changes of the day were the model
on which he formed and conducted his poetical experiments.'

Pittock is correct to stress that the revolutions in America and France impressed
the reformers in Britain. Byron was extremely disappointed that Napoleon was not
allowed to remain in power in France. Byron was disgusted with Britain’s restoration of a
king for France. As for the contemporary dimensions of poetry, Byron’s attitude is
complex. He blasts all those who deviate from tradition, including himself:

…the whole heterogeneous mass of living English poets

[...] and by me, who have shamefully deviated in practice,

but have ever loved and honoured Pope’s poetry with my

whole soul, and hope to do so till my dying day.

Don Juan had been denounced in Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, August 1819. Don
Juan was “a filthy and impious poem, with an elaborate satire on the character and
manners of his wife.” While Don Juan was never filthy and impious, it was bawdy.

Byron admittedly mildly satirized his estranged wife. An argument can be made that
Byron exists within the Augustan tradition of satire, though his style of writing differs

7 Ibid., 385.
notably from his predecessors Dryden and Pope. How strange it is that he should still be defending Alexander Pope in 1820, after all, and denouncing all living English poets for straying from the Augustan tradition.

Byronists owe a debt of gratitude to Leslie Marchand for his modern collection of Byron’s letters. Byron’s ideas and strong voice still resonate over the ages. However, the curious cannot fully know Byron’s world unless they deeply immerse themselves in Georgian culture. The rich tapestry of the Regency is interwoven with a multiplicity of threads, tiny and interlaced, faded and bright. Byron observed the past and his own times as well; likewise, he became a dazzling subject of brightness and darkness. The scope of the study is both broad and minute, to allow the interested to observe a brilliant and complex poet.

My interest in Byron began when I accompanied my grandmother to Lucca, Italy. When my Italian cousins discovered that I had an interest in English literature, they enthusiastically told me how Byron and the Shelleys had resided in Tuscany. I was given a tour of Bagni di Lucca, Pisa, and even shown the beach where P.B. Shelley’s body had been reduced to ashes as Byron watched. That summer in Italy eventually led to a lifelong interest in the Romantic Period.

**Newstead’s Lost Collection**

On September 1, 1760, Horace Walpole wrote a letter to George Montagu, Esq. Walpole had been traveling and was enthusiastic about Newstead Abbey, an ancient estate near Nottingham. Walpole was enthused by what he observed:

The great east window of the church remains, and connects with the
house; the hall entire, the refectory entire, the cloister untouched, with the ancient cistern of the convent and their arms on it; a private chapel quite perfect. The park, which is still charming, has not been so much profaned; the present Lord has lost large sums, and paid part in old oaks, five thousand pounds of which have been cut near the house […] In the hall is a very good collection of pictures, all animals; the refectory, now the great drawing-room, is full of Byrons…

Despite Walpole’s letter about the collection being “all animals,” there were additional canvases. William Byron, the fifth Baron Byron, was still in need of money twelve years later. A major portion of Lord Byron’s collection was delivered to Christie’s Auction House. Hundreds of paintings were offered for sale over five days in March 1772. The paintings for sale appeared in *A Catalogue of All That Grand and Noble Collection of Italian, French, Flemish and Dutch Pictures, of A Nobleman, Brought from his Lordships Seat in Nottinghamshire, Consisting of the Works of the Following Great Masters.*

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The catalogue explained “The above have been collected by his Lordship and noble Father during the course of a Number of Years with great Speculation and vast Expence.” In addition to the artists on the frontispiece, the catalogue offered paintings by many other famous masters, including M. Angelo’s *St. Elizabeth and St. John* and Loutherbourg’s *A romantic landscape with cattle and figures*. The auction took place at the Royal Academy and Cumberland House.

A second auction took place in June 1778. Advertised as *Lord Byron’s Auction Sale*, the catalogue offered “An elegant collection of paintings, by the best masters.” However, the items were mainly “household furniture”: mahogany tables, desks, firearms, brewing vessels, glass and china, featherbeds, plaster statues, and kitchen furniture. The prospective buyers were assured that the “Company may depend that Cold Provisions may be had at the SALE, at an easy Expence, of a Person who will attend for that Purpose.”

Among the prominent paintings listed in the catalogue were *Lady playing on a guitar* by Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Lady in a curious Dress* by Sir G. Kneller, *Venus and Cupid* by Guido, *The Graces, Pallas, Mercury, &c. very fine*, by Reubens, *Woman with Fruit, Flowers, &c. very fine*, by Mich. Angelo., and *Lady and a Blackmoore* by Sir P. Lilly [Lely]. Beside the masters, many paintings were animal subjects, like those Walpole had admired: *Grey Horse, Foreign Fox, Pair of Foreign Ducks, Lion Dogs, &c. very fine*, by Snyders.

Twenty years later, on May 21, 1798, the fifth Baron Byron died at Newstead Abbey. Known as “the Wicked Lord,” William Byron was the poet’s great-uncle. The

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9 Sale Catalogue, March 1772. Beckett and Aley, *Byron and Newstead*, 75, state 460 pictures were sold and the sale produced a sum of 3,300 pounds.
fifth Lord Byron was controversial for the infamous sword duel he had fought in London with his neighbor and relative William Chaworth. In 1765, after a dinner at the Star and Garter Tavern, a quarrel arose between the two men and Chaworth was stabbed in a darkly lit room. Over future decades, William Byron squandered money and was unable to repay loans. Despite the sale of valuable timber, the financial decline of his estate continued until household furniture was sold piece by piece. The descent was not only monetary; William Byron’s son died young and his grandson died at the battle of Calvi in Corsica in 1794. By a twist of fate, the heir became a ten-year-old boy who had never even met his great-uncle.

George Gordon Byron, sixth Baron Byron, was born in London in 1788, the son of Captain John “Mad Jack” Byron, a dashing but irresponsible figure who had run away at age twenty-two with a married woman, Amelia d’Arcy, the Marchioness of Carmarthen. She was the wife of Francis, Marquis of Carmarthen, who soon divorced her. After the birth of a child, Augusta, Amelia Byron died in Paris. Captain Byron’s next wife was an heiress, Catherine Gordon, the daughter of the twelfth Laird of Gight, a family that descended from James I. But Catherine Gordon’s inheritance was insufficient to pay her husband’s substantial debt. John “Mad Jack” Byron fled to a permanent residence in France, though he did manage to return to London for the birth of his son. Catherine Byron professed to love her irresolute husband and asked the executor of her inheritance to provide her spouse with funds. After Mad Jack’s death, Catherine and her son, George Gordon Byron, lived in Scotland where life was less costly than London. Byron had been born with a birth defect, a malformed right foot, a humiliating and


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painful malady that caused lameness. The unexpected inheritance of Newstead Abbey seemed to be a blessing. The boy was told of his relative's death in the Aberdeen Grammar School. He was now a peer, an aristocrat who was eligible to sit in the House of Lords, and the lord of Newstead Abbey. However, the inheritance failed to bring the expected wealth to insure an aristocratic lifestyle. Newstead was in need of repair. The new Lord Byron was unable to live at Newstead until legal matters were unraveled and basic repairs were made. The young lord and his mother were at least able to walk through the ancient but threadbare abbey. Most aristocratic families owned a collection of fine paintings, but the fifth Lord Byron had sold his collection of old masters to raise money. The great dining room that had once been filled with paintings was only adorned by family portraits. Byron and his mother only saw empty walls in other rooms, vast space, where Horace Walpole had once beheld beauty. But the surviving sales catalogues allowed the Byrons to conjecture what had been taken away. The lost paintings were destined to haunt the poet. The paintings will return in Canto XIII of Don Juan, to grace Norman Abbey:

Huge halls, long galleries, spacious chambers, join'd

By no quite lawful marriage of the arts,

Might shock a connoisseur; but when combined,

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11 Beckett and Aley, Byron and Newstead, 75. The authors provide a fine account of the life of William Byron. Their research unravels the complex financial transactions of the fifth and sixth Lords of Newstead Abbey. The authors state that family portraits remained after the auction. Byron's letter of August 6, 1805, confirms the existence of the portraits at Burgage Manor, the residence of his mother. Byron wrote a letter to his half-sister Augusta relating Mrs. Byron complained of Augusta's ingratitude: "You may figure to yourself, for your amusement, my solemn countenance on the occasion, and the meek Lamblike demeanor of her Ladyship, which contrasted with my saintlike visage, forms a striking family painting, whilst in the background, the portraits of my Great Grandfather and Grandmother suspended in their frames, seem to look with an eye of pity on their unfortunate descendant, whose worth and accomplishments deserve a milder fate." Marchand, Volume 1, 72. Byron acknowledges the visual power of an illusory image to stir human emotion. The family portraits will reappear when Don Juan visits the fictional Norman Abbey.

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Form'd a whole which, irregular in parts
Yet left a grand impression on the mind,
At least of those whose eyes are in their hearts (LXVII) 12

According to legend, the Priory of Saint Mary at Newstead had been founded by Henry II in 1170 as an act of remorse for the murder of Thomas a Becket. The clergy led quiet lives of prayer and devotion until Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries. As allies of the Tudors, the Byrons acquired the estate in 1540. The monks' cloisters had been transformed into a mansion that held a library, elegant furniture, and a genuine connoisseur's collection of paintings. "Elegy on Newstead Abbey," an early poem by Byron captures the sense of desolation:

Newstead! What saddening change of scene is thine!
Thy yawning arch betokens slow decay;
The last and youngest of a noble line,
Now holds thy moldering turrets in his sway.
Deserted now, he scans thy gray worn towers
Thy vaults, where dead of feudal ages sleep (137-144) 13

Byron accurately describes his ancestral mansion. Time the Destroyer would remain a central theme of Byron's poetry. The poet masterfully depicted his home with verse in accordance with the classical precepts of Horace: “Ut pictura poesia” or "poetry resembles painting." Rene Rapin's Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise of Poesie, translated in London in 1674 by Thomas Rymer, establishes the importance of Horace's ideas:

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12 Byron: Poetical Works, 817.
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In effect, this Treatise of Poesie, to speak properly, is nothing else, but nature put in method, and good sense reduce’d to principles [...] Horace was the first who propos’d this great Model to the Romans. And by this all the great men in the Court of Augustus form’d their Wits.  

Rene Rapin’s book was widely read in England. Rapin explains the difference in poetry and painting:

Among the particulars of this Art, the Subject and Design ought to have the first place, because it is, as it were, the first production of the Wit; and the Design in a poem is, what they call the Ordinnance in a picture. The great Painters onely are capable of a great design in their draughts, such as a Raphael, a Julius Romanus, a Poussin, and onely great Poets are capable of a great Subject in their Poetry.  

According to Charles Brink, the comparison existed in ancient Greece, long before Horace. Simonides called a picture “silent poetry and poetry a speaking picture[and] these notions were common literary property.”  

Financial trouble was to plague Byron for years to come. Although he was able to refurbish a few rooms at Newstead, most chambers remained vacant and decaying. While still a young boy, the estate was leased, and Byron and his mother lived elsewhere. But when he finally did occupy Newstead, the Main Hall was used for target shooting and the

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14 Rymer, Introduction to Rapin’s Reflections. According to The Dictionary of National Biography, Volume 17, 555, Rymer believed the dramatic efforts of English writers had suffered due to neglect of classical rules of unity.

15 Rapin, Reflections, 24-25.

16 Brink, Horace on Poetry, 369.
Great Dining Room for fencing practice. Like his father, Byron lived in debt. He purchased books and accumulated an extensive library that would reach hundreds of authors by 1816. But paintings were not bought. A visitor to Newstead in 1811 noticed only two paintings and both were of Byron’s dogs.

Even scholars such as Leslie Marchand assert that “Byron was not knowledgeable about painting, and in general cared little for it, except some lifelike pictures such as those of Giorgione (see Beppo, stanzas 11-13).” In a letter of August 9, 1806, to his friend John M.B. Pigot, Byron wrote with frustration about his mother’s temper, calling her “Mrs. Byron furiosa,” and to capture her fury Byron states he would need Dante’s pen or “the Colours of Poussin (who I think, but will not be positive, dealt in the horrible).” The lines show a young man, at age eighteen, deeply immersed in heated emotions and a desire to express ideas with intellectual imagery, both literary and pictorial. While Dante’s Inferno was known to many readers at the time, Nicholas Poussin was only known to the higher social order, those who admired, bought and sold paintings. But magazines such as Ackermann’s Repository of the Arts were reaching the nobility and gentry. Through these, readers learned about the fine arts. Byron informed his friend Pigot that his knowledge about Poussin may be unreliable. Poussin’s canvases did convey a sense of Nature’s power, but their colors were not the source of the acclaim. Nevertheless, the letter shows Byron seeking imagery from an artist to shade his own work. The following year, 1807, Byron’s knowledge of art improved after he purchased The Historic Gallery of Portraits and Paintings, a seven volume publication. But Byron’s passion was literature. His amazingly retentive memory allowed him to cite passages at

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18 Marchand, Byron’s Letters & Journals, Volume 1, 94. Byron’s letter to Pigot is on page 94.
will and his letters are filled with numerous literary references. Byron understood the literary neoclassical literary tradition, but did he fully understand the artistic challenge? According to Jonah Siegel in *Desire and Excess*, “The challenge for the artist in neoclassicism is immense:

Instructed to base himself on the ancient art which is the justification and foundation of everything he hopes to accomplish, in order to create ‘original’ work, he must nevertheless to some degree break out of the cycle of repetition in which he has been trained.  

Sir Joshua Reynolds in Discourse VI of his annual lectures gave advice to the poet and the painter:

It must be acknowledged that the works of the moderns are *more* the property of their authors; he who borrows from an antient, or even from a modern artist not his contemporary, and so accommodates it to his own work, that it makes a part of it, with no seam or joining appearing, *can hardly* be charged with plagiarism: poets practice this kind of borrowing without reserve. But an artist should not be contented with this *only*; he should enter into a competition with his original, and endeavor to improve what he is appropriating to his own work…

Visual art was highly regarded in Georgian culture, especially the *high art* of painting. Sir Samuel Romilly, a celebrated legal reformer in Byron’s time, stated:

[My father] was an admirer of the fine arts, but pictures being

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19 Siegel, *Desire and Excess*, 43.
too costly for his purchase, he limited himself to prints ...

I found a great deal of amusement in turning over the prints

He was possessed of, became a great admirer of pictures,

never omitted an opportunity of seeing a good collection, knew

the particular style of almost every master...I love to transport

myself in idea into our little parlour, with its green paper, and the

beautiful prints of Vivares, Bartolozzi, or Strange, from the pictures

of Claude, Caracci, Raphael, and Corregio...²¹

Records of Fashion, subtitled a Journal of Polite Intelligence, informed readers that it existed “to combine useful knowledge with Innocent and elegant recreation.” Her Royal Highness, Princess Elizabeth, was the patron of the monthly periodical published under the direction of Mrs. Fiske. The opening of the Exhibition of The Royal Academy was a major social event and the correspondent for The Records of Fashion captured the excitement when the Academicians held an annual dinner the night before the opening. In addition to the members of the Royal Academy, the nobility, gentry and political orders were represented. The event, held on March 30, 1808, provides insight into the cultural significance of the gathering:

The tables were laid in the large exhibition room. Between six and seven hundred of the Nobility and Gentry were invited, among whom were the Duke of Norfolk and Archbishop of York, who sat on the right and left hand of Mr. West, the President; likewise the Marquisses of Lansdowne

²¹ Manwaring, Italian Landscape, 86.
and Abercorn; Earls of Dartmouth, Camden, and Bathurst [...] the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Sheridan, and numerous *et caetera* of Lords and Commons. ²²

Whenever an exhibition was held the newspapers and periodicals made certain the public was informed. Royal Academy Exhibits were always the subject of newspaper and magazine interest:

Landscape, though it comes under our notice, is certainly the most conspicuous feature of the present exhibition. Turner here maintained his customary dignity. *The Fleet at Spithead* is a most majestic picture and the views of *Sir John Leicester’s Seat*, which, in other hands would be mere topography, touched by his magic pencil, have assumed a highly poetic character. It is on occasions like these that the superiority of this man’s mind displays itself, and in comparison with the productions of his hand, not only all the painters of the present day, but all the boasted names to which the collector bows, - sinks into nothing... ³³

But the following year, in June 1810, the reviewer for *The Repository of Arts* criticized the Exhibition:

The excessive proportion of portraits in this forty-second exhibition, plainly shews that it is high time to rescue the profession of art from the danger of sinking into trade. This danger has increased, and will increase, so long as the

²² *Records of Fashion*, April 1808, 89. Periodical articles were usually anonymous.
³³ *Repository of Arts*, Supplement, June 1809, 490.
opulent continue to lavish the means of encouragement and patronage on gratification of private vanity. The rage for portraits is not confined to “the human face divine,” exhausts itself on the brute creation; and the heads of the “nobility and gentry” on the walls of the Academy contend for the public admiration with broodmares, terriers, badgers, poodles, Dalmatian dogs, and pointer-bitches. The talent exercised on these unworthy subjects records its own degradation; but the fault rests with the public, not with the artist.²⁴

Despite the sneer of the critic about “these unworthy subjects,” Byron’s animal portraits were actually quite fashionable. Byron hired artists for portraits of Boatswain, his Newfoundland dog, and Woolly, his wolfdog.

The reviewer is equally harsh on Henry Fuseli’s Hercules, to deliver Theseus, assails and wounds Pluto:

We had intended not to notice this picture, considering its errors too gross to need pointing out. But the errors of a man of genius are, in example, dangerous, and ought to be held out as a warning to young students. The figure of it is extravagant and ill-drawn; the arm which holds the bow is not rightly articulated to the shoulder, and the attitude of Pluto most injudicious [...] The contrast is a fresh demonstration how easily the sublime may merge into the ridiculous.

²⁴ Repository of Arts, June 1810, 365.
The assemblages of the higher spheres and “gay circles of British society” were important cultural events that provided social cohesion. Moreover, the aristocracy was given the opportunity to flaunt its wealth by the exhibition of a private collection. Thus, the festive gathering at Stafford House in Cleveland-Row was worthy of newspaper coverage:

Two thousand persons of the highest rank in fashion […]

It was illuminated for the occasion with great brilliance by patent lamps on pedestals supported by bronze dolphins, to the number of three hundred and twenty. The apartments opened were the drawing rooms of the Marchioness, and the picture galleries, which are divided into the Italian, Flemish, and English school; besides the cabinet gallery, sacred to the productions of Vandervelt, Van Oss and Van Huysum, the pictures in the whole of which are valued at 600,00L. 25

While the guests danced, dined and promenaded, their domestics were not forgotten. The correspondent observed that the servants were regaled with “eight hogshead of porter.” The guests who were allowed to view the art collection of the Marchioness were expected to have the knowledge to discuss the paintings on display intelligently. If members of the nobility and gentry lacked the appropriate insight, monthly periodicals assisted their ability to properly read a painting. The beautiful elements of a painting were often discussed in periodicals during the first decade of the nineteenth century. And what is Beauty?

25 Records of Fashion, June 1808, 102.
The perception of Beauty is the most extensive of all the actions of the mind, if not sometimes reaching beyond understanding beings [...] ornament is not to be considered solely with relation to a sense of beauty, or merely external. It is the sign of explanation of ideas, from the painted scars upon the flesh of the savage, to the coronation robes of the monarch of united Empires; the feathered nostril of the Indian female to the Anglo-Grecian drapery of British charms. They all represent qualities adapted to their several states [...] the female Indian emulates the bird whose feathers she wears, in attending her lover to the chase. 26

There were art rules of great consequence, readers learned, such as catching nature in the fact. Raphael was a master of this skill, which meant to catch the truth of universal expression, to draw subjects when they are not aware of being observed. The best painter “can catch a grace beyond the reach of art that with ease can perform wonders beyond the reach of ordinary intellect. Such a man was Shakespeare, Chatterton, Goethe’s Werter [...] When these men sketch, they sketch with fire and feeling [...] There is such a communication between the mind and the hand, that he who is impelled by the fire of genius, fires others; when he draws pathetic subjects, he sketches in tears (so much of tenderness is there in his generous nature), and his works impress the same

26 Ibid., January 1808, 7.
The obsession with personal beauty was so widespread that Town Talk, January 1812, 83, mercilessly satirized the obsession: “But it is in Europe that we look for the delightful diversity and peculiar elegance of fashionable taste. The varied forms of ornament adopted by the opulent demonstrate their ingenuity. With cosmetics for the skin, dyes for the hair, calves for the legs, nay, the dua poma Venus for the bosom, every imperfection of nature is concealed, and every attraction exposed for the benevolent purpose of contributing to general happiness of society, who usually shine like a constellation in this great metropolis, a multitude of industrious artists and their families are maintained...”

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sensations. The theorist has depicted famous writers as if they were painters seated before a canvas. And which of the three sister arts is superior – poetry, painting, or music? “Cursory Remarks on Poetry” answers the query:

The effect which harmony of sounds produces on the ear, or the just and beautiful arrangement of colours on the eye, cannot equal the delight with which the image is filled, at the perusal of the sublime and soft descriptions of poetry. In viewing the grand or delicate productions of the greatest masters of the pencil, we may be wrapped in eager attention, continue gazing, and as it were devouring the prospect with our eyes [...] Poetry, by a greater latitude of impression, and variety of description, cannot only charm the judgment by correctness, call forth unbounded admiration by its amazing powers, gratify the ear by the harmony of its numbers, and set the imagination on its utmost stretch to keep pace with its vivid and changing delineations, but can penetrate still deeper; can ennoble and invigorate the mind by pious and virtuous sentiments, and therefore leave behind more permanent and durable traces. Painting [...] is unable, therefore, to produce the effects of the latter [...] The greatest sculptors and painters of antiquity, were supposed to have searched among the poets for their subjects [...] But no painter or sculptor can ever fully express in marble, or on canvas, some of the sublime and more beautiful descriptions of poetry. The poet has this advantage over the painter, which the latter can never reach,

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27 Repository of Arts, Supplement, June 1809, 425.
of expressing in words things apparently contradictory, which though they may be concerned in the mind, cannot be portrayed by the pencil.\textsuperscript{28}

By 1808, George III had been on the throne for forty-eight years, but mental deterioration prohibited his active involvement in state matters. The Prince Regent, unpopular due to his personal life of pleasure, attempted to rehabilitate his image, since he had become the new royal figure. Painting was chosen as a sophisticated medium to boost his popularity; consequently, the Royal Family, led by the Queen, emphasized the importance of high culture, even paying a visit to the British Museum:

On Friday the 3\textsuperscript{rd}, a small party of the guards, together with the principal police officers, were stationed to keep order. Her Majesty, the Prince of Wales, the Dukes of Cumberland and Cambridge, and the Princesses arrived at the Museum, in three carriages, about a quarter before one o’clock. They were received by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord Chancellor, the Earls of Dartmouth and Aylsford, Lord St. Helen’s, the Speaker of the House of Commons, Sirs J. Bankes and W. Scott, official trustees of the great national repository, Mr. Planta, the Librarian, and several others, who conducted the Royal Family to the new wing added to the building, and shewed them the curiosities with which they appeared highly amused; it is twenty years since her Majesty was there.\textsuperscript{29}

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\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., March 1810, 142.
\textsuperscript{29} Records of Fashion, June 1808, 130.
The editor of *Records of Fashion* saw his mission as the repression of vulgar taste. There were 627 subscribers of the magazine and all were of rank, fashion, and intelligence. Articles about celebrated artists were regarded as an elegant contribution to comprehend “the higher degree of perfection in pictorial representation.” The goal was to analyze epochs of high refinement in order to elevate human nature.  

Rudolph Ackermann’s *Repository of Arts, Literature, Commerce, Manufactures, Fashions, and Politics* was a monthly periodical dedicated to conveying knowledge of the high arts. The publication was dedicated “by Permission to his R.H. the Prince of Wales.” Born at Stolberg in Saxony, Ackermann had studied lithography in Offenbach. Ackermann’s advertised a wide variety of domestic and imported art supplies, from crayons to the best vellum paper. The store was for “the Amusement of Ladies” and “the Attention of Connoisseurs.” There was a choice collection of English and foreign prints, drawings and watercolors. Ackermann’s “Observations on the Arts” gives insight into the artistic milieu that existed in Britain in 1809:

> We are inferior to many other ages, and to some other countries, in almost every art that is practiced […] first rises to our mental vein, Shakespeare – thou uneducated child of nature […] Or learned Ben […] In novel writing we cannot equal Defoe, Fielding, or Richardson […] what have at present in this country to compare to the great works of the sublime Buonarotti, the poetic Julio Romano, the graceful Raphael, Corregio, and Parmegiano, the elegant taste and learning of

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30 Ibid.,149.
Annibal Carrachi and Poussin? In speaking of painters, I might mention the glowing tints of Titian, the silvery tints of Guido, the high-finishing of Gerard Douw, Vander Hayden, Denner, John Van Huysum, and Vander Werf; the lightness of Rubens, the effects of Caravaggio and Rembrandt. In portrait, how inferior are we to Titian, Homiers, Rubens, Vandyke, Velasquez, More, Frank Hall, Rembrandt, Lely, Keller, or our own late countryman, Reynolds! In landscapes to Claude, and a long list of the Dutch and Flemish painters! In engraving, can our prints gain the palm from Annran, Maroon, or even Balechou, Beauvarlet, Le Bas, or Volpato [...] Raphael Morgan, as the best engraver that now practices the art. Bartolozzi is the most powerful contender with the great master for the honour...

The similarity between painting and poetry was recognized in popular periodicals. A reviewer for La Belle Assemblee informs readers that a liberal reading of the similarity might pair off the sister arts of poetry and painting:

Then we should find Thomson and Claude Lorraine, Milton and Loutherbourg, Swift and Teniers, Addison and Titian, Scott and Salvator Rosa, Churchill and Hogarth, whilst Crabbe might be compared with Rowlandson, whose roughest and rudest sketches preserve a likeness, and whose harshest lines produce a more striking effect than the taille douce of the best French engravers

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31 Repository of the Arts, April 1809, 202.
The importance of the arts to establish a moral society is a prominent theme, as evidenced by Martin Archer Shee in *Rhymes on Art*:

> Our Morals are materially connected with our Arts,
> and a good Taste not only refines, but reforms. But
> as a state becomes enriched, not only by the collection
> of ancient coins in the cabinets of the curious, but by
> the active circulation of its currency; so also a pure
> Taste is established in a nation, not only by hoarding
> old pictures in the galleries of the great, but by the
> employment of its living Talents, and the circulation of
> its living Arts.  

Martin Archer Shee, an artist and president of the prestigious Royal Academy, recognized that culture is transformative; the values of the past intertwine with the new thoughts and ideas of a rising generation; eventually, “old pictures” are surpassed by new ones – “Living talents” and “living Arts” will triumph. Nevertheless, the past cannot be totally discarded. The value of tradition was later endorsed by T.S. Eliot in “Tradition and Individual Talent.” Eliot explained that an artist does not have meaning alone, for there must be “the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists.” Both Shee and Eliot, though a century apart, reached similar conclusions. As for Byron, he was torn between extolling Pope and stylistically ignoring him in his own poems.

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32 *Supplement to La Belle Assemblee*, “Retrospect of the Fine Arts: Painting, Architecture, and Sculpture, for the Year 1810,” February 1, 1811. 340-344.

33 Martin Archer Shee, *Rhymes on Art*, xxxvi.

The Literature of the Past

Those who read the literature of the past, especially the novels and poems of the Romantic Period must keep in mind that the works emerged from a dominant literary culture. Modern taste endorses the courageous: William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, the Shelleys, and Byron; these were the intellectually innovative who challenged the values of their own day. Although Byron seemed to challenge religiosity, he was not a self-proclaimed atheist like Shelley nor was Byron an English Jacobin like William Godwin, a radical who hoped for drastic societal change, especially in the early days of the French Revolution. George Gordon, Lord Byron, remains an enigmatic figure. Byron was a libertine who insisted on stern morality among the servants at Newstead Abbey, although like Pamela’s Mr. B., he had a liking for servant girls and fathered a child with a young servant named Lucy. Although he was a notorious womanizer, he maintained a lifelong homoerotic affection for favorite Harrow classmates. Byron was a proud aristocrat, a self-proclaimed Whig, but he also admired Napoleon, George Washington, and Daniel Boone. His contradictions contributed to his alluring personality.

Although Byron stated he knew nothing of painting, he had already read and studied art theory by the time of his departure for Greece in 1809. Moreover, he had spent considerable time in London, the center of innovative visual phenomena. In fact, it was difficult for a literate person to avoid the numerous informative articles about art in *La Belle Assemblee, Ackermann's Repository of Art,* and *Records of Fashion,* popular magazines ostensibly designed for women but likely read by males as well [Fig. 1]. An analysis of contemporary periodicals, especially neglected women’s magazines, reveals

35 Fiona MacCarthy, Byron’s most recent biographer, states in *Byron: Life and Legend,* 80, that nothing is known of the child’s sex or fate. Lucy’s full name is unknown. Byron referred to a possible son in “To My Son!” Byron later had had a liaison with another servant named Susan Vaughan.
the sophisticated level of art knowledge, mainly intended for the nobility and gentry, but equally informative for any interested reader. The first decade of the nineteenth century enjoyed a time of prominent visual culture; not just *high art* but *low art* as well. The visual image reinforced the intellectual thrust, whether it was the production of Constable or Gillray. Both artists made viewers ponder the meaning in the visual code to ascertain significance. As Chris Jenks explains: “The manner in which we have come to understand the concept of an ‘idea’ is deeply bound up with appearance.” But ideas were still rigidly locked within culture of the Augustan Age. Byron was quite perceptive at interpreting visual symbols and eventually became an icon himself [Fig. 2-4]. In 1812, at the height of his fame, he was engaged in an affair with Lady Oxford, a married aristocrat and former lover of Sir Francis Burdett. Byron spent time with Lady Oxford at her estate where a print of Rinaldo and Armida decorated his room [Fig. 5]. A few weeks later, Byron was the guest of the fashionable but chaste Lady Jersey, a leading hostess, and the wife of George Child Villiers, the fifth Earl of Jersey. Byron wrote to his confidante Lady Melbourne and remarked about the contrasts in rooms and décor:

I have been here these two days past in the palace of propriety with a picture of Lucretia in the act of suicide over my chimney, & a tome of Pamela lying on ye. table, ye. first as a hint I presume not to covet ye. mistress of a house, & the last as a defensive treatise in behalf of the Maid. The decorations of my last apartment were certainly very different – for a print of Rinaldo & Armida was one of the

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most prominent ornaments. 37 Byron illuminates his own life with these references to literary and pictorial icons. In effect, he fills the biographical canvas with the brushstrokes of his private life. Torquato Tasso’s Jerusalem Delivered featured Armida as a beautiful enchantress, not unlike Lady Oxford, who pursues the virtuous Rinaldo. Lucretia, the respected Roman matron raped by Tarquin, committed suicide rather than live in dishonor. Richardson’s Pamela was a sensation in 1740, the story of Mr. B. attempting to seduce and then trying to rape a young servant girl. Byron expected his correspondent, Lady Melbourne, to understand the allusions in his letter. 38 Byron’s years of fame brought him into the estates of the aristocrats and the wealthy gentry alike, where he had an opportunity to view the galleries of paintings his own home lacked.

Post-Augustan Enthusiasts: Byron and Jamieson

In August 1818, Alexander Jamieson published A Grammar of Rhetoric and Polite Literature. The book emerged in what is now described as the Romantic Period. However, Jamieson’s ideas were anchored in the previous century. Jamieson wrote that his goal was to instruct the young student:

To form the mind for engaging in the active concerns of life
it is then that he should be taught, that a minute and trifling study of
words alone, and an ostentatious and deceitful display of ornament
and pomp of expression, must be exploded from his compositions, if
he would value substance rather than show, and good sense as the
foundation of all good writing [….] Among the ancient critics, Longinus

37 Marchand, Byron’s Letters & Journals, Volume 2, 250.
38 The exact print of Rinaldo and Armida viewed by Byron is unknown. Numerous paintings depicted the famous scene of Armida bewitching Rinaldo. Poussin, Tiepolo, and Hayez had all painted the scene.
possessed most delicacy; Aristotle, the most correctness. Among the moderns, Addison is a high example of delicate taste; and had Dean Swift written on criticism, he would perhaps have afforded the example of a correct one […] Addison is, beyond doubt, in the English language, the most perfect example of the highest, most correct, and ornamental degree of the simple manner…”

Rather than his own age, Jamieson endorses the past century. Jamieson identifies “delicacy and correctness” as essential characteristics of taste.

_Delicacy of taste_ respects principally the perfection of that natural Sensibility, on which taste is founded. It implies those finer organs or powers, which enable us to discover beauties that lie hid from a vulgar eye.

In Book Seven Jamieson discusses poetry.

Poetry is the language of passion, or enlivened imagination […] Pastoral poetry is to delight the imagination with descriptions of the beauties of nature […] No modern poets have composed Volumes of odes like Pindar and Horace, but many of them have occasionally attempted this species of composition. The chief of these in English are Dryden, Pope, Addison, Gray, and Akenside.

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39 Jamieson, _A Grammar of Rhetoric and Polite Literature_ [Author’s copy]. Written on the flyleaf is Willard Mason Harding, Yale College. The location indicates that Jamieson’s second edition of 1821 was likely used as a textbook. Ibid., “To form the mind…” iii; “Among the ancient…” 211; “Addison is, beyond doubt…” 258; “Delicacy of taste…” 360; “poetry is the language…” 290; “With the thirst…” vii.
These are the modern poets of 1818? Jamieson consistently wholly ignores the new generation of poets, even Byron and Wordsworth who certainly enjoyed strong literary reputations by 1818. Jamieson reminds readers that, although he would discuss the origin and diverse genres of poetry, there was no intent to inspire youths “with the thirst of reaping fame in the doubtful field of poetic composition.” His aim was to prepare students to compose beautiful prose passages. At first glance, Jamieson’s ideas appear woefully dated for 1818? But did his contemporaries agree?

Byron, the most successful of the younger poets of his generation, would have agreed with Jamieson’s taste in British authors, especially the choice of Pope [Fig.6].\(^\text{40}\) Byron’s literary tastes were firmly anchored in the Augustan Age; he certainly knew about the doubtful field of poetic composition. In the summer of 1818, when Jamieson launched his book, Byron idled in Venice, pursuing a life of sexual pleasure, involved with women from high and low society. Despite his hedonistic existence, Byron was also writing his Memoirs and Don Juan. Byron was surprised by the timid response to his two projects. John Murray, his cautious publisher, and even his sophisticated friends, were afraid of the forthcoming projects. The Memoirs could only mean revelations about his failed marriage; disclosures of marital intimacies would transgress proper social etiquette. Even worse, the mere thought of Don Juan, the legendary seducer, was shocking. Don Juan was the visualization of male potency, aggressive sexual desire, and rampant adulterous liaisons. Such a poem would bring moral condemnation and possible legal prosecution for obscenity. What could Don Juan do but engage in sexual activity? The

\(^{40}\) “The Beauties of Alexander Pope” appeared in The Supplement to La Belle Assemblee in June 1809. The article praised Pope.
friends in England feared the forthcoming cantos would be scandalous, possibly a poetic *Fanny Hill*. The glory years of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* were far behind Byron.

The poem had made him a sensation in March 1812. Reviewers praised the young poet and his astonishing work: "This Poem, from one of the sweetest bards that England has ever produced, has, while it awakened criticism and became the theme of general conversation among the literati, obtained almost the celebrity it deserves." Byron's admiration of ancient Greece and the sympathy for the plight of the modern citizens under Turkish dominance struck a chord with readers. But phihellenism had begun decades before. Paintings such as James "Athenian" Stewart’s *Athens; The Monument of Philopappas* and *A Ruin near the Port of Aegina* by William Pars in 1766 were canvases that captured the ruins of ancient Greece. *Childe Harold* had made Byron famous, but the subsequent collapse of Byron's marriage to Annabella Milbanke had brought disgrace, social ostracism, and a humiliating fall. While courting, Annabella had sent her aunt, Lady Melbourne, a plan for "a spouse elect," as Byron put it. The requirements for a husband were perhaps too logical: "She seems to have been spoiled," Byron informed Lady Melbourne, "not as children usually are - but systematically Clarissa Harlowed into an awkward kind of correctness - with a dependence upon her own infallibility..."

Byron wrote to Annabella that "The great object of life is Sensation - to feel that we exist - even though in pain - it is this 'craving void' which drives us to Gaming - to Battle - to Travel - to intemperate but keenly felt pursuits of every description..." The union was

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41 *Supplement to La Belle Assemblee*, January 1, 1813, 349. But not all reviewers were in agreement. *Town Talk; or Living Manners*, November 1812, 302-305, condemned the poem; the moral of Child Harold was faulty; its conception poor; its measure drawling and monotonous and its diction at times "ludicrously pompous, or grossly familiar." *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* was the only thing Lord Byron ever wrote worth reading, proclaimed the critic. "Child Harold will float down the stream of oblivion."


43 Ibid., 109.
a mismatch; if Annabella was Clarissa Harlowe, Byron was a version of Mr. B., Samuel Richardson’s libertine seducer. Mr. B. had reformed and lived happily with Pamela. Byron was not so lucky.

Whispers of adultery, incest, and even homosexual activity, fueled by his former lover Lady Caroline Lamb, swept through the decadent but hypocritical aristocratic social set. Byron had worsened the situation by allowing “Fare Thee Well,” addressed to his estranged wife, to be printed in newspapers. In “A Sketch From Life” he attacked Mrs. Clermont, his wife’s servant and childhood nurse, as being the cause of her desertion. This poem also appeared in print, a serious breach of social decorum, since menials were not publicly humiliated. Byron departed England never to return. Caricaturists Isaac and George Cruikshank sharpened their pencils to ridicule the fallen idol, the man by now regarded by many as the greatest poet of the day.  

The Murd’rous Pencil

Before sailing to France, Byron awaited a strong wind in Dover, accompanied by his close friends Scrope Davies and John Cam Hobhouse. After dinner the trio walked to a nearby churchyard. Byron located the grave of Charles Churchill, the once-acclaimed satirical poet. Churchill, a clergyman, had abandoned his wife and lived with a young woman. Churchill’s fast fall was not unlike Byron’s plummet. Churchill’s headstone was inscribed: “1764 Here lies the remains of the celebrated C. Churchill. Life to the last enjoy’d Here Churchill lies. [From The] Candidate. Hobhouse, Byron’s closet friend and confidante, recorded in his diary that “Byron lay down on his grave and gave the man a

44 The Theatrical Inquisitor, April 1816, 259.
The startling image of Byron, 28, lowering himself onto a grave is thought provoking. Did he consider himself dead or merely one of the living dead? Or was he simply acknowledging his own fate with that of Churchill’s fall? Or did the physical merger of Byron’s body with that of Churchill’s remains signify intellectual solidarity? The power of the image, a living man stretched on a tomb, evokes a Gothic theme. If the odd sight had been made public, caricaturists like George Cruikshank would have seized upon choice material for ridicule [Fig. 7].

