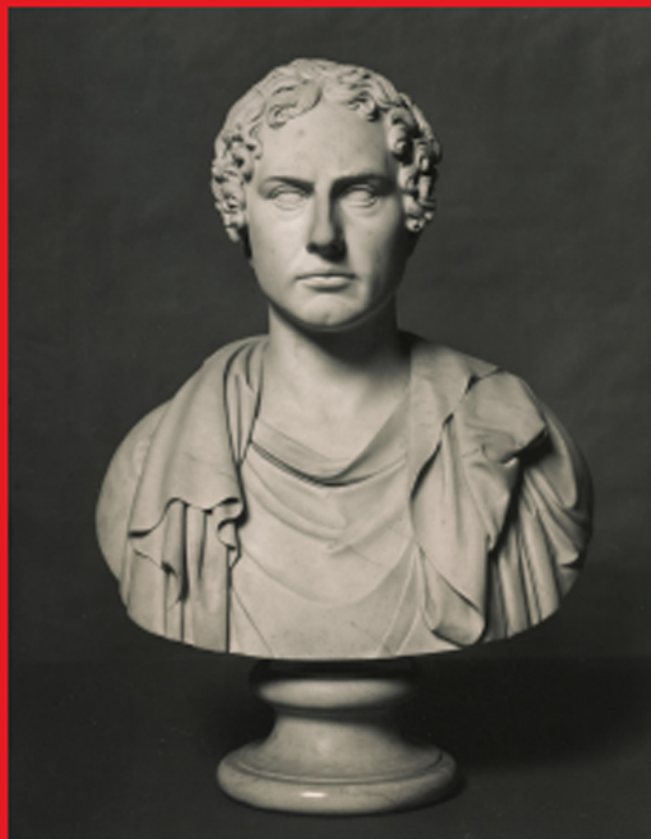


Byron: The Poetry of Politics and the Politics of Poetry

Edited by

Roderick Beaton and Christine Kenyon Jones



CENTRE FOR HELLENIC STUDIES, KING'S COLLEGE LONDON

Byron: The Poetry of Politics and the Politics of Poetry

‘It is no great matter, supposing that Italy could be liberated, who or what is sacrificed. It is a grand object – the very *poetry* of politics. Only think – a free Italy!!! Why, there has been nothing like it since the days of Augustus.’ So wrote Lord Byron in his journal, in February 1821, only days before the outbreak of revolution in Greece, where three years later he would die in the service of the revolutionary cause. For a poet whose life and work are interlaced with action of multiple sorts, surprisingly little attention has been devoted to Byron’s engagement with issues of politics. This volume brings together the work of eminent Byronists from seven European countries and the US to re-assess the evidence. What did Byron mean by the ‘*poetry* of politics’? Was he, in any sense, a ‘political animal’? Can his final, fateful involvement in Greece be understood as the culmination of earlier, more deeply rooted quests? The first part of the book examines the implications of reading and writing as themselves political acts; the second interrogates the politics inherent or implied in Byron’s poems and plays; the third follows the trajectory of his political engagement (or non-engagement), from his abortive early career in the British House of Lords, via the Peninsular War in Spain to his involvement in revolutionary politics abroad.

The contributors to this volume collectively offer a breadth of perspectives and approaches that confront the full range of Byron’s work, as well as the contradictions and ambiguities of his personality and actions. Ultimately, this is a book not only about one great poet’s involvement with politics, but about the possibilities of interaction between art and the imagination on the one hand, and the political lives of societies on the other, between what Byron himself called ‘words’ and ‘things’.

Roderick Beaton is Koraes Professor of Modern Greek and Byzantine History, Language and Literature, and Director of the Centre for Hellenic Studies, at King’s College London.

Christine Kenyon Jones is a Research Fellow in the Department of English at King’s College London.

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**Edited by Roderick Beaton and
Christine Kenyon Jones**

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In memoriam
Peter Cochran

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Peter Cochran died on 20 May 2015. See pp. xix–xx.

