BYRON AND THE MEDITERRANEAN "CULT OF THE SOUTH"

A BICENTENNIAL SYMPOSIUM

PAPER ABSTRACTS

(arranged in alphabetical order of speakers' names)

“Byron and Staël, ou l’italie,”

James Chandler, University of Chicago

My title is an allusion to Staël’s massively influential 1807 novel, *Corinne ou l’Italie,* written from the exile imposed on her by Napoleon after the publication of her first novel, *Delphine*, a few years earlier. The connections between Staël and Byron, a fellow exile, have long been known and have had their share of attention. Staël received Byron in her literary circle and into her home at Coppet when he left England for good in 1816. Their works were well known to each other. After all they were, along with Scott and Goethe, perhaps the most highly recognized writers in Europe in that moment. In line with the topic of this conference, I’m interested in how Byron responded to Staël’s influential representations of Italy, especially in *Corinne,* and in the context of Staël’s famously gendered and aestheticized interest in emerging cultural nationalisms.

The Siege of Corinth and Some Occasions for the "Cult of the South"

Jeffrey N. Cox, University of Colorado Boulder

We often think of occasional poetry as a minor form, despite Amanda Gorman's recent reminder of how important such poems can be. I want to use Byron's poetry of 1816—and particularly his *Siege of Corinth*--as a way to rethink "occasional" poetry. To begin with, he wrote poems that are as occasional as they come: a poem addressed to his alienated wife, " Fare thee well," along with a vituperative personal satire on her confidant Mrs. Clermont. We could think of these as especially personal poems, except he asked his publisher Murray to print and distribute forty copies, which led to the poems being published in a number of periodicals. The private became public. *The Champion* linked these personal occasional poems with Byron's quite different occasional poems on the fall of Napoleon published in *The Examiner*, as liberalism is equated with libertinism. In this context, when it is published, *The Siege of Corinth* can be read as engaging occasions beyond the historical one of the Ottoman-Venetian war it takes up. When we think of the *Siege of Corinth* as a questioning of military triumphalism amidst the occasional poetry around Waterloo, including Wordsworth's "Thanksgiving Ode," we can think of it as addressing immediate occasions; or when we view *The Siege* and its companion poem, *Parasina*, as offering a Byronic program of anti-war poetry and poetry on the limits of the erotic, we can think of the volume as providing the groundwork for the future epic of the occasion, *Don Juan.* Turning to Italian and Greek/Ottoman tales and writing of the struggle against tyranny and for the erotic, Byron was already in 1816 providing an occasion for the "Cult of the South" that Marilyn Butler sees coming into fruition with Shelley, Peacock, and Hunt at Marlow in 1817.

“Ugo Foscolo and the Byron Circle in London: His Correspondence Between Demands, Anxieties, and Talents"

Lilla Maria Crisafulli, Università di Bologna

On March 19, 1819, John Murray sent a letter to Byron in which he expresses his doubts about the recently published *Don Juan*, Canto I. He was puzzled by Byron’s new style and thus writes: “Here is Foscolo at my side – deploring that a Man of your Genius will not occupy some Six or Eight years in the composition of a Work & Subject worthy of you-” Inevitably, Murray’s lack of enthusiasm irritated Byron to the point that, on April 6, rather piqued, he replied: “So you and Mr. Foscolo &c. want me to undertake what you call a "great work" an Epic poem I suppose or some such pyramid. - I'll try no such thing - I hate tasks. - and then "seven or eight years!" God send us all well this day three months - let alone years.” Then, he reversed Foscolo’s exhortation on Foscolo himself: “And Foscolo too! why does he not do something more than the letters of Ortis - and a tragedy - and pamphlets.” Reading this passage, the question to be asked is what was Foscolo doing with Murray? Also, why is he given so much importance that his (critical) opinion is cited in the epistolary exchange between the two friends? The answer might be found in what Foscolo was doing in London. An Italian exile who, nevertheless, was very involved in London's literary and cultural circles, Foscolo actively participated as a columnist and reviewer, able to choose materials to be published or rejected. He frequented London's liberal salons, such as those of Lord and Lady Holland, which had once been assiduously attended by Byron himself. It is precisely through his letters that we can understand the critical role played by Foscolo within the Byron circle in London. My paper will investigate his correspondence examining the relationship he had established with some of Byron’s closest friends and contemporaries. Additionally, it will explore the difficulties and anxieties that his “public” role in London implied.