Byron’s adaptation of visual images to convey literary impact may perhaps be traced to the dispute between William Hogarth and John Wilkes, a controversy that included Charles Churchill. John Wilkes and his ally Charles Churchill will appear in “The Vision of Judgment,” a satirical poem written after Byron’s self-imposed exile of 1816.

Thomas Lockwood analyzes Byron’s link with the Augustan world in *Post-Augustan Satire*. Lockwood poses the question: What is different about the scene of post-Augustan satire? And then he provides interesting answers:

In some of the satire of the mid-century period – in

Whitehead, Churchill, and Chatterton

and again in

the conservative satire of Gifford and the *Anti-Jacobin*

writers at the end of the century, the scene is virtually

divested of a realistic appearance and we are made at the

same time more aware of the declamatory effect of the

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45 Hobhouse diary entry, April 25, 1816, found in Marchand, *Byron: A Biography*. Vol. II, 608. The entry makes no reference to Byron’s action being a prank.
satirist’s ‘voice.’

Though a prolific poet, Churchill is best known by a Hogarth caricature that mocks him. Sean Shesgreen explains how Wilkes, a Member of Parliament, had attacked Hogarth’s character and works, and more particularly, the artist’s history painting in *The North Briton*, No. 17. In a later edition of *The North Briton*, Wilkes criticized George III’s speech on the Peace of Paris, an address the king made before Parliament concerning the treaty that concluded the war between France and Spain. Wilkes wrote that the king’s speech was “the most abandoned instance of ministerial effrontery to be imposed upon mankind.” For disrespect to the Crown, Wilkes was arrested. Churchill was also arrested but dismissed. While he was being arraigned in court, Hogarth sketched Wilkes. The subsequent engraving showed Wilkes as a cross-eyed, leering figure holding a bowl that brings to mind a liberty cap, a symbol of the mob. Wilkes was dismissed in court on the grounds that his arrest was a breach of Parliamentary privilege. Churchill fired back with “An Epistle to William Hogarth.” Churchill’s epigraph on the title page was taken from Horace: “Ut pictura poesis” – Poetry resembles painting, the famous opening line from Horace’s *Ars Poetica*. According to Churchill, Hogarth sketched Wilkes while hidden in the courtroom:

Lurking, most Ruffian-like, behind a screen

So plac’d all things to see, himself unseen

VIRTUE, with due contempt, saw HOGARTH stand,

The murd’rous pencil in his palsied hand.

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47 Shesgreen reproduces Hogarth’s satires of Churchill and Wilkes in Plates 98 and 99.
What was the cause of Liberty to him,
Or what was Honour? Let them sink or swim
Or he may gratify without controul
The mean resentments of his selfish soul.
Let Freedom perish, if, to Freedom true,
In the same ruin WILKES may perish too (409-18) 49

Hogarth retaliated by etching an image that depicted a dog urinating on Churchill’s “An Epistle to William Hogarth.” Churchill was caricatured as Bruiser, a drunken bear. The Commons chose to punish Wilkes and voted the North Briton, No. 45, the edition which included the criticism of the king’s speech, a seditious libel. Wilkes was also charged with publishing “An Essay on Woman,” an obscene poem. Wilkes fought a duel and fled to France. Though in absentia, he was expelled from the House of Commons and found guilty in the Court of King’s Bench for publishing “An Essay on Woman.” Churchill also wrote “The Author” and “the Duellist,” poems that defended Wilkes. In “The Author” he criticized the power of kings:

Ah! What are poets now? As slavish those
Who deal in Verse, as those who deal in Prose.
Is here an Author, search the Kingdom round,
In whom true worth, and real Spirit’s found?
The Slaves of Booksellers, or (doom’d by Fate
To baser chains) vile Pensioners of State (245-250) 50

50 Ibid., “The Author,” 245-257.
Hogarth and Churchill were both superb satirists. Byron was undoubtedly influenced by the political controversy and supported Wilkes and Parliament against the king. Moreover, both Churchill and Wilkes were free spirits and libertines; both had been members of the Hell-Fire Club, founded as a male social group by Sir Francis Dashwood, the group’s leader who wore a monk’s habit. The members also wore monastic robes when they gathered at Medmenham Abbey. Dashwood was painted praying before the statue of Venus de Medici. Byron and his friends emulated the Hell-Fire Club by dressing in monks robes at Newstead Abbey. Charles Churchill died after a brief illness and was buried in the churchyard of St. Martin-le-Grand.

Once in Switzerland, at Villa Diodati, Byron penned “Churchill’s Grave.” The poignant poem indicates the depth of the psychological turmoil Byron experienced at the gravesite of Charles Churchill.

I stood beside the grave of him who blazed
The comet of a season, and I saw
The humblest of all sepulchers, and gazed
With not the less sorrow and of awe
On that neglected turf and quiet stone [...] 

The Glory and Nothing of a Name

Byron’s lines call to mind “the paths of glory” in Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard.” Like Churchill, Byron had been “the comet of a season.” He, too, had been visually represented: first, as a rising poet; later, as a philandering spouse.

51 See Grant for information about the Hell-Fire Club and Dashwood, 547-48.
52 Wallace Cable Brown provides an account of Churchill’s last days. According to Brown, Churchill died from either typhus or fever, 195. Churchill died at age thirty-three; Byron was thirty-six.
The Pantheon of Poets

In 1812, at the peak of his fame, Byron was the central focus of a print that appeared in the monthly magazine *Town Talk*. An accompanying print was titled *The Genius of the Times* [Fig. 8]. The narrator recounts a dream where a charioteer addresses him: “My name is Genius, and Apollo has commissioned me to honour you with a view of Parnassus, that you may judge the Genius of the times.” Among the honored names are Shakespeare, Milton, Rabelais, Le Sage, Pope, Fielding, Moliere, Racine, and Dryden. On a lower tier are Chaucer, Cowper, Johnson, Gay, Jonson, Swift, Newton, Locke, Akenside, Congreve, Tickell, Savage, Spenser, Addison, and Rowe. Dorothy George describes *The Genius of the Times* in *English Cartoons and Satirical Prints*:

Nearest the Temple, though some way from the top, is Walter Scott carried on the shoulders of (presumably) his publisher John Ballantyne. In his pocket is a book, *Lady of the Lake*; his r. hand is in Ballantyne’s coat-pocket, his l. arm extended as he declaims: *Give all thou cans’t, and let me hope for More*” [parodying Pope in *Eloisa to Abelard*] another 2000 for another *Lady of the Lake*, *And a seat near Milton, or I will write a Dunciad*! Ballantyne, disgruntled, exclaims: *Five shillings a line by G-d. They are followed by a procession dragging uphill a large cask […] Astride the barrel sits Lord Byron, fashionably dressed […] In his pocket is *Child [e] Harold.*

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The narrator laughs at Byron’s conceit to think that he could make it to Parnassus.

In 1813 Byron appears in *Rival Candidates for the Vacant Bays*, an engraving by “JC” that satirized Robert Southey the new poet laureate. The Prince Regent appears as a naked Apollo with arrows and a lyre. The traditional payment for the laureate, and annual sack of butt and a hundred pounds, is visible. The Regent says, “Who best can sing of drinking loving lays / Shall have the butt and with it take the bays.” The competing poets run toward the Regent. Among the contenders are Tom Moore, Matthew “Monk” Lewis, and Walter Scott. Moore sits astride a naked Cupid: “I sing the joys of Love and Bacchus store / My gracious R-g-nt would you wish for More?” Matthew Lewis is dressed as a monk: “I have written for pelf / Till I frighten’d myself!!” Scott is dressed as a knight. He carries *Rokeby, Marmion, and Lady of the Lake*. Thomas Busby holds out an Address:

“They say that under George the seconds rule / Cibber was both the poet and fool, / The Prince more moderate now I’d have you know it, / Will take the fool who is no poet.”

*Fashionables of 1816 Taking the Air in Hyde Park*, likely by I.R. Cruikshank, shows the poet at the center of a promenade scene, with a lady on each arm. One female is intended to resemble Mrs. Mardyn the actress. Whispers had it that she and Byron had been involved in an affair. Dorothy George describes the print:

Byron wears a bell-shaped top-hat on projecting curls,

with a high collar and stock, and a coat buttoned to the waist, and sweeping the ground, with baggy trousers gathered at the ankle. They meet a third lady, apparently pregnant, both arms in a muff, who stares angrily at Byron.

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While the print is designated *The Genius of the Times* in *Town Talk*, the magazine, December 1812, also refers to the etching as *The Pantheon of Poets*. 

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All wear flaunting hats or bonnets with high cylindrical crowns, short full skirts. Behind them walks a stout ugly woman who passes a letter to a man behind her, grinning slyly, while he leers grotesquely and thrusts papers into a reticule hanging from her wrist. He is an absurd dandy...⁵⁴

*Lobbyloungers* is a satiric print that captures Byron and other men of fashion ogling actresses.⁵⁵ These prints were mild compared to those after the marital collapse. Although the poems “Fare Thee Well” and “A Sketch From Life” were printed by Murray for private circulation, someone slipped them to *The Champion* newspaper where they were printed on April 14. George Cruikshank went to work. *The Separation, A Sketch from the Private Life of Lord Iron Who Panegyrized His Wife, But Satirized Her Confidante*, Byron is shown embracing Mrs. Mardyn as he bids his wife goodbye. In *Fare Thee Well*, Byron is rowed to a ship. He embraces a buxom woman. The rowboat is stocked with five uncorked bottles that a tag identifies as *old hock*. Byron’s notorious drinking bowl grins eerily. The drinking cup was based on the actual skull that had been located at Newstead Abbey and made into a goblet. A second woman sits at his feet as he doffs his hat and bids farewell to England. The Byron caricature exclaims, “All my faults perchance thou knowest – All my *Madness* – none can know – Fare thee well! Thus disunited – Torn from every *nearer* tie – Seared in heart - & lone - & blighted – More than this I scarce can die!!!!!!” A third woman in the rowboat grabs a leg and says, “Come sit on my knee my love I’m afraid you’ll fall overboard.”

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⁵⁴ George, Print 12825 - *Fashionables of 1816*, 712. George asserts that it was likely L.R. Cruikshank who was the artist; other scholars have stated it was George Cruikshank or possibly a collaboration by both.

⁵⁵ Ibid, Print 12826 - *Lobbyloungers*, 713; Print 12827 - *Fare Thee Well*, 713; Print 12828 - *The Separation*, 714.
Byron appreciated a satiric skewering, except when he was the target: “I was abused by the prints,” he later wrote. But in the summer of 1818, he was in high spirits. Beppo had recharged him. His letter of July 10, 1818, informs John Murray that he has completed an Ode on Venice and two stories – “one serious and one ludicrous.” Byron’s ludicrous refers to Don Juan. The term also appears in Jamieson’s Grammar of Rhetoric and Polite Literature and would certainly describe Byron: “A ludicrous writer is one who insists upon ludicrous subjects with the professed purpose to make his readers laugh.” Of all the characters Byron could have selected, he chose Don Juan. He voiced no pretension about his literary expertise. A year earlier, on September 15, 1817, he wrote to Murray: “All of us – Scott, Southey, Wordsworth, Moore, Campbell, I, are all in the wrong, one as much as another; that we are upon a wrong revolutionary poetical system [...] I took Moore’s poems and my own and some others, and went over them side by side with Pope’s, and I was really astonished I ought not to have been so) and mortified at the ineffable distance in point of sense, harmony, effect, and even Imagination, passion and Invention, between the little Queen Anne’s man, and us of the Lower Empire.” 56 But Byron’s enthusiasm over Don Juan was soon dampened by the opposition from Murray and his friends. He fired back. His comments indicate he was extremely knowledgeable about literature. He points out the masterpieces with bawdy passages.

The opinions which I have asked of Mr. H[obhouse] & others were with regard to the poetical merit - & not As to what they may think due to the Cant of the day – which still reads the Bath Guide [,] Little’s poems – Prior - & Chaucer – to say nothing of Fielding & Smollet

56 Marchand, Byron’s Letters & Journals, Volume 5.
He penned a heated letter to Murray:

If you admit this prudery – you must admit half Ariosto –

La Fontaine – Shakespeare – Beaumont – Fletcher – Massinger –

Ford – all the Charles second writers – in short, *Something of*
mmost who have written before Pope – and are worth reading –

and much of Pope himself – *read him* – most of you *don’t* –

but do - & I will forgive you – though the inevitable consequences

would be that you would burn all I have written, and all your

other wretched Claudians of the day (except Scott & Crabbe)

into the bargain (January 25, 1819).

When the first cantos were completed, John Cam Hobhouse made a diary entry: “I have

my doubts about Don Juan – blasphemy, & bawdry & the domestica facta overpower
even the great genius it displays." 57

*The New Bath Guide*

The letters reveal not only Byron’s fearlessness, but the heated thoughts
demonstrate Byron’s thorough familiarity with traditional literature, and he also knew his

own age. Byron insisted he was writing a moral work. But how could the opposition

agree? After all, Don Juan was a character with a single thought on his mind – sexual

escapades. Not only did Byron have a deep understanding of traditional literature, but he

also was familiar with material that was not officially acknowledged by mainstream
culture. *The New Bath Guide*, a satiric, vulgar, and popular publication is a prime

example. In addition, the monthly periodicals that dealt in sensationalized subjects appealed to Byron’s taste.

*Little Cupid for Others Can Whip in His Torch*

Regency readers enjoyed sexually frank material, and Byron was no exception. Thomas Rowlandson’s prints show how bawdy visual material permeated Georgian society. Rowlandson, a social satirist and caricaturist, provided prints for mainstream purchasers, but he also illustrated Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews*. Rowlandson drew the famous scene where Lady Booby attempts to seduce Joseph. The artist shows her as bare-breasted and alluring.

Rowlandson created a series of amusing drawings published as *The Comforts of Bath* in 1789. The collection included the visually erotic; specifically, scenes hinting of adultery. Rowlandson verges on the forbidden. One plate shows an elderly husband, suffering from gout, having his portrait painted; behind a door, unseen, the young wife embraces a lover. The same year, Rowlandson etched *The Discovery*; a husband points a blade at the throat of a half-dressed man who begs for mercy; a bare-breasted wife, caught *flagrante*, weeps in bed. Ronald Paulson points out the influence of Jean-Honore Fragonard’s *L’Armoire*, an etching that depicts a lover discovered. 58 Rowlandson’s “romantic triangle” was a successful theme with the artist. Rowlandson realized there was a market for even more sexually explicit material, and the artist created pornographic images of couples copulating. Rowlandson’s males could easily be regarded as part of the Don Juan tradition. Fragonard’s *The Swing* allows the male gaze to intimately explore a lovely lady who swings above them. Rowlandson’s mastery of the forbidden visual

includes *The Exhibition Stare Case*, a drawing where the elite tumble down a narrow stairway; at the very bottom skirts no longer hide private female parts, to the delight of the gawking males. Prostitutes were a common sight in London and they were represented in prints. *Street Walkers*, a print by B. Smith in 1786, shows a prostitute encountering a prospective client at the corner of Piccadilly and Bond Street.

A.D. Harvey’s *Sex in Georgian England* reproduces Rowlandson’s *Meditations Among the Tombs*, a title from a devotional work by Rev. James Hervey. The print shows a couple copulating in a churchyard where a funeral is being conducted. A second Rowlandson drawing reproduced by Hervey is *The Willing Fair, or Any Way To Please*. In this print a couple is engaged in sex. A poem accompanies the image:

The happy captain full of wine  
Forms with the fair a new design  
Across his legs the nymph he takes  
And with St. George a motion makes  
She ever ready in her way  
His pike of pleasure keeps in play  
Rises and falls with gentle ease  
And tries her best his mind to please  
Ah! Happy captain, charming sport!  
Who would not storm so kind a fort? \(^\text{59}\)

James Gillray also engaged in erotica, though not to the extent of Rowlandson. His most memorable erotic print is *Fashionable Contrasts; -or The Duchess’s little show yeilding to the Magnitude of the Duke’s Foot*, a 1792 etching. Frederick, Duke of York,

\[^{59}\text{Harvey, Plate 18.}\]
the second son of George III, had wed Fredericka, the daughter of the King of Prussia. As her birthday approached, the London press praised her with “frothy gushing,” writes Richard Godfrey, “centring on the delicacy of her feet and exquisite shoes.” Gillray’s print presents the couple in a coital position with his large buckled shoes visible between her pair of small red slippers.

Many bawdy prints were anonymous. Women usually rode sidesaddle but were beginning to ride in the modern fashion. A print shows a woman boldly mounted astride a horse in a modern manner. Behind her is a sign “To Stretchit.” She asks a sailor, “Pray, Sir, is this the way to Stretchit?”

By selecting *Don Juan* as a title, Byron masterfully drew from literary culture to evoke mental images in the reader. The great lover represents sexual danger. Sexual power can be destructive. The Don Juan of legend flouts convention and morality. But Byron’s Juan is a teenager, harmless and tame when compared with his formidable legend. Although sex is subsumed in laughter, Byron’s opposition was unsure what future cantos would bring. And just how far would Byron go? His life in Venice had been a descent into decadence. He boasted of his prowess in his letters. But the poet found a balance in *Don Juan*. Byron purposely departs from the legend and even strips Juan of his manhood by making him a *her* in the harem with a gender masquerade. *Don Juan* is bawdy but the sex is subtle. And where did Byron and his friends meet Juan? The answer is found in the numerous literary, theatrical and musical variations of the Don Juan character. Hogarth is a good example. *A Harlot’s Progress* and *A Rake’s Progress* are visually stunning, provocative, and morally uplifting. Sean Shesgreen explains the genius

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60 Godfrey, 71,182.
of Hogarth: “Perhaps the innovative characteristic that stands out most in Hogarth’s work is his frequent use of plot; he was the first major European artist to use the technique of narration in the visual arts in a skillful manner.” Nevertheless, Shesgreen states that Sir Joshua Reynolds regarded Hogarth’s work as low and vulgar, as the great portraitist asserted in Discourse III of *Discourses on Art*:

> The painters who have applied themselves more particularly to low and vulgar characters, and who express with precision the various shades of passion, as they are exhibited by vulgar minds, (such as we see in the works of Hogarth), deserve great praise; but as their genius has been employed on low and confined subjects, the praise we give must be as limited as its object.”

*Don Juan* was part of the literary tradition that titillated without being crude. When Byron listed the great works that contained *risqué* subject matter, he believed that *Don Juan* could expect a wide readership. The witty style of *Don Juan* was derived from Christopher Anstey.

*The New Bath Guide: or, Memoirs of the B—R—D Family* by Christopher Anstey is a work that Byron puts forth to support his argument that the reading public enjoyed outrageous satire [Fig. 9-11]. Byron had obviously read it, even though it was published in 1766. “The sprightly Rhyme,” as Anstey called his humorous rhymes, was designed for a laugh: “Lady Tettaton’s Sister, Miss Fubby Fatarmin, / Was the first that presented

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61 Shesgreen on Hogarth’s genius, xv; Reynolds on Hogarth’s vulgarity, xiv.
62 At least six editions were printed between 1766 and 1808. John Anstey brought out an edition of his father’s *New Bath Guide*, published in *The Poetical Works of Christopher Anstey* in 1808. Christopher Anstey was a Cambridge graduate, like Byron, and a wealthy member of the gentry. Christopher Anstey resided on an estate in Cambridgeshire, where he enjoyed the charms of literature and a marriage that produced thirteen children.
her Person so charming (p. 8). The New Bath Guide has a wry narrative voice that immediately establishes the sense of the comic. The narrator promises in print what visual satirists have achieved: “I’m certain none of Hogarth’s Sketches / E’er form’d a set of stranger Wretches.”

The Blunderhead family arrives in Bath and stays “at the Sign of the Bear,” a distinct reference to Churchill. Thus, the intersection of visual and print satire is evident. An analysis of The New Bath Guide indicates the same free-wheeling atmosphere that will later surface in Don Juan. The satire is directed at those who come to Bath, especially “Men of Fashion, and all Men of Wealth, / Who come to this place to recover their Health.” The epistolary manner will provide the literary form:

I here present you with a Collection of Letters,
written by a Family, during their Residence at Bath.
The first of them, from a Romantic Young Lady,
address’d to her Friend in the Country, will bring you acquainted with the rest of the Characters, and save you the Trouble of reading a dull introductory Preface
from Your Humble Servant, The Editor.

Miss Jenny Blunderhead writes to a friend whose parents forbid “the Joys of Bath.” Thus, “all good Authors should expose […] Fathers, cruel and blind.” Jenny is in Bath with Lady B., her aunt. The two children of Lady B., Simkin and Prudence, are also in Bath. Tabitha “Tabby” Runt, their maid, will also provide laughs. Laughter is the reason why Anstey wrote The New Bath Guide. The poetic scheme has odd and leaden rhymes, all designed to provoke a groan in the sophisticated reader but a laugh as well.

63 Ibid., Introduction.
such as flatter / satire. Byron copied the rhymes and the descent to the low and vulgar for humor. The mock-serious narrative voice is strong in Anstey, not unlike a stage comedian telling jokes to a listener. Simkin, the fashionable fop, is called a Ninny, but he is a charming one.

He has some Share of Humour too,
A comic Vein of pedant learning [...] And when you’d think He means to flatter,
His Panegyrics turn to Satire [...] Remarks, that so provoke one’s Laughter,
One can’t imagine what he’s after:
And sure you’ll thank me for exciting
In Sim a wondrous Itch for Writing [...] And if his Bluntness does not fright you,
His Observations must delight you... (p. 9)

Simkin is in Bath to cure “Wind in my Stomach, and Noise in my Head.” The physician’s diagnosis provides an indelicate passage, designed to make the reader squirm and laugh at the same time:

For He talk’d of the Peritoneum and the Colon,
Of Phlegmatic Humours oppressing the Women
From foeculent Matter that swells the Abdomen;
But the Noise I have heard in my Bowels like Thunder
Is a Flatus, I find, in my left Hypochonder [...] Five times have I purg’d, - yet I’m sorry to tell ye
I find the same Gnawing and Wind in my Belly… (p. 14)

Tabby, the servant girl, suffers from chlorosis, a disease affecting young females about the age of puberty, a malady characterized by anemia and irregularity of the menses; the sufferer’s greenish complexion evoked the common name for the problem – the green sickness. Undoubtedly, readers enjoyed the text for its distasteful and startling images. The afflicted who frequent Bath for its curative waters include Miss Scratchit, the Countess of Scales, Lady Pandora MacScurvey, and General Sulphur. The sufferers seek relief that is offered by the magical waters of Bath: “So while little Tabby was washing her Rump, / The Ladies kept drinking it out of a Pump.”

The satire directs its barbs at the mercenary portraitist, not unlike Rowlandson’s painters. A Rowlandson print shows a decrepit husband, his foot bandaged, indicating gout; the elderly spouse sits for a final portrait. Portraitists followed the socially elite to Bath. They followed the money as well:

Or to Painter’s we repair,

Meet Sir Peregrine Hatchet there,

Pleas’d the Artist’s Skill to trace

In his dear Miss Gorgon’s face (p. 60)

The story becomes bawdy when a suitor courts Miss Jenny.

Lovely Nymph, at your Command

I have something in my Hand,

Which I hope you’ll not refuse,

‘Twill us both at Night amuse:

What tho Lady Whisker crave it,
And Miss Badger longs to have it,

'Tis, by Jupiter I swear,

'Tis for you alone, my Dear...(p. 63)

Of course, the image the reader has envisioned is different from the actual object in hand – a ticket to a private ball.

Among the People of Quality are Sir Toby MacNegus, Captain Cormorant, Dr. Squirt, Baron VanTeazer, Miss Carrot Fitz-Oozer, the Duchess of Truffles, Lady Bumfidget, Sir Pye Macaroni, and Count Vermicelli. For all of these, in spite of their lofty appearance “twas very well known, / Their Hair and their Faces were none of their own.” Sadly, as Lady Bunbutter explains, the time comes when the elderly must forego the social whirl:

For when you have put out the conjugal Fire,

'Tis time for all the sensible Folk to retire;

If Hymen no longer his Fingers will scorch,

Little Cupid for others can whip in his Torch, (p. 89)

The young are brought to Bath to find mates. Mrs. Danglecub brings her son, Master Marmoset:

Her Delight and her Joy;

His pidgeon-wing’d Head was not drest quite so soon,

For it took up a Barber the whole Afternoon [...] 

She says that her Son will his fortune advance,

By leaving so’early to fiddle and dance;
By the poem’s end, Prudence has joined the Methodists, Simkin has become a
Rakehell, Jenny laughs at religion, and Tabby Runt has gone astray. Sexual humor
prevails as the Blunderhead family disintegrates. Prudence has a dream vision of her
suitor, Roger, who professes that “I must fill you full of Love.”

I began to fall a kicking,
Panted, struggl’d, strove in vain;
When the Spirit whipt so quick in,
I was cur’d of all my Pain […]
Come again then, Apparition,
Finish what thou has begun;
Roger, stay, Thou Soul’s Physician,
I with thee my race will Run
Faith her Chariot has appointed
Now we’re stretching for the Goal;
All the Wheels with Grace anointed
Up to heav’n drive my Soul. (p. 98)

The sexual innuendo is apparent and, for this reason, the narrator intrudes: “The Editor,
for many Reasons, begs to be excused giving the Public the Sequel of this young Lady’s
Letter, but if the Reader will please to look into the Bishop of Exeter’s Book, entitled,
The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists compared, He will find many Instances
(particularly of Young People) who have been elected in the Manner above (p. 99).

Before the family packs up and returns home, Simkin writes a final letter to his mother,
a message that conveys a bawdy finale:
But the *Man without Sin*, that Moravian Rabbi,

Has perfectly cur’d the *Chlorosis* of Tabby,

And, if right I can judge, from her Shape and her Face,

She soon may produce him an Infant of Grace (p. 103)

A pregnant Tabby is the final image stamped on the reader’s psyche. The extended abdomen is emblematic of sexual transgression. The Moravian Rabbi and Tabby call to mind Hogarth’s *Before and After* where a couple engages in illicit sex. Both Hogarth and Anstey provide a coherent visual image; visualization constructs morality. The emotional response is vital. The reader smiles. The fusion of sin and laughter is comic not unlike Fielding’s wonderful novels. The lesson will remain in Byron’s thoughts. Even in *Hours of Idleness*, an early volume of sentimental poetry, there is an epigraph from Anstey’s *New Bath Guide* in “Answer to Some Elegant Verses Sent By A Friend To The Author, Complaining That One Of His Descriptions Was Too Warmly Drawn.”

But if any old lady, knight, priest, or physician,

Should condemn me for printing a second edition

If good Madam Squintum my work should abuse,

May I venture to give her a smack of my muse?

Byron’s defiant “Answer to Some Elegant Verses” delivers a *smack* indeed. He recognized the fierce emotions of the soul and validates passion and boldness:

Oh! How I hate the nerveless, frigid song,

The ceaseless echo of the rhyming throng,

Whose labour’d lines in chilling numbers flow,

To paint a pang the author ne’er can know!
The praise of passion and erotic desire will resurface in *Don Juan*. But Byron’s masterpiece is distant. First, it will be shown how his early poetry followed the Picturesque, the Grave, and the Ruins.
CHAPTER 2

VISUAL IMAGES OF THE PAST AND PRESENT

"To produce anything entirely new, in an age so fertile in rhyme,
would be a Herculean task, as every subject has already been
treated to its utmost extent. Poetry, however, is not my primary
vocation; to divert the dull moments of indisposition, or the monotony
of a vacant hour, urged me 'to this sin.' "

Introduction, Hours of Idleness

Byron’s disclaimer brought critical jeers. What, asked reviewers, was his primary
vocation? To be an aristocrat? Of course, the true reason for the disclaimer was the
anxiety of anticipated criticism. Although Byron seems diffident, I would say, about his
poems, he was a master poet and craftsman. He remains an icon of Romantic poetry. Yet,
his poetic career is a fascinating phenomenon. He consistently praises Alexander Pope,
condemns those who do not follow the Augustan tradition but writes poetry as he
chooses. In essence, his individualism triumphed over the past. An exploration of the first
decades of the nineteenth century reveals a dominant school of poetry with diverse waves
crashing against the shore of authority.

The Romantic Period officially begins with the poetry of Wordsworth and
Coleridge, as if their poems, and Wordsworth’s theory, launched a literary movement that
toppled neoclassical poetry. This idea is incorrect. Poetry had changed long before
*Lyrical Ballads*. Joseph Warton’s *An Essay on The Writings and Genius of Pope* (1756)
had announced that “The Sublime and the Pathetic are the two chief nerves of all genuine
poesy.” ¹ Joan Pittock notes that this is the first time in English criticism a major
evaluation reacts against the current poetic tradition; poetry was separated from the
socially didactic “to identify a correct taste with a susceptibility to the sublime and
pathetic.” William Bowles attacked the traditional with his 1806 edition of Pope.

Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” published in 1751, indicates the
trend in poetry. Romantic themes, especially the importance of natural beauty, had also
become popular long before *Lyrical Ballads* was published in 1798. The artificial
language of Pope’s day is absent from the extremely influential “Elegy.” Moreover, it
was the aesthetic theories of Edmund Burke and William Gilpin that provided the public
shift toward a pronounced interest in Nature and *seeing the real*, rather than the artificial.
Why buy a landscape painting when the real mountain range can be enjoyed? Critics have
acknowledged the existence of *pre-Romanticism*; however, isn’t it actually true
Romanticism? It is indeed Romanticism. Wordsworth simply solidifies in his famous
Preface what has been taking place as a minor current for a long time. Byron sneered at
the *Lakers*, Southey, Wordsworth and Coleridge. But nature was a subject of the sublime
long before this period. Although the Lake Poets did draw attention, and Southey became
poet laureate, the general readership continued to purchase the classic authors of the past.
The numerous advertisements in popular magazines document the packaging of the
cultural past.

And what about the art realm? According to Jonah Siegel, the neoclassical theory in the art academies was dominated by Greek culture. Johann Winckelmann’s essay “On the Imitation of the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks” (1755) provides insight. Winckelmann professed a belief that the imitation of beauty is reduced to a single object; such as the statues of Antinous and Apollo. Joshua Reynolds, the first president of the British Academy, stated that artists should not be ashamed of copying the ancient masters.²

The Picturesque

Byron’s intellectual and political values were deeply anchored in the dominant ideas of the eighteenth century. Byron was solidly in agreement with Winckelmann and Richard Payne Knight, the scholars who wrote about the superiority of Grecian sculpture. By the last decades of the eighteenth century, the concept of the Picturesque was widely accepted. Jane Austen’s Northanger Abbey was completed in 1803, but the novel was not published until after her death. Northanger Abbey and Persuasion were combined for publication and Henry Austen, her brother, furnished a brief biography for publisher John Murray. There is no record that Byron was familiar with Austen’s novels; nevertheless, Northanger Abbey includes a famous scene that is echoed by Byron who claimed to know nothing of painting.

Catherine Morland, 17, walks along beechen Cliff with her sophisticated friends Henry and Eleanor Tilney. They view the country near Bath “with the eyes of persons accustomed to drawing, and decided on its capability of being formed into pictures, with all the eagerness of real taste.” Henry Tilney graciously gives young Catherine “a lecture

² Siegel, Desire & Excess, 40.
on the picturesque [...] his instructions were so clear that she soon began to see beauty in everything admired by him.” Henry Austen’s biographical sketch is brief but informative. The reader learns that his sister “was a warm and judicious admirer of landscape, both in nature and on the canvas. At a very early age she was enamoured of Gilpin on the Picturesque; and she seldom changed her opinions either on books or men.” 3

The Picturesque was one of the primary aesthetic theories of the later eighteenth century. After Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful*, William Gilpin’s *Essays on Picturesque Beauty* provided the most influential framework to observe the external world. Sam Rogers, a poet who was held in high esteem by Byron, acknowledged the debt literature owed Gilpin: “I have only copied from him who has taught the world how to describe,” acknowledged Rogers. 4 Gilpin, a clergyman and artist, published *Essays upon Prints* in 1768. Gilpin taught the public how to apply the principles of painting to the examination of prints. In part, his success was due to the mania for cheap engravings. Prints were to be appreciated by “design, disposition, keeping and the distribution of light,” writes Mavis Batey. 5 Gilpin sought to construct a regular code for examining landscape scenery. In 1782 he published *Observations on the River Wye* and used his own drawings to explain aesthetic principles. Gilpin had traveled extensively, as far as Sicily and, as Vivien Jones points out, he believed that for the picturesque traveler, “nature is the primary object.” 6 Gilpin’s promotion of the

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1 Henry Austen’s comments are found on p. 6; Henry Tilney’s explanation is on p. 98.
2 Barbier, *Samuel Rogers and William Gilpin*, 39. Rogers praised Gilpin in a letter (June 17, 1797). Rogers was a close friend of Gilpin and owned original Gilpin landscape drawings, notes Barbier. Byron became a close friend of Rogers and was introduced to many famous individuals by Rogers. Copley and Garside trace the origin of the term to French and Italian references to painting in general, rather than a term restricted to landscape. The term was widespread by the end of the eighteenth century, 1.
3 Batey, *Jane Austen and the English Landscape*, 52.
4 “Politics and the Picturesque in women’s fiction” by Vivien Jones is in *The Politics of the Picturesque*, 120-44.
Picturesque countered the predominant academic theory of the time. Gillen D’Arcy Wood explains that history painting, not landscape, still life, or portraiture commanded the status of epic poetry. In *The Shock of the Real: Romanticism and Visual Culture, 1760-1860*, Wood reproduces history painter James Barry’s words in 1783: “The principal merit of [history] painting, as well as poetry, is its address to the mind; here it is those arts are sisters.” But Gilpin emphasized the importance of visual pleasure. Gilpin’s famous *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and On Sketching Landscape*, published in 1794, is about the joy of seeking beautiful views:

> The love of novelty is the foundation of pleasure. Every distant horizon promises something new; and with this pleasing expectation we follow nature through all her walks.

> We pursue her from hill to dale; and hunt after those beauties, with which she everywhere abounds

Gilpin writes that “the picturesque eye is perhaps most inquisitive after the elegant relics of ancient architecture; the ruined tower, the Gothic arch, the remains of castles, and abbeys.” ^ Byron follows Gilpin in Canto I of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*. Harold laments the fate of modern Greece, enslaved and ruined:

> Thy temples to thy surface bow,

> Commingling slowly with heroic earth,

> Broke by the share of every rustic plough:

> So perish monuments of mortal birth,

> So perish all in turn, save well-recorded Worth; (LXXXV)

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7 Gilpin, 48.
8 Ibid., 46; God and Nature, 47.
Save where some solitary column mourns
Above its prostrate brethren of the cave; (LXXXVI)  
Gilpin connects the Picturesque to Virtue for “Nature is but a name for an effect, / Whose cause is God.” Gilpin’s ideas transcended art theory and were made use of in literature. Wordsworth situates the experimental poems in *Lyrical Ballads*, like “The Thorne” and “Tintern Abbey,” on a mountain or hilltop. Even more interesting, Gilpin provided intellectual stimulus for Wordsworth’s famous lines that “Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.” Gilpin wrote in *Essays on Picturesque Beauty*:

There may be more pleasure in recollecting [...] the scenes we have admired, than in the present enjoyment of them [...] The imagination becomes a camera obscura, only with this difference, that the camera represents objects as they really are: while the imagination, impressed with the most beautiful scenes, and chastened by rules of art, forms its pictures, not only from the most admirable parts of nature; but in the best taste (pp. 51-52)

Edmund Burke explored the sensory and judgmental process and its relation to artistic pleasure. Burke defined the Sublime: “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects.” In the category of *vastness* Burke included the astonishment of gazing at a huge rock or mountain. On the other hand, the Beautiful evokes “social passions,” which Burke divided into two kinds; “the society and the sexes,” which means

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9 *Byron: Poetical Works*, 207.
a choice of mates in humans and "general society," the passions that make us social
beings. Burke's beauty is smallness, smoothness, delicacy and gradual variation.

Walpole appropriated Burke's theory and applied it to Gothic literature, a genre
that Walpole claimed to have originated. Indeed, in The Castle of Otranto the Gothic
atmosphere is dominated by the gigantic helmet that mysteriously falls on the son of
Manfred and kills him; all that is visible is "a mountain of sable plumes." The massive
castle dominates the Gothic realm; within are sublime characters. Walpole's evil Manfred
and Anne Radcliffe's Montoni in The Mysteries of Udolpho strike fear in readers. Both
novels have lovely heroines; Isabella and Emily St. Aubert who evade rape and death.
Literary historians believe the Picturesque mediates between the Sublime and the
Beautiful. The Gothic castle is situated within the reality of aristocratic institutions, but
with the Picturesque there will be a literary shift to tales that occur within the landed
estate, the domain of the gentry, an area representative of the rising Whig aristocrats of
the 1700s. As E.J. Clery documents:

According to Whig historiography, the Anglo-Saxon
Witenagemot was the forerunner of the modern Parliament,
embodies an ideal balance of power shared by monarch,
lords, and commoners known as the 'Gothic Constitution.'
Disruption of this balance gave rise to the tumultuous events
of the seventeenth century: the Civil War, the establishment
of a Commonwealth, followed by a Restoration of a Stuart line,
the deposing of James II, and finally the installation of the

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10 Burke's idea of the Sublime, 86; Vastness, 114; the Beautiful, 88-90, 147. Longinus did not include
terror in the category of the sublime.
11 Walpole, Castle of Otranto, 18.
Protestant William of Orange and Queen Mary. The Whig party were the supporters and beneficiaries of this last ‘Glorious Revolution’ of 1688, and set themselves up as guardians of the Constitution.  

The Gothic Tower

Chris Brooks writes that the Gothic Revival in architecture was the result of the displeasure with Prime Minister Robert Walpole’s close association with the court. Archibald Campbell, a duke and a Whig, built a Gothic tower on his estate in 1734. Campbell and other Whigs regarded the landed aristocracy as the heirs of Saxon democracies, defined as “assemblies of primitive landowning nobility.” Burke’s sublime mountain produced awe; Gilpin’s pleasant mountain produced pleasure; Walpole’s Gothic tower - castle produced fear. The tower became a distinct part of visual culture [Fig. 12].

Nicola Trott explains that the Picturesque developed for three reasons: First, there was “a recognition that a third term was needed for aesthetic experiences fitting into neither of the rather rigidly segregated categories of the Sublime and the Beautiful [Fig. 13]. Second, the Grand Tour focused on the magnificence of European art, especially Italian art. The Royal Academy under Sir Joshua Reynolds offered lectures on prominent artists. The trio of painters hailed was Claude Lorraine, Nicholas Poussin, and Salvator Rosa, a triumvirate celebrated in 1748 by James Thomson in his poem “The Castle of Indolence.”