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Christine Kenyon Jones is a Research Fellow in the Department of English at King's College London. Her books include *Kindred Brutes: Animals in Romantic-Period Writing* (Ashgate, 2001) and (as editor) *Byron: The Image of the Poet* (AUP, 2008). Her contributions to books and journals include papers on Byron's pronunciation, his portraiture, his religious heritage, his eating habits and his criticism of Keats.

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Preface

In 2011, the English Department at King's College London was invited by the International Byron Society (now the International Association of Byron Societies) to bid to host one in its series of prestigious annual conferences. By the time the bid went forward, a collaboration had been formed between the Department and the Centre for Hellenic Studies – after all, Lord Byron had died in 1824 'in and for Greece', in the words of an obituary of the time, and his iconic intervention in the Greek War of Independence is still remembered as a foundational event in the creation of the modern Greek nation-state that we know today. With the blessing of Department and Centre, the collaboration quickly crystallized as one between individuals, the editors of the present volume.

Once planning for the conference began in earnest, it became clear to us that Byron's contribution to the cause of Greek national independence could not be the chief focus. For one thing, previous successful conferences in the series had been hosted by the Byron Societies of Athens and Missolonghi; the Greek theme had naturally been given prominence there. Instead, we proposed that Byron's intervention in the liberal-national transformation of European politics during the nineteenth century should become the hinge on which a neglected, and much broader, aspect of the poet's life and work could turn. And so we hit upon the title that is now the title of the present book.

The thirty-ninth International Byron Conference was held at King's from 1 to 6 July 2013. Papers were given on every conceivable aspect of Byron's convergence with the world of politics, understood in an inclusive sense, by some 70 speakers, and attended by over 130 delegates from 22 countries. In addition to academic papers, highlights included a reading of the words of Lords Byron and Elgin on the subject of the Parthenon Sculptures ('Elgin Marbles') – hosted by the British Museum in the Parthenon Galleries – and a dramatized reading of Byron's play *The Two Foscari* with scenes from Verdi's opera based on it, *I due Foscari*, performed by students of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. In tandem with the conference, the exhibition *Byron and Politics: 'Born for Opposition'* was mounted at the Maughan Library, King's College London, jointly curated by David McClay (National Library of Scotland) and Katie Sambrook and Stephanie Breen (Foyle Special Collections Library, King's College London), and ran throughout the summer. The exhibition featured Byron manuscripts never shown

in public before, from the John Murray Archive, National Library of Scotland and rare published items from the Maughan Library at King's, as well as memorabilia from private collections.¹

As is usual with volumes in this series, we have not sought to preserve in print a record, or 'proceedings', of the conference. In any case, such a record already exists on the webpage of the International Association of Byron Societies.² Instead we have invited contributors to re-write, expand and fully document their arguments, with a clear focus on the interaction between poetry and politics in Byron's work and life – a significantly narrower remit than had been possible at the conference. Specially written for the volume are the chapters by the two editors and the Afterword by Paul Hamilton, representing an overview by a distinguished expert whose own approach to the convergence between Romantic poetics and politics has focused on figures other than Byron.

In this way, we hope that the present volume will take forward part, at least, of the wide-ranging and intersecting discourses that were heard in 2013, and make a focused contribution to a growing, but still relatively neglected, aspect of Byron studies – a contribution of equal importance for those who study English literature, the political context of Romanticism in Europe, and, not least, the emergence of the modern Hellenic world.

This is the point at which to record debts of gratitude carried over from the conference, as well as new ones. The conference was generously sponsored by the Byron Society (re-founded in London on Byron's birthday, 22 January 1971). As organizers, we were joined by the present Lord Byron and Mr Kenneth Robbie, respectively the Society's President and Chairman, with whom it was an especial pleasure to work. In addition, we were supported by an academic committee consisting of eminent Byronists Bernard Beatty, Peter Graham, Alan Rawes and Jane Stabler. The unusually complex administration was ably handled by Pelagia Pais, Institute Manager of the Arts & Humanities Research Institute (AHRI) at King's College London, with her small professional team and a willing cohort of Student Ambassadors recruited for the occasion. Logistical, academic and moral support was also unstintingly provided by the collaborating academic departments at King's: the Department of English and the Centre for Hellenic Studies. Publicity and other material for the conference was designed by Wendy Pank, to her usual high standard. Finally, we are most grateful to John Smedley, our editor at Ashgate until December 2015, and Michael Greenwood from December 2015, for making the whole process, from contract to production, run smoothly.