“Byron, Hunt, and the ‘Miscellaneousness’ of *The Liberal*’s Souths”

Greg Kucich, University of Notre Dame

This paper focuses on the collective project of *The Liberal* (the literary periodical edited by Leigh Hunt in Pisa and published by his brother John in London) to addresses two prominent critical questions about Byron’s relation to the progressive aesthetic and political agendas of the younger romantic era writers that Marilyn Butler has memorably characterized as “the cult of the South”: 1) the degree to which we can identify the group of British writers gathered in Pisa to launch *The Liberal* (Byron and Hunt, in particular, but including the Shelleys) as an identifiable “circle” promoting shared liberal, if not radical, creative and political values; 2) the extent of Byron’s engagement in action and writing with the reformist values of his *Liberal* collaborators, infamously dubbed a “Satanic School” by its reactionary enemies. While scholars and theorists of British Romanticism have devoted great innovative energy over the last generation to unpack and breach the boundaries of conventional critical categories like “first-generation” and “secondgeneration” writers, or the very notion of a “High Romanticism,” those critics who have developed breakthrough studies of the politically radical “Hunt Circle” or “Cockney School” in Hampstead, the “Shelley Circle” at Marlowe—or the reformulation of these groups in Pisa around *The Liberal* project as a “cult of the South”—have worked to disclose newly recognized categories of writers whose selfconsciously shaped collective redraws conventional maps of “Romanticism.” This presentation offers a different way of complicating our understanding of these radical groups by conducting a fresh analysis of the problematic, often vexed but highly creative liaison between Hunt and Byron during *The Liberal* years, which demonstrates how they projected, often in fractious and contradictory ways, multiple types of subversive aesthetic and political agendas, or multiple “Souths.” It was precisely this evasive, multifronted dynamic—what Hunt subversively called our “miscellaneousness”—that made the insurrectionary force of *The Liberal* project so threatening to the era’s cultural bastions of orthodoxy and legitimacy.

“Byron’s Life in the Frezzeria, and a Few Other Venetian Discoveries”

Richard Lansdown, University of Tasmania

In letters to his English friends Byron referred in somewhat dismissive and complacent terms to his rented apartments in the Frezzeria, and his biographers have often followed suit, referring to the premises there as “the shop of a draper” (Leslie Marchand) and to Pietro Segati (husband of his mistress Marianna) as a “merchant of Venice” and not much more. But the poet took up residence in the property with lightning speed after his arrival in Venice in November 1816 and occupied rooms there—with at least three servants, in addition—for nearly eighteen months before moving into the Palazzo Mocenigo in May 1818. The relationship with Marianna Segati lasted about the same period of time, and must rank as the secondlongest sexual relationship of his life, with vital implications for his prodigiously creative sojourn in Venice. I want to use one particular document—a letter from Ruskin’s Venetian factotum Rawdon Brown to Earl Stanhope of 1856—to shed some more light on these arrangements and on Signora Segati as a person and an influence. How, for example, did Byron find these rooms so quickly? What sort of shop, exactly, were the Segatis running? What sort of person was Marianna Segati, and what role did she play in Byron’s Venetian existence? If time permits I should be happy to share other more trivial results of my recent Venetian researches: why the Englishman from *Don Juan*, John Johnson, has that peculiar name, for example; and who were the Italian originals for Juan, Julia, and Don Alfonso in the first canto of that poem.

“Byron the Osmanli”

Piya Pal-Lapinski, Bowling Green State University

“Byron the Osmanli” will focus on Byron's *Turkish Tales*, and explore the way Byron was drawn towards *Ottoman* identity as distinct from *Turkish* (the 2 are not the same, though confused all the time), and as produced by the culture of Istanbul and Anatolia. I’ll argue that this complicates Byron’s stance towards Greece and Philhellenism considerably. As historian Halil İnalcık reminds us, “The Ottoman empire was not a Turkish empire. It was a multilingual, multireligious, and multicultural political system.

. . .” The term “Osmanli” had nuanced, interchangeable meanings in the 18th and 19th centuries, referring to descendants of the House of Osman, subjects of the Ottoman empire, and the multi-ethnic Ottoman ruling elite. I’ll discuss Byron’s reworking of Ottoman figures from his reading of Knolles, Rycaut, and François de Tott in his poetry, such as Ibrahim Pasha of Parga, the Barbarossa brothers, (Barbary corsairs). and Kösem Sultan (The Sultanate of Women). I'll also draw on Byron's stay in Istanbul and his comments on the architectural landscape of the city in his letters, especially Yedikule (Seven Towers) Süleymaniye, Valide Sultan, and Sultan Ahmet mosques.