12 Clery, Castle of Otranto, xxvii.
Lorrain and Poussin were noted for idealized landscapes situated in seventeenth century Rome. This fostered the third impetus for the growth of the Picturesque – the, fascination with landscapes. Art historians Andrew Wilton and Anne Lyles explain the importance of Lorraine and Poussin:

[They] sought to present Nature in paintings in such a way that a perfect harmony of elements was established within the rectangle of the picture-frame. The component parts, intended for the most part to suggest a Platonic version of the actual Roman Campagna, were of limited variety; temple (ruined or reconstructed), lakes, bridges, trees and sky were endlessly rearranged to create dreamlike settings for biblical or mythological stories.

The wilderness painted by Salvator Rosa, especially his decaying trees, caught the fancy of the art elite in England. The importance of the artist’s imagination was critical in art theory in the eighteenth century. Wilton and Lyles assert the imagination is the core concept in Reynold’s Royal Academy Discourses. John Constable and J.M.W. Turner responded to the new interest in landscape, as opposed to the portrait or history canvas.

Not only were contemporary artists responding to the new interest in landscape and the Picturesque, but writers like Jane Austen masterfully adapted the concepts.

Byron was familiar with the aesthetics of Burke and Gilpin. In “Lachin Y Gair” the mountain of the Northern Highlands is the subject of the poem. “Lachin Y Gair” appeared in Hours of Idleness but was soon published in La Belle Assemblee, quite a feat.

14 Trott, “The Picturesque, the Beautiful and the Sublime,” 74.
15 Wilton and Lyles, The Great Age of British Watercolours, 37, 38. The authors explain that Canaletto represented smooth symmetrical facades; natural roughness and irregularity were directly contrary to perfect design, 83.
for a young poet of nineteen—"the Right Hon. G. Gordon, Lord Byron," as the periodical informed readers. 16 Most periodical poems were anonymous works. Byron’s notes to Hours of Idleness provided information on "Lachin Y Gair" so the reader could understand it: "One of our modern tourists mentions it as the highest mountain, perhaps, in Great Britain. Be this as it may, it is certainly one of the most sublime and picturesque amongst our ‘Caledonian Alps.’" 17 The note indicates Byron’s understanding of the “sublime and picturesque” as part of the dominant literary conventions:

Away, ye gay landscapes, ye gardens of roses
In you let the minions of luxury rove;
Restore me on the rocks, where the snowflake reposes,
Though still they are sacred to freedom and love:
Yet, Caledonia, beloved are thy mountains,
Round their white summits though elements war;
Though cataracts foam ‘stead of smooth-flowing fountains
I sigh for the valley of dark Loch na Garr […]
England! thy beauties are tame and domestic
To one who has roved o’er the mountains afar:
Oh for the crags that are wild and majestic!
The steep frowning glories of dark Loch na Garr.

16 La Belle Assemblee, October 1807, 219.
The Grave

Not only was the Picturesque represented in Byron’s early poetry, but images of the Grave and the Tower were predominant [Fig. 14-17]. Several poems in Hours of Idleness recall the Graveyard School of Poets and their distinct obsession with Death. Robert Blair’s The Grave (1743) was a model with its dark imagery:

And buried ‘midst the wreck of things which were:
There lie interr’d the more illustrious dead.
The wind is up” hark – how it howls! Methinks
Till now I never heard a sound so dreary...

Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” published in 1751, is part of the tradition. Anne Williams explains that Gray’s famous poem did not contain the usual “sublime thrills” associated with human mortality and death. Williams views the Graveyard genre of the eighteenth century as part of the momento mori tradition: “the verse equivalent of that tomb sculpture prominent in the late Middle Ages, where the body of the interred was portrayed in a state of partial decomposition.” But just as significant are the emblem books of the Middle Ages. At first glance, the idea may seem strange. In early years of publishing, engravings were meant to “define to the eye” the scope of the book, as Rosemary Freeman points out in English Emblem Books. Freeman explains that the most successful of the emblem writers was Francis Quarles:

“His work was popular. Over two thousand copies of his Emblems and Hieroglyphikes of

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18 Blair, The Dead, 2.
19 Williams, Prophetic Strain, 100.
the Life of Man were printed for the first combined edition in 1639 and another three thousand at least were issued in the subsequent year.” The books Quarles published sold well and earned him the enmity of contemporaries such as Robert Farlie whose Lychnocausia (1638) ridiculed emblems writers like Quarles and his followers:

I need not praise thy Booke: No more to tell,
Then that it Pictures hath, will make it sell:
Bookes, gaudy, like themselves, most do now buy,
Fine, trim, adorned Bookes, where they may spy
More of the Carvers than th’ Authors skill

Alexander Pope showed disdain for Quarles in Book I of The Dunciad, notes Freeman: “where the pictures for the page atone / And Quarles is sav’d by Beauties not his own.” This is most likely where Byron encountered Quarles and studied his work on his own. But Byron found merit in Quarles; it can be argued also that Byron found a style that later surfaced in Don Juan. Quarles wrote poems from a melancholy perspective, but he also wrote, as Freeman puts it, with a gift for showmanship.

Despite the sneers of Farlie and Pope, Freeman writes that Quarles was quite good at writing lucid phrases: “He had an epigrammatic style, an eye for parallels, a trick of taking the reader into his confidence.” He writes with epigrammatic wit as an independent observer: “And he repents in Thornes, that sleeps in a bed of Roses.” Freeman provides a sample of Quarles’s poetry, the story of Argalus and Parthenia. She observes that he writes with sly wry detachment:

And here my Muse bids draw our curtains too.

21 Ibid., 126.
‘Tis unfit to see what private lovers do.
Reader, let not thy thought over rank,
But veil thy understanding with a blank.
Think not on what thou think’st; and if thou canst
Yet understand not what thou understandst

The style is very similar to what the reader observes in *Don Juan*. Byron conducts the reader to a specific mental image, often a bawdy image, then chastises the reader for thinking such a thought. But the young Byron preferred the gloom of the emblems.

Quarles uses an emblem as a single image to reinforce the point of a poem; for example, Time and Death argue over their prey in *Hieroglyphikes*:

*Death* Time, hold they peace, and shake thy slow pac’d Sand,
Thy idle Minitis make no way:
Thy glass exceeds her how’r, or else does stand,
I can not hold; I can not stay;
Surcease thy pleading, and enlarge my hand
I surfet with too long delay:
This brisk, this boldfac’d light
Does burn too bright;
Darkness adorns my throne; my day is darkest night. 22

The engraving that Quarles uses to accompany his poem shows winged Time, hourglass in hand, standing near skeletal Death, dart in hand, about to snuff a candle. Byron makes use of the engraving in line 34 of “Elegy on Newstead Abbey” - “Time steals along, and

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22 Ibid., 123.
Death uprears his dart” [Fig. 18]. Flowers were offered as emblems: “The Lillie is the Scepter of the chaste Diana...” [Fig. 19]. Byron referred to a flower called “Love in Idleness” in Don Juan. Byron also returns to the Middle Ages in English Bards and Scotch Reviewers:

When Vice triumphant holds her sov’reign sway,
Obey’d by all who nought beside obey;
When Folly, frequent harbinger of crime,
Bedecks her cap with bells of every clime (27-30)  

The image of Vice and Folly are ancient. Byron relied on the reader’s knowledge of print culture. George Wither’s A Collection of Emblems (1635) shows the personifications of Virtue, an elderly man, and Vice, a naked female [Fig. 20]. The complex emblem is explained by Rosemary Freeman:

Vice holds a whip in her hand, at her feet is a lute,
And beside her a vase of flowers; the mask which she holds in front of her face barely conceals her real nature. Virtue, a sober old man, bears a book in his hand, and the rod of Mercury, the symbol of wisdom, lies at his feet. Behin’d is a sunflower, the emblem of constancy in the pursuit of an ideal, which is balanced on Vice’s side by crossed bones and a skull.  

Byron, like Pope, appeals to moral authority to reveal the true nature of vice and folly.

The image of Folly was common in the Middle Ages. Folly, a woodcut by Heinrich

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23 Byron: Poetical Works, 33.
24 Freeman, 114.
Vogtherr the Younger, shows a buffoon in cap and bells; one hand partially covers a lined and ugly face; the other hand holds a stick with a face on the end. The face resembles the fool’s face; the tiny cap has pointed ears, signifying an ass. Byron knew something of German art and referred to Hans Holbein’s gruesome images of Death and his victims [Fig. 21]. Rosemary Freeman shows that Wither’s emblems were all drawn from Gabriel Rollenhagen’s *Nucleus Emblematum Selectissimorum* (1611-13). Rosemary Freeman demonstrates the rise of classical visual authority, promoted by such proponents as Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury believed the arts should promote moral behavior. In his *Second Characters* (1713) Shaftesbury ridicules Wither’s image of Virtue and Vice as “magical, mystical, monkish and Gothic.”

Shaftesbury commissioned Paolo de Matteis to paint *A Notion of the Historical Draught of Hercules,* based on the story of Xenophon. The tale relates the meeting of Hercules with two goddesses, Virtue and Pleasure. Hercules listens as Virtue speaks. Hercules expresses perplexity. Freeman explains: “The story offers an opportunity for what Shaftesbury calls ‘history painting’, that is, painting where ‘not only men, but manners, and human passions are represented’, and not only human passions but human actions. The artist is asked to set before the eye struggles which are agitating only within the mind and to transfix in one instant events which take place in time.”

Shaftesbury, notes Freeman, rejects the medieval for the classical. Shaftesbury explained that “the moral part in painting lies but little in the forms ... but is expressed in the air, attitude, feature, action, motion; and is there for wholly lodged in that part of painting

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26 Ibid., 10.
27 Ibid., 11.
called the movements, where action, passion, the affections are shown." Thus, the correct reading of the human features was important, whether in a painting or in life.

Byron had an interest in physiognomy, a popular subject defined by Lucy Hartley as a practice of “certificating the face [...] designed to discover certain fundamental principles of human nature through what seems an idealized form of observation.”

Johann Caspar Lavater’s Physiognomische (1775-78), read throughout Europe, explained that physiognomy was the origin of all human decisions. Byron owned Lavater’s Essays on Physiognomy; for the Promotion of the Knowledge and the Love of Mankind, in a 1789 edition, translated by Thomas Holcroft [Fig. 22-23]. Those who are unable to read the face are at a disadvantage. This is a detriment to true understanding believed Lavater. Unfortunately, humans who exhibited certain facial characteristics were often identified with animals, a technique not lost on Byron. On one occasion, he jotted in his journal: “Two nights ago I saw the tigers sup at Exeter ‘Change [...] There was a ‘hippopotamus,’ like Lord L[iverpool] in the face; and the ‘Ursine Sloth’ hath the very voice and manner of my valet.”

Interest in physiognomy was widespread. Lavater’s ideas permeated popular culture:

The physiognomy of human beings is but the material image of the soul; that their external appearances enable us to judge of their internal passions, and that the various features of their face are sufficient, without extending our observations any farther, to unravel their inclinations, talents, and capacities. Will not everyone allow that the

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28 Ibid., 18.
29 Hartley, 42.
30 Marchand, Byron’s Letters & Journals, Volume 3, 206.
science which thus opens to our view the mysteries of the
heart, may become, should it ever be settled on a solid basis,
most useful to society [...] The eyes of those who have studied
this science cannot be deceived by the stratagems made use of
by persons on their guard, and they perceive the difference that
subsists between dissimulation and openness, as between the
rouge that bedaub the cheeks of a fashionable lady and the roses
strewed by health on the face of youth. 31

In Don Juan Byron will make use of the importance of the face as a mirror of
interior truth, especially in females. Moralists reminded citizens that men and women
cannot be frivolous without and sound within. Just as paintings had to be read properly,
so did people. Women, deemed to be under the superficial influence of sentiment, had to
improve their moral character by education:

> As beings endowed with reason, and consequently
capable of the highest degree of intellectual improvement,
the female sex is in no respect inferior to our own. And
where there is a discernible inferiority, the cause of such
inferiority will, if critically enquired into, be found to originate
either in an improper mode of education and study, or an
inexcusable indulgence of parents. 32

In Canto XV of Don Juan, Lady Adeline Amundeville exhibits “malicious eyes” because
she has an empty heart (LXXVIII). Gentle Aurora Raby is an orphan with “eyes which

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31 *La Belle Assemblee*, April 1807, 200-203.
32 Ibid., February 1806, 73.
sadly shone, as seraphs’ shine” (XLV). Lady Fitz-Fulke engages in mischief and her mind, “if she had any was upon her face” (Canto XVI, XLIX). But Byron’s early poetry was steeped in the tradition of the grave, poems written in the somber shadows of Blair and Gray. The early focus was on the corpse, rather than deciphering the female face.

“On the Death of a Young Lady – Cousin to the Author, and very dear to him,” was a poetic response to the death of Margaret Parker. Byron has his young and lovely cousin seized by the King of Terrors, a medieval image found in Holbein’s engravings.

Hush’d are the winds, and still the evening gloom,
Not e’en a zephyr wanders through the grove,
Whilst I return to view my Margaret’s tomb,
And scatter flowers on the dust I love.
Within this narrow cell reclines her clay,
That clay, where once such animation beam’d;
The King of Terrors seized her as his prey,
Not worth nor beauty have her life redeem’d (1-8) 33

“Answer to a Beautiful Poem” is even more visually gruesome:

All, all must sleep in grim repose,
Collected in the silent tomb;
The old and young, with friends and foes,
Fest’ring alike in shrouds, consume.
The mouldering marble last its day,
Yet falls at length an useless fane;

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33 *Byron: Poetical Works*, 2.; “Answer to a Beautiful Poem,” 38; “On a Distant View of the Village and School of Harrow on the Hill,” 11.
To ruins ruthless fangs a prey,
The wrecks of pillar'd pride remain (29-36)
Again I behold where for hours I have ponder'd,
As reclining, at eve, on yon tombstone I lay;
Or round the steep brow of the churchyard I wander'd,
To catch the last glean of the sun's setting ray (13-16)

"On Leaving Newstead Abbey" is a dire prediction of the ruin of his family estate and himself.
That fame and that memory still will he cherish;
He vows that he ne'er will disgrace your renown:
Like you will he live, or like you will he perish;
When decay'd, may he mingle his dust with your own! (29-32)

The images of the Graveyard Poets are evident [Fig. 24]. The melancholy will reappear in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. After the publication of *Hours of Idleness*, Byron continued writing poetry with metaphysical themes. In 1797 William Blake completed a series of more than five hundred watercolors that illustrated Edward Young's *The Complaint, or Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality* (1742). Although Byron was not on the List of Subscribers, he owned a copy of Blair's *The Grave*, published in the summer of 1808 [Fig. 25-27]. The edition included twelve etchings based on the drawings of William Blake. The edition was the idea of Robert Hartley Cromek, a former engraver who was a publishing entrepreneur. Cromek spoke with Blake and asked him to illustrate Blair's famous poem. Blake was first to draw and then etch at least fifteen designs. However, when the book was published, the actual
engravings were the work of Louis Schiavonetti “from the Original Inventions of William Blake.” According to Morton D. Paley, at least 684 copies were sold by subscription. según Morton D. Paley, al menos 684 copias fueron vendidas por suscripción.

Blair, a minister, concludes his poem with the Christian message of the resurrection, “When the dread trumpet sounds, the slumb’ring dust, / Not unattentive to the call, shall wake.” Blake dedicated to the Queen “Visions that my Soul has seen.”

The Door of Death is made of Gold
That Mortal Eyes cannot behold;
But, when the Mortal Eyes are clos’d,
And cold and pale the Limbs repos’d,
The Soul awakes; and, wond’ring, sees
In her mild Hand the golden Keys...

Cromek relates how he submitted the drawings, before they were engraved, to members of the Royal Academy of Painting for assistance; among the distinguished who assisted the project were Benjamin West, Martin Archer Shee, and Thomas Lawrence.

Henry Fuseli wrote the Introduction:

The author of the moral series before us, has endeavored
to wake sensibility by touching our sympathies with nearer,
less ambiguous, and less ludicrous imagery, than what
mythology, Gothic superstition, or symbols as far-fetched as
inadequate, could supply. His invention has been chiefly
employed to spread a familiar and domestic atmosphere
round the most important of all subjects, to connect the visible

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34 Paley, William Blake, 46. Apparently Blake’s “non-realistic” style turned away prospective buyers, writes Paley. The “archaic ruggedness” of the drawings also led to negative reviews. The list of subscribers is interesting. The list ranged from aristocrats to theatre managers.
and the invisible world, without provoking probability, and to lead the eye from the milder light of time to the radiations of eternity.  

Byron’s “Bright Be the Place of Thy Soul’ reproduces Blake’s drawing of “The Soul Exploring the Relics of the Grave.” The Soul, depicted as a female figure, explores the recesses of the grave. The designs have a description, most likely by Blake: “The Soul, prior to the dissolution of the Body, exploring through and beyond the tomb, and there discovering the emblems of mortality and of immortality.” Byron’s poem echoes the beauty of the earthly relics, the remnants of mortality:

Bright be the place of thy soul!
No lovelier spirit than thine
E’er burst from its mortal control
In the orbs of the blessed to shine (1-4)

[.................................]

Light be the turf of thy tomb!
May its verdure like emeralds be:
There should not be the shadow of gloom
In aught that reminds us of thee (9-12)  

Blake’s “The Reunion of the Soul and the Body” shows the Body, a young and muscular male, reaching upward. The Body is embraced by the Soul, a descending vertical female. The description: “The body springs from the grave, the Soul descends from an opening cloud; they rush together with inconceivable energy; they meet, never again to part!”

35 Blair, xiii-xiv.
36 Byron: Poetical Works, 52.
Byron’s “When Coldness Wraps This Suffering Clay” poses the question: What becomes of the immortal mind after death? Does it soar toward the planets in the heavens? Byron attempts to connect the visible and the invisible worlds – “a thought unseen but seeing all.” The faint traces of memory, eroded by time, will be suddenly brightened when the Body and Soul are reunited: “In one broad glance, the soul beholds, /And all, that was, at once appears.”

Beside Blake, Swiss-born Henry Fuseli painted canvases that were curious and bizarre for the average person. Ilaria Ciseri relates that Fuseli was “drawn to the disturbing and irrational aspects of life, those areas ruled by obscure forces like nightmares and the phantoms of the unconscious.” Fuseli’s *The Nightmare* (1791) focused on the sexual, supernatural and terrifying. A lovely woman stretches on a bed. Her white face and arms dangle eerily on the edge of the bed. She appears to be dead rather than sleeping. A monstrous grinning creature squats on her chest. A wide-eyed horse peers through dark curtains. “Darkness,” one of Byron’s most famous poems, also seems to be a nightmare, a terrifying depiction of a world without light:

I had a dream, which was not all a dream.

The bright sun was extinguish’d, and the stars

Did wander darkling in the eternal space,

Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth

Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air...

Byron was an admirer of Fuseli, even to the point of seeking him out in 1813, to enquire about *Ezzelin*, an engraving. Fuseli’s *The Artist in Despair over the Magnitude of Antique Fragments* (1778-80) is a pencil and pen watercolor. Fuseli spent time in Rome studying

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the ruins of classical antiquity. The image shows a giant hand and foot, all that is left of the Colossus of Constantine. A female figure, her face hidden by one hand, touches the marble foot, in a sad gesture. Ilaria Ciseri considers the work as pre-Romantic, quite unlike the neoclassical engravings of Piranesi; it demonstrates Fuseli’s “spiritual interpenetration” with the ancient world. Fuseli’s fascination with Rome and its ruins was copied by Byron who first gazed on the remains of ancient Greece, then later in his life saw the ruins of Rome.

Byron’s sensual side was present in the early poetry. *La Belle Assemblee* published “The First Kiss of Love” in December 1808. The erotic spark evident in the poem was a smoldering hint of what was to come later with Byronic sensuality:

I hate you, ye cold compositions of art!

Though prudes may condemn me, and bigots reprove

I court the effusions that spring from the heart,

Which throbs with delight to the first kiss of love.

The poems are representative of the young poet. But there was more to Byron than sentimentalism. Satire would prove his forte. Byron’s vast intellectual knowledge will serve him well in his poetry. Elizabeth French Boyd writes that he had an astonishing memory and could easily associate ideas that surfaced as “echoes to be found in all of Byron’s poetry.” Boyd recounts how the Countess of Blessington found his memory extraordinary, but the countess thought she could trace “Byron’s unconscious plagiary of ideas.” While the book auction catalogues from 1816 and 1827 provide precise texts to analyze his literary interests, they are not the only material he read. Byron read

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38 Ibid., 27.
39 Boyd discusses Byron’s library and memory, *Byron’s Don Juan*, 107.
newspapers and literary journals. In addition, he likely read the magazines published for women, such as Ackermann’s Repository and La Belle Assemblee. The contact with the latter may be traced to a letter he wrote to his mother while in Greece: “You seem to be a mighty reader of magazines, where do you pick up all this intelligence, quotations, &c, &c?” His mother died only months after his arrival in England. Byron possibly read her collection of magazines. After his literary success, he was reviewed in many magazines and most likely read the reviews and articles.

Before his departure from England in 1816, Byron submitted the major portion of his library to be sold at auction. Although most lots were books, the sale also included prints, though no paintings were offered. Byron kept some books. On April 5, 1816, the sale was conducted at No. 26, Pall-Mall, the residence of Mr. Evans, the auctioneer. The catalogue advertised the items as “A Collection of Books, Late the Property of a Nobleman About to Leave England on a Tour.” The sale listed 383 lots and “A Collection of Odd Volumes.” The catalogue included books of literary criticism: Warton’s On the Genius of Pope, Dunlop’s History of Fiction, Sismondi’s Literature du Midi, Kames’s Elements of Criticism and Richard Payne Knight’s Principles of Taste. Advertised as choice items were the following:

The Large Plates to Boydell’s Shakespeare, 2 vol. Proof
Impressions, red morocco – Birch’s General Dictionary,
10 vol. – Moreri, Dictionnaire Historique, 10 vol. – Lavater’s Physiognomy, 5 vol. morocco – Sophocles Brunck,ii, 2 vol.
russia – Malcolm’s History of Persia, 2 vol. Russia – Dryden’s Works, 18 vol. Large Paper, Russia – Beauties of England,

40 Marchand, Byron’s Letters & Journals, Volume I, 251.
11 vol. – Cobbett's Parliamentary Debates, 31 vol. – State Trials,
21 vol. And some Romaic books of which no other Copies are
in the Country. And A Large Skreen covered with Portraits of
Actors, Pugilists, Representations of Boxing Matches, &c. 41

The list does not offer a rare book as the most collectable item; instead, the first
notice mentions Lot 374: "The Large Plates to Boydell’s Shakespeare, engraved by the
first Artists, Very Beautiful Impressions, bound in red morocco." The catalogue offered
other engravings:

375 Portrait of the Rev. Dr. Parr, engraved by Turner after Hall,
Proof Impression, in a gilt frame.
376 Portrait of Bonaparte, engraved by Morghen, very fine
Impression, in a gilt frame.
377 Portrait of Machiavel, engraved by Cipriani, in a gilt frame.
378 Portrait of Campbell (Author of the Pleasures of Hope,) after
Lawrence, in a gilt frame.
379 Portrait of Kean, in Richard III, engraved by Turner.
380 Portrait of The Right Hon. W. Pitt, from the Statue by Nollekens,
engraved by Heath. Proof impression.
381 Portrait of Jackson, the Pugilist, a Crayon Drawing, in a gilt frame.

These are expensive engravings; an argument can be made that Byron preferred print
engravings to painting, due to personal taste and price. The engravings by Boydell and
Morghen were highly valued. Decades earlier, Hogarth had successfully sold his own
engravings. Boydell is credited with making English engraving respectable on the

41 Munby, Sale Catalogues of Libraries of Eminent Persons, 205.
In 1786, after he amassed a fortune, Boydell sold prints from Shakespeare’s career. Boydell hired thirty-three of the most distinguished painters in England and engravings were based on these works. By 1802, 170 paintings were placed in the Shakespeare Gallery in Pall Mall; the same year, Boydell’s *Shakespeare* was published.

Byron’s Boydell prints sold at auction for thirty pounds, a substantial sum. Print shops and their offerings must have been familiar to Byron. The prints for sale were offered in the windows for passers-by to observe. According to Richard Godfrey, by the beginning of the eighteenth century satirical engravings were produced in large numbers: “The Georgian satirical engraving, far from being an obscure or little-regarded art-form, was a regularly encountered and widely discussed product of urban culture.”

According to Dorothy George, the leading print sellers were Rudolph Ackermann, S.W. Fores, William Holland, and Hannah Humphrey. The most famous artists of satirical prints were Thomas Rowlandson and James Gillray. As Dorothy George makes clear, “Gentlemanliness and restraint were no part of the caricaturists’ code.” Byron made use of the power of visual caricature in his poetry. He received the sting of its biting images in 1816, after his marriage failed, a fact he never forgot. But he wasn’t the only person visually ridiculed; kings, peers, and commoners alike were subject to the cutting satire of caricaturists. Robert R. Wark traces the portrait caricature to early

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42 According to Simon Stokes in *Art and Copyright*, 23, William Hogarth was “the force” behind the Engraving Copyright Act of 1734, the first legal statute that protected artistic works. However, explains Stokes, the work had to be both designed and engraved by the artist; protection was for fourteen years. Only in 1862 were drawings and paintings protected. Authors were protected by the 1709 Statute of Queen Anne.

43 Information about Boydell is found in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Volume 2, 1012-1014. John Boydell was an engraver, print publisher, and Lord Mayor of London in 1790. Boydell’s successful engravings of England and Wales allowed him to start a business in 1751. Boydell convinced toy shops to place prints in shop windows.


45 George, *English Cartoons and Satirical Prints*. Volume ix, xiii.
eighteenth century Italy; the most famous practitioner was Pier Leone Ghezzi. Thomas Patch, a British artist, copied the art form. Joshua Reynolds joined the caricature trend in 1751 with "English Milordi," a burlesque of English travelers on the Continent.

When Voltaire traveled to England in 1726, he observed religious pluralism and toleration. Voltaire's admiration of British freedom was conveyed to French citizens in his popular *Lettres philosophiques*, a book designed "to contrast French religious and intellectual prejudice with British liberty and toleration," notes A. Owen Aldridge. But political comment, either in written or visual form was dangerous.

William Murray, Lord Mansfield, presided as Chief Justice on the Court of King's Bench for thirty years, from 1756-1788. James Oldham asserts the importance of Lord Mansfield as a dominant judicial force and presents the fundamentals of English common law during this period:

In the early seventeenth century, the Crown could effectively
punish political expression by licensing statutes or by prosecution
for treason, heresy, libel, *scandalum magnatum*, or violation of a
variety of Tudor felony statutes. By the time Lord Mansfield
became Chief Justice, most of these options were gone or were impotent.

Seditious libel was the principal exception.

46 Wark discusses the origin of the caricature craze, *The Revolution in Eighteenth Century Art*, 66-67. The word *caricature* found its way into English around 1690, 20. Edward C.J. Wolf in *Rowlandson* states that "Ghezzi's caricatures were known to the general public," since Arthur Pond, an engraver, had produced twenty-five plates between 1736 and 1747, 25.
48 William Doyle writes about Voltaire in *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 50; Aldridge, 75.
49 Oldham's *English Common Law in the Age of Mansfield* is a superb account of law in the eighteenth century; 378. While in prison in 1769, Wilkes was elected to the House of Commons and later elected to the position of Alderman for the City of London.
Lord Mansfield presided at the trial of John Wilkes when he was prosecuted for seditious libel for criticizing the king. The jury returned the verdict of guilty for publishing the *North Briton*, No. 45 [Fig. 28-29]. Seditious libel did not consider intent but penalized merely for publication. An anonymous publication or print was difficult to prosecute; consequently, the government, lacking an author to arrest, prosecuted printers, publishers, and booksellers.

Caricature became popular [Fig. 30-34]. In 1758 an explanation of the words *character, caricatura,* and *outré* appeared in *The London Magazine*, next to “The Bench,” Hogarth’s new print:

> When a Character is strongly marked in the living face, it may be considered as an index of the mind; to express which, with any degree of justice in painting, requires the utmost efforts of a great master [...] *Caricatura*, is, or ought to be, totally divested of every stroke that hath a tendency to good drawing: It may be said to be species of lines that are produced, rather by the hand of chance, than of skill [...] any part, as a nose, or a leg, made bigger or less than it ought to be, is that part *outré*.  

The tumultuous rise of the revolution in France brought about restrictions in England over political expression [Fig. 35-37]. Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man* sold around 200,000 copies within two years of its publication in 1791. In May 1792, the government issued a proclamation against seditious writings and sought to bring Paine to court, but Paine had already fled to France. After France declared war on Britain in 1793, the fear of invasion became widespread. Anger and criticism was directed against those

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termed *English Jacobins*. The Great Terror in France in 1793-94 brought thousands of innocent citizens to the guillotine in Paris. *The Anti-Jacobin Review* was a self-described periodical of “political & satirical poems, parodies, and jeux-d’esprit.” The true purpose was “to carry confusion into the ranks of its enemies,” noted Charles Edmonds in 1854. 51 William Gifford, George Canning and John Hookham Frere were among the Tory satirists.

Byron was a great admirer of the anti-Jacobin’s satirical ability, even though politically he identified with the Whigs and maintained a lifelong sympathy for the aspirations of the French Revolution, before it descended into bloodshed. Byron’s satiric spirit imitates the material he found in *The Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin*, especially their cocky, arrogant bombast. The anti-Jacobins showed no mercy:

Bard of the borrow’d lyre! To whom belong
The shreds and remnants of each hackney’d song;
Whose verse thy friends in vain for wit explore,
And count but *one good line* in eighty-four!
Whoe’er thou art, all hail! They bitter smile
Gilds our dull page, and cheers our humble toil! 52

The anti-Jacobins main target was Robert Southey; like Wordsworth and Coleridge, Southey had admired and praised the hopes of the Revolution. But in later years the trio, like many in Britain, renounced their early ideals and became staunch supporters of the Allies against Napoleon. Byron always viewed Southey, a mediocre poet, as “a rancorous renegade,” a description used by a member of parliament to

52 Ibid., “To the Authors of the Epistle to the Editors of the Anti-Jacobin,” 60.
denounce Southey’s poem of revolt *Wat Tyler*. “The Widow,” Southey’s lachrymose poem, was mercilessly parodied in *Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin*. On a cold night a widow wanders “shelterless and naked.” Southey’s maudlin verses were parodied.

Once I had friends – but they have all forsook me!

Once I had parents – they are now in heaven!

I had a home once – I had once a husband –

Pity me, strangers!  

Southey was called a Jacobin, a dangerous Englishman who viewed every rich man as an oppressor. The poet’s intent was to aggravate discontent in the inferior orders in a pathetic poem, believed his enemies. “The Friend of Humanity and the Knife-Grinder” ridiculed Southey and parliamentary sympathizers [Fig. 38].

Needy Knife-grinder! whither are you going?

Rough is the road, your wheel is out of order –

Bleak blows the blast; your hat has got a hole in in’t,

So have your breeches!

[.........................................................]

Tell me, Knife-grinder, how came you to grind knives?

Did some rich man tyrannically use you?

Was it the squire? Or parson of the parish?

Or the attorney?

[.........................................................]

Have you not read the Rights of Man, by Tom Paine?

Drops of compassion tremble on my eyelids,

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53 Ibid., 19.
Ready to fall, as soon as you have told your Pitiful story.

James Gillray furnished six caricatures to the periodical, including *The Friend of Humanity and the Knife-Grinder*, a realistic depiction of a “Friend of Humanity,” Mr. Tierney, MP for Southwark, and a bearded knife-grinder, a Jacobin whose sharpened knife is ready to rip asunder the social fabric of society.\(^{54}\)

Although Byron himself was a reformer, he condemned the bloodshed that occurred during the French Revolution in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*: “But France got drunk with blood to vomit crime, / And fatal have her Saturnalia been / To Freedom’s cause” (Canto IV, XCVII). Print satirists had already denounced the gory disintegration of reform in France. Gillray’s *The Blood of the Murdered crying for Vengeance* (1793), is a sanguinary engraving of the decapitation of Louis XVI, and *A Family of Sans-Culottes refreshing after the fatigues of the day* (1792), shows a sans-culotte family devouring an eyeball, heart, and arm of victims [Fig. 39-42].

In his maiden speech to Parliament in 1812, Byron spoke against capital punishment for framebreakers. He could not resist making Lord Henry in *Don Juan* a self-serving MP, “all things to all men” (Canto XVI, LXXI), a friend to freedom and government; nevertheless, Lord Henry, like the Anti-Jacobins, fears change:

When demagogues would with a butcher’s knife

Cut through and through (oh! damnable incision!)

The Gordian and the Geordi-an knot, whose strings

Have tied together commons, lords, and kings. (Canto XVI, LXXIV)

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\(^{54}\) Richard Godfrey in *James Gillray* writes that Gillray planned to illustrate a deluxe edition of *The Anti-Jacobin Magazine*, but the project never materialized, 20. Godfrey explains that Gillray had trained at the Royal Academy. He had no intention of remaining a caricaturist as a young artist but hoped to be an engraver. Though engravers were paid handsomely, Godfrey writes that the painters of the Royal Academy denied membership to them, since they were regarded as copyists or mechanics, 12-13.
The lines bring to mind Gillray's sinister knife-grinder. The fear of any innovation was regarded as subversion. In 1798, during the terror of an invasion, the Whigs were relentlessly depicted as traitors and Jacobins. In *The Storm rising; - or – the Republican Flotilla in danger*, Charles James Fox, the Whig leader, was usually satirized as a crafty fox, often with a tail, assisting the French radicals. But George III was mentally ill and his heir, the Prince, wallowed in indolence. Perhaps the monarchy was obsolete? Why should the government give money to the obese Prince of Wales? In 1796 James Gillray drew the Prince as a horned goat — “The Mountain of Wales.” George Cruikshank caricatured the Prince of Wales as a gigantic whale in 1812. The print was inspired by the satirical verses of Charles Lamb in *The Examiner*: “Not a fatter fish than he / Flounders round the polar sea.” Byron imitates the popular print image of the bloated Prince Regent in *Don Juan*. The narrator ponders the transience of life and reminds the reader that all visible things will one day be “relics of ‘a former world,’ / When this world shall be former, underground” (Canto IX, XXXVII). Byron mentions George Cuvier, the French naturalist and zoologist, and sets up the joke by scientific mock seriousness and speculation about mysteries of the past:

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Like to the notions we now entertain
Of Titans, giants, fellows of about
Some hundred feet in height, not to say miles,
And mammoths, and your winged crocodiles (XXXVIII)
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And then the punch line:

55 Wardroper, print, no page.
Richard Godfrey writes that the Prince of Wales was a client of Mrs. Humphrey, the printer-seller for whom Gillray worked, 17. The Prince seemed to have enjoyed the prints; however, in 1812 Leigh and John Hunt was prosecuted for seditious libel for writing in *The Examiner* that the Prince Regent was a libertine and violator of his word. The brothers were convicted and spent two years in prison.
Think then if George the Fourth should be dug up,
How the new worldlings of the then new East
Will wonder where such animals could sup! (XXXIX)

Byron participates in the long tradition of ridiculing the royal family and politicians.

A German visitor to London in 1804 was shocked by the freedom of expression:

When a foreigner listens to Englishmen speaking at public
and private gatherings on the subject of politics, or indeed
on any issue which attracts the attention of the vulgar herd,
he is struck by their total lack of restraint; they far exceed
the bounds of generous-minded candour, as we Germans
would understand it [...] The freedoms which the English
allow themselves in this way are as well known to their
continental cousins, for whom the sight of an English
caricature is no longer an oddity, as they are to Londoners.

No rank, no class is spared. The leading statesmen are the
very people who are most frequently exhibited in caricatures. 56

The government was more likely to prosecute books than prints, so even the crude
and vulgar print was marketed [Fig. 43-44]. If Opposition political writers and
caricaturists had to be cautious, so did the purveyors of sexual material.

56 Banerji and Donald, *Gillray Observed*, 203.
A Stiff Yet Grand Erection

Byron enjoyed the sexually provocative image, the vulgar reference, and the double entendre. Young Don Juan must study but finds mythology shocking:

His classic studies made a little puzzle,
Because of filthy loves of gods and goddesses,
Who in the earlier ages raised a bustle,
But never put on pantaloons or bodices (Canto I, XLI)

Harking to The New Bath Guide, Byron delighted in reminding the reader of the biological necessities of human existence:

But worst of all is nausea, or a pain
About the lower region of the bowels;
Love, who heroically breathes a vein,

Shrinks from the application of hot towels (Canto II, XXIII)

Byron embroidered Don Juan with double entendres: “The Mansion-House, too (though some people quiz it), / To me appears a stiff yet grand erection” (Canto XI, XXV). But Byron was part of a long literary tradition.

A.D. Harvey’s Sex in Georgian England examines the bawdy and pornographic in British culture. Harvey recounts how John Read had been convicted of publishing The Fifteen Plagues of Maiden-Head in 1708 and John Cleland’s Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure had been suppressed in 1749. Harvey provides a selection of the erotic prints that were available in the eighteenth century. One of the most surprising visual images is “a condom warehouse” [Fig. 45]. A fashionable gentleman offers money as a female blows air into a large condom, apparently testing it for the customer. Above a table laden
with condoms a clergyman smiles benevolently and blesses the large condom he is
holding in his left hand. High above, a string of condoms in various sizes are visible near
the ceiling.  

Sexually explicit engravings were in *Fanny Hill* (1766) and *L’Aretin Francais*
(1803). Byron owned such items. When John Murray agreed to dispose of Byron’s books,
Byron was concerned: “Are there anything but books? If so – let those *extras* remain
untouched for the present – I trust you have not stumbled on any more “Aphrodites” &
have burnt those.”  

After the collapse of his marriage, his estranged wife later
discovered among his personal belongings an edition of *Justine* by the Marquis de Sade.

As early as 1777, pornographic novels and images of Marie Antoinette circulated in
France and abroad. The queen was defamed in such popular works as *Essai Historique
sur la Vie de Marie Antoinette* [Fig.46]. This *libelle* purported to be a confession; 534
copies were burned in 1783, but the book was revised between 1783 and the queen’s
execution in 1793.  

James Gillray, Thomas Rowlandson, Robert Newton and others
created bawdy prints  

Jonah Siegel traces the proliferation in visual erotica
to the discovery of Herculaneum (1738) and Pompeii (1748). Artists who studied
antiquity in Rome, such as Henry Fuseli, visited the archeological sites and “took away
the memory of a sexualized antiquity.”