Roderick Beaton
Christine Kenyon Jones
King's College London
March 2016

Notes

- 1 The illustrated exhibition catalogue is available to download at www.kcl.ac.uk/library/collections/archivespec/docs/Byron-Catalogue-2013-webonly.pdf.
- 2 www.internationalassociationofbyronsocieties.org

Peter Cochran (1944–2015)

An appreciation

Christine Kenyon Jones

The effects of the loss of Dr Peter Cochran on 20 May 2015 on Byronists and Byron studies worldwide will be immeasurable.

Peter himself had for many years given up trying to summarize the huge range of his contributions, and his entries in the programmes for Byron events yield only bland overviews such as ‘Peter Cochran edits the works and correspondence of Byron on the International Byron Society website’ (39th International Byron Conference, London, 2013) and ‘Peter Cochran has written innumerable articles on Byron, edited Byron’s text for Garland and others, edits the *Newstead Abbey Byron Review* and is Research Fellow of the School of English of Liverpool University’. At Dublin in 2005 he mentioned that he had become a Senior Research Fellow at Liverpool and ‘hosts the celebrated Hobby O website’.

Such descriptions are of course woefully inadequate in representing Peter’s work. It is characteristic of his generosity of spirit and his wish to share everything he wrote with everyone possible, and also the fact that he was an early and enthusiastic pioneer of information technology, that it is to Peter’s own website that we must go to see something of the great extent of his expertise, his huge industry in transcribing and editing Byronic texts (including the diary of Hobby O – John Cam Hobhouse), and his deeply knowledgeable but fiercely independent commentary on almost all aspects of matters Byronic.¹

Peter may have had his first taste of Byron’s work during his undergraduate degree in English at Cambridge, but it was not until after he had established successful careers, first as an actor (including with the Royal Shakespeare Company) and then as teacher and Head of Drama at the Hertfordshire & Essex High School for Girls, that Peter really encountered Byron, and that this encounter led him to study for his PhD with Professor Drummond Bone at the University of Glasgow.

This is how Peter describes it, in an unpublished autobiography of 2002:

I am, in Christian terms, a godless person, but I also *know* that here are fairies at the bottom of my garden; to keep them happy and at a distance, I never go into it. But one fairy had come in to visit me instead on this day, unheeded: he was plump, beautiful, supernaturally pale, with blue-grey eyes (one smaller than the other) and curly, slightly receding hair. His right foot was twisted because of a malformation of the Achilles’ tendon, and he had no earlobes

[...]. He'd got in from the garden via a narrow gap between the loo window and its frame, which I'd been meaning for some time to have replaced. And as I stood there [...] he descended upon me: for, as I scanned down my old pupils' notes to *The Vision of Judgment*, a strange hot flush ascended from my ankles to my hairline, and I knew that, whatever else happened, I was doomed to make an edition of, at the very least, this poem, and on my beloved Amstrad to boot. I knew, also, that for the rest of my days, my destiny would be entwined inextricably with the life, works and reputation of Lord Byron. Four years later I had a PhD, being an edition, incorporating a new text – done directly from the manuscript – of Byron's *the Vision of Judgment*. And I haven't stopped since.²

Peter went on to edit (almost always from the original sources) most of Byron's verse and prose, as well as many collections of letters to Byron, and to publish commentary on many aspects of Byron's life and times, including his book reviews which became a touch-stone for Byron criticism. Characteristically, he made all these available online in easy-to-use formats to anyone who was interested, and his website became *the* source for Byron scholars, critics and enthusiasts worldwide.