“Byroniana; or, Problems and Post-obits for Posterity”

Jerome McGann, University of Virginia

This is a peek into the more or less recondite archive of bibliographical Byromania. When you go there you find odd and often interesting things that went missing and then came back, or that were out there for a long time and nobody knew. Two hundred years is a long time for a Lost and Found to accumulate. It’s also a long time for nefarious persons to foul the pure Byronic stream with polluted matter, but also for that company of the good and the just to keep things in order and clean things up. It’s a place where you might even get provoked to look again at much loved and long familiar things and wonder about them once again.

*"*The Ismail Cantos of *Don Juan*: Complications and Speculations"

Peter Manning, Stony Brook University

The Ismail cantos of *Don Juan* have attracted a great deal of attention, much of it growing from Byron's employment of, and resistance to, his source, the *Essai sur L'Histoire Ancienne et Moderne de la Nouvelle Russie* by the Marquis de Castelnau (1820). I will consider how the contexts in which Byron was writing in 1822 of a siege that had taken place in 1790 complicate the narrative he develops. For example, he is writing of Ismail with knowledge of the massacres of Turks at the Fall of Tripolitsa in 1821 and of Greeks at Chios in 1822. He writes as if the only inhabitants of Ismail were "Turks," when it was always in fact a multinational trading port and also, in 1821, an important gathering place for planners of the Greek Revolution. Missing such details, scholars have tended to flatten-out Byron's subtle exploration of agency in the Siege where individuals such as Suvorov appear personally bloodthirsty but were in fact also driven by the whole structure in which the fighters are enveloped. Following Byron's practice, I will explore the resulting tensions. Lastly, following the work of Matthew Borushko and others on agency in Byron's account of the siege I will consider the relationship of these cantos to the following English cantos: the reflective narrator of the English cantos would be impossible without the work done in the poem at Ismail.

"Byron and Turner in Venice: Desire, Decadence and Romantic Irony"

Anne Mellor, UCLA

This illustrated talk explores the impact of Byron's poetry on W. J. M. Turner's paintings of Venice, beginning in 1819. After summarizing Byron's views of Venice, as recorded in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage IV, Beppo,* and his letters, I will argue that Byron profoundly shaped Turner's understanding of Venetian history, culture, and political significance. We will look first at Turner's immediate visual responses to Byron's poetry, *Women at a Window, Reclining Nude,* and *Looking across the Bacino di San Marco.* Turner's experiences in Venice also transformed his paintings into an exploration of light itself, and into a new conception of the act of painting as a *performance*, as I shall document. More important, Turner developed a visual correlation for Byron's most revolutionary philosophical poetics, the romantic irony of *Don Juan*. We will examine several of Turner's paintings that illustrate this, most notably *The Sun of Venice going to Sea* (1843).

“Understanding Byron's Celebrity through *Don Juan* and the Tribute to Francisco de Miranda and Germaine de Staël”

Omar F. Miranda, University of San Francisco

Lord Byron was telling us a lot about his own celebrity through his long poem and masterpiece. In this talk, I aim to decode those messages, arguing that *Don Juan*'s guidebook to Byron's particular celebrity of performances and contradictions serves as a tribute to two of his celebrity precursors: the Venezuelan revolutionary, Francisco de Miranda (1750-1816), and the French-Swiss Woman of Letters, Germaine de Staël (1766-1817). Part of my findings examines what *Don Juan*'s plot structure, setting of time and place, and narrator/narrative style all tell us. My analysis also emphasizes how, as Staël does in her novel, *Corinne ou l'Italie*, Byron cultivated a culture of celebrity grouped together with "the South," the Mediterranean and "Meridian" climate of possibility that Byron (like Staël) pitted against the "North." Ultimately, I show how Byron not only embodied his Mirandist and Staëlian models of celebrity in his own day-to-day but also embedded the poses and paradoxes of these celebrity precedents into his great poem.