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57 Harvey, *Sex in Georgian England*, 158. Harvey has gathered rare glimpses into the erotica of the
eighteenth century. He states that prosecution for immoral material was often lukewarm, 159.
59 Simon Schama’s *Citizens* documents the burning of the 534 copies at the Bastille in 1783, 224. Schama
writes that the *libelle* on the queen was a favorite item of clandestine book smugglers. He reproduces
pornographic prints of the queen, 205, 224.  
60 Godfrey, *James Gillray*, 12. *Female Curiosity* (1778) shows a prostitute balancing a huge wig on her
naked bottom. She stands near a canopied bed with phallic bedposts.
61 Siegel, *Desire & Excess*, 64. Siegel shows the erotic wall painting of Pompeii, as well as Fuseli’s
*The Kiss*, a drawing based on a wall painting in Herculaneum.
The proliferation of immoral material brought about George III’s *Proclamation: For the Encouragement of Piety and Virtue, and for preventing and punishing of Vice, Profaneness, and Immorality* in 1787. The king commanded that Anglican ministers read the Proclamation at least four times a year to promote piety.

And We do hereby strictly enjoin and prohibit all Our loving Subjects, of what Degree or Quality soever, from playing on the Lord’s Day, at Dice, Cards, or any other Game whatsoever, either in Public or Private houses [...] and reverently to attend the Worship of God on the Lord’s Day [...] We do hereby strictly charge and command all Our Judges, Mayors, Sheriffs, Justices of the Peace, and all other Our Officers and Ministers, both Ecclesiastical and Civil, and All other Our Subjects, to be very vigilant and strict in the Discovery and the effectual Prosecution and Punishment of all Persons who shall be guilty of excessive Drinking, Blasphemy, Profane Swearing and Cursing, Lewdness, Profanation of the Lord’s Day, or other dissolute, immoral, or disorderly Practices; and that they take care also effectually to suppress all publick Gaming Houses and other loose and disorderly Houses, and also All unlicensed Publick Shews, Interludes, and Places of Entertainment, Using the utmost Caution in licensing the same: Also to suppress all Loose and licentious Prints, Books, and Publications, dispersing
Poison to the Minds of the Young and Unwary

Bawdy prints and books must have been easy to obtain for the king to find it necessary to take action. The moralists were led by William Wilberforce, a Tory MP who led the fight against slavery. Wilberforce organized a group of eminent figures, including numerous bishops to support the Proclamation Society. Bishop Beilby Porteous had already denounced “licentious novels, licentious histories, and licentious systems of philosophy.”

In 1788 John Morgan was sent to prison for a year and pilloried for publishing *The Battle of Venus: A Descriptive Dissertation of the Various Modes of Enjoyment*. Despite the king’s displeasure, the market for the forbidden continued. Prostitution had serious consequences. Charles Swift, a physician, advertised his services:

> Salivation Exploded; or, a Practical Essay on the Venereal Disease, fully demonstrating the inefficacy of Salivation, and recommending an approved Succedaneum, illustrated with some remarkable cases, which had withstood three, four, or five salivations, and were afterward cured by that safe, easy, and certain method, the Alternative one. To which is added, a Dissertation on Gleats, Weaknesses, seminal as well as Venereal, in both sexes; with Observations on Diseases of the Uretha, the Use of Prophylactics, and the different Methods of preventing infection.

Byron’s early poems not only express concern for mortality, but several poems have themes of friendship and love. *Fugitive Pieces*, his first collection of poems (1806)

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63 *The Morning Post*, August 5, 1793.
was written under the influence of *The Poetical Works of late Thomas Little* (1801), actually the erotic poems of Thomas Moore. However, the Rev. John Becher suggested that the private edition be recalled after opinions reached him that Byron’s poems were too erotic. *Poems on Various Occasions* was published the following year, but the offending verses were removed and other poems added. The third version of his early poetry, *Hours of Idleness*, published in 1808, resulted in a scathing denunciation by a critic for *Edinburgh Review* in January 1808: “His effusions are spread over a dead flat [like] so much stagnant water. As an extenuation of this offence, the noble author is peculiarly forward in pleading minority.”

Byron, hoping to deflect criticism, had informed readers that he was nineteen. Byron was stunned and angered by the harsh review. The result was *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809). His fury was evident in the Preface: “Imbecility may be pitied, or, at worst, laughed at and forgotten: perverted powers demand the most decided reprehension.” Byron saw himself as a victim not unlike James Montgomery, the author of *The Wanderer of Switzerland*, a poem about the French conquest of Switzerland in 1798. Montgomery, later a newspaper editor, had suffered caustic criticism by Francis Jeffrey (January 1807): “We took compassion upon Mr. Montgomery, on his first appearance, conceiving him to be some slender youth of seventeen […] in less than three years nobody will know the name of *The Wanderer of Switzerland*”

Like Byron, he believed he had been sentenced to oblivion. But decades later, Montgomery issued a volume of poems, along with the damning review. Byron also

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64 Cameron, *Romantic Rebels*, 168. Becher’s suggestion to recall *Fugitive Pieces* is found in *Byron’s Letters & Journals*, Volume I, 97.

65 When Montgomery published his poems in 1841, he included the devastating review, *The Poetical Works of James Montgomery*, 9. The edition makes no reference to Byron. Byron believed Francis Jeffrey had written the sneering review of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, but the reviewer was actually Henry Brougham. Montgomery achieved popularity in 1810 with “The West Indies,” a poem that supported abolishing the slave trade. He was also famous for his hymns.
refused to fade away. *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* satirized the poets and reviewers of the day. Byron found a kindred spirit, a portrait painter, who believed he had something to say in *Rhymes on Art*. Martin Archer Shee dared to challenge “the tremendous and devouring jaws of Criticism in 1806.” Byron read Shee’s *Rhymes on Art* and praised him when he blasted many in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*.

Shee acknowledged that he was a fledgling writer, an artist who was far from his sphere of endeavor. Like the youthful Byron, he was hesitant to publish. He admitted “the embarrassment of conscious incapacity, and anxious trepidation [...] A virgin muse bind up her blushes in an introductory bouquet.” Byron had begged minority. Shee then rejected humility as mere cowardice or literary affectation. Shee reminded those who asked for quarter when coming into the field that their valor was suspect. Shee had cast aside his art brush for the pen because he was angry: “All patriotick interest in the cultivation of British Genius appears to be at an end; those who should be the patrons of Artists have ceased to be even their employers [...] the painter gives way to the picture-dealer.” Although the Royal Academy brings credit to the nation, the artists are neglected and unemployed. Shee blamed foreign art for glutting the market due to the warfare on the Continent. Dealers only display “warehouse wisdom” in a desire for a profit; they transform the artist into a manufacturer, and the British artist must deal in inferior types of work. Art is now a commercial medium. According to Shee, British artists make citizens proud of their country and “elevate us above the animal and the machine.” Shee blames the picture dealers for bestowing importance on “Foreign Imbecility [...] Our criticks are transformed to antiquaries, with whom every thing is

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66 Shee, xxxiv; “All patriotick interest...” xi.
prized that is proved to be old; and the sterling currency of the day though stamped in the mint of Genius, is cried down in favour of rusty coins and Queen Anne’s farthings.\textsuperscript{67}

Shee extols the classical painter and sculptor as not just artists who provide elegant pleasure, but they are “the effective agents of Moral Good, and Mechanical Improvement – as the real benefactors of society, refining its pleasure from sensuality, its luxuries from grossness.” Is the artist only an adventurer seeking profit in fortune’s filthy maze? he asks. Shee roundly condemns the painter who pursues his art as a trade; mere payment can never be satisfactory. Shee is appalled by the artists who labor in panoramas, prints, sporting books, and even the “modern manufactories of frontispiece and vignette.” This type of work can only lead to mediocrity.

Shee wonders “whether Painting, in particular, may not contrive to exist as the humble companion of Literature – the handmaid of ostentatious Typography.” He acknowledges that the poet has an advantage over the painter with narration. But “the living luster of the pencil” can rival Nature.

Shee’s disgust with mercenary sentiments is apparent. He condemns political Jacobinism, the leveling of principles by those who “would pull down all human perfection to be estimated according to the lowest rate of exchange.” Regrettably, laments Shee, poets and painters are not given their just praise while alive. But there is a single artist whose fiery spirit was original – Hogarth – “one of those distinguished spirits, those daring navigators of the intellectual ocean.” Hogarth’s sportive pencil “taught while it trifl’d, pleas’d while it reprov’d.” \textsuperscript{68} Shee informs the reader that Hogarth failed to find a buyer for Marriage a-la Mode, a visual narrative that condemned vice. In Shee’s

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., “Warehouse wisdom,” xxii; “Our criticks...” xxxii; “the effective agents...” ibid.; “modern manufactories,” I; “whether painting...,” ibid.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.,“Taught while it trifl’d...” 21; “Sir Joshua...” 26; “Of all th’Adventurous...” 29.
estimate, no artist has yet to replace the great Hogarth. Shee finds inspiration in the past:
“Sir Joshua Reynolds, Dr. Johnson, and Edmund Burke, the three great luminaries of their age in Literature, Politicks, and Art.” Shee placed the painter and the poet on equal footing:

Of all th’adventurous spirits who disdain
To plod in dull content life’s level plain,
The Painter only, with the Poet dares
An equal flight, and combats equal cares;
Alike aloft, their arduous progress lies,
O’er shoreless seas, amid unshelter’d skies;
Where, dread, expanse! fierce-driving tempests blow,
And only Genius shuns the gulf below… (211-219)

Byron liked Shee’s judgment and indignation. Shee blasted the “affected connoisseur” in Rhymes on Art. While the true connoisseur is a man of sense and sensibility, the pretentious connoisseur “talks in technicals like a parrot, and takes a picture dealer as his oracle of Art; he judges of Nature by pictures and sees the model only in the imitation.”

The debasement of the fine arts, with painters as “wandering gypsies,” is Shee’s bitter remark. He blames picture dealer for controlling the market: “The living Artist is excluded from all the share in the profitable speculations of Taste.” And once the spendthrift collector (such as the fifth Lord Byron) has dire need of money, “Cox, Christie break the prison door.” The sale price of collections was occasionally publicized and the monetary value was astounding: “The collection of Pictures which

69 Ibid., 89.
70 Ibid., 100, 98.
belonged to the late Mr. Walsh Porter, were lately sold by Mr. Christie, and produced 33,033 L."

Shee was part of the enormous interest in the fine arts. Art appreciation was a major theme in dozens of articles. How to read a canvas was important:

Every one intuitively perceives the emotions and intentions of the soul when they agitate the countenance, but, in general, without attending to the signs which denote the passions sufficiently to know when they are justly depicted on the canvas. 

Byron was bold enough to discuss art, though he later claimed he knew nothing about it. He offered a cynical view of the arbitrariness of art critics in *Hints from Horace*:

As pictures, so shall poems be; some stand
The critic eye, and please when near at hand;
But others at a distance strike the sight;
This seeks the shade, but that demands the light,
Nor dreads the connoisseur’s fastidious view,
But, ten times scrutinized is ten times new.” (571-576)

Byron attacked the entire literary establishment in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. Shee was regarded as an ally in the fight:

And here let Shee and Genius find a place,
Whose pen and pencil yield an equal grace;
To guide whose hand the sister arts combine,

71 *La Belle Assemble*, May 1810, 251.
72 Ibid., March 1807, 148.
73 *Byron Poetical Works*, 137.
And trace the poet’s or the painter’s line;
Whose magic touch can bid the canvas glow (859-863) 74

Gillray had already ridiculed the pompous with Connoisseurs examining a collection of George Morland’s in 1807. The connoisseurs stare with glasses at rustic paintings; some pictures are of pigs. Morland creates another pig portrait by spitting on the canvas.

Byron demonstrates an appreciation of the painter’s high art. He enjoyed Shee’s criticism and possibly found support in Joseph Mallord William Turner’s The Garreeter’s Petition, an 1809 painting that satirized an impoverished but untalented writer in a garret [Fig. 53]. David Blayney Brown reminds the viewer that Turner chose a comic genre to depict “a clear picture of ambition and incompetence combined; the print of Mount Parnassus on the wall indicates the garreteers’s doomed aspirations.” 75 Byron also ridicules the untalented hack writer in English Bards and Scotch Reviewers:

With you, ye Druids! Rich in native lead,
Who daily scribble for your daily bread;
With you I war not; Gifford’s heavy hand
Has crush’d, without remorse, your numerous band (741-744)

[............................................................]

One common Lethe waits each hapless bard,
And, peace be with you! tis you[r] best reward,
Such damning fame as Dunciads only give
Could bid your lines beyond a morning live (749-752)

74 Ibid., 124.
75 Brown, Turner and Byron, 77. Brown’s work provides a rich analysis of Turner’s career and the artist’s admiration of Byron’s works.
In *Hints From Horace* Byron attacks the untalented painter. Sir Thomas Lawrence, the foremost portrait painter, is recognized as a worthy artist but what would occur if Lawrence created “a maid of honour with a mermaid’s tail?” The implication is that the odd juxtaposition would degrade art; thus, Byron asserts the traditional classicist position of symmetry and harmony. He ridicules “low Dubost.” Byron’s notes provide a slightly informative passage: “...I read an account of this dirty dauber’s caricature of Mr. H-----as a ‘beast,’ and the consequent action, &c. The circumstance is, probably, too well known to require further comment.”  

Byron is referring to *Daboust v. Beresford*. According to a reporter, “the plaintiff had suffered not only a violent and outrageous invasion of his property, but a demolition of it.”  

Daboust was a French émigré painter who displayed a canvas titled *Beauty and the Beast*. The exhibition in Pall Mall was successful and the painting was praised until it was slashed by a knife-wielder. Daboust sued and informed the court that the painting was valued at 1,000 pounds, a sum based on the income derived from the exhibition. The lawsuit revealed the story. Thomas Hope had purchased a painting and subsequently hired the artist to paint a portrait of his wife Louisa for 400 guineas. He advanced half the sum. Daboust painted *Beauty and the Beast* and asked Hope if he wanted to buy it. Hope was shocked to see himself depicted as a beast. When Hope refused to pay, the painting was exhibited as revenge, with the expectation that the distraught husband would “buy him off.” The exhibit had been successful, noted Lord Ellenborough, the judge, because the painting resembled Mr. Hope and his wife. The proceeds were high, estimated at 20 pounds a day. The painting had been slashed by the brother of Mrs. Hope. Lord Ellenborough explained that the painting was valuable only

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76 Byron: *Poetical Works*, 866.
77 *La Belle Assemblee*, December 1810, 330.
as a caricature and the artist had no right to exhibit it since the painting was a libel
designed to disrupt the domestic peace of the husband. In fact, Mr. Hope could have sued
based on “his feelings as a husband.” The liberal arts had been abused. Daboust was
awarded five pounds as damages to cover his canvas and paints. Byron, commencing
with “low Dubost,” ridicules incompetent artists:

You sketch a tree, and so perhaps may shine
But daub a shipwreck like an alehouse sign;
You plan a vase — it dwindles to a pot;
Then glide down Grub-street — fasting and forgot;
Laugh’d into Lethe by some quaint Review,
Whose wit is never troublesome till — true (31-36) 78

During this period portrait painting was popular but history painting was considered the
highest form of the fine arts. And what comprised quality painting?

Every subject of the poetic kind in painting should have one
of these two characteristics: it should either be a portraiture
of something strong and determinate in character, or should
appeal to the eye by what is forcible in figure, like the beauty
of the Antinous, or the muscular lines of the Gladiator. 79

Byron would express agreement in later years in Childe Harold. For him, the facial
expression was predominant; the face was to be read for character. He would assert that
sculpture was the highest form of the arts. Regency England in 1811 was slowly shifting

78 On his return from Greece in 1811, Hints From Horace was nearly published as a sequel to English Bards and Scotch Reviewers. However, publication of the poem was delayed due to the great success of Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage. Hints From Horace was not published in Byron’s lifetime.
79 Supplement to La Belle Assemblee, February 1811, 342.
toward “the new schools” of poetry and painting. The importance of painting and poetry was consistently pointed out in popular periodicals:

Painting is the art of representing to the eyes, by means of figures and colours, every object in nature that is discernible by the sight; and of sometimes expressing, according to the principles of physiognomy, and by the attitudes of the body, the various emotions of the mind […] Painting offers to our eyes every thing which is most valuable in the universe […] The man who clothes trivial or common ideas in verse, exercises the profession of twisting syllables into a certain measure. The poet who clothes in good verse ideas and sentiments, that are merely agreeable, professes an agreeable art. But he who, by, the magic of verse of ideas, of imagery, or of colours, adds sublimity to the sublime objects of nature, is a great poet and a great painter.  

The artists who were distinguished for living excellence in history painting were Benjamin West, Henry Fuseli, Robert Smirke, Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg, and James Northcote, according to La Belle Assemblee. West was hailed for The Queen of the Amazons led captive by Theseus. Reviewers believed modern artists expressed the living canvas, unlike the sepulchral picture rooms, where centuries of old masters predominated. The rise of the Romantic Painter was evident with Henry Fuseli, an artist who was both criticized and admired: “He is a man of great genius and extensive

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80 Ibid., July 1808, 7.
81 Ibid.
learning; but his invention is too copious to be accurate [...] He scorns all appeal to the
taste and sensibility of the spectator [...] he aims at the terrible sublime [...] Mr. Fuseli
has produced one picture of some importance, which he calls Hercules, to deliver
Theseus, assaults and wounds Pluto.” Like Byron, Fuseli belonged to diverse worlds.
He admired the traditions of the past but wanted to display his own individual creativity.

The same review criticized J.M.W. Turner’s recent works, specifically his two
paintings of Lowther and Retsworth Castle, as “melancholy examples of his negligence
or exhausture of fancy.” Those praised as sculptors who honored Britain with their work
were Joseph Nollekens, John Flaxman, and James Westmacott. But the fine arts appear to
retrogress in architecture: “the absurd rage for the Gothic seems to threaten destruction to
Greek purity and Italian elegance.” Once again, the Gothic / Greek binary shows the
duality of culture; two totally diverse artistic categories can exist side by side.

Byron’s early poems are expressions of sentimental love and friendship. “To
Mary: On Receiving Her Picture” is a fine example of the strongly pictorial poem. Sight
arouses affection for Mary, but it is the “sweet copy: that is “far more dear to me, /
Lifeless, unfeeling as thou art.” The relation between the actual Mary and the artistic
reproduction is the preference of the canvas over the real. Mary is “Unconscious that her
image there / Held every sense in fast control.” Though false, the image painted on the
canvas maintains power and sensuality. The poet genuflects to the painter and art.

The paintings of Thomas Gainsborough were popular, especially The Cottage
Door (1780). Gainsborough made the lives of simple cottagers appear to be a “rustic
idyll,” as Anne Bermingham explains the Gainsborough paintings. Sensibility, an

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82 Ibid. The reviewer for Ackermann’s disliked Fuseli’s Hercules, June 1810, 365.
83 Byron: Poetical Works, 13.
eighteenth-century concept, appealed to the senses, especially the heart, and “celebrated the simple beauty of nature and idealized the life of the countryside and the rural peasantry [...] Sensibility had as its central tenet the intersection of new models of vision and visual perception,” writes Bermingham.  

“The Dream” reproduces the atmosphere of a Gainsborough painting:

I saw two beings in the hues of youth  
Standing upon a hill, a gentle hill,  
Green and of mild declivity, the last  
As ‘twere the cape of a long ridge of such,  
Save that there was no sea to lave its base,  
But a most living landscape, and the wave  
Of woods and corn-fields, and the abodes of men  
Scatter’d at intervals, and wreathing smoke  
Arising from such rustic roofs… (27-35)

If Byron found visual inspiration in Gainsborough’s high art, he also discovered merit in the low art of caricature. Byron’s true forte was satire. An example is his “Epitaph for Joseph Blackett, Late Poet and Shoemaker,” written in 1811:

Stranger! Behold, interr’d together,  
The souls of learning and of leather […]  
Tread lightly - where the bard is laid  
He cannot mend the shoe he made;

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84 Bermingham, “Sensation & Sensibility,” program comments for an exhibit at the Huntington Library, co-organized with the Yale Center for British Art, Feb. 11 – May 14, 2006. The Eidophusikon was recreated by Robert Poulter; visitors were offered a fine recreation of the experiences that dazzled audiences centuries earlier.  
85 Byron: Poetical Works, 92.
Yet is happy in his hole,

With verse immortal as his sole …

The satire on a blacksmith who wrote poetry is devastating. The genre of the headstone admonition of *As I am, so shall ye be* creates the comic mental image of Blackett and his shoes together in a tomb. The homonyms *soul/sole* bring a laugh, just as the pun on Blackett’s name and moral status.

For character – he did not lack it;

And if he did, ‘twere a shame to ‘Black it.’ 86

The direct influence of visual culture is evident in the manner in which Byron reproduces *The Dance of Apollo and the Muses* by Julio Romano. The drawing appears in *The Historic Gallery of Portraits and Paintings*. The seven volumes were intended to instruct. While biographical information is important –

it is capable of receiving considerable aid and embellishment from sculpture, and painting. What history records, they exhibit; and if by the perusal of brilliant exploits, and the contemplation of magnanimous actions, the judgment be regulated, and the mind enlarged, the correct and skilful delineation of them, no less forcibly enchants the fancy, and amends the heart, the union, therefore, of history, painting, and sculpture, is so obvious… 87

*The Dance of Apollo and the Muses* shows Apollo crowned with laurel, dancing with the Muses, hand in hand [Fig. 54]. The painter displays “poetical genius, to represent the divinities who preside over the fine arts. This picture, like the other compositions of this

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86 Ibid., 61.
87 Advertisement; pagination in the seven volumes is sporadic.
artist, offers the most graceful attitudes, beautiful heads, life, expression, and correct
design.” 88 Byron wrote in English Bards and Scotch Reviewers:

- Blест is the man who dares approach the bower
- Where dwelt the muses at their natal hour
- Whose steps have press’d, whose eye has mark’d afar,
- The clime that nursed the sons of song and war (867-870) 89

Byron reproduced in verse what his eye beheld. The Historic Gallery of Portraits and
Paintings (1807) is extremely informative. The print technology of the time could not
reproduce the paintings; nevertheless, there is an attempt to capture the essence of what
appears on the canvas. The painters in the biographical sketches will later surface in
Canto XIII of Don Juan in Norman Abbey: Carlo Dolce, Titian, Salvator, Albano,
Vernet, Spagnoletto, Lorraine, Rembrandt, Caravaggio, and Teniers. Byron had
knowledge of the artists. He would later observe famous paintings in Italy. The entries in
The Historic Gallery provided insight. Antoine-Jean Gros is the subject of a biographical
entry. The artist’s oil painting Sappho et Leucates is reproduced in a drawing. The Greek
poet Sappho, embracing a lyre, is about to leap from the cliff at Leucates. Canto II of
Childe Harold reproduces the image in poetry. Harold sails past the mount and ponders
the sad scene:

- 'Twas on a Grecian autumn’s gentle eve
- Childe Harold hail’d’d Leucadia’s cape afar” (XL)

88 Volume IV, The Historic Gallery, seven volumes. There are 261 biographical sketches; 36 drawings of
sculptures; 178 drawings of paintings. The 1816 Sale Catalogue states that Volume V is missing. It is
tempting to believe that Byron retained this specific volume. Why? There is a drawing of “The Origin of
Sculpture,” a drawing based on Berthelmy’s painting. Byron later wrote in his journal that he preferred
sculpture over painting.
89 Byron: Poetical Works, 124.
Dark Sappho! could not verse immortal save
That breast imbued with such immortal fire?
Could she not live who life eternal gave?
If life eternal may await the lyre,
That only Heaven to which Earth’s children may aspire (XXXIX) ⁹⁰

Byron may have seen the cape from afar, but the mental image that likely remained in his thoughts was the engraving of Sappho leaping from the cliff with her lyre in hand. The entry on Salvator Rosa described the artist’s romantic canvases:

His historical pictures, therefore, are inferior to his landscapes and his battles. It is in those works in which he worked from exuberance of his own fancy, that he gave the greatest proof of extensive talents. His compositions, in general, have peculiar force and energy; his touch is vigorous, his design bold and natural, and throughout his pictures, we may perceive admirable correspondence of his ideas, execution, and effect. The painter studied nature with profound attention and judgment. Everything is of a piece, his rocks, trees, sky, even to his handling, have the same rude and wild character, which animates his figures, but he chose to represent her in her utmost grandeur and magnificence, and at times under an aspect truly terrific. His battles are sanguinary in the extreme, his sea pieces represent the most disastrous tempest, and his landscapes scenes of wildness

⁹⁰ Byron: Poetical Works, 200.
and horror. "He delights," says M. Fuseli, "in ideas of desolation, solitude and danger, impenetrable forests, rocky or storm-lashed shores in lonely dells leading to dens and caverns of banditti, alpine ridges, trees blasted by lightning or sapped by time, or stretching their extravagant arms athwart a murky sky, lowering or thunder clouds and suns shorn of their beams. His figures are wandering shepherds, forlorn travellers, wrecked mariners, banditti lurking for their prey, or dividing their spoils, but this general vein of sublimity or terror, forsook him in the pursuit of witcheries, apparitions, and specters: here he is only grotesque or capricious." 91

In Don Juan, Byron describes Rosa’s paintings as a “wilder group of savage Salvatore’s.”

But even in Childe Harold descriptions correspond to Salvator Rosa’s paintings:

Childe Harold pass’d o’er many a mount sublime.
Through lands scarce noticed in historic tales (Canto II, XLVI)
[..........................]
To greet Albania’s chief, whose dread command
Is lawless law; for with a bloody hand
He swayed a nation, turbulent and bold (XLVII)

Rosa’s mountains and banditti remained with Byron as an emblem for his poetic canvas. Salvator’s trees, described by Fuseli as “blasted by lightning or sapped by time” represent human life without harmony. In Manfred the hero stands on a mountain of the Jungfrau and contemplates suicide.

91 Volume II.
To be thus –

Grey-hair’d with anguish like these blasted pines,

Wrecks of a single winter, barkless, branchless,

A blighted trunk upon a cursed root,

Which but supplies a feeling to decay –

*The Historic Gallery of Portraits and Paintings* presents *Time Reveals Truth* by Rubens. The theme of the painting was the estrangement between Mary de Medici and her son, Louis XIII. Time is borne by truth from the desolate spot where she has been chained. The allegorical figures represent the malice of courtiers that started the dissension between mother and son. Byron’s “To A Youthful Friend” laments the time that has passed since “thou and I / Were firmest friends.” The former friend is fickle and shows “a trifling heart.” The disintegration is shown to be similar to the occurrences at court:

> Alas! whenever folly calls

> Where parasites and princes meet

> (For cherish’d first in royal halls,

> The welcome vices kindly greet), (53-56) ⁹²

Over time, the implication of improvement is desired: “In time forbear; amidst the throng

/ No more so base a thing be seen” (73-74).

*Venus, Vulcan & Cupids* is a drawing of Julio Romano’s erotic painting. A curtain has been pulled back. The viewer is allowed to peer into the intimate life of Vulcan and Venus [Fig. 55]. Vulcan embraces a bare-breasted Venus as six small Cupids hover at their feet. A little Cupid holds a bow. Vulcan balances six long arrows on his shoulder.

⁹² *Byron: Poetical Works*, 53.
Venus is removing another arrow from a quiver. The sexual symbolism is clear. The striking image reappears years later in Don Juan. The narrator imagines Juan, handsome in a military uniform, as a transformed Cupid:

His wings subdued to epaulettes; his quiver
Shrunk to a scabbard, with his arrows at
His side as a small sword, but sharp as ever;
His bow converted into a cock'd hat;
But still so like, that Psyche were more clever
Than some wives (who make blunders no less stupid),
If she had not mistaken him for Cupid (Canto IX, XLV) 93

Beside Venus, Vulcan & Cupids, Byron makes use of Gillray’s The Marriage of Cupid and Psyche, a print from 1797. Lord Derby is portrayed as a diminutive Cupid and crowned by another winged Cupid who wears a fool’s cap which Byron reshapes to “a cock’d hat” [Fig. 56]. Byron’s time in Albania, Greece, and Turkey allowed him to observe the remnants of the classical world. He became a cognoscenti of sorts. Byron hired Jacob Linckh to make drawings for him. However, as will be shown, it was the portrait that emotionally moved him with deep intensity; the print evoked laughter.

As an admirer of Napoleon, Byron owned an engraving of the Emperor in his coronation robes. The original painting was the work of Francois Gerard. Napoleon projects imperial power. He wears a velvet mantle and white ermine robe and stands before the throne holding a staff topped with an eagle; on a nearby stool is a scepter and orb. Byron had followed Napoleon’s last years with the hope that, if defeated, he would

93 Draper Hill’s Fashionable Contrasts, 168, discusses Gillray’s The Marriage of Cupid & Psyche (1797). Lord Derby, only three weeks after his wife’s death, had wed Miss Farren, an actress. The marriage was a scandal.
at least maintain rule in France, where the ideas of the Revolution could be reawakened.

Byron had purchased Raphael Morghen’s engraving and was impressed: “The Emperor becomes his robes as if he had been hatched in them.” 94 Byron’s “Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte” captures the awe of the Emperor’s fall:

’Tis done – but yesterday a King!
And arm’d with Kings to strive –
And now thou art a nameless thing:
So abject – yet alive!

The astonishment that Napoleon failed to fight to the end by use of “the sword, the scepter” is contrasted with the symbols of power in Gerard’s painting.

As if that foolish garment could wring
Remembrance from thy breast.
Where is that faded garment? where
The gewgaws thou wert fond to wear,
The star, the string, the crest?
Vain forward child of empire! Say,
Are all thy playthings snatched away? 95

John Clubbe regards Byron’s anger as Napoleon’s failure not to die on the battlefield nor as a suicide. After the abdication, Napoleon lost both title, grandeur, and status. The anger directed at Napoleon “indicates the depth of his attachment.” 96 Napoleon’s image was judged to be of such interest that in December 1814 the Adelphi Exhibition offered a

95 Byron: Poetical Works, 73.
96 Clubbe, “Between Emperor and Exile: Byron and Napoleon, 1814-1816.”
single painting, Robert Lefevre’s “work of transcendent merit in the line of Portrait Painting.” For the price of a shilling the curious could see an astounding portrait.

This portrait is the size of life, five feet six inches high, on a canvas of seven feet and a half by five feet; he is standing in his customary position, and in the uniform he constantly wore. Those who have seen him must acknowledge lively resemblance to original; and those who have not seen him will be fully impressed with a perfect idea of his person and character.

Every person’s mind must be agitated in contemplation of the scenes which are now threatening to embroil the whole civilized world again, by the ambitions and treasonable conduct of Bonaparte. The Exhibition of a true correct likeness of his person and manner must therefore become an interesting sight to every one, either young or old, as for twenty years past very individual has constantly been expressing their most anxious curiosity and desire to see him.  

Byron recognized that sophisticated painting could entrance the viewer. But Byron also found merit in the caricaturist’s low art, a form disdained by Martin Archer Shee. Byron saw caricaturists as allies, especially James Gillray. Gillray ridiculed what he regarded as false science. Byron uses Gillray’s prints as inspiration to bludgeon “pseudo-bards” and “new schools” of poetry in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers:*

> What varied wonders tempt us as they pass!  
> The cow-pox, tractors, galvanism, and gas.  
> In turns appear to make the vulgar stare,

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97 *La Belle Assemblee, Advertisements Section December 1814.*
Till the swoln bubble bursts – and all is air!

Now less new schools of Poetry arise,

Where dull pretenders grapple for the prize:

O’er taste while these pseudo-bards prevail (131-135)

Byron assumes that readers would have understand the reference to “cow-pox, tractors, galvanism, and gas.” Thus, the popularity of Gillray’s visual satire must have been widespread. *The Cow-Pock-or The Wonderful Effects of the New Inoculation* (June 12, 1802) shows people receiving the vaccine; the result is that small cows burst from faces, noses, mouths, and even a man’s posterior [Fig. 57]. *Scientific Researches! – New Discoveries in Pneumatics! or an Experimental Lecture on the Power of Air* (May 23, 1802), shows the result of a disastrous experiment [Fig. 58]. The audience at the Royal Institution watches a lecture-demonstration that goes awry. A man sucking a valve emits an explosion from his rear, to the surprise of the people behind him. Isaac and George Cruikshank satirized the nauseating effect of carbonic gas in street lighting [Fig. 59], so Byron could have had both prints in mind. Gillray’s *Metallic Tractors* (November 11, 1801) shows a physician inserting a needle or metallic tractor in a startled patient’s nose [Fig. 60]. Benjamin Douglas Perkins had published a book in January 1800 that promoted his invention; metallic tractors was a cure for numerous maladies: “The Cures of Gout, Rheumatism, Head-ache, Sprains, Bruises and all analogous diseases of Horses which are published, are innumerable.” Thus, Byron incorporates popular visual satire into his denunciation of the literary realm.

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98 *London Times*, April 19, 1801. Gillray was the greatest caricaturist of his day. His prints were up to date and convey immediacy in the images. He sold his prints in the shop of Hannah Humphrey. The available prints were placed in the windows for all to see [Fig. 61-62].

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A short satire, “The Curse of Minerva,” was written in Athens. The poem was an attack on Lord Elgin for removing the marbles. Byron had likely read Richard Payne Knight’s *Specimens of Ancient Sculpture*, published by the Dilettanti Society in 1809. Although a recognized scholar, Knight did not believe that the friezes and metopes were the work of Phidias but were only architectural studies. Byron echoes Knight. Byron was famous as a satirist, but *Childe Harold* would change the public perception. *Hints From Horace* was announced in magazines but Byron delayed its publication and stopped it altogether. But he later fired a poetic barrage at dancers:

A new dance has been introduced in the fashionable circles, under the title of the *Polish Waltz*. It is something in the *attitudinal style* of Lady Hamilton, but trenches a little too much upon the confines of decorum. The morality of the dance, however, depends upon the leader of the band, who varies his time, *ad libitum*, animating the performers, eight number, when they become languid by a grave step, and moderating their motion, by a slow measure when they become too lively. Byron denounced the “Voluptuous Waltz” in 1812, even though it had been around for a decade. Popular magazines were not as condemnatory and showed engravings of dancers [Fig. 63]. In “The Waltz: An Apostrophe Hymn” the focus is on immorality. The pseudonym he adopts is that of Horace Hornem; the *horns* implying

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100 Bell’s Weekly Messenger, April 12, 1801,118.
101 La Belle Assemblee, February 1817.
adultery. The erotic dance led the seducer to place a hand on a wife, then horns on a husband.

The fashion hails – from countesses to queens,
And maids and valets waltz behind the scenes (153-154)

[…………………………………………………] Say – would you make those beauties quite so cheap?

Hot from the hands promiscuously applied,
Round the slight waist, or down the glowing side,
Where were the rapture then to clasp the form?

From this lewd grasp and lawless contact warm? (230-237)

“The Blues” also seems motivated by spite rather than humor. Female intellectuals, known as blues, attended lectures or met to discuss literature [Fig. 64-65]. In the poem, Wordsworth is announced as the next lecturer. Byron derides Wordsworth for his poetic subjects: “Does he stick to his lakes, like the leeches he sings, / And their gatherers, as Homer sung warriors and kings” (55-56). Gillray had satirized women who read the horror tales of Matthew “Monk” Lewis. Byron returned to the bluestockings in Don Juan.

And hence arise the woes of sentiment,
Blue-devils, and blue-stockings, and romances

Reduced to practice, and perform’d like dances (Canto XIV, LXXIX)

103 The term bluestocking is traced to the women who frequented the parties of Elizabeth Vesey (1715-1791). Mrs. Vesey sought “to see everything and everybody” and was a popular hostess. According to The Dictionary of National Biography (1882), Volume 20, 290, she assembled women in “a blue room” in her London residence. Instead of playing cards, the ladies invited men of letters to discuss writing. Fanny Burney claimed the term originated when Benjamin Stillingfleet was invited to be a guest. He declined due to his lack of proper attire. Mrs. Vesey told him to come in his blue worsted (ordinary) stockings, and the nickname stuck; New Encyclopedia Britannica, Volume 2, 302.
CHAPTER 3

'THE VERY POMPES OF THE DIVELL'

Byron wrote of the London theatre in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*:

Men go not to be lectured, but amused

[.................................]

Plays make mankind no better, and no worse.

Then spare our stage, ye methodistic men (364, 369-370)

The Puritans in England always had a dislike of the playhouse. In 1633 William Prynne published *Histrio-Mastrix: The Players Scourge*. Prynne, a lawyer, cited numerous theological passages to make his point:

That popular Stage-playes (the very Pompes of the Divell

Which we renounce in Baptisme , if wee believe the Fathers)

Are sinfull, heathenish, lewde, ungodly Spectacles, and most pernicious Corruptions, condemned in all ages, as intolerable mischiefes to Churches, to Republickes, to the manners, mindes and soules of men. And that the Profession of Play-poets, of Stage-players, together with the penning, acting, and frequenting of Stage-playes, are unlawfull, infamous, and misheseeming
Christians

During the Regency the theatre was still criticized by moralists but Drury Lane, the Theatre Royal, and smaller theatres were frequented by enthusiastic audiences. Attacks were made by drama critics who disliked the popular productions that were successfully staged at the expense of the traditional plays. S. Tipper published an engraving, *The Monster Melodrama, 1807*, that mocked the diverse dramatic genres of the period [Fig. 66]. David Mayer describes the bizarre image:

The monster [is] a composite beast with the heads of Sheridan, Kemble, Grimaldi, and a Harlequin, a body-half-Harlequin, half-lion, and a scaly “Tale of Misery,” tramples the works of Congreve, Beaumont and Fletcher, Colman and Shakespeare, while nourishing such melodramas as *The Caravan, The Wood Demon, The Road to Ruin, The Hunter of the Alps*, and the spectacle *Sleeping Beauty.*

Byron was familiar with the range of productions offered in London. One of his earliest letters, at age seventeen, informed Augusta Leigh, his half-sister, that he had seen the current stage sensation, William Betty: “I have seen this young Roscius several times at the hazard of my life, from the affectionate squeezes of the surrounding crowd. I think him tolerable in some characters, but by no means equal to the ridiculous praises showered upon him by *John Bull.* Byron idolized the dramatists and performers. He had

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1 *The Theatrical Inquisitor*, February 1814, 73. Charles I enjoyed the private masques. He was incensed when Prynne attacked “emperors or persons of quality to dance upon a stage, or act a play.” The king and queen did both. Prynne was disbarred, had both ears cropped, fined 5,000 pounds, and imprisoned for life. In the Civil War that erupted Charles was blamed and beheaded. Prynne died peacefully in 1669.
2 Mayer, *Harlequin in His Element*, 12.
3 Marchand, *Byron’s Letters & Journals*, Volume 1, 67. The boy actor was so popular that the military had to be called to keep order, writes Leslie Marchand, 67.
a folding screen made in 1814; one side was covered with stage players, such as Edmund Kean and Sarah Siddons; the other side had images of pugilists.