While the website shows the depth and range of Peter's work, it cannot represent his great and inimitable personality. All of us will have our own memories of his ebullience, his wit and humour, his enthusiasm, his strong likes and equally strong dislikes, and the powerful sense of his presence in a room, which was perhaps related to his abilities as an actor and director. He was at his most stimulating when often also at his most combative, and the individuality of his 'take' on Byron (which was often painfully critical for many of us) gave an edge and excitement to what otherwise might have been bland or over-academic debates. I have sometimes thought the effect of Peter's presence may have been a little like that of Byron himself – intelligent, generous, funny, enthusiastic, challenging and always interesting and exciting, although sometimes also a little alarming.

The conference out of which this book grew was the last international Byron event that Peter attended. On that occasion, besides giving the paper on which [Chapter 11](#) is based, he took part in a very lively and memorable debate with Jack Gumpert Wasserman about Byron's impact on European history and politics.

Through his scholarship, energy, friendship and exceptional generosity, Peter has helped to bring countless people into the Byron ambit, and to make us all better Byron scholars and critics, and his work and his memory will live on through the Byron community in that most positive of ways. He was also a dearly loved father and grandfather, and the contributors to this book, along with Byronists worldwide, share our great sorrow at his early death with his family and all those who have been close to him.

Note

1 <https://petercochran.wordpress.com/>

2 Quoted by courtesy of Emily Cochran.

Abbreviations

Except where indicated in individual chapters, all quotations from Byron's works are taken from the editions marked with *.

B Lord Byron (in notes and references).

**BB Byron's Bulldog: The Letters of John Cam Hobhouse to Lord Byron*, ed. Peter W. Graham, Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1984.

**BLJ* Byron, George Gordon Noel, Lord, *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 13 vols, London: John Murray, 1973–94.

**LBCMP* Byron, George Gordon Noel, Lord, *Lord Byron: The Complete Miscellaneous Prose*, ed. Andrew Nicholson, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.

**LBCPW* Byron, George Gordon Noel, Lord, *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980–93.

CHP Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: A Romaunt*.

DJ Lord Byron, *Don Juan*.

**MCLB* Medwin's *Conversations of Lord Byron*, ed. Ernest J. Lovell Jr, Princeton University Press, 1966.

NLS National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh. John Murray Archives: George Gordon, Lord Byron, Correspondence and Papers (followed by Ms. and file number from the current catalogue).

PC Peter Cochran's website: petercochran.wordpress.com/.

WLB Byron, George Gordon Noel, Lord, *The Works of Lord Byron*, ed. E.H. Coleridge, 6 vols, London: John Murray 1902–5.

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Introduction

Roderick Beaton and Christine Kenyon Jones

For a poet whose life and work are interlaced with action of multiple sorts, surprisingly little attention has been devoted to Byron's engagement with issues of politics. What did he mean by the '*poetry* of politics'? Was he, in any sense, a 'political animal'? Can his final, fateful involvement in Greece be understood as the culmination of earlier, more deeply rooted, quests? This collection brings together the work of eminent Byronists from seven European countries and the US to re-assess the evidence.

The first part of the volume's title refers to a well-known entry in Byron's *Ravenna Journal*:

It is no great matter, supposing that Italy could be liberated, who or what is sacrificed. It is a grand object – the very *poetry* of politics. Only think – a free Italy!!! Why, there has been nothing like it since the days of Augustus.

(*BLJ* 8.47)

With its marked excitement about the early stages of his involvement with the Italian Carbonari, this passage from February 1821 illustrates Byron's immersion in the dramatic national and international politics of his time, and the way in which, for him, poetry and politics were twin passions. If Byron conceived of politics in terms of poetry, however, he also unquestionably brought politics of many kinds to the writing and reading of his work, and the second part of the title reflects the way in which Byron's politicized approach to poetry is perceived by this collection's contributors to embrace not only the affairs of state of many countries in his own time, but also a much wider range of 'political' issues that are still highly relevant to our own times, and in terms as often personal as public.