“The ‘Marlow Moment’ of Spring 1817 and Leigh Hunt’s *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* (1828)”

Nicholas Roe, University of St. Andrews

Opening with Marilyn Butler's chapter “The Cult of the South: the Shelley circle, its creed and its influence,” I want to consider how the “Marlow moment” of Spring 1817, and its reveries about the Mediterranean, shaped the classicism of Hunt's *Foliage* (1818) and, more particularly, the tenor of *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* (1828). I aim to explore Hunt's book from several perspectives: as a corrective to the idealistic “Cult of the South” and to some ideas about Byron, and as a narrative that has some curiously modernist tendencies. Aware of Hunt's prized independence as editor of the *Examiner*, I take Hunt at his word when he says “I am not vindictive, and ... I tell the truth.” What will emerge in the paper, I hope, is a more nuanced view of *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* as a prototype of modern biography, published long before Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* spurned “tedious panegyric” and promoted biography that would shoot “a sudden, revealing searchlight into obscure recesses.” As Hunt came to terms with Lord Byron and the actuality of “the South,” the “Marlow moment' can be seen to have helped to shape Hunt's determination to “put an end to a great deal of false biography.” That this meant Hunt would have to write “of necessity a painful retrospect” is one compelling aspect of a complex and self-critical narrative that tells us of “a sense of mistake on both sides.”

“Byron’s Iberia – Place, Text, Thing”

Diego Saglia, Università di Parma

Byron’s Mediterranean journey began with his crossing of war-torn Iberia in July-August 1809. Central Portugal and southern Spain gave him his earliest taste of foreign lands, while also proving inspirational and formative in many ways. In the first canto of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* Byron conveys such imaginative and experiential possibilities through expressions of visual expansion (“The eye dilates”, l. 239); but, alongside visuality, his delineation of Iberian cultural geographies includes spatial, textual, and material components. In other words, Portugal and Spain inaugurate Byron’s writing of foreign lands through a clustering and an enmeshing of places, texts and things. The least explored of these is the material dimension—the world of things that signifies an *other* geography, history and culture, as well as referencing the lived experience of a country’s inhabitants. As this paper shows, things play a significant role in Byron’s perception and writing of the Iberian lands as geo-cultural complexes. In keeping with his poetics of fact, in *Childe Harold ’s Pilgrimage*, *Don Juan*, *The Age of Bronze*, and his letters, Byron repeatedly conjures up Portugal and Spain through significant materialities, including knives, castanets and guitars, mantillas, shoes, and the thing “of words” that was the Spanish *Constitution* of 1812. Presiding over the inception of Byron’s writing of exotic lands, Iberia places his representations of foreign geographies under the threefold heading of place, text and thing, assigning specific relevance to a world of things that we need to reappraise in order to gain new insights into the power and resonance of Byron’s geo-cultural imagination.

"'These oriental writings on the wall': Reclaiming Greece in Byron's *Don Juan*"

Maria Schoina, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

In his recent study on *Don Juan*, Richard Cronin calls "The Isles of Greece" a "liberal poem" because "it allows so many shades of meaning to play across its surface, which is a characteristic that it shares with the word liberal itself" (*Byron's* Don Juan*: The Liberal Epic of the Nineteenth Century*). Context-based readings of the lyric over the past thirty years (textual, literary, historical, political) have offered important insights into our appreciation of its nature. Yet Byron scholars acknowledge the poem's endemic ambivalence and lack of transparency with regard to its aims, complicating its canonical reception as one of the most famous expressions of Byron's philhellenism. Jerome McGann contends that "the complex voicing in the poem extends the world of which and for which the poem is speaking" (*The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory*). Tony Tyler speaks of its many "contradictions" and "multi-directional language" ("Byron's Greek Freedom in 'The Isles of Greece' Lyric"), while Caroline Franklin, analyzing the sexual politics of the Haidée/Lambros stanzas, argues for the poem's "Utopian dreams of Philhellenism" (*Byron's Heroines*). In my presentation I want to continue the debate so as to uncover more "shades of meaning" that underpin the Haidée/Lambros/Greek isle stanzas of *Don Juan* and their complex philhellenic sentiments. Drawing on understudied literary contexts (such as Athanasios Christopoulos's Anacreontic *Lyrics*, the Romaic satire

"Rossanglogallos," and Byron's unpublished draft review of William Martin Leake's *Researches in Greece*), I will discuss the roles these played in shaping the nuanced expression and destabilizing tone of the lyric. A related aim of this paper is to reassess the troubled, hybridized portrayal of Greece in the song and related stanzas (the writing on the wall that Byron mentions in Canto III stanza 65) and subsequently reflect on the vulnerabilities and contradictions of the western concept of Philhellenism as it is acted out in the poem.