The theater provided intellectual stimulation and innovative visual spectacle. The previous decades had brought significant change to the stage. Gainsborough's friend, Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg, was a distinguished artist but also a set designer at Drury Lane. His *Visitor to a Moonlit Churchyard* (1790) captures the sepulchral ruins of a Gothic churchyard replete with toppled tombs and exposed skulls [Fig. 24]. De Loutherbourg had invented the *Eidophusikon*, a spectacle that made its debut was on February 28, 1781. The production combined painting, sound effects, singing, harpsichord music, and unique visual displays such as colored lighting. Advertisements urged Londoners to come to “the Large House,” fronting Leicester-street, Leicester-Square to experience a wonder. *The Morning Herald, and Daily Advertiser* elicited curiosity:

*Eidophusikon*

*Or, various Imitations of Natural Phenomena,*

*Represented by Moving Pictures, Invented and Painted by Mr. de Loutherbourg, in a Manner entirely New.*

*The Performance divided into Five Scenes:*

*1st. Aurora, or the Effects of the Dawn, with a View of London from Greenwich Park.*

*2d. Noon, the Port of Tangier in Africa, with the distant View of the Rock Gibraltar and Europa Point.*

*3d. Sun-set, in View near Naples.*
4th. Moonlight, a View in the Mediterranean, the Rising of the Moon, contrasts with the Effects of Fire.

The conclusive scene, A Storm and Shipwreck

The following day, the newspaper’s correspondent praised the event. The audience had been comprised of the fashionable, “as well as literary characters [...] Mr. de Loutherbourg’s superior genius in the scenic line of his profession, has led him to invent in the above spectacle, several of the most beautiful representations of nature that were ever effected, by mechanism, and painting. – His different views are all formed by detached pieces [...] The wrathful sky that wound up the scene, the forked lightning pervading every part of it, together with the imitative peals of thunder, produced an effect, that astonished the imagination..." No longer did city dwellers have to travel to the remote countryside to enjoy Gilpin’s Picturesque; the sublime now came to the city. Subsequently, the finale of the Eidophusikon became the “Grand Scene from Paradise Lost” with Satan dramatically rising from Pandemonium.

French theatre was also developing dazzling visual spectacles. La Fantasmagorie terrified spectators in 1797 [Fig. 67]. Chris Brooks relates that the show opened in London in 1801 under the name of Phantasmagoria. Paul de Philipsthal brought audiences sublime “gothic sensation” produced by technology:

Using magic lanterns, which special effects that included projecting images on smoke, accompanied by music and noises off stage, the Phantasmagoria comprised a sequence of illusions in which pleasant

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4 The Morning Herald, and Daily Advertiser, March 1, 1781. De Loutherbourg was among the first to capture on canvas the rise of industry. His View of Coalbrookdale by Night in 1801 shows a kiln belching fire and smoke. Ilaria Cesari regards the painting as the artist’s rendering of the advance of industry “perceived as dangerous to the pristine state of nature; Romanticism, 23.
landsca pes were transformed into moonlit graveyards, spooks and
skeletal forms glimmered in the gloom, and disembodied heads floated
towards the audience. Onlookers gasped, screamed – and even more
gratifyingly – fainted.  

By the time Byron was a teenager, London was filled with unique galleries,
theatres, and exhibits. Galleries were able to lure a crowd with a single painting. New
portraits were advertised and made available for viewing by the public. Two prominent
portraits were promoted in 1803, those of the Princess of Wales and Henry Grattan, the
Irish parliamentary reformer. Exhibits offered a wide selection of paintings for purchase,
including “capital pictures of the modern School,” such as the works of Abraham Pether,
Julius Caesar Ibbetson, and Phillipe Jacques de Loutherbourg. 

John Constable, a young artist, wrote from London in May 1803 that “panorama
painting seems all the rage. There are four or five now.” The idea that bigger is better
was behind the Panorama in Leicester Square, the creation of Robert Barker. Large
canvases, some thirty feet long, gave the illusion that the viewer was truly in a distant city
or even a foreign city. Patrons were led through a darkened room and suddenly stepping
before the cleverly lit panorama were astonished. In April 1801, an advertisement
promoted a “View of Constantinople,” a new panorama about to open: “Mr. Barker went
purposely to make this drawing – through the influence of Lord Elgin, received an Order
from the Porte, and a Janissary to attend him when making his Drawings.” While
Robert Barker traveled to exotic cities such as Constantinople, Copenhagen, and Paris,

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5 Brooks, The Gothic Revival, 120.
6 The Times, May 31, 1803.
7 Leslie, Memoirs of the Life of John Constable, 17.
8 The Times, April 24, 1801.

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the panoramas were painted by his son, Henry Ashton Barker. The Lyceum offered a historic picture, *The Siege of Acre*, a battle scene from 1799, by Robert Ker Porter. The work showed the siege and defense of Acre, by sea and land, as well as portraits of the combatants.

London offered auctions of quality paintings and prints, such as the collection that once belonged to John Davenport, Esq., deceased; Christies advertised that it was “a capital Selection of the most perfect Cabinet Pictures in the several Schools, formed with great taste and liberality during his several journeys on the Continent; comprising the works of Giorgione, Schiavone, Paduanino, Domenichino, Carracci, Parmigiano, Poussin, Guido, Baroccio, S. Ferrato, Rubens, Rembrandt...” 9 Those who collected British art could bid for the drawings of the late Michael Angelo Rooker, explained Mr. Squibb, the auctioneer: “The valuable and extensive Collection of high-finished drawings, containing Views of the principal Rivers and Remains of Antiquity, in England and Wales; comprising the largest and most valuable assemblage of Topographical Works that has been offered to the public attention for many years, executed with great truth and accuracy...” 10

The Pantascopic Theatre promised a spectacle prepared “at a considerable expense [...] new and curious hydraulic experiments.” The first artists in the country would unite with men of science. In the tradition of Loutherbourg, the audience would be enthralled by “a great variety of Eidothaumata, among which will be introduced some surprising Optical Automata, which, to the eye, will seem real and palpable, though only visionary.” Pyrotechnics would be available but “without gunpowder and smoke. It is

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9 Ibid., January 7, 1801.
10 Ibid., April 25, 1801.
impossible to convey, by description, any idea of effects, which must be seen to be fully understood." \(^{11}\) The producers knew how to lure an audience. \(^{12}\)

The Picturesque, Panorama, and Pantoscopic changed the theatre, and even influenced the lowly Pantomime. Joseph Grimaldi established clown-centered harlequinades and, by his comic ingenuity, was responsible for the acclaim of the pantomime from 1806 to 1823. \(^{13}\) Grimaldi collaborated with Thomas J. Dibdin in ridiculing pomposity. David Mayer writes that Dibdin’s *Harlequin and Mother Goose; or, The Egg*, first staged in December 1806, changed the pantomime and set the mark for future productions [Fig. 68]. A reviewer damned *Harlequin Pedlar, or the Haunted Wells* because the production lacked two critical elements:

A Pantomime, as it appears to us, should have two leading qualities – its scenery should be of the nature of Panorama, and its tricks the farce of action. We cannot say of this Pantomime that it has any scene of this kind; there is no picturesque representation of any known place […] Good mechanical tricks, and real farcial action the natural awkwardness of a Clown, and the incidental humour of goods and chattels, are worth all the clouds, the roses, and gold and silver of Fairies. \(^{14}\)

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\(^{11}\) *The Times*, January 4, 1805.

\(^{12}\) In April 1816, a purely visual production was drawing crowds. “Miller’s Picturesque and Mechanical Exhibition” was a show of special effects that baffled audiences, including the reviewer of *The Theatrical Inquisitor*: “The marvelous neatness and ingenuity of the mechanism, which pleases us so much while we at the same time find it so difficult to comprehend, leaves it unequalled by that of any other exhibitory work within our recollection. We gaze on the bustle of the picture before us, until we almost fancy a principal of life to pervade the fairy scene. The rise of the sun is a master-piece of art. The slow growth of night, also, over the landscape covered with snow, diffuses the very soul of stillness among the hushed spectators,” 153.

\(^{13}\) Mayer, *Harlequin in His Element*, 3.

\(^{14}\) *La Belle Assemblee*, January 1810, 45.
The Licensing Act required that all theatre managers submit material for clearance.

David Mayer determined that the pantomime of this period relied on action and scenic effects and avoided dialogue except for opening rhymes. The presentations were usually a one-act drama, two hours long and divided into eighteen scenes. Despite the fact there was an official censor who read scripts, major theatres changed productions almost nightly. Bawdy material was common, as a reviewer for *The Theatrical Inquisitor* lamented in a condemnation of *Fair Game*: “The most characteristic feature of this piece was a shameless and inartificial indecency. Every possible occasion was seized for the introduction of innuendoes as broad as witless; and attempted double entendres on kissing, bushhunting, and chambermaids at once evinced the author’s stupidity and licentiousness.”

Despite the criticism leveled at the stage, Catherine Gordon Byron and her son were fervent playgoers. While her son was abroad, she wrote a letter informing him about near riots at the Theatre Royal:

There was another disturbance at Covent Garden Theatre when it first opened this season as bad as ever about the Private Boxes, but it ended by the managers or rather mismanagers being obliged to give up the point to the

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15 Mayer, *Harlequin in His Element*, 23.
16 *The Theatrical Inquisitor*, December 1813, 382. This publication could just as easily print its own bawdy material. In a humorous parody of art auctions, one lot offered a “statue of Priapus, an upright picture,” August 1813, 21. The publication had a strong dislike of Methodists who were anti-theatre: “The pious frenzy which drives such crowds to the Madhouse of Blackfriars, will appear still more strongly to be only a particular symptom of nervous melancholy [...] It is difficult to find a man or woman in this rank who does not either chew tobacco or take snuff, or swallow opium, or drink spirituous liquors; *nor is this so much the general characteristic of the lower orders of society, as the constant and peculiar accompaniment of Methodism*, April 1815, 276-77. Byron echoed the sentiment. “Then spare our stage, ye methodistic men,” wrote Byron in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. 

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The visual magic of the theatre would infuse Byron’s works.

**Don Juan, the Star of the Pantomime**

Byron enjoyed the excitement of London. As he told his prospective wife, *sensation* was the great object of life. London had everything a young rakehell needed, as he wrote to his friend John N.B. Pigot: “The Adventures of my life from 16 to 19 & the dissipation into which I have been thrown when in London, have given a *voluptuous* tint to my ideas…”  

The dissipation was likely connected to prostitution. The higher priced courtesans were found lounging in the theatre; actresses were also available for a fee. A year after Byron wrote to Pigot, he wrote to his friend John Cam Hobhouse about more escapades:

Altamont is a good deal with me, last night at the Opera

Masquerade, we supped with seven whores, a *Rawd* and

a *Ballet-master*, in Madame Catalani’s apartment behind

the Scenes, (of course Catalani was not there) I have some

thoughts of purchasing [James ] D’egville’s pupils, they would

fill a glorious Harem.  

The popularity of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* at the King’s Theatre made it a target of parody in 1817. The parody would eventually lead to *Don Juan*. Although Byron had crossed the channel in disgrace by then, he was motivated to write a poem about Don Juan, too. Byron was pleased that his ideological enemy, Robert Southey, was being

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19 Ibid., letter of February 27, 1808, Volume 1, 159.
humiliated over an early political poem. Robert Southey was being laughed at due to *Wat Tyler*, an early poem of 1794, whose hero is the leader of the rebellion in the reign of Richard II. Southey had tried to obtain an injunction to stop its publication, but Sir Samuel Romilly argued that the work did not merit protection since “a more dangerous, mischievous, and seditious publication had never issued from the press.” News of Southey’s humiliation reached Byron. If one of Byron’s friends sent him the May edition of *The Theatrical Inquisitor*, with the article about Southey’s legal trouble, Byron would have read that the managers of the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, “aware of the popularity of *Don Giovanni* at the King’s Theatre, this evening produced an afterpiece called *The Libertine*; it is a free translation of the Italian Opera. The character of *Don Juan* was supported by Mr. C. Kemble, that of Leporello by Mr. Liston [...] The piece has proved very attractive.”

*Don Juan: or, the Libertine Destroyed,* “a serio comic pantomime ballet” was presented at the Lyceum; it had been presented five years before and was based on Shadwell’s *Libertine* (1790). Byron possibly saw the earlier production that was described by Keats, the drama critic for *The Champion*, as “having been wire drawn for many years past at the neighboring theatres, made a pet of at Surrey, and fiddled away to hell at the Italian opera.” The next month, Thomas Dibdin staged *Don Juan; or, A Spectre on Horseback! a Comic, Heroic, Operatic, Tragic, Pantomimic, Burletta-Spectacular Extravaganza*. Dibden was identified as “the conductor of a *Vaudeville*

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20 *The Theatrical Inquisitor*, May 1817, 371.
21 Ibid., 389-390. *The Theatrical Inquisitor* was possibly sent to Byron at this time. *Manfred* was reviewed in August 1817.
establishment, or Theatre of Parody.” Dibdin’s version was performed at the Royal Circus and the Surrey Theatre. 24

The opening in Don Juan paraphrases Keats, the drama critic of The Champion.

Byron identifies Don Juan with the pantomime:

I want a hero: an uncommon want,

When every year and month sends forth a new one,

Till, after cloying the gazettes with cant,

The age discovers he is not the true one:

Of such as these I should not care to vaunt,

I’ll therefore take our ancient friend Don Juan -

We all have seen him, in the pantomime,

Sent to the devil ere his time 25

Byron appeals to the established visual tradition. Harlequin’s Vision, was the production staged at Drury Lane during the Christmas holidays of 1817. As previously stated, Byron was abroad and could not have seen it, though he may have seen an earlier version; however, the reviewer for La Belle Assemblee deemed the production worthy of coverage and provides the plot:

The Christmas holidays afforded as usual, to all the happy

children the feats of Harlequin and the Clown: a new Pantomime

at Drury-Lane was produced, entitled Harlequin’s Vision; or the

Feast of the Statue: it was gotten up under the direction of Mr.

Lethbridge, the machinist, and does credit to his skill. The first

24 The Theatrical Inquisitor, June 1817, 59.
Scene, which represents the Council Chamber of Pluto,
is peculiarly brilliant. It is composed of large arches in
the Saxon style, around each of which, as well as up the
wings, fire is in motion, and a view of the fiery lake of
the infernal regions appears in the rear. Pluto and Proserpine
are seated on a throne, with Alecto on the right, Megaera on
the left. Pluto summons the Furies, who place themselves on
each side of the stage, and sing a chorus. Mercury enters with
the Ghost of Don Juan's Father, and who pleads for his son
with Pluto: Pluto promises to forgive Don Juan, but Proserpine
declares her resolution to assert her empire, and to have Don Juan
for her slave; she employs Mercury as her agent, to excite him to
vice and augment his means of gratification. Don Juan is discovered,
after the close of the scene, asleep on a couch, with Laporello sleeping
at his feet. Mercury touches Don Juan with his caduceus, and the latter
falling on his knees, vows to love Leonora. In the second scene he kills her
father; and Elvira is persuaded by Venus to assume the garb of Columbine,
in order to save Juan from Proserpine. All Elvira's endeavours are,
however, ineffectual. Some novelties are introduced in this well known
theatric spectacle. Among others, Don Juan is taken in Charon's boat
across the river Styx, and instead of being flung into fire on the stage, he
is seized by two Furies who drag him to the dominions of Proserpine.
These are two Harlequins and two Columbines. 26

Why did Byron confer lowly pantomime status on Don Juan, rather than the artistically higher opera of Don Giovanni by Mozart (1787)? The pantomime was generally looked down on by the serious critics, such as the anonymous reviewer who wrote:

Such plays as Hamlet and Macbeth are but little calculated for the multitude; and besides, so small a portion of the house is accessible to the lower class, from the exceeding high prices of the places, that they rather seem to be tolerated, than to enter a house built expressly for their reception. If this is a fair statement, the introduction of pantomimes is a deviation from the intended plan, for they can only amuse a few children and the body of the illiterate. 27

Byron certainly was aware of the elite attitude respecting the pantomime's artistic inferiority, but he felt otherwise. Did the plot of Harlequin’s Vision inspire him to write his own version of the Don Juan legend? Unlikely. What provoked Byron was seeing himself called a libertine in print. In January 1817, the reviewer for The Theatrical Inquisitor regretted that the poet’s skill had degenerated with The Siege of Corinth and Parisina and, sadly, the new Prisoner of Chillon, and other Poems would fail to restore the laurel. Despite the overall dislike of the new volume, the poem “Darkness” is praised for the “wild, scriptural grandeur flung about this effort, and we would select it, with a

26 La Belle Assemblee, January 1818, 41.
27 The Theatrical Inquisitor, December 1814, 403.
When Harlequin Harper (December 1813, 373) was reviewed, the conclusion was reached that “these pantomimes have generally a familiar likeness [...] The best mechanical change was that of an enormous cat, by which the clown was swallowed, and soon after disgorged.”
glowing hand, from the whole mass of modern poetry, as a labour which genius may toil in vain to excel.” 28 But the “Stanzas to —” was singled out for “amorous ardor.” The poem was written to extol the loyalty of his sister Augusta. She was also the subject of whispers and condemnations. Rumors spread in the higher ranks that Byron and his half-sister were lovers. The reviewer has this in mind in the following passage;

We are no advocates however, for these tender epistles from married men of genius, unless they are written to their wives, or their washer-women, a distinction very often considered by such persons to be without a difference.

If Lord Byron is ambitious for a libertine character, he has done well to suppress the designation of that virtuous female to whom these Stanzas are addressed; for, without a reason to conceal her appellation, surely the name of his wife would have been prefixed to the verses, if to her they had been dedicated.

We never look upon depravity without lamentation.

Byron was indeed a libertine. He accepted the stinging rebuke. If the world saw him as Don Juan, the script would be his own; Byron would don the mask and play Don Juan for laughs. “The Italian is fittest for Burlesque and better becomes the mouth of Petrolin and Arloquin in their Farces,” wrote Thomas Rhymer. 29 Byron’s own life would merge with the legendary lover. Byron would have plausible deniability for any scenes that were too close to reality. Canto I is a canvas that contains references to Byron’s life and wife, “the Princess of Parallelograms,” as he called her. Donna Inez is described:

28 Ibid., January 1817, 47.
29 Rapin, Reflections on Aristotle’s Treatise of Poetry, 1674.
Her favorite science was the mathematical,
Her noblest virtue was her magnanimity;
Her wit (she sometimes tried at wit) was Attic all,
Her serious sayings darken'd to sublimity;
In short, in all things she was fairly what I call
A prodigy – (XII)

“Our ancient friend Don Juan” refers to the legend and likely the Commedia Dell’Arte. The buffo comedy of Pantalone, Arlecchino, Brighella, the Doctor, and the Lover had long made audiences laugh. The pantomime had scant dialogue but lots of sex. 

Arlequin Fait L’Amour a Francisquina, a French engraving, shows Arlequin touching a woman’s inner thigh [Fig. 69]. Thelma Niklaus reminds in Harlequin that on the Commedia’s stage images were strictly visual: “In a comedy based upon the Don Juan theme from which Mozart took his opera, Arlecchino toasted a woman in the presence of a Statue, upon which the Statue bowed to him. In his terror, Arlecchino turned a complete somersault with the glass of wine in his hand, without spilling a drop.” 30 The broad humor could often be crude, notes Niklaus; obscenities and indecencies were both verbal and visual: “Arlecchino’s stick, the Captain’s sword, and the dangling phallus worn by Pantalone played their shameless part, to the wholehearted delight of the audience. As always, sex and all bodily functions provided ready cause for mirth” [Fig. 70-71].

Pantomimes in 1806 were rarely totally silent, notes David Mayer; they included song, minor dialogue and dancing. By linking Don Juan with the buffo tradition, Byron tells the reader not to take his work too seriously, at least in the first two cantos. Moreover, Byron may have communicated a Regency sexual code, the idea that pantomime was

30 Niklaus, Harlequin, 56; “Arlechinno’s stick,” 56.
synonymous with “the Cyprian market” found in the debauched theater. *Town Talk; or Living Manners* blasted “Mr. Elliston’s School for Vice” in November 1811:

Pantomimic shows and minor representations are the fertile hot-beds of depravity, the well-stored warehouse for the wholesale supply of the Cyprian market. Amongst the first of these places of iniquitous resort, the Surrey Theatre may be fairly ranked – from both its contiguity to the nursery of prostitution, and the evident compact which exists between the door-keepers and those unfortunate beings who ply for hire in every part of the house. The indecencies which the eye of modesty is compelled to witness, even in the boxes, are as to demand the instant and vigorous interference of some competent authority […] It is here that thoughtless youth imbibes the first contagion of vice – it is here that he is taught to explode the blush of modesty – to laugh at morality – and call masculine virtue a crime. The dazzled eye is easily led astray […] there is a class of females which resort hither, who may be termed *equivocal elegantes*, and who infesting the front seats in the boxes, spread the snares for higher game than apprentices and shopmen, all those beings who delight in *semi-nudity* may properly come under the denomination, which includes a very considerable proportion of the fashionable audience […] Of the depravity which exists behind the scenes,
where none but the vicious mark the vicious, we might with truth
say more than we would venture to insert in our pages [...] It is
too painful to wade through the mire which here obstructs our way;
and we shall only recommend to Mr. Elliston to lock up the secrets
which are in the bosoms of the priests of the temple.

One of The Surrey Theater’s stars was Thomas Ellar, the famous Harlequin of the era, note Mander and Mitcheson. Although the Surrey Theatre may have been a hot-bed of immorality, the productions were pure entertainment. They were usually on a double or triple bill. *Harlequin and Mother Goose; or, the Golden Egg*, was staged by the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden and was said to have made 20,000 pounds for the theatre. The simple story is based on Mother Goose’s fear that the goose that lays the golden eggs will be stolen. Joseph Grimaldi portrayed Clown in the production. Prints of pantomime scenes were published, a phenomenon attributed to the fame of Grimaldi:

For the first time pantomime is completely depicted in
all its enchantment in the juvenile drama sheets, theatrical portraits, and tinsel pictures which began to make their appearance about the same time as Grimaldi rose to fame.

These sheets of Characters, Scenes and Tricks, often embellished with full scenes showing the pantomimes in

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31 *Town Talk*, November 23, 1811, 356-358. Elliston had started his rise to success at the Bath Theatre. George Colman obtained the patronage of the royal family for him. He was the manager of the Orpheus and Surrey theatres. *The Theatrical Inquisitor* gives an unflattering biography of Elliston: “Vanity and impatience of legitimate study and regular application, are the leading features of his character [...] the nightly ornament of clubs in Albemarle Street; a dabbler in every thing, a master of nothing,” April 1813, 131-135. The expose must have been effective. *The Theatrical Inquisitor* (June, 1813, 324) informed playgoers: “The Surrey Theatre is now conducted with a decorum and ability of which we formerly despaired.”


progress, give, as no words can, a perfect ‘Penny-Plain Tuppence Coloured’ picture of the period. 34

Nursery tales were often the story of the pantomimes, but they were hardly the traditional tale. Lumley Skeffington’s *Sleeping Beauty* in 1805 was a melodrama situated in England in the time of chivalry. Joseph Grimaldi appeared in *Cinderella; or, the Little Glass Slipper* in 1804, a combination of ballet and melodrama. But it was an odd Cinderella notes M. Willson Disher:

The story was strangely perverted. The triumph of the heroine was not due to her fairy god-mother but to Venus, in order to introduce a ballet of Loves and Graces in the island of Cytherea. 35

As a young man, Byron blasted the literary establishment and the theatrical realm as well. Though Byron enjoyed the London theatre, he adopted the conventional superior view of the satirist, the playgoer who defends the traditional works of Shakespeare and Otway. Byron satirized the literary establishment in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* and the Drama as well:

Now to the Drama turn – Oh! motley sight!

What precious scenes the wondering eyes invite:

Puns, and a Prince within a barrel pent,

And Dibdin’s nonsense yield complete content [...] (560-563)

Still Skeffington and Goose divide the prize

and sure great Skeffington must claim our praise,

For skirtless coats and skeletons of plays [...] (569)

While poor John Bull, bewildered with the scene,

Stares, wondering what the devil it can mean (604-605) 36

Byron’s reference to motley indicates his familiarity with The Monster Melodrama, the bizarre creature in the print. Byron’s jibe at Skeffington for “skirtless coats” cannot be understood by the modern reader unless it is known that Sir Lumley Skeffington was a dandy. Skeffington was caricatured by James Gillray in 1800 in a print titled “So Skiffy-Skipt.” The reference was to the playwright’s dress at the Queen’s birthday ball.

Skeffington was an eccentric figure, given to peculiar clothing and makeup [Fig. 72].

Criticizing the theater was nothing new. The religious and the elite had both made popular productions a target. Hogarth had attacked the pantomime and farces in A Just View of the British Stage in 1724 [Fig. 73]. As Hogarth explained, This Print Represents the Rehearsing of a new farce that will include ye two famous Entertainments Dr. Faustus & Harlequin Shepherd...” The bizarre scene is being staged in Newgate Prison with a violinist dangling from a hangman’s noose, a flying dragon and Ben Jonson’s ghost rising from a trap door and urinating. Three privies are onstage with toilet paper inscribed Hamlet, MacBeth, Julius Caesar and The Way of ye World. 37

Byron’s attack on motley and clowns cannot be taken too seriously [Fig. 74-75].

In 1808 Byron contributed to the traditional benefit performances held for Joseph Grimaldi. 38 His criticism of the pantomime was merely directed toward its popularity, while the traditional plays are forgotten, but he obviously enjoyed pantomimes as his

37 Shesgreen, Engravings by Hogarth, Plate 4.
38 Dickens, Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi, 214, 227.
support of Grimaldi shows. In later years, in Don Juan, Byron gave consistent remarks that the story was a only a comedy:

And the sad truth which hovers o’er my desk

Turns what was once romantic to burlesque (Canto IV, III)

Despite his early jibes against “Buffoonery’s mask” in English Bards and Scotch Reviewers, Byron made use of it in Don Juan. The Forty Thieves had been staged at Drury Lane in April 1806. The production was described as “one of the most splendid spectacles ever exhibited on the stage.” The lead characters were “Cassim Baba, the rich brother, and Ali Baba, the poor brother.” Byron likely saw the production. After Don Juan is taken prisoner and sold as a slave in Constantinople. Baba, a black eunuch, transforms Juan into a female. He escorts him through the vast palace until they stand before a bronze door guarded by two pigmies. There is no dialogue: “They spoke by signs – that is, not spoke at all.” The silence reaffirms the link to the pantomime.

And looking like two incubi, they glared

As Baba with his fingers made them fall

To heaving back the portal folds; it scared

Juan a moment, as this pair so small

With shrinking serpent optics on him stared (V, XC)

The visual grandeur is enhanced when they pass a treasure room where gems and gold glitter.

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39 According to A.B. England, Byron’s Don Juan, 84, Don Juan should be defined as a burlesque. Byron insists he is writing an epic but there is a discrepancy between style and subject: “Burlesque consists in the use of imitation of serious matter, made amusing by the creation of an incongruity between style and subject [...] a sense of the absurd.”

40 La Belle Assemblee, April 1806, 169.
Immorality in the theater was a topic in vogue due to the prostitutes who frequented the productions and the stage actresses were often involved in scandals. The most notorious example was Dorothea Jordan’s long relationship with William, Duke of Clarence, the third son of George III. They lived together for twenty years. Their ten children adopted the name of Fitz Clarence. According to Mike Ashley, William, a future king, deserted her because “she had become an alcoholic and was no longer attractive.” But William’s coldness offended public sentiment, as expressed by the sympathetic biographical sketch of Mrs. Jordan. The scandal surrounding her was a delicate matter, as La Belle Assemblee noted: “The character of a public person is to be delineated with a strict reference to its object [...] The subject of our present biography has shone as a mother, nay, almost as a wife.” Thus, the theater was an immoral place, from the highest performer to the lowest, from the legitimate houses to the pantomimes; it was the suitable roving ground of Don Juan. Byron startles the reader with “our ancient friend Don Juan...in the pantomime.” An amusing scene in Don Juan occurs when Baba transforms the hero into Juanna, a female, in order to meet Gulbeyaz in the harem:

> And now being femininely all array’d,
> With some small aid from scissors, paint, and tweezers,
> He look’d in almost all respects a maid,
> And Baba smilingly exclaim’d, ‘You see, sirs,
> A perfect transformation here display’d (Canto V, LXXX)

The sight of the handsome Don Juan turned into Juanna is amusing and likely derived from the Commedia Dell’Arte. Cross-dressing was common writes Thelma Niklaus:

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41 Ashley, *British Kings and Queens*, 686.
42 *La Belle Assemblee*, November 1814, 213.
Transvestism is another fecund source of humour,
and all the primary Masks appear from time to time
in women’s clothing. Indeed, in *Arlequin Lingere,*
Arlechino appears in comic hermaphroditic form,
dressed one half as man, the other as a woman, much
to the confusion of his customers. He often appeared
disguised as a widow, a goddess, a courtesan, a vestal
virgin, or a lady of fashion. 43

A French print shows *Arlequin Disguised As Diana,* a bizarre and amusing image [Fig. 76]. Byron had likely seen hilarious sight gags in the pantomimes. Moreover, actresses portrayed men, known as a “breeches role,” a role that was a part of the British theatrical tradition dating to the Restoration. 44

The likelihood exists that Byron actually conceived the idea of “Donny Johnny” before 1818. The initial inspiration could have been “Youthful Errors Amended, and the Reward of Conjugal Fidelity: A Tale from the Spanish.” Byron’s original idea may have been to write a novel about Don Juan, as his own “Spanish tale.” Byron started novels at different times but never completed anything. Even Louis Napoleon, the emperor’s brother, had written a historical novel, *Mary; or, the Hollander,* a love story based on the French invasion of Holland. Byron asked his friend Hodgson for a copy of the novel written by Lucien Buonaparte. Hodgson had translated the novel.

Byron was aware of women’s periodicals, as he remarks in a letter to his mother, and it is likely that he read “Youthful Errors Amended,” a story that appeared in *La Belle

43 Niklaus, *Harlequin,* 56.
44 Mayer, *Harlequin in His Element,* 63.
Assemblee. Don Ferdinand, a profligate young man, receives money from his father for his studies but squanders the funds on gambling, licentiousness, and other vices. His faults are concealed under the fair exterior of a gentleman. Don Ferdinand courts Donna Juanna, a woman who is aware of his excesses but looks on them as the follies of youth. Ferdinand, the typical Don Juan character, draws from her “the soft confession of her love. He knew but too well how to take advantage of the frankness and susceptibility of Juana’s disposition.” 45 Byron’s use of the name “Johnny Donny” in his letters links “Youthful Errors Amended” as a source of inspiration. After Drury Lane burned, and the new theatre was being built, the company occupied the Lyceum and performed pantomimes like Jack and Jill; or, The Clown’s Disasters. In May 1815, Byron was appointed to the Sub-Committee of Management of Drury Lane Theatre to read scripts. Byron learned a great deal from his first hand observations of theatre life. Byron later deflates the pompous hypocrites, masked as Don Juan.

Blowing up the Pic Nic’s (1803) and Dilettanti Theatricals (1802) are Gillray’s magnificent hand-coloured etchings that satirize the professional thespians for their disdain of the fashionable members of the Pic Nic Society, those who engage in amateur dramatics. In James Gillray and the Art of Caricature Richard Godfrey describes Dilettanti Theatricals:

A screen, decorated with heroes and heroines of the Society, divides the room. The principal figures prepare themselves and cavort before it. The large woman in the centre is Lady Buckinghamshire, her face covered with

45 La Belle Assemblee, November 1814, 213-216.
patches. Matching her bulk at the left is Lord Cholmondeley, grotesquely attired as Cupid. Sir Lumley Skeffington capers as Harlequin.\textsuperscript{46}

Richard Sheridan, masked and dressed in a multi-colored Harlequin outfit, is described as “Harlequin Quixotte attacking the Puppets” [Fig. 77]. Sheridan whirs a feather and the players of the Pic Nic Theatre, preparing to perform \textit{Tom Thumb}, topple. This was the spirit Byron wanted in \textit{Don Juan}. The poem will present the unexpected, just like the pantomime, a little bit of everything. \textit{Don Juan} will be a dazzling spectacle that will stun the audience and make them laugh.

When the curtain is drawn in Canto I, the narrator assures the audience \textit{Don Juan} will be an epic in accordance with Aristotle’s rules but “I’ve got new mythological machinery, / And very handsome supernatural scenery” (Canto I, CCI). The theatrical impresario has spoken. The eclectic scenes will be his unique presentation. For the critics who don’t like it, “Thou shalt not write, in short, but what I choose; / This is true criticism, and you may kiss –“ (Canto I, CCVI).

A variation of the pantomime is set forth in Canto IV when Juan is aboard ship, destined to be sold as a slave; Juan meets fellow prisoners, a company of Italians, opera singers and dancers, with most “hardly fit for as fair” (LXXXV). The troupe may have been based on Byron’s personal acquaintance with Madame Catalani’s company, and recollection of the ballet master-pimp. The singers live by their voices, which the reader cannot hear, but their description is wonderful. The \textit{buffo} or clown of the troupe tells their sad story, “in a few words,” for clowns seldom speak. The clown still exudes

\textsuperscript{46} Godfrey, \textit{James Gillray}, 205. Like the Pic Nic players, Byron also owned a wood panel screen. His screen, sold at auction, had portraits of thespians and pugilists on it.

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cheerfulness — "at least his face." The prima-donna has a few good notes left, but she is more of a courtesan than singer:

> With no great voice, is pleasing to behold;
> Last carnival she made a great deal of strife,
> By carrying off Count Cesare Cicogna
> From an old Roman princess at Bologna (LXXXIII)

The musico has a voice of "the third sex," the castrato. The bass brays like an ass. As for the dancers, the Pelegrini is a "laughing slut." As for the baritone, "Having no heart to show, he shows his teeth" (LXXXIX). Byron depicts them all as fools, fit for a low stage farce. Byron later employs the image of the pantomime performers when Juan arrives in England. However, Juan is no buffoon:

> And then he danced, - all foreigners excel
> The serious Angles in the eloquence
> Of pantomime, - he danced, I say, right well,
> With emphasis, and also with good sense –
> A thing in footing indispensable;
> He danced without theatrical pretence,
> Not like a ballet-master in the van
> Of his drill’d nymphs, but like a gentleman (XXXVIII)

Byron leaps from London to Rome for his imagery. He summons Aurora, the painting of Guido Reni. Juan floats ahead of the fleet chariot: "A flying Hour before Aurora, / In Guido’s famous fresco, which alone / Is worth a tour to Rome" (Canto XIV, XL).

The fusion of low pantomime and high art displays Byron at his best.
“The Vision of Judgment” is Byron’s most theatrical and pictorial work. The satire originated with Byron’s detestation of Robert Southey. After George III died, the poet laureate wrote “A Vision of Judgment,” a poem that praises the king and follows him into heaven. Southey’s preface includes references to “the Satanic school,” intended as a direct attack on Byron. Byron responds with his own version of the king’s demise. Byron adopts the pseudonym *Quevedo Redivivus*. The satire is one of Byron’s best and shows elements of an amusing play. Byron recalls how the London stage could indeed create a vision. The story opens with St. Peter lazily sitting by the celestial gate with rusty keys since wholesale slaughter is no longer occurring on earth, unlike “the Gallic era eighty-eight.” After the start of the French Revolution the bodies began piling up. The humor can’t be missed: “The angels were singing out of tune, / And hoarse with having little else to do.” The effect is certainly comic. George III, a protector of tyrants has died. His funeral is a “sepulchral melodrama.” St. Peter perks up when he hears “wondrous noise he had not heard of late - / A rushing sound of wind, and steam and flame.” But St. Peter quips, “There’s another star gone out, I think.” A cherub with glowing wings confirms that George III is dead. St. Peter and the angel recall the previous king who had arrived, carrying his severed head, because he “could not keep a crown.” But when Louis XVI claimed to be a martyr, St. Peter, a true martyr, angrily knocked the head from king’s hands. George III has his head “as doth the puppet – by its wire.” The image conveys the lowly puppet theatre. Theatrical effects are evident when the archangel Michael arrives: “The gate flew / Asunder, and the flashing of its hinges / Flung over space an universal hue / Of many-colour’d flame.” Unexpectedly, Satan makes an entrance to claim his subject, a king who “warr’d with freedom and the free […] The foe
to Catholic participation.” St. Peter says he will be damned rather than open the gates for George III. In a scene that is directly lifted from the Eidophusikon’s “grand Scene from Paradise Lost,” Satan dazzles everyone:

Then Satan turn’d and waved his swarthy hand,
Which stirr’d with its electric qualities
Clouds farther off than we can understand,
Although we find him sometimes in our skies;
Infernal thunder shook both sea and land
In all the planets, and hell’s batteries
Let off the artillery, which Milton mentions

As one of Satan’s most sublime inventions (LII) 47

The introduction of the testimony of John Wilkes and Junius against the king shifts the poem to the political realm. Byron assumes that the reader is sophisticated and has seen Hogarth’s engraving of Wilkes and his curious leer. Furthermore, Byron assumes the reader has also seen the triple face of Junius by T. Bonnor[Fig. 78]. In the poem Junius’s face keeps changing: “The man was a phantasmagoria in / Him self – he was so volatile and thin.” Byron draws on the special effects of The Phantasmagoria, the stage show that frightened audiences: “Presto! His face changed, and he was another” (LXXVIII). The magician’s magic word – presto – the immortal command for a stage trick is used. The stage theatrics continue: “now many rays / Were flashing around him; and now a thick steam hid him from sight” (LXXIX). Byron conjures the poet laureate. Southey suddenly appears, brought to heaven where he recites his poetry. “The angels stopp’d

47 Byron: Poetical Works, 156.
their ears and plied their pinions; / The devils ran howling” (CII). In the confusion George III slips into heaven.

The years of fame led Byron to a deeper study of paintings, prints, and sculpture. In London, at Samuel Rogers’ residence, Byron met Richard Payne Knight, one of the most respected Greek scholars of his generation. Knight, a wealthy heir and MP, was a member of the Society of Dilettanti. In 1777 Knight went to Sicily to study Greek architecture and statuary and published his discoveries in *Expedition in Sicily*. In 1786 he published *A Discourse on the Worship of Priapus*, a scandalous work, based on his observations of the survival of pagan phallic cults in a Catholic festival in southern Italy.