The book explores this double theme through three parts: the first examines the implications of reading and writing as themselves political acts; the second interrogates the politics inherent or implied in Byron's poems and plays; and the third follows the trajectory of Byron's political engagement (or non-engagement) from his abortive early career in the British House of Lords, via the Peninsular War in Spain, to his involvement in revolutionary politics abroad.

Part 1 opens with Jonathan Gross's salutary reminder that writing about Byron's politics is itself politicized. Gross argues 'that books on Byron reflect the decade

in which they were composed, even (or especially) when critics deny such influence'. Gross's contention 'that our own readings of Byron reflect the times in which we write our books on Byron's poetry' is especially true of two key critical works on Byron's politics, by Malcolm Kelsall and Michael Foot, which were published within a year of each other in the Thatcherite Britain of the late 1980s and are both frequently cited in this collection. Gross draws attention to Foot's role as a left-wing leader of the UK Labour Party, and Kelsall's self-definition as 'a man who was bombed by the Luftwaffe', in showing how their opposing views of the seriousness and effectiveness of Byron's politics owes much to both authors' different shaping by World War II. All of the studies discussed by Gross find ways of connecting Byron's writing with his life, and both with the political realities, constraints and aspirations among which he lived and wrote.

Kelsall's conclusion that 'The life of Byron is of no political significance' provides a starting point for argument for many contributors to this volume.¹ In terms of Byron's work, Andrew Stauffer agrees with Kelsall that 'Byron was not much interested in the day-to-day business of politics; his vision habitually moved to the long retrospective view of present action'. In the light of this, Stauffer explores Byron's relationship to 'the occasional – the emergent moment in tension with the larger narrative – at an intersection of poetics, politics and print culture'. Stauffer reconsiders Byron's earliest published lyrics in *Fugitive Pieces* (1806) and *Hours of Idleness* (1807), and the beginnings of his engagement with the press, as a way of tracing to their source some of the main currents of his subsequent political poetry.

Mirosława Modrzewska's chapter focuses on Byron's authorial personae in his comic and burlesque writings, including *Beppo*, *The Devil's Drive*, *Don Juan* and *The Vision of Judgment*, as 'a tool for liberating language as a way to intellectual and political libertarianism', and shows how the masqued, 'trickster'-style, authorial role in these works 'presupposes a new reading style and a new role for literature, as a seductive political game with the reader', which Modrzewska sees as a Romantic response to Cervantes.

Continuing the theme of the complexity of Byron's authorial personae, Anna Camilleri acknowledges that the discussion of Byron's writings on female intellectuals is an especially charged arena in our own era for the negotiation of the critical politics of gender. Rereading Byron's satire of bluestockings (or 'Blues', in the language of the day) in the light of a comic tradition going back to Juvenal, however, Camilleri contends that Byron's critique of would-be female intellectuals is motivated by a hatred of cant rather than of women, and she concludes that '[t]he reasons Byron finds to laugh at bluestocking culture are the same ones that cause him to laugh at the Lakers: the earnest hypocrisy that, in its tonal inflexibility, is misapplied and misreads people, situations and ideas'. This is, she points out, the very antithesis of Byronic *mobilité*.

Starting from Byron's famous lyric 'She walks in Beauty', and Schopenhauer's 'deeply sympathetic' reading and quotation of Byron's work, Timothy Morton explores how the idea that beauty 'provides some kind of zero degree of relating to another entity' disturbs the Hegelian distrust of the night, outside logic, 'in

which all cows are black'. Morton shows how Byron's lyric 'elegantly stages the encounter with not-me that overlaps the encounter with the nonhuman', and, he urges, 'philosophy has to stop policing nonexistent metaphysical boundaries' and 'get into the business' of enabling us to tolerate the kind of strangeness that he perceives Byron (and Schopenhauer) to be invoking.