“Rereading Byron’s Venetian Ode”

Andrew Stauffer, University of Virginia

My presentation will focus on Byron’s poem known as “Venice. An Ode,” written midsummer 1818. Byron had been living in *La Serenissima* for almost two years and had just moved into the Palazzo Mocenigo. He had begun writing *Don Juan* and was arguably at the height of his powers. The convergence of poet, place, and time couldn’t have been more promising. Yet the poem has been classed as a notorious disappointment. Why? What went wrong, either with the poem or the critical reception of it, or both? I begin from the observation that the poem’s received title, “Venice, An Ode,” was supplied by later editors. In manuscript and in the early Murray editions, the poem is simply titled, “Ode.” One central question that needs to be asked, then, is, what exactly is the subject of this poem? What is it an ode to or upon? The poem begins with an invocation to Venice, and Venetian political history prompts some, but by no means all, of the musings of the poem. Venice is not its consistent subject, and one of the problems of the poem seems to be its swerving attention, its rhetorical distractions and grammatical tangles. I read these as the symptoms of a poet in a state of confoundment, both personally and politically. Through close attention to the manuscript and Byron’s revisions, I read the metaphors, allusions, and rhetorical formations of the “Ode” as enacting blockages and breakdowns that are features of Byron’s political despair.

"'Strange coincidence': The Juans, the Mediterranean, and the World-System"

Clara Tuite, University of Melbourne

In a footnote to *Don Juan* Canto IV (1821), Byron recollects the "strange coincidence" by which he happened to hear in 1817 one of the singers of an Italian opera company that had been engaged "for some foreign theatre," embarked at an Italian port, and then carried to Algiers and sold by their impresario, "returned from her captivity" to "sing … in Rossini's opera of *L'Italiana in Algeri* at Venice." Engaging "the Juans" (as Byron sometimes referred to his work-in-progress from July 1821) as a phenomenon of seriality and intertextual circuitry, this talk explores *Don Juan*'s working of this "strange coincidence" by considering the relationship between poetic form and historical "fact." Here, the coincidence functions as a principle of textual agency that powers the poem's digressive *ottava rima* epic mobility and assembles its motley cosmopolitan crew of adventurers, islanders, travelling performers, mercenaries, impresarios, sailors, pirates, privateers, slavers and enslaved, and "free" people. My paper thus engages what Marilyn Butler calls "the one assured epic of the cult of the south" by focusing on the Mediterranean movement of

Don Juan II-VI, routed through a bustling ecosystem of Mediterranean piracy, from pirate's lair on the Cyclades to slave-ship to the seraglio in Constantinople. A broader interest is the strange coincidence by which Byron's satirical epic mediates an emergent world-system of global capitalism and its new imperialisms that is contemporaneous with what Goethe calls in 1827 the "epoch of world literature."

“‘warm south’ to war south: Keats and Byron” Susan J. Wolfson, Princeton University

In 1819, poet listens in a springtime night to this bird singing of “summer in full-throated ease,” and in aching desire petitions, “O for a beaker full of the warm South, / … That I might drink, and leave the world unseen, / And with thee fade away into the forest dim.” Byron, ever impatient with Keats’s wordings, disingenuously claimed not to understand this catachresis. By the next February (1820), Keats’s mouth would fill with his own blood, an event he took as his death-sentence. I’ll begin with Keats’s various imaginings, early to late, of “the warm south,” not just as geography but as an ideational allure. Keats’s last dream of a healing south wind is a whim of mind that is rebuked by a ruin, a “temple, sad and lone” that has been “spar'd from the thunder of a war / Foughten long since.” In September 1820 Keats would leave England for a warm-south healing not to be. For Byron, living in the warm south of Ravenna and looking eastward to the war in Greece as Keats was dying in Rome, the warm south was ever sibling to a war-south, in its fields and arenas of entertainment. Traveling in Portugal and Spain in 1810, he found no paradise, just a series of paradises lost to warfare, imperialist tyrannies, the ruins of time, and the blood-sport of bullfighting. I trace this course from Cintra to Seville, to Rome’s Colosseum. Or “Byron’s Colosseum,” as it emerged after *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* Canto IV*:* a gorgeous, vivid, visceral poetry in which violent history cannot be expelled in contemplating in the moonlit remnant, haunting the twinkling transformation that draws pilgrims and tourists with tenacious, inhuman bloody shades.