Knight’s most popular success was *An Analytical Inquiry Into the Principles of Taste* (1808). Knight was concerned with identifying “real and permanent principles of beauty.” Knight wrote that ideas of beauty were arbitrary: “All male animals think the females of their own species the most beautiful productions of Nature […] The sable Africans view with pity and contempt the marked deformity of the Europeans.” Knight followed David Hume’s assertion that beauty exists in the mind of the beholder. He ridicules “an eminent author, who makes terror to be a principal of the sublime.” Knight terms Burke’s aesthetics *absurd, strange and unphilosophical*. With bitter humor, he reduces Burke’s concept of sublime smells to “a sublime stink.” The classical scholar knew that Longinus did not consider terror as part of the sublime. Knight returns to the original definition of the sublime, provided by Longinus; the effect of the sublime is to

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49 Stumpf, *Expedition Into Sicily*, 10. Stumpf writes that Knight saw himself as “the country’s foremost connoisseur.”
50 Knight, *Principles of Taste*, 13. Sculpture and poetry are discussed on pages 109-110, 241; Knight’s concept of the *pittoresco* is explained on page 151.
lift up the soul; to exalt it into ecstasy not terrorize it. As for painting and sculpture, Knight writes that both are limited to exterior form; consequently, they have limited influence on the human passions when compared to poetry. Nevertheless, all the arts provide morality by “softening mankind [...] turning the mind from violent and sanguinary, to mild and peaceful pursuits.”

Knight believed that Grecian sculpture established a high standard of beauty, though it could not bring sensual pleasure to the eye “for such pleasure can only arise from colour [...] Sculpture and poetry require order and regularity.” Knight concludes that painting in modern Europe “has never approached the state of abstract perfection, which we admire in the sculpture of ancient Greece.” Knight discussed the Picturesque. The subject was still an aesthetic force in 1808. Knight informed readers the term came from the pittoresco – “after the manner of painters.” According to Knight, the pittoresco was invented by Giorgione and perfected by Titian. The Italian artists did not make their lines more distinct and tints separate but they blended them together with airy lightness. The tints, light and shadow merged harmoniously and became “grateful to the eye.” Byron kept Knight’s thoughts in mind; they surfaced a decade later in Canto VI of Don Juan. Gulbeyaz, the sultan’s bride, is madly in love with Juan, but he remembers Haidee, his beloved. Gulbeyaz is devastated by being rejected. Her proud head hangs down in defeat. The narrator is at a loss to depict her:

Would that I were a painter! To be grouping
All that a poet drags into detail!
Oh that my words were colours! But their tints
May serve perhaps as outlines or slight hints (CIX)
The inability to describe Gulbeyaz's emotional distress, the ashen cheek, pain and
convulsion, recalls the painter's expertise with colors and tints. The painter can create
something "grateful to the eye." Byron admits defeat.

Byron agreed with Knight's dislike of Rubens and the artist's "fondness for
painting fat and flabby women." Once on the Continent, Byron observed Rubens'
paintings and jotted his dislike in a letter to Augusta Leigh: "I think Rubens a very great
dauber, and prefer Vandyke a hundred times over (but then I know nothing about the
matter). Rubens' women have all red gowns and red shoulders - to say nothing of necks,
of which they are more liberal than charming, it may be very fine, and I suppose it may
be Art, for 'tis not Nature." 52

Knight's aesthetic insight veers into the male psyche. Why do artists represent
women in poems and paintings? Knight explores the sentiment of love. He traces
"pictures of perfection" to the age of puberty, when animal desire commences. Those
with warm and vivid imaginations are always in love "from the age of puberty to that of
decrepitude; so that their whole lives may be said to be passed in a perpetual renovation
of hope." Disappointment is common to these men, for female charms seldom reach
visionary perfection. Literary figures are especially susceptible to the unattainable:

And though we may read, in poems and romances, of chaste
or unsuccessful love continuing during long periods of years,
and only ending with the lives of the parties, it may be reasonably
be presumed that such love, if it ever existed at all [...] was rather
a metaphysical delusion of the understanding, than an energetic

51 Ibid., 184. Knight's "sentiment of love" can be found on pages 188-89.
52 Marchand, Byron's Letters & Journals, Volume V, 73-74.
affection of the soul. Such appears to have been the love of Petrarch,

Cowley, Waller, and other such lovers in verse. 53

Petrarch’s unrequited and obsessive love for Laura was the target of Byron’s pen: “Even
Petrarch’s self, if judged with due severity, / Is the Platonic pimp of all posterity” (Canto
V, 1). In April 1817, while in Venice, Byron viewed a posthumous portrait of Petrarch
and Laura – “very hideous both.”

Knight was impressed by Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, “the work of the greatest
vigour both of conception and expression that has appeared since Milton.” 54 Byron had
condemned Lord Elgin for removing the Parthenon marbles. Elgin was called “a patron
of larceny” in the Notes to Childe Harold and further condemned in “The Curse of
Minerva” as a plunderer like Alaric, a barbarian: “Some retribution still might Pallas
claim, / When Venus half avenged Minerva’s shame” (121-122). 55 Knight was not
impressed by the Elgin Marbles but believed the nation should purchase them at a fair
market price because “they would have been all broken up by the Turks, or carried away
piece-meal. I think therefore that the Government ought to make him a remuneration
beyond the amount of my estimate” 56 [Fig. 79].

Knight criticized Hogarth’s “ideas of taste”; specifically, the belief that beauty
was inherent in objects, isolated as “a graceful serpentine curve.” Knight agreed with
David Hume that beauty existed in the mind of the beholder. Knight owned landscapes
by Claude Lorrain and was a patron of the artist Richard Westall who later painted
Byron’s portrait. Byron was impressed with Knight and reflects his ideas. Knight’s The

53 Knight, Principles of Taste, 189.
54 Ballantyne, Architecture, Landscape, and Liberty, 52.
55 Byron: Poetical Works, 142. Byron alludes to the disfigurement of Elgin’s nose, thought to be related to
venereal disease.
56 Ballantyne, Architecture, Landscape, and Liberty, 57. Hogarth’s serpentine curve, 79.
Progress of Civil Society (1796) expresses the idea that "Perhaps at Tomuctoo the fairest nymph of St. James [...] might seem a disgusting mass of deformity; and who shall decide which party is right, or which is wrong?" Knight's idea of cultural beauty is repeated by Byron in Canto XII of Don Juan:

But if I had been at Timbuctoo, there

No doubt I should be told that black is fair (LXX)

It is. I will not swear that black is white;

But I suspect in fact that white is black,

And the whole matter rests upon eyesight.

As a blind man, the best judge (LXXI) 58

Knight provided a strong foundation for the nobility and gentry to understand art. Byron participated in the pictorial culture of the high social order.

On Saturday, May 8, 1813, John Constable was present for the opening of an exhibition in honor of the late Sir Joshua Reynolds. Constable, a rising artist, was gaining acclaim as a talented landscape painter. Constable wrote an account of the event to his future wife, Maria Bicknell:

On the arrival of the Prince Regent, the Marquis of Stafford and the governors of the Institution hastened to conduct him upstairs. His manner was agreeable, and I saw him shake hands with many of the company. Dinner was announced at seven, the Marquis of Stafford (the president) in the chair, behind which, on a considerable elevation, was placed a statue of Sir Joshua Reynolds, by Flaxman.

57 Ibid., 159.
58 Byron: Poetical Works, 807.
The Earl of Aberdeen made an excellent speech; he said that
‘although the style of Sir Joshua Reynolds might differ in appearance
from the style of those specimens of art which are considered the
nearest to perfection in the ancient Greek sculpture, and the productions
of the great schools of Italy; yet his works were to be ranked with them,
their aim being essentially the same – the attainment of nature with
simplicity and truth.’ The Regent left the table about ten, and returned
to the Gallery, which was now filled with ladies. Among them I saw
Mrs. Siddons, whose picture is there as the ‘Tragic Muse.’ Lord Byron
was pointed out to me; his poetry is of the most melancholy kind, but he
has great ability.’ 59

The Times hailed the event as a tribute to an exalted native talent and gave a list of
the Reynolds paintings loaned by the nobility and gentry:

The Ugolino – the Dido – the Cupid and Psyche – the Infant
Hercules – the cardinal Virtues, (from which the window at New
College, Oxford, is in part painted,) – the two pieces of the
Fortune-tellers – the young Bacchus – the Puck – the Portrait of
Mrs. Siddons, as the Tragic Muse – of Robinetta – of the Sleeping
Girl – the late Lord Abercorn, (one of his early works,) – Tomkins,
the writing master, (his last portrait,) – the late Lord Camden –
A Groupe of the first Marquis of Lansdowne, Colonel Barre, and the
first Lord Ashburton – Lawrence Sterne – Mr. Windham – Dr. Johnson –
Admirals Keppel, Boscawen, and Rodney – the late Mr. Whitbread, and

59 Leslie, Memoirs of the Life of John Constable, 41.
the present one, when a child — the late Mrs. Sheridan, a peculiarly, interesting picture — the Prince of Wales — the Duke of York — the Earl of Moira — Count de Nippe — the late Lord Dunmore — Mr. Baretti — Sir G. and Lady Beaumont — Lord and Lady G. Cavendish — Dr. Burney — Mrs. Baldwin, the Greek lady — Bishop Newton — the Duke of Orleans, (one of his best whole lengths from Carlton house) — the late Marchioness of Tavistock — the present Lord Crew, when a boy, as a young Henry VIII. — the late Lady Boringdon — Oliver Goldsmith — and the celebrated picture of Garrick between the Tragic and Comic Muses. 60

**The Male Gaze**

When the public was allowed to view the exhibit, Jane Austen attended and enjoyed the experience. *Pride and Prejudice*, recently completed, was in her thoughts. She eagerly scanned the portraits for faces that brought to mind her literary characters but wrote to her sister Cassandra in a whimsical fashion: “I can only imagine that Mr. D. prizes any Picture of her too much to like it should be exposed to the public eye. I can imagine he would have had that sort of feeling — that mixture of Love, pride, and delicacy.” 61

Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* has Mr. Darcy, a wealthy and aloof member of the gentry, attracted to Elizabeth Bennet. In the novel Darcy stares at Elizabeth with his male gaze. When Elizabeth visits Pemberley, Darcy’s estate, she is shown his portrait by Mrs. Reynolds, the housekeeper, an allusion to Sir Joshua Reynolds. Elizabeth begins to fall in love with Darcy in the family portrait gallery:

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60 *The Times*, May 10, 1813.
She beheld a striking resemblance of Mr. Darcy, with such a smile over the face, as she remembered to have sometimes seen, when he looked at her. She stood several minutes before the picture in earnest contemplation, and returned to it again before they quitted the gallery […] There was certainly at this moment, in Elizabeth’s mind, a more gentle sensation towards the original, than she had ever felt in the height of their acquaintance. The commendation bestowed on him by Mrs. Reynolds was of no trifling nature.  

The portrait of Mr. Darcy on canvas, though only an inanimate illusion, softens Elizabeth’s dislike for him, a rich person she regards as arrogant and emotionally distant. Elizabeth gazes at the painting and hears Mrs. Reynolds praise him. In essence, Elizabeth receives a lecture, not unlike Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*; whereas, Catherine learned how to decipher the Picturesque, Elizabeth will hear and discover how to properly read a portrait. The happiness of many people was in Darcy’s guardianship, she is told by Mrs. Reynolds. Elizabeth remembers the painting’s *warmth* “and softened its impropriety of expression.” Elizabeth is emotionally moved by the power of the direct male gaze. The painting’s *warmth*, as she now comprehends, conveys sexual passion. Thus, the visual and the auditory have changed her attitude toward Mr. Darcy.

Byron told Lady Melbourne that he attended the Reynolds Exhibit expressly to view “Lady Melbourne and Child,” a painting of her as a young woman. But he may have had other motives as well. Byron was a great admirer of Sarah Siddons. Reynolds painted her in the role of Melpomene, the muse of tragedy. Also on display was Reynolds’

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Ugolino, from the pitiful scene found in canto 33 of Dante’s *Inferno*. Ugolino was accused of betraying Pisa and locked in a tower with his sons to die of famine. He gnaws on the head of his enemy, Archbishop Ruggieri. Reynolds’s presents Ugolino as forlorn. He appears hopeless as his two sons look to him for help; two more sons recognize their fate. Later, in 1819, Byron’s “The Prophecy of Dante” made use of Ugolino. In the poem, Rome has been overrun by the new tyrants, just as the Goths, Germans, Franks, and Huns ruined Rome in the past. Beasts like the bird, wolf, and vulture are more humane than the nations that prey like human savages and explore “All paths of torture, and insatiate yet, / With Ugolino hunger prowl for more” (II, 89-90). The doomed father is treated poignantly in “The Prophecy of Dante.” But in Canto II of *Don Juan* poor Ugolino is made part of a satire, when starving sailors dine on the dead:

And if Pedrillo’s fate should shocking be,

Remember Ugolino condescends

To eat the head of his arch-enemy

The moment after he politely ends

His tale; if foes be food in hell, at sea

’Tis surely fair to dine upon our friends,

When shipwreck’s short allowance grows too scanty,

Without being much more horrible than Dante (LXXXIII)  

Byron’s wicked sense of humor was part of his personality. Those who were eager to meet him expected to find a melancholy Childe Harold but met a jovial and witty fellow instead.

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63 *Byron: Poetical Works*, 374.  
64 Ibid., 670.
In December 1814, Martin Archer Shee published *Commemorations of Reynolds*. Byron owned a copy. In a review of the book, Shee was called “a correct and pleasing poet” by *La Belle Assemblee*. Shee described Mrs. Siddons in the character of *The Tragic Muse*:

> In awful pomp – impassioned – yet serene,
> Sublime in sorrow sits the Tragic Queen
> A solemn air – self-sustained repose,
> The Muse in meditative sadness shows
> The tinge of grief her touching aspect wears […]

Shee discusses Cardinal Beaufort’s picture, painted on his deathbed. The painting, once hung in the Shakespeare Gallery, is equaled by Shee’s lines, notes the reviewer – “He meets the King of Terrors with dismay.”

Several months after the Reynolds exhibit, Byron spoke with Henry Fuseli about an engraving. In March 1814, Byron had been reading Sismondi’s history and wanted to investigate the life of Bracciaferro, Count of Ravenna. He wrote in his journal:

> I am mightily taken with Braccio di Monte, Giovanni Galeazzo and Eccolino. But the last is not Bracciaferro (of the same name), Count of Ravenna, whose history I want to trace. There is a fine engraving in Lavater, from a picture by Fuseli, of that Ezzelin, over the body of Meduna, punished by him for a hitch in her constancy during his absence in the Crusades. He was right – but I want to know the story.”

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As previously stated, Byron owned Lavater’s *Essays on Physiognomy* (1789). According to D.H. Weinglass, Lavater hired Johann Heinrich Lips and Johann Rudolf Schellenberg to engrave the illustrations. Lips engraved “The Head of Ugolino” and Lavater commented: “Melancholy without consolation and hope verged on madness.” In 1779 Lips made an engraving of Fuseli’s *Count Ezzelin Musing over the Body of Meduna, Slain by him for Infidelity*, a painting in the Soane Museum, London.

Byron had been impressed by a second engraving made by John Raphael Smith in 1781. Fuseli subsequently told Byron the origin of the Ezzelin painting. The engraving, based on the painting, shows Ezzelin sitting above the outstretched body of his wife, her breasts exposed. On the floor, a rosary is beside her. He peers straight ahead, his face dejected. Nearby are a Bible, crucifix, and hourglass. Though slain for infidelity, the objects seem to show she repented. Byron asked Fuseli about the engraving and the story. “I have been looking in vain, Mr. Fuseli, for some months in the poets and historians of Italy, for the subject of your picture of Ezzelin; pray where is it to be found?”

“Only in my brain, my Lord [...] for I invented it.”

Fuseli was an admirer of Byron’s poems and purchased the works as soon as they were published. Byron recorded in his journal that the Princess of Wales had asked Fuseli to paint any scene he wished from *The Corsair*. Whether Fuseli obliged or ever created a painting is unknown. But two Fuseli drawings exist that show Conrad carrying Gulnare from the harem [62a].

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68 Burton and Murdoch, *Byron*, 130.
Byron later wrote that what he preferred in a painting was the countenance. The focus could be derived from Lavater’s physiognomy research. In December 1814 a version of Lavater’s famous work was announced in London: *A Series of Heads: Delineating the Various Passions of the Soul, and the Anatomy of the Human Face*. Over six months, twenty-four prints by H. Singleton and George Townley Stubbs would be sold. The plates were intended to show human passion – Attention, Compassion, Admiration, Maternal Solicitude, Pleasure, Pain, Anxiety, Contempt, Sympathy, Veneration, Adoration, Rapture, Meditation, Tranquility, Laughter, Grief, Terror, &c. The work was for the young students of drawing and art. 69

After Byron went to the Continent, he visited art galleries and his knowledge of painting became more extensive [Fig. 80-83]. While in Milan he wrote to John Murray:

The Brera gallery of paintings has some fine pictures; - but nothing of a collection - of painting I know nothing - but I like the Guercino – a picture of Abraham putting away Hagar - & Ishmael – which seems to me natural & goodly. 70

Several months later, on April 14, 1817, Byron wrote again to Murray of a gallery visit: “I also went over to the Manfrini Palace, famous for its pictures. Amongst them, there is a portrait of Ariosto by Titian, surpassing all my anticipation of the power of painting or human expression: it is the poetry of portrait and the portrait of poetry.”

Byron was entranced by two portraits, one of Catharine Cornaro, the queen of Cyprus, and the other a painting by Giorgione.

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69 *La Belle Assemblee*, Advertising Sheet, December 1, 1814.
70 Marchand, *Byron’s Letters & Journals*, Volume 5, 116. Giovanni Francesco Barbieri was nicknamed Guercino due to his squint, notes Prothero, Volume 3, 377. According to Rona Goffen, the Ariosto painting is now known as *The Gentleman in Blue*. 

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There was also one of some learned lady, centuries old, whose name I forget, but whose features must always be remembered. I never saw greater beauty, or sweetness, or wisdom: - it is the kind of face to go mad for, because it cannot walk out of its frame. There is also a famous dead Christ and live apostles, for which Buonaparte offered in vain five thousand Louis; and of which, though it is a capo d'opera of Titian, as I am no connoisseur, I say little, and thought less, except of one figure in it […] You must recollect, however, that I know nothing of painting; and that I detest it, unless it reminds me of something I have seen, or think it possible to see, for which I spit upon and abhor and the Saints and subjects of one half the impostures I see in the churches and palaces; and when in Flanders, I never was so disgusted in my life as with Rubens and his eternal wives and infernal glare of colours, as they appeared to me; and in Spain I did not think much of Murillo and Velasquez. Depend upon it, of all the arts, it is the most artificial and unnatural…"

At the Uffizi Galley in Florence Byron admired Titian’s voluptuous Venus. The visits to the galleries in Italy were used for Beppo:

They’ve pretty faces yet, those same Venetians
[..........................]

And like so many Venuses of Titian’s
(The best’s at Florence – see it, if ye will),
They look when leaning over the balcony,
Or stepp’d from out a picture by Giorgione (XI)
Whose tints are truth and beauty at their best;
And when you to Manfrini’s palace go,
The picture (howsoever fine the rest)
Is loveliest to my mind of all the show;
It may perhaps be also to your zest,
And that’s the cause I rhyme upon it so:
‘Tis but a portrait of his son and wife,
And self; but such a woman! love in life! (XII)

Byron was impressed by the realistic faces in the canvas, not the perfect faces of
“ideal love.” His journal contained other ideas about painting. He liked Guido Reni’s
Massacre of the Innocents because one of the figures reminded him of Lady Ponsonby: “I
know nothing of pictures myself, and care almost as little; but to me there are none like
the Venetian – above all, Giorgione. I remember well his Judgment of Solomon in the
Mariscalchi in Bologna. The real mother is beautiful, exquisitely beautiful.” 71
On April 26, 1817, Byron wrote to John Murray that he was “drunk with beauty” after
visits to art galleries in Florence and Rome:

What struck me most were, the Mistress of Raphael, a
portrait; the Mistress of Titian, a portrait; a Venus of Titian
in the Medici gallery — the Venus; Canova’s Venus also in
the other gallery: Titian’s mistress is also in the other gallery
(that is, in the Pitti Palace gallery); the Parcae of Michael

71 Ibid.
Angelo, a picture; and the Antinous – the Alexander – the
one or two not very decent groupes in marble; the Genius of
Death, a sleeping figure

The aesthetic comments convey the distinct impression that Byron did not examine a painting for its total compositional elements. The painting’s importance is in the individual faces. The emotional experience of the subject’s gaze is what possesses him. The experience of viewing a canvas, documenting impressions, and later creating poetry is clear. Byron’s intellectual process is inquisitive and honest. There is a parallel between the canvas and the literary text; the result is poetic artistry. The admiration for the paintings in Italy is a far cry from claims that he knows nothing of painting. Canto IV of Child Harold expressed similar ideas of beauty:

We gaze and turn away, and know not where,
Dazzled and drunk with beauty, till the heart
Reels with its fullness; there – forever there –
Chain’d to the chariot of triumphal Art (L)

**Sculpture – the Highest Form of Art**

Byron’s time in Italy would lead him to regard sculpture as the highest form of art: “A great artist will make a block of stone as sublime as a mountain.” Byron wrote in his journal that Canova’s bust of Helen was unsurpassed.

Byron had read about sculpture in The Historic Gallery of Portraits and Paintings. But in the sale catalogue of 1816, volume 5 was said to be missing.

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Speculation is offered as to the possibility that Byron retained this specific volume.

Volume 5 has a drawing of Berthelmy’s painting, *The Origin of Sculpture* [Fig. 84].

Prometheus is credited as being the first sculptor:

> After having formed a statue of man, Prometheus with the assistance of Minerva, ascended to Olympus, and stole the sacred Fire. He returned upon earth, animated his work, and thus incurred the anger of Jupiter, who was irritated at seeing rights usurped [...] it appears, that Prometheus was the first sculptor of celebrity [...] Time begins his course, the Fates draw the web of human life – and one of them, Atropos, prepares the fatal scissors, destined to terminate it. Above Time, Poetry is prepared to celebrate the glory of the event; and, to consecrate him by their works, painting and Sculpture appear closely united. The artist is entitled to much praise, for the happy disposition of the figures, who uphold themselves admirably in the air, without the slightest appearance of falling.

Richard Payne Knight had asserted that sculpture was preferable to painting in *Principles of Taste*. For Knight, the Laocoon displayed “energy and fortitude of mind.” Virgil’s *Aeneid* recounts how Laocoon had warned the Trojans to beware of the wooden horse left before the city gates by the Greeks. Poseidon, supporting the Greeks, sent serpents to kill the priest and his two sons. Volume 2 of *The Historic Gallery of Portraits and Paintings* cites Winckelman’s view of the Laocoon: “The spectacle of nature, plunged into the deepest affliction, under the image of a man, who exerts against its attack, all the powers

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74 Knight, *Principles of Taste*, 342.
of his soul.” “The Prophecy of Dante” is a vision of the drawing Byron had seen over a decade earlier:

What is poesy but to create
From overfeeling good or ill: and aim
At an external life beyond our fate,
And be the new Prometheus of new men,
Bestowing fire from heaven, and then too late,
Finding the pleasure given repaid with pain,
And vultures to the heart of the bestower (Canto 4, 11-17)

Byron proclaims the superiority of sculpture but praises painting:

The kindled marble’s bust may wear
More poesy upon its speaking brow
Than aught less than the Homeric page may bear;
One noble stroke with a whole life may glow,
Or deify the canvas till it shine
With beauty so surpassing all below
That they who kneel to idols so divine
Break no commandment, for high heaven is there
Transfused, transfigurated: and the line
Of poesy, which peoples but the air
With thought and beings of our thought reflected,
Can do no more: then let the artist share
The palm
[...............................................................
(Canto 4, 24-36)

Ye shall be taught by Ruin to revive
The Grecian forms at least from their decay (Canto 4, 44-45)

Byron visited Rome and studied the celebrated sculptures that appear in Canto 4 of

*Childe Harold* [Fig. 85-88].

Or, turning to the Vatican, go see
Laocoon’s torture dignifying pain –
A father’s love and mortal’s agony
With an immortal’s patience blending:

- Vain

(CLX) 76

The statue of Apollo is praised:

Or view the Lord of the unerring bow,
The God of life, and poesy, and light –
The sun in human limbs array’d, and brow
All radiant from his triumph in the flight;
The shaft hath just been shot – the arrow bright (CLXI)

And Venus:

There, too, the Goddess loves in stone, and fills
The air around with beauty; we inhale
The ambrosial aspect, which, beheld, instills
Part of its immortality; the veil

75 *Byron: Poetical Works*, 370.
76 William Blake was hired to engrave *Laocoon* for *Cyclopedia; or Universal Dictionary of the Arts, Science, and Literature* (London 1819). Jonah Siegel reproduces the engraving. It appeared in "Sculpture" along with engravings of *Venus de Medici* and *Apollo Belvedere* about the very time Byron had studied the statues in Rome," Siegel, 82.
Of heaven is half undrawn; within the pale

We stand (XLIX)

And the famous Gladiator:

I see before me the Gladiator lie:

He leans upon his hand – his manly brow

Consents to death, but conquers agony,

And his droop’d head sinks gradually low (CXL)

Although literary historians designate Byron a Romantic, Byron did not place nature higher than art, as he made clear in his published criticism of W.L. Bowles in the Pope controversy:

It appears to me that St. Peter’s, the Coliseum, the Pantheon, the Palatine, the Apollo, the Laocoon, the Venus di Medicis, the Hercules, the dying Gladiator, the Moses of Michael Agnolo, and all the higher works of Canova (I have already spoken of those of antient Greece, still extant in that country, of transplanted to England, ) are as poetical as Mont Blanc or Mount Aetna, perhaps still more so, as they are direct manifestations of mind, and presuppose poetry in their very conception.

Byron will use the marble statues he has seen in Greece and Rome in his art. When Juan and Haidee fall in love they embrace and “they form a group that’s quite antique, / Half naked, loving, natural, and Greek” (Canto II, CXCIV). Juan’s encounter with Haidee

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seems to indicate true love in Nature. They inhabit an Arcadian realm until the return of her father.  

Haidee, enraged by her father Lambro’s attempt to assassinate Juan, will die from anger. The inner passion will explode in fury. Byron unites the visual; he combines the beauty of the marble statues of *Venus Pudica* and the anguish of *Laocoon* and *The Dying Gladiator*. Byron employs the trio of famous classical statues to fashion an image of Haidee:

The ruling passion, such as marble shows
When exquisitely chisel’d, still lay there,
But fix’d as marble’s unchanged aspect throws
O’er the fair Venus, but for ever fair;
O’er Laocoon’s all eternal throes,
And ever-dying Gladiator’s air,
Their energy like life forms all their fame,
Yet looks not life, for they are still the same (Canto IV, LXI)

The poet has cleverly used sculpture to capture Haidee’s death.

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78 In *Lord Byron: The Critical Heritage*, editor Andrew Rutherford points out Coleridge’s interesting comment about the natural world of Juan and Haidee and the celebration when Lambro returns: “The festal abandonment puts one in mind of Nicholas Poussin’s pictures,” 265.
CHAPTER 4

THE VACANT GALLERY ADORNED

But now I’m going to be immoral; now

I mean to show things as they really are (Canto XIII, XL)

The long road to Norman Abbey was not meant to be an end but, sadly, Byron’s premature death ended Don Juan. The poem is rich in humor. The visual images in Canto I return to Gillray for laughs. The images are reminiscent of the prints that Byron used to burst the swoln bubble of modern wonders in English Bards and Scotch Reviewers: the “cow-pox, tractors, galvanism, and gas.” Once again, Byron reminds readers that they live in “the age of oddities let loose” (CXXVII). While some discoveries are genuine, others are fraudulent, put forth by charlatans, such as new noses and the guillotine. ¹

The print culture England is kept in mind when Juan is sent to Cadiz as punishment for his moral failure. When the ship founders at sea without wind, Juan’s spaniel becomes a meal. Juan is given “one of the fore-paws” (LXXI). Cannibalism ensues with the starving dining on Pedrillo, Juan’s “most reverend tutor.” The gruesome image is similar to Gillray’s prints. After the execution of Louis XVI in 1793, Gillray produced Petit souper a la Parisienne; or - A Family of Sans-Culotts refreshing after the fatigues of the day. The print showed a family eating the eye, heart and limbs of the murdered, including a baby that is being drained of blood. Before the French Revolution, Gillray had created

¹“One makes new noses” refers to the metal-tractors that were inserted in the face and nose to remedy illnesses. Byron has Gillray’s print in mind.
Monstrous Craws in 1787, a print of George III, Queen Charlotte and the Prince of Wales eating from a bowl inscribed John Bull's Blood. Byron once again recalls Dante and possibly the engravings of Lavater and Fuseli, when the traitor Ugolino is incarcerated and condemned to die of famine with his sons: “Remember Ugolino condescends / To eat the head of his arch-enemy.”

Byron’s distinct interest in the printed image of Ugolino lends credence to the visual as a reference. In Canto X, Byron cleverly presents the image of an apple, an object that represents Adam’s failure but also Isaac Newton’s symbol of gravitation and a symbol of science. The apple becomes “A thing to counterbalance human woes” (II). Likewise, the steam engine can bring unemployment to many but also conduct passengers to the moon.

Byron spices the poem with ribald, erotic, and bawdy images. Byron’s dedication to Robert Southey, deleted by John Murray, shocks the knowing reader with its reference to “quite a-dry-Bob,” signifying an ejaculation without omission, a comment on Southey’s sterile poetry. The “Italian Musico Cazzani” implies cazzo or penis in Italian, just as Count Corniani signifies cuckold. Don Juan’s life changes when Don Alfonso stumbles over a pair of masculine shoes, an image that calls to mind Gillray’s Fashionable Contrasts; or- the Duchess’s Little Foot Yeielding to the Magnitude of the Duke’s Foot.”

The most striking ribaldry is Donna Julia’s fall from grace: “And whispering ‘I will ne’er consent’ – consented” (CXVII). The virtuous wife collapses. Juan and Julia engage in an adulterous romance [Fig. 89]. When her husband searches his wife’s apartment, he fails to find Juan. The guilty lover escapes, at least momentarily: “Young
Juan slipp’d, half-smothered, from the bed” (Canto I, CLXV). The image brings to mind Rowlandson’s bawdy prints.

Byron reproduces Rowlandson’s image of Death. The visual depiction is no longer the medieval horror of the King of Terrors nor is it fright of the churchyard found in Blair’s poetry. Byron adapts The Dance of Death, published in 1815. Ronald Paulson points out that many of the sketches simply indicate natural decay, such as Death painting an elderly husband. The wife, behind a screen, smiles at a young man. The portrait on the canvas shows the old man with horns. He is already a cuckold. Such is life. Another drawing shows an elderly man sitting by the fireside. Skeletal Death puffs a pipe beside him [Fig. 90]. He is not a destroyer but a companion. The wife weaves at a loom and gazes at a young man outside. Byron introduces Death in Canto IX, in the midst of war. The military assault of Ismael left few survivors.

And thus Death laughs, - it is sad merriment,

But still it is so; and with such example

Why should not Life be equally content

With his superior, in a smile to trample

Upon the nothings which are daily spent

Like bubbles on an ocean… (XIII)

Though far from England, Byron allows his mythic hero to enter his native country and settle old scores in Canto XII. Byron is atop Pegasus. He rides extremely high: “We have just lit on a ‘heaven-kissing-hill,’ / So lofty that I feel my brain turn around” (LXXXV). Byron will ridicule England.
In Byron’s view, England defeated Napoleon and freedom as well: “the once adored / False friend, who held out freedom to mankind, / And now would chain them, to the very mind” (LXVII). Byron will mount Pegasus and observe his nation from a position of literary authority: “My Muse by exhortation means to mend / All people, at all times, and in most places, / Which puts my Pegasus to these grave places” (XXXIX).

Few would remember the insult hurled at Byron years earlier by Town Talk. When the periodical had published a print entitled The Genius of the Times. Byron sits astride a barrel as he is carried toward Mount Parnassus. The image does not treat him as harshly as other poets, especially those destined to Lethe. But the text is bitter: “I cannot refrain from laughing at his lordship’s conceit to journeying to Parnassus; for as well might a Grub-street garret be expect to find money in his pocket by gazing at the Bank of England, as his lordship should be a poet by visiting the mount.” Byron returns.

**Illumination**

In Canto XI Don Juan arrives in London. The narrator praises the “line of lights” when compared to “the Continent’s illumination.” But France is not yet “a lamp-lighting nation.” Byron’s comparison makes use of the transformation of London to gas lights for “London’s so well lit.” But the physical comparison only serves to contrast with the intellectual brightness. After all, the French proclaimed *The Age of Reason*, but something went terribly wrong. Byron brilliantly makes use of Gillray’s *The Zenith of French Glory – the Pinnacle of Liberty. Religion, Justice, Loyalty, & all the Bugbears of Unenlightened Minds, Farewell*, a 1793 print that shows the execution of Louis XVI. A bishop and two monks dangle from lampposts. A sans-culotte sits atop the lamppost. He
plays a violin with his naked foot on the head of the lynched bishop. Byron informs the reader:

The French were not yet a lamp-lighting nation,
And when they grew so – on their newfound lantern,
Instead of wicks, they made a wicked man turn, (XXVI)
A row of gentlemen along the streets
Suspended, may illuminate mankind,
As also bonfires made of country seats
But the old way is best for the purblind (XXVII)

Juan arrives “in decent London.” Around his hotel are “several score / Of those pedestrian Paphians” (XXX), the street walkers well documented in prints by Robert Newton and others. The imagery shifts to painting. Juan’s reputation and adventures have both preceded him. “Romantic heads are pretty painters” (XXXIII) and Juan charms both wives and virgins. Byron’s use of colors imitates the painter’s brush. The canvas captures the false faces of the married and the unwed beauties alike:

...wedded dames
Bloom’d also in less transitory hues;
For both commodities dwell by the Thames,
The painting and the painted; youth, ceruse,
Against his heart preferr’d their usual claims (XLVIII)

Byron aboard Pegasus is both moralist and jokester. Once in London, he will reveal the true world “of highest caste”: (Canto XIII, LXXXIII). The characters are given ludicrous names, just as Christopher Anstey had done in The New Bath Guide. Miss Scratchit and
Lady Bumfidget are reborn as Lady Fitz-Frisky, Miss Maevia Mannish, the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke, and Countess Crabby. Miss O’ Tabby is a nod to Tabitha “Tabby” Runt, the maid in *The New Bath Guide*.

*Don Juan* was astounding in its satire. The poem dazzled, entertained, and infuriated. Many readers believed Byron showed *too much*. A century earlier, Rene Rapin explained that a satirist could err:

> The principal end of Satyr, is to instruct the People
> By discrediting Vice. It may therefore be of great
> Advantage in a State, when taught to keep within its
> Bounds [...] Satyr that takes off the mask, and reprehends
> Vice too openly, is not very delicate; but though it can be
> More difficult to praise, than to blame, because it is easier
> To discover in People what may be turn’d into ridiculousness,
> Than to understand their merit

But Byron had his own righteous certainty. “Art is *not* inferior to nature for poetical purposes,” asserted Byron. *Don Juan* is certainly an *artistic* work.

Despite the trepidation of Byron’s London friends, like John Cam Hobhouse, Shelley was highly impressed and regarded the poem as truly unique: “Astonishingly fine. It sets him not above but far above all the poets of the day; every word has the stamp of immortality.” Byron wrote to his publisher that he had no specific plan only materials.

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2 Rapin, *Reflections*, 137.
Can the reader observe a coherent story? Or does the reader simply acknowledge Byron’s stream of consciousness technique? Philip W. Martin states that writing a commentary on *Don Juan* is a risky business:

The critic, sensing that he is in the presence of a masterpiece, often finds himself perplexed as to how he may provide a suitably substantial discussion. Seeing that the poetry needs no explication as such, he projects into it themes and concepts that do. There is a real difficulty here, for *Don Juan* certainly upsets habitual critical practices.

*Don Juan* offers contradictory reasons for its own existence, notes Martin:

From its very beginning the reader is aware of the claim Byron makes upon the poem’s voice as his own, a voice that not only announces a languid indifference to the epic task at hand, but also carefully reminds the reader of its social and educational qualifications.

The poem resembles “the hydra of melodrama,” the monster that was satirized in print. Perhaps this is what makes it interesting. Each canto offers something new and different, even though the main character, Don Juan, is still present. Jerome J. McGann points out that Canto 15 offers Byron’s own perspective:

I perch upon an humbler promontory,

Amidst life’s infinite variety:

With no great care for what is nicknamed glory,

But speculating as I cast mine eye

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5 Martin, *Byron: A Poet Before His Public*, 173.
6 Ibid., 186.
On what may suit or may not suit my story

And never straining hard to versify,

I rattle on exactly as I’d talk

With anybody in a ride or walk (XIX)

Thus, Byron’s lack of unity is unique: “Byron makes a great virtue of not comprehending the world in a unified, integrative, or closed system.”^7 As Byron asserted, I cast mine eye. Whatever he observes becomes material for poetry. The argument could be made that Byron took his own advice that was offered in Hints From Horace:

If you would please the public, deign to hear

What soothes the many-headed monster’s ear:

If your heart triumph when the hands of all

Applaud in thunder at the curtain’s fall,

Deserve those plaudits – study nature’s page

And sketch the striking traits of every age (213-218)

The final canto of Don Juan takes place in Norman Abbey, the estate that was modeled on Newstead Abbey. Byron’s masterpiece draws on paintings, drawings, caricatures, and the theatre to enliven the narrative. But before the final lines are reached, where Juan arrives at Norman Abbey, the cantos provide a fascinating journey.

Lavater’s Physiognomy

Byron knew how to adapt theories of painting to construct characters in accordance with high art. His fascination with physiognomy led him explore art theories

^7 McGann, Lord Byron’s Don Juan, 30.
about the portrait, such as the informative “Illustrations of the Graphic Art.” The reader is informed:

Every countenance, they say, has a characteristic trait
which constitutes its physiognomy [...] The moral character
ought also to be found in a portrait; this character consists
not only in the momentary expression of the features, but,
above all things, in the air and manner of the figure and in
the particular attitude, for a lively and active person ought
not to have a tranquil air, nor a phlegmatic man a lively
movement or expression. The moral character is also painted
in the eyes.

Byron masterfully adapts the theory to depict his female characters. In Canto I Donna Julia is “married, charming chaste, and twenty-three” (LIX). But the narrator can observe passion in her face. She will fall just as Eve.

Her eye (I’m very fond of handsome eyes)
Was large and dark, suppressing half its fire
Until she spoke, then through its soft disguise
Flash’d an expression more of pride than ire,
And love than either (LX)

Though Julia struggles to subdue her smoldering passion, the fire within is visible in her expression. Byron has sketched a portrait that draws from physiognomy. The dark eye is the feature that discloses her personality. Her light touch on Juan’s hand is more powerful than the wand of the enchantress Armida who seduced Rinaldo. Perhaps Byron recalled

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8 *La Belle Assemblee*, December 1811, 316.
the print he had viewed at Lady Jersey’s when he compares Donna Julia to “Armida’s fairy art” (Canto I, LXXI). After the lovers engage in adultery, the narrator recalls the sweetness of “first and passionate love.” This is a sin that is compared to Adam’s fall. Byron’s thoughts return to the drawing of The Origin of Sculpture by Berthelmy. The lovers have stolen the flame of love, just as Prometheus did.