Part I of the book ends with Peter Graham's discussion of Byron and George Orwell as examples of the rebel who boldly flouts the strictures of his class, place and time – but does so in 'a distinctively ruling-class English way'. Each writer was, Graham observes, 'more a friend of the people than a man of the people': for both, being anti-totalitarian meant wishing men 'to be free / As much from mobs as kings – from you as me'. Graham goes on to compare Byron's 'Dedication' and first canto of *Don Juan* with Orwell's 1946 essay 'Politics and the English Language' as texts which treat a shared understanding of the crucial, symbiotic connection between language and politics, particularly in relation to cant: an 'in-group language meant to mislead outsiders', memorably coined by Orwell with terms such as 'Big Brother', 'thoughtcrime' and 'doublethink'. Both Orwell and Byron are, Graham shows, masters at detecting and unmasking this pervasive, variously insidious, misleading, vague or incompetent use or abuse of language.

The chapters which make up Part II, 'Politics in the Poetry', broadly follow the chronological sequence of the poems that are discussed here. In the first, writing on *The Giaour*, Martin Procházka demonstrates how Byron's use of fragmentation as a discursive strategy differs from that of other Romantics. Instead of functioning as a specific point of view or artistic perspective, the fragment becomes for Byron in this poem, 'chiefly a "speech act", both "constative" and "performative" – telling of the fragmentation of literary forms and establishing a discursive strategy which aims to change readers' awareness of history and the present time'. Procházka asks us to consider the text of *The Giaour* not as a completed meaning but as 'an open-ended process which transcends the limits of the work of art', and to connect Leila with Aurora and *The Giaour* with *Don Juan*, as a means of 'grasping different existential and at the same time ideal dimensions of Byron's poetry than those of its political and historical implications'. The connection with Aurora and her separation from the world of politics and sexual intrigues may, Procházka proposes, transform the allegorical and symbolic implications of the *Giaour*'s tragic story into a message of hope.

Bernard Beatty's study of poetry, politics and prophecy in *The Age of Bronze*, *The Vision of Judgment* and *The Prophecy of Dante* judges these poems against Howard Nemerov's contention that 'Poetry makes things happen, but rarely what the poet wants', and concludes, broadly, that Nemerov is right. Demonstrating the partiality of Byron's response to the politics of the Congress of Verona in 1822, Beatty contends that *The Age of Bronze* is 'essentially a cartoon poem. As such, it is often powerful and pleasing in places but it is limited in the ways that cartoons are limited'. In the *Vision of Judgment*, where the real contest is between Byron and Southey, 'The poetry of politics is displaced by the politics of poetry'. And in *The Prophecy of Dante* Byron is able to present Dante and Napoleon as supporters of Italian nationalism only by sidestepping the main thrust of Dante's political

thought and misrepresenting Napoleon's relationship with Italy. 'It would be hard to find a clearer example of poems *not* making things happen', Beatty points out. Nevertheless, he concludes, "A moral morn" is the hope of human beings as such, not simply poets. It is in these higher politics of poetry that Byron's accomplished political poetry may be said to make things happen'.

John Owen Havard's chapter situates Byron's 'cynicism' by reference to the ideas of the Cynic sect of ancient Greece, and the 'dog-like' nature to which it was supposedly related, rather than those of modern cynics. Ancient Cynic concepts that are important to Byron, Havard shows, and that pervade his personal and political as well as his literary stances, include causing deliberate scandal and making polemical gestures; speaking truth, especially truth to power; deploying a savage, 'biting' wit; espousing self-induced privation and simplicity of living; having no attachments and embracing the condition of exile while being 'a citizen of the world'; deploying vulgarity, paradox, literary parody and allusion, and, in general, cultivating a 'very public, visible, spectacular, provocative, sometimes scandalous way of life', as Foucault put it. The volatile political and poetic stance Byron came to occupy reflects the 'snarl and snap' by which the original Cynics sought to shock their contemporaries, and draw out attention to the way in which his cynical stances towards politics, and his real agitation for change, very often coincide.

Alexandra Böhm addresses Byron's poetry and politics in Italy by exploring the poet's *Ravenna Journal* entry about 'the very *poetry* of politics' within the context of the complex situation of the arts as a subsystem of society around 1800 and the social systems theory of sociologist Niklas Luhmann. Although poetry and politics are closely linked in Byron's remark, she argues that they do not interact in his journal: 'in fact, writing seems irreconcilably opposed to action as well as imaginative thinking to materialist reality'. The emphasis on action and the hope for change which pervades the entire *Journal* is, she points out, 'accompanied by a derogatory assessment of the figure of the poet, and indeed of Byron's own achievements'. *The Vision of Judgment*, also written in 1821, does however, Böhm argues, eventually realize an interaction between poetry and politics through 'a poetics of scandal, which transgresses the boundaries of the arts system and intervenes in the socio-political system'.

Peter Cochran's chapter is, sadly, published posthumously, after his untimely death in May 2015 (see pages xix–xx). In addressing the politics of *Don Juan*, Cochran characteristically makes links between Byron's work and his letters and biography: citing, in particular, a letter to Byron from Douglas Kinnaird about the riots connected with the funeral of Queen Caroline. The chapter also explores a connection between Byron and Fielding in the use of 'Flash' language (the underworld cant deployed by Tom the Highwayman in canto 11), which Cochran was apparently the first to make. It refers to what the author calls Byron's 'breathtaking' class arrogance, and discusses stanzas criticizing the House of Lords which Byron deleted, apparently because they were too radical.

The chapter which follows also addresses *Don Juan*, this time with a focus on the English cantos, in which, according to Michael O'Neill, Byron 'makes a performance out of political stance-taking'. In his exploration of whether the

politics in *Don Juan* add up to more than ‘exhibitionist role-playing’, O’Neill demonstrates how Byron expresses politics ‘not by issuing from some final position above and beyond the text, but by ceaselessly monitoring their mode of utterance’ – dramatizing the process by which any judgement can be made. Bringing together these stanzas’ gothic theme and the very material politics of Lord Henry Amundeville and his ilk, O’Neill discusses how Byron’s gaze is topical yet caught by what hovers ‘Between two worlds’, like the figure of Aurora Raby. The presentation of the pregnant country girl with a ‘double figure’ illustrates the way in which, for Byron, politics is inseparable from a sense of people as caught in states of entrapment ‘that make overt protest or compassion seem a false rhetoric’.

The final chapter in [Part II](#), by Mirka Horová, on the poetics of heroic transformation, discusses how Byron ‘rewrit[es] the heroic for the purposes of modernity’, characterizing warfare as ‘a bloody, gory affair’ which simultaneously thwarts and deforms those who engage in it. Horová shows how both the contrasting protagonists of Byron’s dramas *Sardanapalus* and *Marino Faliero*, by virtue of their heroic ‘misbehaviour’, seek to subvert traditional, oppressive notions of government, while the unfinished *Deformed Transformed* ironizes the very idea that anybody can be heroized by any politics or ideology whatsoever. The transformation of people into heroes is, Horová shows, ‘History’s big Mephistophelean trick on humanity’, and adds a ‘Byronic touch to the Faustian paradigm’, whereby the ‘hero’ pays for his transformation with other people’s blood, not his own.

In [Part III](#), ‘When a man hath no freedom to fight for at home...’, Christine Kenyon Jones’s chapter considers Byron’s activities as member of the House of Lords between 1809 and 1816 in a wider context than the three speeches there for which he is widely known. Kenyon Jones discusses the many debates Byron attended without speaking, and his contribution to parliamentary processes by serving on several committees to consider minor matters of business, as well as his observation and knowledge of the House of Commons. The parliamentary milieu formed a significant, though deeply frustrating, part of Byron’s life during his London years, and Kenyon Jones identifies some of the particular characteristics of the Westminster environment in this period that led him later to conclude that he was ‘not made for what you call a politician’. Even in the wake, of his (also frustratingly unsuccessful) attempt at involvement in the politics of Italy, however, ‘the drive toward some kind of political engagement did not leave him’, she points out, ‘and it was this that would ultimately carry him to Greece, and to his death in 1824’.