The tree of knowledge has been pluck’d – all’s known –
And life yields nothing further to recall
Worthy of this ambrosial sin, so shown
No doubt in fable, as the unforgiven
Fire which Prometheus filch’d for us from heaven (CXXVII)

Haidee, like Donna Julia, is also sketched with a perfect portrait based on her facial expression: “… eyes were / Were black as death, their lashes the same hue.” Haidee’s glances are like a coiled snake who can suddenly shoot its poison. The fiery temper is subdued but will ultimately lead to fierce anger and the bursting of a vein and death.

Gulbeyaz, the sultana who has bought Juan, is introduced with an air of voluptuousness in Canto V. She is a seductive painting:

The lady rising up with such an air
As Venus rose with from the wave, on them
Bent like an antelope a Paphian pair
Of eyes, which put out each surrounding gem (XCVI)

However, with Dudu, Byron allows the reader to observe an indolent countenance. Byron combines painting and sculpture to bring Dudu to life. In Don Juan
she is described as "A kind of sleepy Venus" (Canto VI, XLII). Dudu resides in a harem.

She is lovely, sensual, and indolent:

Dudu’s form / Look’d more adapted to be put to bed,
Being somewhat large, and languishing, and lazy,
Yet of a beauty that would drive you crazy (XLI)

[..........................]

Her Attic forehead, and her Phidian nose;
Few angles were there in her form, ‘tis true (XLII)

[..........................]

She was not violently lively, but
Stole on your spirit like a May-Day breaking;
Her eyes were not too sparkling, yet, half-shut,
They put beholders in a tender taking;
She look’d (this simile’s not quite new) just cut
From marble, like Pygmalion’s statue waking,
The mortal and marble still at strife,
And timidly expanding into life (XLIII)

Dudu is charming but she would not make a good subject for a painting. Why?

Dudu, as has been said, was a sweet creature,
Not very dashing, but extremely winning,
With the most regulated charms of feature,
Which painters cannot catch like faces sinning
Against proportion – the wild strokes of nature (LII)
In essence, Dudu’s loveliness is flawless. She lacks a single physiognomic trait that a painter could use to characterize her. Consequently, she is more like a perfect statue. The brilliance of Byron’s poetic artistry is evident by an analysis of the subtle aesthetic description of Dudu’s portrait. *Attic* and *Phidian* bring to mind ancient Greece where Phidias sculpted masterpieces. Byron reinforces Dudu’s sensual image with a reference to Ovid, thereby spanning the ancient world from Greece to Rome and, ultimately, to Turkey. The “regulated charms of feature” is a Renaissance dictum that corresponds to Leonardo da Vinci’s theory that “beauty is the harmony of the parts.” Byron compares Dudu to “a soft landscape of mild earth, / Where all was harmony,” though she lacks passions “which some call the ‘sublime’” (LIII). Thus, the aesthetic link arrives in England, to Gilpin’s *landscape* as opposed to Burke’s *sublime*. The sculpture imagery continues within the sleepers:

A fourth as marble, statue-like and still,

Lay in a breathless, hush’d, and stony sleep;

White, cold, and pure; as looks a frozen rill,

Or the snow minaret on an Alpine steep,

Or Lot’s wife done in salt, - or what you will;

My similes are gathered in a heap,

So pick and choose – perhaps you’ll be content

With a carved lady on a monument (LVXIII)

Although Byron regards sculpture as the highest form of art, he could employ imagery that compares the high social order to cold stone. In Canto XIII, “the Brahmins of the *ton*” who visit Norman Abbey are portrayed in a negative manner:
...polished, smooth, and cold

As Phidian forms cut out of marble Attic.

There now are no Squire Westerns as of old;

And our Sophias are not so emphatic,

But fair as then, or fairer to behold.

We have no accomplished blackguards like Tom Jones,

But gentlemen in stays, as stiff as stones (CXI).

Byron places fictional blackguards before the cold aristocrats. Previously, he had seen beauty and goodness in marble forms, especially in his description of Dudu. She has an Attic forehead and Phidian nose. Dudu looks as if she had just been cut from marble. Byron knew of his contradictions, as he points out in Canto XV: “If people contradict themselves, can I / Help contradicting them, and everybody, / Even my veracious self” (LXXXVII).

In Canto XIV Juan’s attractiveness makes him a favorite. He becomes a “full-grown Cupid” (XLII). The image of an adult as Cupid imitates Gillray’s engraving of the Prince Regent as Cupid. The Duchess of Fitz-Fulke and Lord Augustus Fitz-Plantagenet resemble Lady Oxford and Sir Francis Burdett. Byron became Lady Oxford’s lover.

She was a fine somewhat full-blown blonde,

Desirable, distinguish’d, celebrated

For several winters in the grand, grand monde

I’d rather not say what might be related

Of her exploits, for this were ticklish ground (XLII)
Although Byron merely teases, Lady Oxford was known publicly for her adulterous liaisons. Byron purposely writes that Lady Fitz-Fulke’s hair is blonde to mask her true identity. Lady Oxford’s portrait reveals that her hair was dark. The old lover is miffed by her new beau: “This noble personage began to look / A little black upon this new flirtation” (XLIII). And what about the duke? “Theirs was that best of unions, past all doubt, / Which never meets, and therefore can’t fall out” (XLVI). The duke suffers from gout, says Lady Fitz-Fulke. The duke is ill. Lady Fitz-Fulke enjoys masculine companionship. Her mind, “If she had any, was upon her face” (Canto XVI, XLIX).

The description of Norman Abbey in Canto XIII is meticulous. There are details that match Newstead — “A glorious remnant of the Gothic pile” (LIX). The once-empty galleries that met Byron as a young boy are now filled with paintings. Family portraits adorn the halls, galleries, and chambers. There are portraits of barons, earls, and Lady Marys. The countesses in “robes and pearls” have been painted by Sir Peter Lely, “Whose drapery hints we may admire them freely” (LXVI). Lely, born in Westphalia, came to England in the entourage of Prince William of Nassau, the noble who wed Henrietta Maria, daughter of Charles I. Lely was influenced by the great Anton Van Dyck, a Dutch painter famous for his realistic silk drapery. Byron emphasizes the artistic expertise of Peter Lely in depicting drapery, a fact Byron likely found in the Historic Gallery of Portraits and Painting. There are also paintings of judges, bishops, generals, and lords.

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9 The portrait is by John Hoppner. An anonymous writer for Town Talk (July 27, 1811) engaged in a bitter attack on Lady Oxford: “Oxford is notorious for contaminating our young men […] Sir Francis, it seems, took a fancy to Miss Scott, now Lady Oxford, and affections being mutual, led to the natural consequences. A child made his appearance, and Sir Francis immediately entered into a bond, with the young lady’s brother, L20,000…”
While Byron did inherit a few family portraits, he failed to inherit a collection of paintings like the old masters on view at Norman Abbey in Canto XIII of *Don Juan*:

Carlo Dolce, Titian, Salvatore, Albano, Vernet, Spagnoletto, Rembrandt, Lorraine, Caravaggio, and Teniers.  

Byron undoubtedly had the sale catalogues of the fifth Lord Byron in mind and quips he may be mistaken “for an auctioneer.” In a brilliant literary allusion he reminds the reader that even a poet like Homer had a “Catalogue of ships” but he will, as a “mere modern” poet “spare you then the furniture and plate” (LXXIV). Thus, even the old sales catalogues were retained in Byron’s formidable memory [Fig. 91]. He wrote in Canto XIII: “Here sweetly spread a landscape of Lorraine” (LXXII). The “Second Day’s Sale” lists number 29, Claude, “A warm and agreeable landscape, in the stile of.” Although Byron never inherited “the Grand and Noble Collection” of his great-uncle, he magically conjures the dispersed paintings to adorn Norman Abbey.

Lord Henry and Lady Adeline are the hosts of aristocratic guests; the elderly criticize the pictures. Byron’s scene may have been from personal experience. After all, if the periodicals instructed the nobility and gentry how to view paintings, criticism must have been prevalent at social gatherings when collections were examined.

Canto XV introduces the theme of marriage; specifically, matchmaking to unite the perfect man and woman. Adeline has eligible women in mind: Miss Reading, Miss Raw, Miss Flaw, Miss Showman, Miss Knowman and the two heiresses Giltbedding. The surnames convey mental caricatures for the reader. Marriage is compared to Holbein’s *Dance of Death* (XXXIX). The theme of Death will continue. Aurora Raby is an orphan.

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10 Nine of the eleven artists are listed in the sales catalogue of 1772; Albano and Vernet are not included. Although listed on the first page, Leonardo da Vinci does not appear in the catalogue. The “Fifth Day’s Sale” lists Caravaggio’s *A bon vivant*. While the title suggests a pleasant image, Byron’s reference to Caravaggio conveys a “gloomier stain / Bronzed o’er some lean and stoic anchorite” (Canto XIII, LXXII).
She is "radiant and grave." The adjectives describe a dual nature, someone both alive and dead. Indeed, Byron seems to have Blakes’s drawings in mind. “Radiant and grave” could be The Soul Hovering Over The Body. Aurora is a mournful figure. Did Byron possibly have The Book of Thel in mind? Thel, a shepherdess holding a staff, watches at a gate.

She look’d as if she sat by Eden’s door,
And grieved for those who could never return no more
She was a Catholic, too, sincere, austere (XLVI)
[.................................................................]
She gazed upon a world she scarcely knew,
As seeking not to know it, lone,
As grows a flower, thus quietly she grew (XLVII)

Byron transforms the “old pictures” of knights and dames into a Gothic scene. The portraits are no longer handsome and lovely ancestors, the images are merely “portraits of the dead [...] ghastly, desolate, and dread” (VXII). 11 But at midnight, by moonlight, the portraits appear to come alive within the frames.

And the pale smile of beauties in the grave,
The charms of other days, in starlight gleams,
Glimmer on high; their buried locks still wave
Along the canvas; their eyes glance like dreams
On ours, or spars within some ducky cave,

11 The portraits by moonlight bring to mind Nathaniel Hawthorne’s House of the Seven Gables where similar occurrences take place.
But death is imaged in their shadowy beams.

A picture is the past; even ere its frame

Be gilt, who sate hath ceased to be the same (XIX)

The inspiration could be the eerie drawings of William Blake in Robert Blair's *The Grave*. Blake presents a duality of body and soul in *The Soul Exploring the Recesses of the Grave*. The Soul (a female) explores a cavern where a body lies. Above the cavern, a man in a strange pose seems as if he about to cast his body heavenward. In *The Soul Hovering Over the Body* two female images are displayed. The deceased lies on a bed while the outstretched Soul floats skyward. The portraits presage the presence of the ghost of the Black Friar. After he has seen the ghost, Juan is shocked. Aurora offers him a look that he is unable to understand: “He caught Aurora’s eye on his, / And something like a smile upon her cheek” (Canto XVI, XCII). Byron still relies on Lavater’s advice to read the face for insight. Juan is unable to fully understand her expression.

Canto XVI contrasts the older and younger generations. Painting is a major theme. The art works are all traditional. Lord Henry represents the proper figure of the gentry, a connoisseur of paintings, and “friend of artists, if not arts.” The connoisseur-aristocrat is a figure who has been often depicted in engravings [Fig. 92-93]. A picture-dealer brings a painting by Titian to Lord Henry for judgment. No modern painters are represented. Norman Abbey is the subject of the designs of a “Bricklayer of Babel, call’d an architect,” (LVIII) who wants to modernize the ancient abbey. Byron returns to the Picturesque. The aristocratic fad for remodeling ancient structures and parks revolves around Humphrey Repton, a landscape gardener known as an improver. Alistair M.
Duckworth reports that Repton was "a figure of controversy, the butt of satire. 12 Repton was famous for eliminating natural beauty for regularity. He cut trees from entrances to enhance the view and make homes appear larger. For Lord Henry to achieve "good taste" he must first provide "English money" Canto XVI, LIX). 13 The reference to Repton shows that Byron was still engaged in the aesthetic concerns of the past century. Numerous prints show the widespread renovations undertaken by Repton throughout England. Lady Fitz-Fulke displays literary tastes from the past. She reads The Bath Guide and Hayley's Triumphs. The last image we have of Don Juan at Norman Abbey is a second encounter with the ghost of the Black Friar. To Juan's surprise, the ghost is the phantom – Lady Fitz-Fulke! Byron's death brought Don Juan to a close.

Byron's first vision of Newstead Abbey, his own ancestral estate, led to Norman Abbey, an artistic version. The young boy who had seen vacant walls chose to adorn the imaginary abbey with old masters. Byron seemed to have envisioned a plot that deals with the Titian painting, the rare canvas brought by the picture dealer to Lord Henry for appraisal. But we will never know for sure what would have transpired. But Byron did return to Newstead, at least in his mind, to hang the paintings. Byron did know a great deal about painting and the visual arts.

12 Duckworth, The Improvement of the Estate, 41.
13 Jane Austen's Mansfield Park also endorses the Picturesque. When the dull but wealthy Rushworth decides his estate "wants improvement," the person to be consulted is Humphrey Repton. Repton's work was personally known to the Austens. Thomas Leigh, a cousin, had hired Repton to redesign his estate. Jane Austen and her mother were shown the improvements.
CODA

BYRON: VISUAL ICON AND ARTISTIC INSPIRATION

William Hazlitt is recognized as one of the foremost critics of his own age. Hazlitt’s most famous observations are found in The Spirit of the Age, published in 1825. Hazlitt had hoped to be a painter but abandoned the profession. However, he did regard painters as worthy of praise, but the best were dead, just as the poets:

The greatest poets, the ablest orators, the best painters, and the finest sculptors that the world ever saw, appeared soon after the birth of these arts, and lived in a state of society which was, in other respects, comparatively barbarous. Those arts, which depend on individual genius and incommunicable power, have always leaped at once from infancy to manhood, from the first rude dawn of invention to their median height and dazzling luster, and have in general declined ever after. ¹

As for modern poets, Hazlitt delivered lectures in 1818. He regarded Wordsworth as the most original living poet. Wordsworth is “the poet of mere sentiment.” Hazlitt praises the poems in Lyrical Ballads as works “of inconceivable beauty, of perfect originality and pathos.” And what about Byron? Hazlitt was unimpressed:

Lord Byron (judging from the tome of his writings might be

Thought to have suffered too much to be a truly great poet

[...] Lord Byron shuts himself up too much in the impenetrable
gloom of his own thoughts, and buries the natural light of
things in ‘nook monastic.’ The Giaour, the Corsair, Childe
Harold, are all the same person, and they are apparently all
himself. The everlasting repetition of one subject, the same
dark ground of fiction, with the darker colours of the poet’s
mind spread over it, the unceasing accumulation of horrors
on horror’s head, steels the mind against the sense of pain [...]

It is like a cancer, eating into the heart of poetry. But still there
is power; and power rivets attention and forces admiration. ‘He
hath a demon’ and that is the next thing to being full of the God. ²

Although Hazlitt condemned Byron’s themes, the critic acknowledges the poet’s artistic
power. Unlike Hazlitt, the general public had responded to Childe Harold’s wandering,
musing, and dissipation with enthusiasm. Byron’s poetry was decadent, cynical, and
thrilling, and it sold. The style was a far cry from Wordsworth’s experiments. Harold
wandered through Greece but observed only what had been great. Greece was no longer
the dominant nation of the West. The glories of the past had vanished; only ruins
remained. The classical world was a decaying relic, just like Harold. The interest in the
classical world had started decades earlier.

Neoclassicism surfaced in the mid-eighteenth century, as a result of the
excavations at Herculaneum and Pompeii. The writers who popularized the new art were
Johann Joachim Winckelmann and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Winckelmann claimed

that modern art could be significant if it imitated the ancient Greeks. Lessing expanded Winckelmann's theories and argued that specific Greek statues represented the best of "Greek high classicism," explains Elizabeth Pendleton Streicher. Greece was indeed an important subject for Byron. He achieved his fame in Greece as both poet and martyr.

"Of all writers it was Byron who was to be the most influential in forming painters' views of the Orient," asserts David Blayney Brown. From the very moment of publication, Childe Harold seized the imagination of readers. Artists such as Fuseli were impressed by the poem. Childe Harold inspired artists to reproduce its scenes and characters. George Jones published a series of fifteen illustrations of Childe Harold; among these were The Youth of Childe Harold, The Maid of Saragossa, and Childe Harold alone in the Crowd. In 1813 Jones published drawings from The Giaour, one of Byron's popular Oriental Tales. In 1824 George Cruikshank created Illustrations of Lord Byron, a collection of engravings.

One of the captivating aspects of Childe Harold is seeing the Orient through the eyes of a disenchanted hero. Most readers, unable to travel to Greece, Albania, or Rome are allowed the excitement of experiencing past realms in poetry. Byron is a master of depicting broad sweeps of history in magnificently written lines. The ability to "paint with words" is part of Romanticism. Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner attribute the rise of Romanticism to "the language of landscape." As they explain:

One of the most radical aspects of early Romanticism was the attempt to replace history painting – large formal depictions of

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3 Streicher, Masterworks from Stuttgart, 9. Winckelmann's important works were Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture (1755) and History of Antique Art (1764).
5 Though popular, both volumes are deemed perfunctory art by David Blayney Brown.
historical or religious scenes – by landscape […] the vehicle of
the Sublime. In the seventeenth century, the landscapes of
Poussin and Claude reached their full dignity as depictions
of Classical Nature, with figures in antique dress, and often
a mythological subject discreetly integrated into an ideally
‘Arcadian’ countryside. The Romantic artists wanted to make
the elements of Nature alone carry the full symbolic meaning.
Their project was, in fact, identical with the contemporary
attempt by Wordsworth and Holderlin to give pure landscape
poetry the force and gravity of Milton’s and Homer’s epic style.  

Byron, not unlike his creation Harold, wandered the world observing life amidst
the ruins, quite aware that the transience of time reduces all heroes to dust, but before the
fatal day, a gaze turned outward and inward. As Wieland Schmied explains:

At the outset of Romanticism, the artist’s gaze is turned inward.
To look into an imagined past (often with mythical Gothic echoes)
is in itself to look inward. This is true of [Caspar] Friedrich and
with some reservations – also of Delacroix. It was Friedrich who
gave the much-quoted advice, ‘Close your bodily eye, that you
may see your picture first with the eye of the spirit. Then bring to
light what you have seen in the darkness, that its effect may work
back on others, from without to within.’

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6 Romanticism and Realism, Rosen and Zerner, 51.
Byron’s death in Greece redeemed his tarnished reputation. The collapse of his marriage and the prosecution of Don Juan for obscenity brought scandal and condemnation. But Greece changed his posthumous reputation. The poet was regarded as a selfless hero, someone who gave his fortune and life to liberate the cradle of Western values from Ottoman rule. Although Byron died of fever in Missolonghi in 1824, rather than in combat, the poet’s death focused attention on Greece’s enslavement. Across Europe, especially in France, those who loved freedom mourned the passing of a great poet and liberator. William St. Clair documents the response in France to Byron’s passing:

French literature in the early nineteenth century was perhaps more influenced by the poetry and the life of Lord Byron than by any other foreigner [...] A flood of books of poetry on the death of Byron were hurriedly printed – no less than fourteen separate works in 1824 alone. The Opera immediately arranged for a new tragedy to be prepared on the theme. The students of Paris are said to have spontaneously put on mourning and spent the rest of the fateful day tearfully reading aloud passages from the poems of the great hero. Reprints of his works and reproductions of his (long-since romanticized) portrait were rushed through the presses. Commemorative medals were struck. An exhibition of a picture of the death of Lord Byron by a Greek artist drew large crowds. It is said to have shown the body of the poet stretched out on a bed. An observer records that ‘The Sword which Childe Harold had drawn for the cause of the Greeks is
The Death of Lord Byron by Joseph Odevaere is an idealized painting of Byron on his death bed. Odevaere had worked under David in Paris and the work resembles The Death of Marat, note Anthony Burton and John Murdoch:

Byron is crowned with bay leaves and his lyre is beside him with its strings broken. The pedestal of the bed is ornamented with medallions inscribed with the titles of his poems – the Ode to Napoleon, Bride of Abydos, Childe Harold, The Corsair, Siege of Corinth, Lara, The Giaour, The Lament of Tasso. On the right, Byron’s sword stands against a fragment of antique statuary, inscribed with the Greek work Liberty. 

Burton and Murdoch record other varied funerary tributes to Byron: P. Pistrucci’s Non Omnis Moriar depicted Byron’s imaginary tomb with a weeping willow; Alfred Joseph Stothard produced a commemorative medal, struck in 1824, that shows Byron in profile. Adam Friedel had actually served with Byron in Greece. He later settled in London as an artist-lithographer. Friedel etched Byron in tartan dress and wearing a Homeric helmet.

There were numerous poetic tributes that coincided with the visual honors.

The philhellenic movement spread and volunteers flocked to Greece. Eugene Delacroix was a fervent supporter of the Greek War of Independence. Delacroix had an interest in Orientalism. In addition, he was a great admirer of Byron’s poetry. Delacroix’s paintings captured the emotional support in Europe for the liberation of Greece from

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8 St. Clair, That Greece Might Still Be Free, 267-68.
9 Burton and Murdoch, Byron: An Exhibition, 124.
Turkish control. Delacroix exhibited *Scenes from the Massacres at Scios* in 1824. The work was bought by the king for the Louvre.

*Le Romantique* is an anonymous engraving, published in Paris in 1825, that depicts a Byronic figure, book in hand, sitting on a rocky crag. The handsome youth holds his chin in contemplation and gazes upward, where bats fly near an ivy-twined ruined tower. A smaller man, cradling a guitar, appears to sing. The engraving bears a resemblance to Bertel Thorvaldsen’s later statue that found a home in Trinity College. *Le Romantique* captures the essence of Byron and the young men who read his poems.  

In May 1826, additional paintings with Byronic themes were shown at the Lebrun Gallery: *The Combat of the Giaour and the Pasha* and the famous *Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi* [Fig. 95-96]. Delacroix’s *The Death of Sardanapalus* was inspired by Byron’s poem and captures the king’s sensuality in 1827. Critics disliked the decadent scene. Byron’s poetry remained a source of inspiration for the artist in later years. Delacroix brought forth *Gulnare vient trouver Conrad dans sa Prison* (1831), *Sketch for the Shipwreck of the Don Juan* (1839), and *La Fiancée d’Abydos* (1843). In the political realm, diverse figures as Bismarck and Mazzini read Byron’s poems for inspiration.

Byron’s image became the face of Romanticism. The portrait by Thomas Phillips that shows him dressed in an Albanian costume was especially entrancing for admirers. Christine Kenyon Jones explains the dynamic quality of Byronism:

> Reasons for the visual impact of Byronism are not far to seek. The effect of Byron’s poetry relies far more heavily on showing, looking and seeing than on other senses. The dramatic incidents of *Childe Harold* and Byron’s early oriental tales emphatically...
lent themselves to illustration, and the instant popularity of these poems made the publication of drawings and engravings relating to them a sound investment for both publishers and artists.  

George Harlow’s idealized etching contributed to the public fascination. The poet was represented as a melancholy figure with dainty features.

*The Art of the Brontes* by Christine Alexander and Jane Sellars is a fine compilation of the drawings, sketches, watercolors, and paintings of Branwell, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne. The Byronic influence is significant note the authors:

Engravings illustrating the poetry and life of Byron were the greatest single influence on the subject and style of the Brontes’ drawings, and this was reinforced by the Annuals with their fashionable beauties and sublime landscapes. The many sketches of Byronic-style heads [...] and Byron’s obvious influence in their poetry and prose during the years 1833 to 1835 show clearly that the Brontes’ reading was concentrated on Byron at this time.  

Charlotte Bronte magnificently depicted Edward Rochester, the hero of *Jane Eye*, as a brooding and mysterious figure. The Brontes reproduced Byron’s famous face in pencil drawings. According to Alexander and Sellars, Byron’s image was copied from *The Literary Souvenir* in 1830 [Fig. 97]. Richard Westall’s drawing of *Childe Harold and Ianthe*, engraved by E. Portbury, was faithfully reproduced. The Bronte’s adapted pencil portraits were given names such as *Alexander Soult* for the Byonic image. Ironically, they

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12 Alexander and Sellars, 17.
also used early images of Arthur Wellesley, the victor of Waterloo, the Duke of Wellington, who was transformed into *Arthur Adrian, Marquis of Douro*. Byron’s sympathy for the aspirations of French Revolution and Napoleon’s military prowess led him to bitterly satirize Wellington’s triumph. Byron believed the British government should have allowed Napoleon to remain in power in France rather than be condemned to exile. The artwork of the Bronte siblings reveals the depth of Romanticism: flowers, pets, cottages, picturesque landscapes, ruined towers, castles, lovely women and handsome men, gallows, and tombs.

Beyond the reproduction of Byron’s striking visual image, the Byronic ideal would be promoted by a shift in art theory and its application in the field of watercolor painting. As Andrew Wilton points out, Sir Joshua Reynolds had formulated laws of art in his *Discourses* that were accepted by painters as ‘immutable truth.” In essence, Reynolds advocated heroic subjects from history or myth, and “a bold style of colouring that was subordinate to the intellectual principles embodied in the Florentine ideal of *disegno.”* However, an aesthetic shift now occurred:

The first stage in the process whereby the grand generalizations of Reynold’s epoch were tamed, as it were, for more popular consumption was, paradoxically perhaps, the spread of high neo-classicism. The taste for the ‘classical’ of which Tom Taylor had spoke had undergone important modifications in the last decade or so of the eighteenth century. They can be summarized as a change of preference from spurious to genuine Greek antiquity.

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This was simply a consequence of increased knowledge.  

Watercolor painting was elevated by Thomas Girtin’s “style of sublime topography,” as Andrew Wilton explains. The Water-Colour Society viewed its own medium as an equal of the oil canvas. J.W.W. Turner was to work in watercolor as well as oil and to be regarded as a leading landscape painter. But Byron’s legacy was enhanced by “the fashion of painting single figures as ‘historical’ portraits – usually heroines from Shakespeare or Byron – which occupy the ground somewhere between the genre and portrait [...] Charles Lock Eastlake, one of the most earnest of his generation, exhibited works of this kind at the Academy, and allowed them to be engraved in the Annuals.”  

Lord Byron’s Dream by Eastwood was painted in Rome in 1827. Writes David Blayney Brown: “Eastlake’s picture offers a definitive image of a melancholy or reflective wanderer in distant lands. The subject is clearly Byron himself, as it is also in Byron’s poem The Dream (1816).” The same year Eastlake painted Haidee, a Greek Girl. Thus, there was a fusion of sublime topography and historical portraits.

Turner and Byron by David Blayney Brown attests to the admiration J.M.W. Turner had for Byron’s works. Although the poet and artist never met, Turner admired Byron’s poetry and was artistically inspired by certain passages. Turner exhibited six paintings from Byron’s poems between 1818 and 1844. The first, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1818, was The Field of Waterloo. The painting depicts a gruesome nocturnal scene: women search the battlefield for their loved ones. Turner had visited Waterloo in August 1817, the year after Byron’s famous visit. This was Turner’s first painting to be shown with a citation from Byron’s poems, notes Brown. But no more Byronic-themed

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14 Ibid., 169.
15 Ibid., 178.
16 Brown, Turner and Byron, 84.
paintings were exhibited by Turner during Byron’s lifetime. After Byron’s death, in 1832, Turner exhibited *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage – Italy*. The painting was shown with the following quotation:

And now fair Italy!

Thou art the garden of the world […]

Even in thy desert, what is like to thee?

The very weeds are beautiful, thy waste

More rich than other climes fertility:

Thy wreck a glory, and thy ruin graced

With an immaculate charm which cannot be defaced

(Canto IV, XXVI)

Turner also painted: *The Bright Stone of Honour (Ehrenbreitstein) and Tomb of Marceau*, a canvas inspired by *Childe Harold*. General Francois-Severin Marceau was praised by Byron. The poet had visited the spot where the young commander had died at the battle of Altenkirchen. The artist, states Brown, had also visited the fortress of Ehrenbreitstein, near Coblenz. Turner was inspired by Byron’s lines: “Honour to Marceau – He was freedom’s champion!”

Turner shared a love of Italy with Byron. *Modern Rome – Campo Vaccino* traces its origin to *Childe Harold*: “The moon is up, and yet it is not night; / Sunset divides the sky with her,” wrote Byron. (Canto IV, XXVII). Turner spent time in Venice in 1819. The inspiration brought *Venice, the Bridge of Sighs, The Approach to Venice, St. Marks’ Place, Venice*. Turner contributed landscape subjects to works published by John Murray.

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Gilpin’s Scene of Grandeur

In 1833 John Murray published the first volume of a work that promoted Byron’s fame while endorsing the popular topographical style: *Finden’s Landscape & Portrait Illustrations to the Life and Works of Lord Byron.* The force behind the book was the Finden brothers success of the illustrations they made to Thomas Moore’s *Life and Works of Lord Byron.* William Brockedon, an artist and contemporary of Byron, wrote the narrative for the Findens’ book. Most likely, it was John Murray who selected Brockedon. The earlier *Landscape and Portrait Illustrations of Lord Byron* has been expanded, explains Brockedon in the *Advertisement,* and “form an elegant accession to the drawing-room table and to the library of illustrated works.” The engravings were derived from drawings and sketches by artists, including the renowned: Turner, Westall, and Harlowe, as well as lesser known artists like Clarkson Stanfield and George Fennell Robson. The book follows William Gilpin’s famous recommendation for drawing landscapes: “The winding river – the shooting promontory – the castle – The abbey – the flat distance – and the mountains melding into the horizon.”

The engravings in the first volume focused primarily on the topography of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage.* Among the engravings are impressive images of Gibraltar, Lisbon, Malta, and Corinth.

*Finden’s Illustrations* demonstrates the solid link between the sister arts of literature and painting. The artists appear to have been admirers of Byron. The Finden

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18 The three volume work is also titled in the frontispiece, *Finden’s Illustrations of the Life and Works of Lord Byron, With Original and Selected Information on the Subjects of the Engravings by W. Brockedon.* According to the *DNB,* Brockedon (1787-1854) was a recognized painter, author, and inventor. Brockedon had an interest in mechanics and art. From 1812 to 1837 he exhibited works to exhibitions of the Royal Academy and the British Institution. Information about Brockedon is located in the *Dictionary of National Biography,* volume 2, 1882, 1277-80.

19 Gilpin, *Three Essays,* 87.
brothers, the engravers of the drawings, were well known for their work in annuals, poetry, and other popular works.\(^{20}\) William and Edward had been employed in engraving the Elgin Marbles for the British Museum. They achieved a great success with the illustrations to Thomas Moore’s *Life and Works of Lord Byron* in 1833. This was followed by *Byron Beauties* in 1834.

In 1824 William Brockedon had traveled in the Alps to investigate the route of Hannibal in the Second Punic War. Brockedon’s drawings were engraved and published in 1827 as *Illustrations of the Passes of the Alps by Which Italy Communicates with France, Switzerland, and Germany*. The landscape images generally follow William Gilpin’s idea of *picturesque beauty*: “that roughness forms the most essential point of difference between the beautiful and the picturesque”\(^ {21}\) Villeneuve, drawn by Clarkson Stanfield, is the title vignette. The engraving sets the visual tone: The engraving is described by Brockedon:

> The approach to the lake of Geneva from Italy, on the Side of the canton of the Pays de Vaud, is one of striking beauty, which seldom fails to arrest the attention of the traveler. The lofty mountains that bound the northern shores of this extremity of the lake spring almost abruptly from the water’s edge; the castle of Chillon appears in the

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\(^{20}\) The Findens, William (1787-1852) and Edward (1791-1857), established a school and students executed works that bear the Finden name. Before his death, William Finden signed a petition to the queen requesting recognition of the claims of engravers to be accorded the same honors as members of the Royal Academy. According to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, the Findens published the illustrations to Moore’s biography on their own and at their own cost; *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1882, volume 7, 21-22.

\(^{21}\) Gilpin, *Three Essays*, 6,
The scene shows peasants in the foreground on a dirt road. The rustic view contrasts with the distant mountains and clouds. William Brockedon reminds readers that Byron, when he passed through the region in 1816, had met an English party in a carriage; within was a sleeping lady—"fast asleep in the most anti-narcotic place in the world," stated Byron. Brockedon was no doubt an admirer of Byron's poetry and was familiar with biographical details of his life. The engraving of a Turner drawing is dynamic. Gibraltar is vibrant. A British boat skims the wind-blown sea with Gibraltar in the background.

Brockedon includes Byron's "Loch Na Garr," accompanied by the drawings of Clarkson Stanfield and George Fennell Robson. Brockedon cites Robson's *Scenery of the Grampians* (1814):

As a picturesque object, few mountains in the Grampian range are more interesting than Lachin y Gair. Though its summit horizontally to a great extent, it is far from presenting a heavy or inelegant contour, for even where its broad front is displayed to the spectator, the brow of it is diversified by gentle inflections or pointed asperities. The peculiar acuteness of its highest pinnacle is another circumstance of characteristic beauty, which distinguishes this mountain from its more lumpish neighbors; but the most sublime feature of Lachin y Gair consists in those immense perpendicular cliffs of granite, which give such impressive grandeur to its north-eastern aspect.  

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22 *Finden's Illustrations*, n.p.

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Stanfield’s drawing is pastoral, a scene of peasant women and cattle. In the distance is the famous mountain. Robson’s drawing shows the rocky mountain peaks jutting against the sky in the distance; in the foreground gnarled trees stretch above a herd of deer. There are many engravings that visually convey what Byron experienced or so imagine the readers of his poems. The engraving of Corinth captures Byron’s lines:

That rival pyramid would rise
More mountain-like, through those clear skies,
Than yon tower-capped Acropolis,
Which seems the very clouds to kiss.

*Corinth* by Stanfield contrasts a horizontal line of city buildings with a gigantic oval-shaped mountain. *The Acropolis, Athens*, drawn by J.M.W. Turner, also stirs the viewer. In the foreground armed horsemen hold sabers and banners aloft as they cross a plain; in the distance the sun rests behind the ancient citadel. Turner also contributed *The Temple of Minerva*. Turner’s drawings were engraved by Edward Finden [Fig. 98-99]. The engravings also show images of Venice and Verona. But the most striking *Castle of Chillon* magnificently enthralls the viewer. J.D. Harding captures a menacing solid prison amidst white-capped, choppy waves. Harding follows Gilpin’s advice when drawing lakes, to avoid flat dullness spread on the canvas “by the undulations of water; or by reflections from all the rough objects in its neighborhood.”

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23 *Finden’s Illustrations*, D. George Fennell Robson (1788-1833) was a watercolorist who had exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1807. The following year, Robson wandered the mountains of Scotland, dressed as a shepherd, carrying Scott’s *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. In 1814 he self-published *Scenery of the Grampians*; the forty drawings of mountain landscape were drawn by Robson but etched by Henry Morton. *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1882, volume 17, 61.
Finden’s Illustrations contain images of women who entranced Byron: Mary Chaworth, the Maid of Saragoza, and Margarita Cogni. Most surprising were the engravings of Lady Byron and Ada, Byron’s daughter; after all, Lady Byron had separated from her husband and took her child. The visual images contributed to the biographical legend.

The prospectus for Finden’s Illustrations expressed the purpose of the undertaking was to “place within the reach of all classes of readers these delightful productions of the first Poet of the age.”

Although Finden’s Illustrations was a popular commercial venture, artists still found Byron a subject for a single canvas. Sir William Allan returned to the glory of Byron’s youth in 1832. Allan painted Lord Byron Reposing in the House of a Turkish Fisherman after having Swum Across the Hellespont. The painting connects the poet’s life with classical Greece and Orientalism [Fig. 100]. J.T. Wilmore engraved Lord Byron’s Room in the Palazzo Mocenigo in 1837, a work based on a picture by Lake Price.

Byron stares intently at the paintings above him [Fig. 101]. Although the engraving is the result of artistic imagination, Byron certainly studied paintings and knew a great deal about art.

Within the time frame of 1816 – 1833 Byron was recognized as not only one of the great poets of English Literature but a cultural icon as well. However, tastes change. By 1840, William Makepeace Thackeray asserted that art in France and Germany was “infinitely higher than in England.” 26 France and Germany had been inundated with productions from the British market, especially images from the Byron Beauties, but

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these were trivial. Thackeray condemned “the standard ‘Album’ for instance – that unfortunate collection of deformed Zuleikas and Medoras.” Bertel Thorvaldsen’s statue of Byron was rejected by the religious authorities of Westminster Abbey. Admirers of Byron were pleased in 1842 when Thorvaldsen’s statue was accepted by the Wren Library, Trinity College. Students at Cambridge continue to admire one of their own [Fig. 102-103].

As time passed, there was a decline in the sale of Byron’s poems. According to Christopher W. Hart, the advance of time brought “a tradition of regarding his social and political thought as superficial [...] Where his reputation was maintained, as in the case of Matthew Arnold (1822-88), he was valued above all as a poet of feeling and sentiment.” Byron had been influenced by the visual arts and his image exists as an enduring visual inspiration.

27 Thorvaldsen’s statue resembles Le Romantique, an anonymous Parisian engraving from 1828.
VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS

“The Brera Gallery of painters has some fine pictures; - but nothing of a collection – of painting I know nothing - but I like the Guercino - a picture of Abraham putting away Hagar -& Ishmael – which seems to me natural & goodly” – Byron

October 15, 1816

Despite the remark, Byron did know a great deal about painting and the visual arts. He read about paintings and studied them. Moreover, he was drawn to caricature and sculpture. The visual spectacle of the theatre also influenced him. Painting, drawing, caricature, sculpture, and theatrical effects were all used in his poetry, thereby enhancing the text with richer imagery. Byron appears as a reluctant Romantic. He was a great admirer of Augustan satire, especially the poetry of Alexander Pope. Byron demonstrates a profound knowledge of literature. In his early poems he employed visual images that were anchored in eighteenth century literature: death, the grave and ancestral ruins. Byron also adapted William Gilpin’s concepts of the Picturesque. Although he is regarded as a Romantic, Byron believed that the new poets were inferior to the past: “I look upon this as the declining age of English poetry [...] There can be no worse sign for the taste of the times than the depreciation of Pope,” he complains. But he continued to write in his own style and, despite his comments, knew a great deal about visual culture, as the following images indicate.
How to Read the Image

Women’s periodicals like *The Records of Fashion* sought “to combine useful knowledge with innocent and elegant recreation.” For example, readers were informed how to interpret the drawing of Charles Hayter in the frontispiece of *The Records of Fashion* for January 1809. The figure on the left represents the *genius* of Fancy and Fashion. She points to the rainbow as the foundation of harmony and color. The young Recorder notes the shades of departed fashions, whose fleeting forms soon vanish, so she must insert them in *The Memoirs of Female Dress*.

Figure 1

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The Byronic Image

Byron's own image became an icon.

Figure 2

*Byron Landing From A Boat*
by George Sanders, 1807
The young aristocrat before *Childe Harold* brought fame.

Figure 3

*Byron*
Engraving by H. Meyer, from an 1818 drawing by G.H. Harlow.
Figure 4

Portrait of Lord Byron in Albanian Dress
by Thomas Phillips, 1835
Byron’s portrait came to represent the
Romantic poet. Phillips had painted Byron
in London during the poet’s life but made
this posthumous painting for the wedding
of Ada Byron.
Rinaldo and Armida

Byron knew how to read paintings. In a humorous letter to his confidante, Lady Melbourne, he describes a print in the room he was given as a guest at Lady Oxford’s estate. Byron and Lady Oxford were engaged in a romantic affair. After his visit, Byron was a guest at the estate of another fashionable hostess, Lady Jersey, and noted the difference in pictorial images in both guest rooms: “I have been here these 2 days in the palace of propriety with a picture of Lucretia in the act of suicide over my chimney, & a tome of Pamela lying on ye. table, ye. first as a hint I presume not to covet ye. mistress of a house, & a last as a defensive treatise in behalf of the Maid. The decorations of my last apartment were certainly very different – for a print of Rinaldo & Armida was one of the most prominent ornaments” (November 26, 1812).

Figure 5

Rinaldo and Armida
by Nicolas Poussin
c. 1628

Although the precise Rinaldo and Armida print that Byron observed is unknown, the point Byron makes is the importance of the image. The image of the lovers in Poussin’s painting indicates a forbidden romance. The picture’s subject is from Torquato Tasso’s Gerusalemme Liberata (1581). Rinaldo is a Christian warrior and Armida is an enchantress.
Byron’s Enchantress

Jane Elizabeth Scott was the wife of Edward Harley, the fifth Earl of Oxford. Although married, she engaged in love affairs with Sir Francis Burdett, Byron, and others. Lady Fitz-Fulke and Lord Augustus Fitz-Plantagenet resemble Lady Oxford and Sir Francis Burdett. Byron seldom detailed physical descriptions of characters in *Don Juan*, but he does describe Lady Fitz-Fulke:

She was a fine and somewhat full-blown blonde,

Desirable, distinguish’d, celebrated

For several winters in the grand, *grand monde*

I’d rather not say what might be related of her exploits

(Canto XIV, XLII)

Lady Fitz-Fulke is described as a *blonde* to mislead the curious. Lady Oxford’s hair was dark, but the allusion is evident.

*Lady Oxford*
by John Hoppner

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Byron’s literary idol was Alexander Pope. Byron defended Pope in *On the Rev. W.L. Bowles’s Strictures on the Life and Writings of Pope*: “I look upon this as the declining age of English poetry [...] There can be no worse sign for the taste of the times than the depreciation of Pope [...] He is the moral poet of civilizations” (Pamphlet March 1821).

Figure 6

*Alexander Pope*
The 1727 portrait of Pope by M. Dahill appeared in *La Belle Assemble* in June 1809. The engraving is by Robert Cooper.

*Byron*
Thomas Phillips painted Byron in 1814. The painting bears a resemblance to the etching of Pope that appeared in *La Belle Assemblee*. The pose, facial expression, and even the open-collared shirt suggest that Byron requested the similarity.
Charles Churchill
(1731-1764)

Before departing England forever, Byron lowered himself onto the grave of Charles Churchill, thereby creating an image of personal identification with both the living and dead Churchill. Byron’s social fall was similar to the swift and scandalous decline of Churchill. Soon after, Byron wrote:

I stood beside the grave of him who blazed
The comet of a season, and I saw
The humblest of all sepulchers…

From “Churchill’s Grave”

Figure 7

Churchill’s grave in Dover
The anonymous print appeared in *Town Talk* in December 1812, when Byron was at the height of his fame. Byron is depicted atop a barrel on his way to Mount Parnassus. The failed poets disappear in Lethe, the river of oblivion. The narrator laughed at Byron’s conceit to think he could make it to Parnassus.

Figure 8
Christopher Anstey
(1724-1805)

Christopher Anstey’s *The New Bath Guide* (1766) was a satire on life in Bath that was admired by Byron. When John Murray and Byron’s friends worried over *Don Juan*, fearing that Byron would write a controversial poem, Byron argued that the work was part of a popular genre in English literature. Though mildly bawdy, *The New Bath Guide* made readers laugh. Byron wanted *Don Juan* to do the same.

Figure 9  
*Christopher Anstey*  
Unknown artist

Figure 10  
*Frontispiece for The New Bath Guide.*  
Folly, wearing a cap and bells, leads members of the Blunderhead family by the nose. Drawing by S. Wale; engraving by G. Grignion.

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The New Bath Guide

The 1807 edition includes an etching of Roger approaching Miss Prudence Blunderhead for a sexual encounter. In Letter XIV, Miss Prudence writes to Lady Elizabeth that she has been “elected to Methodism by a Vision.”

Elected I, tho once rejected,

Like a little wand’ring Sheep;

Who this morning was elected,

By a Vision in my Sleep:

I dream’d an Apparition

Came, like Roger, from Above;

Saying, by Divine Commission

I must fill you full of love

Figure 11

Engraved by F. Eginton

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The Gothic Tower

The Gother Tower expressed political overtones. Members of the gentry and aristocratic estate traced their lineage to the ancient Anglo-Saxons. They considered themselves to be representatives of the landed estate, taxpayers whose voice was critical in national affairs, as opposed to the strictly monarchical ruler.

Figure 12

The Duke of Argyll's Gothic Tower at Whitton Park was erected in 1734. The composition shows an estate governed by regularity: an artificial pool, two bridges, and parallel, symmetrical lines of trees. The strollers in the foreground are not dwarfed by the natural elements but blend harmoniously with the natural features of the park. The artist, William Woollett, masterfully constructs an "hourglass" comprised of a triangular pool and triangular sky. The etching was made in 1757. William Gilpin's *picturesque* advocated an estate surrounded by Nature.
The Picturesque

Byron was knowledgeable about William Gilpin's concept of the Picturesque and referred to the picturesque in "Lachin y Gair," an early poem.

Figure 13

William Havell's *Stormy Twilight* represents the essence of Gilpin's picturesque beauty. The 1807 landscape image is drawn from an elevated position. The perspective surveys Nature. The composition unites a variety of parts, comprised of rough objects; specifically, the towering windblown trees, the distant castle, and the lone rider. The elements form contrasts between Nature, a human, and an ancient building. The windblown tree creates sublimity, while the smooth sky is beautiful; the overall affect is picturesque. The enormous tree appears to be partially uprooted. The viewer expresses wonderment as to the imminent danger of the rider. The rough texture of the scene and the effect of light and shade convey a sense of irregularity. The ruin in the distance is an elegant relic of ancient architecture; it establishes the transience of time and a past heritage. The astute observer agrees with Gilpin's premise that every horizon promises something new.
Death and the Grave

The eighteenth century shows a rising interest in morbid subjects. Robert Blair’s *The Grave* was a gruesome account of the human fascination with death and decay by “the graveyard poets.” Byron’s early poems emulated the horror and triumph of death.

Figure 14

J. H. Lips’ engraving shows the skull behind the mask in Johann Caspar Lavater’s *Physiognomische*. Byron was familiar with Lavater’s writings about physiognomy.

Figure 15

*Gray’s Tomb*
by Hendrik Frans de Cort

Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” was not as gruesome as Blair’s *The Grave*. Nevertheless, the fate of humanity is the same: “The paths of glory lead but to the grave.”
The Churchyard and the Ancestral Ruins

Byron’s early poems reflect the poetic themes of eighteenth century literature.

Figure 16

Byron sat for hours on gravestones at Harrow.

Figure 17

Newstead Abbey was the ancestral estate of the Byron family.
Emblems

Byron was familiar with the emblems of Francis Quarles. Most likely, he discovered Quarles through Alexander Pope’s ridicule of Quarles’ use of emblems. The visual image of Time and Death is transformed into poetry in “Elegy on Newstead Abbey.” Byron writes: “Time steals along and Death uprears his dart.”

Figure 18

From Hieroglyphikes of the Life of Man (1638) by Francis Quarles

The image appeared in Parthenia Sacra (1633) by Henry Hawkins: “The Lillie is the Scepter of the chaste Diana...” Byron uses the image of a flower in Don Juan based on its description: “There is a flower called ‘Love in Idleness.’” The flower is the pansy.

Figure 19

The Lillie
The image appeared in Parthenia Sacra (1633) by Henry Hawkins: “The Lillie is the Scepter of the chaste Diana...” Byron uses the image of a flower in Don Juan based on its description: “There is a flower called ‘Love in Idleness.’” The flower is the pansy.
Shaftesbury and History Painting

Rosemary Freeman points out the Earl of Shaftesbury's comparison of visual images. Shaftesbury criticized George Wither's use of "monkish" emblems. Paolo de Matteis' *A Notion of the Historical Draught of Hercules* was used by Shaftesbury to show "history painting." Hercules meets Virtue and Pleasure. "The artist is asked to set before the eye struggles which are agitating only within the mind and to transfix in one instant events which take place in time," wrote Shaftesbury in *Second Characters* (1713). Freeman regards the comments as the rejection of the medieval image and the rise of the classical image.

Figure 20

*Virtue and Vice*
From *A Collection of Emblemes* (1635)

*Virtue and Vice* by Paolo de Matteis

A *Notion of the Historical Draught of Hercules* (1713)
by Paolo de Matteis
The Gothic Image

Byron made use of Hans Holbein’s medieval woodcut.

Of marriage – (which might form a painter’s fame,

Like Holbein’s ‘Dance of Death’ – but ‘tis the same)

Don Juan
(Canto XV, XXXIX)

Figure 21

The Newly-Married Lady (1538)
Physiognomy

Johann Caspar Lavater’s theories were influential in Europe. Byron read Lavater and made use of the ideas concerning facial expression. Byron admired the engraving of *Ugolino*.

Figure 22

*Ugolino*
Engraved by J.H. Lips
From *Physiognomische*

Figure 23
From *Physiognomische*

“Two nights ago I saw the tigers sup at Exeter ‘Change […] There was a ‘hippopotamus,’ like Lord L[iverpool] in the face; and the ‘Ursine Sloth’ hath the very voice and manner of my valet.” - Byron

*Journal* November 1813
The Sublime

Edmund Burke’s *Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) established *the sublime* as an element of fear. Both literature and art were influenced by Burke’s ideas. Philip James de Loutherbourg was a theatrical scenic designer and painter. His innovative *Eidophusikon* dazzled audiences with scenic effects and lighting.

Figure 24

*Visitor to a Moonlit Churchyard*
By Philip James de Loutherbourg, 1790
The transience of existence is shown in the ruins of the church and exposed skulls in the churchyard. The sublime sense of mortality and decay is balanced by the image of Christ arisen from the dead.
Byron and Blake

Byron owned an 1807 copy of Robert Blair’s *The Grave* with engravings from “the original Inventions of William Blake.” The duality of body and soul is evident in Blake’s drawings. Byron employed the concept in Canto XVI of *Don Juan* when subjects in portraits reanimate in the moonlight, even though their bodies are buried.

...Voices from the urn

Appear to wake, shadows wild and quaint

Start from the frames, which fence their aspect stern (XVII)

And the pale smile of beauties in the grave,

The charms of other days in starlight gleams,

Glimmer on high; their buried locks still wave along the canvas;

their eyes glance like dreams

On ours, or spars within some dusky cave,

But death is imaged in their shadowy beams (XIX)

Figure 25

*The Soul Exploring the Recesses of the Grave*

Engraving by Louis Schiavonetti from a drawing by William Blake
Did Byron also see Blake’s *The Book of Thel*, published in 1789? The description of Aurora Raby in *Don Juan*, Canto XV, brings to mind Thel, a young shepherdess who peers into an unknown world.

She looked as if she sat by Eden’s door,
And grieved for those who could not return no more [...] 
She was a Catholic, too, sincere, austere [...] 
She gazed upon a world she scarcely knew, 
As seeking not to know it, silent, lone 
As grows a flower, thus quietly she grew...
Satirical Engravings

Byron's satire is linked to the visual satire of the eighteenth century.

Byron was familiar with the engravings of William Hogarth and James Gillray and made direct references to their works in his poetry. British culture was rich in print satire. Even the Prince of Wales, mercilessly satirized for years, had an account with a print shop to purchase the latest caricatures of himself. Byron describes John Wilkes, Hogarth's enemy, in "The Vision of Judgment."

A merry, cock-eyed, curious-looking sprite,
Upon the instant started from the throng,
Dress'd in fashion now forgotten quite...

Figure 28

*John Wilkes Esq.*
by William Hogarth
Figure 29

*The Bruiser*
by William Hogarth.
Hogarth depicts Churchill as a drunken bear; a dog urinates on the poet's "Epistle to Hogarth."
Caricature

Figure 30

_English Milordi_
by Joshua Reynolds, 1751
Reynolds tried his hand at the caricature craze with an image of English travelers.

Figure 31

_A Batch of Peers_
by Frederick Byron
William Pitt assists the king and queen in removing newly baked peers from the oven.
Ackermann’s Repository of Arts, 101 Strand

London was filled with print shops and art galleries.

Figure 32

*Ackermann’s Repository of Arts*
Social Satire

Byron’s *Don Juan* is part of the tradition of pungent social satire. The prints of the period were dynamic and often vulgar. The most famous were those of James Gillray, a satirist who skewered royals and political leaders alike. Charles James Fox, a prominent Whig leader, sports a tail as a cunning fox. The Prince of Wales is a horned goat, indicating an overweight and licentious character. Byron employed animal imagery in his response to the critics of *The Edinburgh Review* who lambasted *Hours of Idleness*. The savage snarl of the wolves frightens the Muses:

> For ever startled by the mingled howl  
> Of northern wolves, that still in darkness prowl;  
> A coward brood, which mangle as they prey,  
> By hellish instinct, all that cross their way…

(426-30)

Figure 33

*Gloria Mundi*  
by James Gillray

Figure 34

*Enchantments lately seen upon the Mountain of Wales*  
by James Gillray
The French Revolution

The guillotine and Napoleon were common images in Byron’s lifetime.

Christopher Kelly’s *History of the French Revolution* was published in 1819.

The prints provide an idea of the British view. The execution of Marie Antoinette is a far cry from the queen’s actual end. The print of Wellington first appeared in 1816 with an explanation: “Britannia attended by British & Prussian Officers, Victory descending and placing the laurel on the brows of Wellington, while Europe is presenting badges of Honour to the Military Heroes of Waterloo.”

Figure 35

![Image of Marie Antoinette's execution](image1)

Figure 36

![Image of Wellington](image2)
Political Radicalism

As a Whig, Byron supported reform and the ideals of the French Revolution.

He opposed "despotism in every nation." However, he was opposed to radicalism of the knife grinders, led by the friends of humanity. Byron feared fanatics would repeat the atrocities of the French Revolution. As he wrote in Don Juan:

It is not that I adulate the people;
Without me, there are demagogues enough,
And infidels, to pull down every steeple,
And set up in their stead some proper stuff.
Whether they may sow skepticism to reap hell,
As is the Christian dogma rather rough,
I do not know; - I wish men to be free
As much from mobs as kings – from you as me

(Canto IX XXV)

Figure 37

Monstrous Craws
by James Gillray, 1787
The king queen, queen, and prince regent feed from a bowl inscribed John Bull's Blood.
The Anti-Jacobin

The poems of The Anti-Jacobin periodical were published in 1807 as Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin. Although Byron was not a Tory, he still enjoyed satire. Poems like “La Sainte Guillotine” and “The Friend of Humanity and the Knife Grinder” were biting poems that expressed the fear that radicals in England would instigate a bloody revolution.

Tell me Knife-grinder, how you came to grind knives?
Did some rich man tyrannically use you?
Was it the squire? Or parson of the parish?
Or the attorney […]
Have you not read the Rights of Man, by Tom Paine
Drops of compassion tremble on my eyelids,
Ready to fall, as soon as you have told your Pitiful story

Figure 38

The Friend of Humanity and The Knife Grinder
by James Gillray
Images of Blood and Cannibalism

Gillray’s drawings were often gruesome. Byron imitated the scenes and mentions blood and cannibalism.

But France got drunk with blood to vomit crime,
And fatal have her Saturnalia been
To Freedom’s cause, in every age and clime...

*Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*
(Canto IV, XCVII)

Figure 39

*A Family of Sans-Culottes refreshing after the fatigues of the day*  
by James Gillray, 1792

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Figure 40

*The Blood of the Murdered crying for Vengeance*
by James Gillray, 1793
The iconic guillotine and the severed head of Louis XVI.
Enlightenment

Canto XI of *Don Juan* is based on Gillray’s print – *The Zenith of French Glory*.

A sans-culottes, playing a violin, sits atop a lamplight and watches the execution of Louis XVI; a naked foot rests on the head of a lynched bishop who dangles with two monks. Wrote Byron:

The French were not yet a lamp-lighting nation,
And when they grew so – on their newfound lantern,
Instead of wicks, they made a wicked man turn (XXVI)
A row of gentlemen along the streets
Suspended, may illuminate mankind,
As also bonfires made of country-seats
But the old way is best for the purblind (XXVII)

Figure 41

*The Zenith of French Glory – The Pinnacle of Liberty
Religion, Justice, Loyalty, & all the Bugbears of Unenlightened Minds, Farewell!*
baby James Gillray, 1793

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British Political Prints

British political prints reflected the passion of politics and were often coarse.

The same vulgarity was directed at Britain's enemies.

Figure 42

_Buonaparte Establishing French Headquarters in Italy_
by Robert Newton, 1787
The war with France gave rise to crude political prints. "It's my turn next," says Prime Minister William Pitt.
Figure 43

_Idol-Worship or The Way to Preferment_
Unknown artist

Figure 44

_A Freeborn Englishman!
by George Cruikshank
The print condemns the government's repressive legislation in 1813._

A FREEBORN ENGLISHMAN!
THE PRIDE OF THE WORLD!
AND THE ENVY OF SURROUNDING NATIONS!!!
Visual Erotica

Byron was well versed in classical and contemporary literature; in addition, he was familiar with bawdy books and prints. After the separation, Lady Byron found his *Justine* by the Marquis de Sade. Byron asked John Murray to destroy any *Aphrodites* in preparation for the auction of books and prints; most likely, this refers to some type of erotic representation. The market for bawdy material was so widespread that George III issued a proclamation in 1787 calling for the prosecution of licentious material. Byron’s selection of Don Juan for a hero was not a random choice. Don Juan represented unrestrained male sexuality.

Figure 45

Unknown artist, 1744

A.D. Harvey describes the print as “quality control in a condom warehouse.” A clergyman appears to bless a condom.
Figure 46

*Essai Historique sur la Vie de Marie Antoinette*
Unknown artist
Marie Antoinette was the subject of obscene satires before the Revolution.

Figure 47

*Fashionable Contrasts; - or the Duchess’s Little Shoe Yielding to the Magnitude of the Duke’s Foot*
by James Gillray, 1792

Figure 48

*Meditations among the Tombs*
by Thomas Rowlandson
Rowlandson, a successful commercial artist in the book trade, created many erotic prints. The title, notes A.D. Harvey, is from a religious work by Rev. James Hervey (1746). The terror of the grave gives way to laughter for *life is a jest*. 

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Pedestrian Paphians

Byron delighted in bawdy imagery. *Don Juan* does not have vulgar language but does contain double entendre and sexually suggestive situations. Byron describes the London streetwalkers in *Don Juan*:

They reach'd the hotel; forth stream'd from the front door
A tide of well-clad waiters, and around
The mob stood, and as usual several score
Of those pedestrian Paphians who abound
In decent London where the daylights o'er;
Commodious but immoral, they are found
Useful, like Malthus, in promoting marriage –
But Juan now is stepping from his carriage

(Canto XI, XXX)

Figure 49

*The Male Carriage or the New Evening Dilly*
by Robert Newton, 1798
Inspiration

The relationship between literature and painting had been discussed since Horace.

Figure 50

*The Historian Animating the Mind of a Young Painter*

by Thomas Rowlandson, 1794
The Forbidden

Byron was stunned by the criticism hurled at *Don Juan*. As he wrote: “I understand the outcry was beyond everything – pretty Cant for people who read Tom Jones – and Roderick Randon – and the Bath Guide – and Ariosto – and Dryden – and Pope to say nothing of Little’s Poems.” – Byron

October 28, 1819

Figure 51

*The Comforts of Bath*

by Thomas Rowlandson, 1798

The fading aristocrat, ill with gout, is unaware of his wife’s adultery.
Literature and the Artist

Thomas Rowlandson’s drawings were used to illustrate an edition of Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews*. Rowlandson’s drawing captures the moment when Lady Booby attempts to seduce young Joseph. Mrs. Slipslop peeps through a half-open door.

Figure 52
Byron and Turner

J.M.W. Turner avidly read Byron's poems. Both satirized the untalented hack writer.

With you, ye Druids! Rich in native lead,  
Who daily scribble for your daily bread;  
With you I war not; Gifford's heavy hand  
Has crush'd, without remorse, your numerous band

*English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*

(741-744)

Figure 53

*The Garreeter's Petition*
by J.M.W. Turner, 1809  
The pitiful writer lives a life of misery.
Portraits and Paintings

Byron read about art. He owned the 1807 edition of *The Historic Gallery of Portraits and Paintings*. The seven volumes included drawings of famous paintings and commentary by such artists as Henry Fuseli. Byron made use of the information and even incorporated visual images he observed into his poetry.

Blest is the man who dares approach the bower
Where dwelt the muses at their natal hour;
Whose steps have press’d, whose eye has mark’d afar,
The clime that nursed the sons of song and war

*English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*

(867-870)

Figure 54

*The Muses Dancing Before Apollo*

Julio Romano

*The Historic Gallery* included a drawing of Julio Romano’s painting.
Don Juan and Cupid

Byron transformed Don Juan into a Cupid after he dons a uniform. Byron made use of elements from two prints: Julio Romano’s *Venus, Vulcan & Cupids* and *The Marriage of Cupid and Psyche* by James Gillrary. Byron describes Don Juan:

His wings subdued to epaulettes; his quiver
Shrunk to a scabbard, with his arrows at
His side as a small sword, but sharp as ever;
His bow converted to a cock’d hat;
But still so like that Psyche were more clever
If she had not mistaken him for Cupid

(Canto IX, XLV)

Figure 55

*Venus, Vulcan & Cupids*
by Julio Romano
Figure 56

*The Marriage of Cupid and Psyche*

by James Gillray, 1797
Visual and Poetic Satire Intersect

Byron was inspired by Gillray’s prints in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*.

What varied wonders tempt us as they pass!

The cow-pox, tractors, galvanism, and gas,

In turns appear, to make the vulgar stare,

Till the swollen bubble bursts – and all is air!

Nor less new schools of poetry arise…

*English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*

(129-35)

Figure 57

*The Cow-Pock*

by James Gillray, 1802

The inoculation against

“cow-pock” creates small cows that burst from humans.

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Figure 58

*The Use of Gas*
by James Gillray, 1802
The Good Effects of Carbonic Gas!
by Isaac and George Cruikshank, 1807
When gaslight arrived in London, no one seemed to like it, says John Wardroper: "...except its promoter – pictured here as a sideshow performer out to make an enormous profit ‘all in air.’"
Figure 60

The Metallic-Tractors
by James Gillray, 1801
Metallic-tractors were inserted to cure a variety of maladies.
Visual Culture

The public had visible access to prints for sale.

Figure 61

*Very Slippy-Weather*  
by James Gillray  
Gillray’s print shows Hannah Humphrey’s  
print shop at 27 St. James Street. The shop  
was Gillray’s residence for the last eighteen  
years of his life, notes Draper Hill in  
*Fashionable Contrasts.*
Figure 62
*James Gillray*
Self-portrait by the greatest caricaturist of his day.

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Figure 62A

*Conrad Liberates Guinane*
by J.H. Fuseli
Byron admired Fuseli’s engraving *Ugolino* and even met the artist to enquire about Fuseli’s *Ezzelin*. Fuseli purchased Byron’s poetry as soon as it was published.
Voluptuous Waltz!

The *Polish Waltz* was introduced to London in 1801. Byron's "The Waltz: An Apostrophic Hymn" criticized the dancers for the indecorum involved. Was he serious or condemnatory because, due to his lameness, he declined to dance?

The fashion hails - from countesses to queens,
And maids and valets behind the scenes [...] 
Round all the confines of the yielded waist,
The strangest hand may wander undisplaced...

(192-93)

Figure 63

*La Belle Assemblee*, February 1817
Bluestockings

Byron, like Gillray, found the female literary societies ripe for ridicule.

In “The Blues” Lady Bluebottle and Lady Bluemont ask Wordsworth to lecture. Byron sneered at Wordsworth’s poetic subjects:

How does your friend, Wordsworth,
that Windemere treasure?
Does he stick to his lakes, like the leeches he sings?
And their gatherers, as Homer sung warriors and kings?

(II, 4-49)

Don Juan expresses similar disdain for the Blues.

The Blues, that tender tribe, who sigh sonnets,
And with pages of the last Review
Line the interior of their heads or bonnets,
Advanced in their azure’s highest hue

(Canto IX, 1)

Figure 64

Tales of Wonder: The attempt to describe the effects of the Sublime & Wonderful is dedicated to M.G. Lewis, Esq. MP
by James Gillray, 1802
La Belle Assemblee
by James Gillray, 1787
The female fashionables
worship at the altar of love.
The Theater

Byron frequented the London theater as a young man and was knowledgeable about the playwrights and their works.

Figure 66

*The Monster Melodrama*
Unknown artist, 1807
The bizarre creature satirizes the different theater genres. The heads are those of Sheridan, Kemble, Grimaldi, and Harlequin. Beneath the creature’s paws are the works of Congreve, Beaumont and Fletcher, Colman, and Shakespeare. The monster is suckled by authors of *The Caravan, The Wood Demon, The Road to Ruin, The Hunter of the Alps,* and *Sleeping Beauty.*
The Phantasmagorie

After achieving literary success Byron became a member of the Sub-Committee for Drury Lane. Although Byron criticized the theater in *English Bard and Scotch Reviewers*, he obviously enjoyed the productions.

Figure 67

*La Phantasmagorie*
Unknown artist
The engraving depicts the Paris theatrical sensation of 1797. Paris producers triumphed with a sublime spectacle during the French Revolution. The effects produced skeletons, mists, and fear. London producers imitated the spectacle. Byron uses the visual effects in “The Vision of Judgment.”
The Pantomime

The pantomime was often a short afterpiece or a major production staged during the Christmas season. The pantomime combined song, dance, and often satire. Dialogue was minimal. The astounding scenery and costumes delighted audiences and brought high ticket sales. Joseph Grimaldi, the most famous Clown character of his day, was financially assisted in benefits by Byron.

Figure 68

Harlequin and Mother Goose; or, The Golden Egg
Unknown artist, 1806
Commedia Dell'Arte

The pantomime was descended from the *commedia dell'arte* where bawdy images were common. Byron purposely plucked Don Juan from the lowly but popular pantomime.

I'll therefore take our ancient friend Don Juan,

We have all seen him in the pantomime

Sent to the devil, somewhat ere his time.

(I, 6-8)

Figure 69

*Arlequin Fait L'Amour A Francisquina*

16th century

Figure 69

The engraving shows the bawdy phallic image and low humor.
Figure 71

Domenico Biancolleli
Known As Dominique
1640-1688
Now to the Drama turn – Oh, motley sight!

Byron satirized the stage in English Bards and Scotch Reviewers. His criticism resembles Hogarth’s complaint that theatrical masterpieces are ignored while the lightweight pieces are staged.

Shall sapient managers new scenes produce
From Cherry, Skeffington, and Mother Goose
While Shakespeare, Otway, Massinger, forgot […]
And sure great Skeffington must claim our praise,
For skirtless coats and skeletons of plays

Figure 72

Skiffy Skipt
by James Gillray, 1800
Sir Lumley Skeffington,
a dandy, was also satirized by Byron.
A Just View of the British Stage
by William Hogarth, 1724
The pantomime and farce are predominant while the privies are stocked with toilet paper marked Hamlet, Macbeth, Julius Caesar, and Way of the World.
Figure 74

_Constancy!! – or Rival Clowns in the New Pantomime of Harlequin & Quixote_
by Robert Newton, 1798
The pantomime’s was eclectic stage entertainment.

Figure 75

_Harlequin and Clown_
by George Cruikshank
Laughter

Figure 76

*Harlequin Disguised As Diana*
Unknown artist
The French print shows Harlequin dressed as a female. Transvestism was common in the *commedia dell'arte*. Byron had Don Juan disguised as a female in the harem.

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Figure 77

*Blowing Up the Pic Nic's; or, Harlequin Quixotte attacking the Puppets*
by James Gillray, 1802
The print shows professional performers demolishing an amateur production of *Tom Thumb*. Richard Brinsley Sheridan, dressed as Harlequin, swirls a white feather that strikes a blow with newspaper reviews. David Garrick emerges from the floorboards. Byron emulated the spirit of Gillray and the pantomime.

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Junius

Although an aristocrat, Byron’s political sympathies were with the Whigs. However, he admired Napoleon as a military officer and the last hope of restoring the ideals of the French Revolution of 1789. Junius was an unknown critic of the government, responsible for attacks on George II and his ministers. The Junius Letters were published in the Public Advertiser between 1769 and 1771. The London Magazine suggested three main Figures for Junius in February 1770: Edmund Burke, Lord George Sackville, and Sir Philip Francis (Nicholas Robinson, Edmund Burke: A Life in Caricature).

In “The Vision of Judgment” Byron places Junius in heaven and refers to the suspected trio, indicating he had likely seen T. Bonnor’s print, though he substitutes Horne Tooke for Sackville. Most surprisingly, Byron emulates the experience of The Phantasmagorie, the eerie optical entertainment imported from France that used magic lanterns, smoke, music, and offstage sound effects.

The more intently the ghosts gazed, the less
Could they distinguish whose features were;
The Devil himself seem’d puzzled even to guess;
They varied like a dream – now here, now there […]
The man was a phantasmagoria in
Himself – he was so volatile and thin […] (LXXVI)
For sometimes he like Cerberus would seem –
‘Three gentlemen at once’ (as sagely says Good Mrs. Malaprop); then you might deem
That he was not even one; now many rays
Were flashing round him. And now a thick steam
Hid him from sight – like fogs on London days:
Now Burke, Tooke, he grew to people’s fancies
And certes often like Sir Philip Francis (LXXIX)

_{The Vision of Judgment_}

Figure 78

_{Junius_}
by T. Bonnor, February 1770
The Elgin Marbles

Byron disliked the removal of the marbles and denounced Lord Elgin in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage:

Dull is the eye that will not weep to see

Thy walls defaced, thy mouldering shrines removed

By British hands... (Canto II, XV)

Figure 79

The Elgin Marbles; or John Bull buying stones at a time his numerous family Want Bread

by George Cruikshank

Lord Elgin explains the price is only L35,000.
The Galleries

Byron visited several art museums while abroad. Although he concluded that sculpture was the highest form of artistic representation, he praised paintings that he liked.

Like a flying Hour before Aurora,

In Guido’s famous fresco which alone

Is worth a tour to Rome…

*Don Juan*, (Canto XIV, XL)

Figure 80

*Aurora*

by Guido Reni
“Of painting I know nothing; - but I like the Guercino – a picture of Abraham putting away Hagar & Ishmael – which seems to me natural and goodly.”

Byron
October 15, 1816

Figure 81
The Portrait of Poetry

Byron was impressed by Titian’s *Gentleman in Blue*. He described it as “the poetry of portrait and the portrait of poetry.”

Figure 82

*Gentleman in Blue*
bby Titian, c. 1510
The painting was once though to be a portrait of Ariosto.

Figure 83

*Napoleon*
bby Francois Gerard, 1804
Byron owned an engraving of the portrait by Raffaello Morghen.
Giorgione and Reni

Byron admired *The Massacre of the Innocents* and *The Tempest*.

Figure 83A

*Massacre of the Innocents*
by Guido Reni, 1611

Figure 83B

*The Tempest*
by Giorgione
Sculpture: Kindled Marble

Byron saw a drawing of Berthelmy’s *The Origin of Sculpture* in *The Historic Gallery of Portraits and Paintings* (1807). The narrator explained: “The artist is entitled to much praise for the disposition of the figures, who uphold themselves admirably in the air without the slightest appearance of falling, as is frequently but too obvious in the figures of cupolas.” Byron defined poetry in *The Prophecy of Dante*, Canto 4.

What is poesy but to create
From overfeeling good or ill: and aim
At an external life beyond our fate,
And be the new Prometheus of men,
Bestowing fire from heaven, and then too late,
Finding the pleasure given repaid with pain, (11-16)
The kindled marble’s bust may wear
More poesy upon its speaking brow
Than ought less than the Homeric page may bear (25-27)

Figure 84

*The Origin of Sculpture*
by Berthelmy
Sculpture: The Highest Form of Art

“A great artist will make a block of stone as sublime as a mountain.”

- Byron

Byron agreed with Richard Payne Knight that sculpture was the highest form of art.

Knight, a prominent aesthete, also collected paintings and admitted that talented painters could surpass Greek art. While in Italy Byron praised statues from the classical world in Childe Harold.

Figure 85

*Apollo Belvedere*

Figure 86

*Venus de Medici*

Figure 87

*The Dying Gaul*

(once called *The Dying Gladiator*)

Figure 88

*Laocoon*
Don Juan

Byron shocked his publisher and friends by announcing he would write about the scandalous Don Juan, the icon of rampant male sexuality.

I want a hero: an uncommon want,

When every year and month sends forth a new one,

Till, after cloying the gazettes with cant,

The age discovers he is not the true one:

Of such as these I should not care to vaunt,

I'll therefore take our ancient friend Don Juan

(Canto I, I)

Figure 89

Adultery

The engraving is from Alexander Hogg's *A New and Complete Collection of the Most Remarkable Trials for Adultery*, published in 1799. The work was prosecuted for obscenity, though the Hogg claimed its purpose was to shame the guilty. Adultery was a subject Byron knew from experience.
Rowlandson, Byron, and Death

A drawing in The English Dance of Death shows Death as a pipe smoking companion of a sick and elderly husband. The young wife already is courted by a suitor. Another drawing shows Death as an artist. The canvas depicts the fading husband with horns, the sign of a cuckold. The wife and her lover await the husband’s demise. The fading husband is inevitable. The transience of time and extinction cannot be changed, as Byron expresses in Canto XV of Don Juan. Death is merely a collector of debts. The can take the elderly “debtor” but should spare the young wife.

Like a meek tradesman when, approaching palely

Some splendid debtor (VIII)

Whate’ver thou takest, spare awhile poor Beauty!

She is so rare, and thou hast so much prey.

What thou she now and then may slip from duty (IX).

Figure 90
by Thomas Rowlandson
From The English Dance of Death, 1815-16
The Lost Collection

“How sweetly spread a landscape of Lorraine.”

*Don Juan* (Canto XIII, LXXII)

The fifth Lord Byron’s *Grand and Noble Collection* of paintings was sold in 1772. When the poet inherited Newstead Abbey at age ten, only family portraits remained. Byron was aware that the ancestral residence once held hundreds of paintings by the masters. “The Lost Collection” reappears in Canto XIII of *Don Juan*. In Norman Abbey, the fictional model of Newstead, are paintings by Peter Lely, Carlo Dolce, Titian, Salvatore Rose, Spagnoletto, Claude Lorrain, Rembrandt, Caravaggio, and Teniers. Byron recognized the power of the visual arts and lamented, “for to the dolour / Of bards and prosers, words are devoid of colour” (*Don Juan*, Canto XIV, XL).

Figure 91

*Auction Catalogue, 1772*
Connoisseurs

Collecting paintings was part of the cultural activity of the nobility and gentry. Art knowledge was offered in prestigious magazines like Ackermann's. In Canto XVI of Don Juan, Lord Henry agrees to examine "a special Titian."

Figure 92

Connoisseurs by J.H. Lips, 1777
The engraving appeared in Lavater's Physiognomische.

Figure 93

Connoisseur examining a collection of George Morland's by James Gillray, 1807

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The Death of Byron
by Joseph Odevaere
The idealized painting of Byron’s death in 1826 attests to the admiration for the poet on the Continent. Odevaere has discretely covered Byron’s malformed foot. The titles of Byron’s poems are on the bed frame encircled by laurel. Byron’s sword rests against a shattered column, signifying his sacrifice for the liberation of Greece. Odevaere studied under Jacques-Louis David, whose Marat Assassinated was the most famous painting of the French Revolution. Byron has achieved heroic status in Odevaere’s painting.
Byron the Liberator

Byron’s sacrifice in Greece inspired artists to depict the struggle of Greeks to throw off the rule of the Ottoman Turks.

Figure 95

*Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi*
by Eugene Delacroix, 1826
The artist captures the tragedy of Missolonghi’s fall. Although the Greeks surrendered, they were slaughtered by the Turks in 1826.

Figure 96

*Combat of the Giaour and the Pasha*
by Eugene Delacroix, 1826
The artist’s inspiration was Byron’s *Giaour*
Byron and the Brontes

The Bronte siblings were influenced by Byron’s life and poetry. Charlotte Bronte used Richard Westall’s Byronic images as a model for her pencil drawings.

Figure 97

Childe Harold and Ianthe
by Richard Westall
The engraving is by E. Portbury.
Finden's Illustrations

In 1833 John Murray published *Finden's Landscape & Portrait Illustrations to the Life and Works of Lord Byron*. The three volumes were filled with exquisite engravings that allowed readers to see what Byron had visually experienced and captured in his poetry. The engravings were based on original drawings including those of J.M.W. Turner.

Figure 98

*Malta*
b by J.M.W. Turner
Engraved by Edward Finden
Figure 99

*The Temple of Minerva*
by J.M.W. Turner
Engraved by Edward Finden
Figure 100

*Lord Byron Reposing After Having Swum Across the Hellespont* by Sir William Allan, 1832
Although Byron swam the Hellespont, the scene is fictionalized for effect.

Figure 101

*Lord Byron's Room in the Palazzo Mocenigo* by Lake Price
The artist shows Byron in Venice, dreamily writing poetry, surrounded by paintings. The famous engraving by J.T. Wilmore was published in 1837.
Etched in Marble

Figure 102

Le Romantique
Unknown artist
The anonymous engraving was published in Paris in 1825. A young man sits atop a crag in a meditative mood. Bats hover around a ruined tower entwined with ivy. The man on the left holds a guitar and appears to sing. The engraving likely influenced Thorvaldsen's later statue.

Figure 103

The genius of Poetry
by Bertel Thorvaldsen
The poet, pen in hand, sits in a meditative moment. The original was made for Westminster Abbey, but Byron was regarded as too controversial and the statue went to Wren Library, Trinity College, in 1844. Byron holds a copy of Childe Harold.
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