Agustín Coletes-Blanco, for his chapter on the poetry and politics of the Peninsular War, draws upon the *Proyecto Otras Lenguas, Otras Armas, Poesía proespañola inglesa, portuguesa, francesa y alemana de la Guerra de la Independencia (1808–1814)*, which gathers together material written in languages other than Spanish about Spain during this crucial period. This war was one of the favourite *topoi* for British contemporary writers: not only those now known as major Romantic poets (including Byron and Wordsworth) but also many who were popular then but later forgotten, as well as the host of anonymous writers

whose occasional verses on the subject were published in newspapers. The response through British poetry resulted in a home-front war of ‘psychological and sociological importance’, Coletes-Blanco demonstrates, concluding that on the whole this domestic war was won by the same conservative forces that had crucially contributed to winning the real war in the Peninsula. Liberal voices such as those of Byron and Laetitia Barbauld played what he defines as an oppositional ‘guerrilla role’ – but were on the losing side.

The following two chapters both specifically address Byron’s relation to Italian politics. Rosa Mucignat suggests that changes in late-eighteenth-century European culture which combined politics and prophecy opened up a space for poetry to present itself as an alternative methodology not only for narrating the past but also for prefiguring the future. ‘Revolutionary discourse is apocalyptic, in the sense that it announces the end of the world as we know it; but in contrast to the Apocalypse of the Scriptures, it requires the action of men, who need to be mobilized and organized. This is precisely what Foscolo and Byron are aiming to do’, Mucignat argues, and their poems hold up the past to indicate a way out from the recurrent cycles of old history. When Byron draws a parallel between Dante’s Italy and the Italy of his day he is, she says, ‘describing a bad continuity that has to be broken: Italy is stuck in a worsening loop of internecine strife and foreign occupation because of its incapacity to solve problems that, in Byron’s fiction, had already been exposed by Dante back in the fourteenth century’. In order to move on from Dante’s prophecy, Italians need to ‘recognize the accuracy of his political diagnosis and act accordingly’: to ‘cast off their vicious habits and unite to make the revolution’.

Piya Pal-Lapinski in turn explores Byron’s poem about Parisina, alongside operas on the same subject by Donizetti and Mascagni, in order to consider how different artists deploy ‘the paradigm of the absolutist, despotic Renaissance state to comment on the politicization of death at different periods in the formation of Italian nationalism’. The twentieth-century fascist state, Pal-Lapinski points out, ‘yoked together art, eroticism and war in particularly insidious ways’. Whereas Byron uses the story of Azo, Hugo and Parisina to explore multiple forms of state power and the aesthetics of resistance, Mascagni and his librettist D’Annunzio ‘transform the same historical episode into a political spectacle in which the decadence of art is purged through sacrifice, and the aesthetic object completely appropriated by the state, functioning as war machine’.

The final three chapters bring us to the country with whose politics Byron has been most associated – Greece. The topic is considered first by Alexander Grammatikos in terms of the way in which travelogues by early-nineteenth-century British visitors to Greece (Byron, John Cam Hobhouse, William Martin Leake and Sir Henry Holland) contributed to a reconceptualization of the Modern Greeks and their affinity with Europeans. The tendency to read *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* as a poem concerned with the Ancient Greek past has, Grammatikos argues, obscured the importance in the original publication of its translations of Modern Greek literature and its copious notes on Modern Greek society and culture. Looking at the notes as well as the text of *Childe Harold*, Grammatikos

shows how Byron uses Modern Greek education and Romaic (i.e. vernacular) literature to assess Greek national character, and argues that Byron associates the expansion and diffusion of education in Greece with national liberation, while, at the same time, questioning Greece's association with Europe and relationship with Britain.

Stephen Minta's chapter is concerned with 'the quiet revaluation of Byron's politics that has taken place over recent years, a revaluation that offers a counterweight to more traditional and more dramatic accounts of Byron's apparent failures and egoism in the political sphere'. Minta distinguishes between 'an ideologically-driven politics that knows where it starts and carries with it the baggage to evaluate its achievements' (noting that in terms of this kind of politics, Byron will inevitably fail), and, on the other hand, 'a politics which allows for mess, imprecision, for finding your way towards a goal which often redefines itself as you move'. On this reading of politics, he says, 'Byron's altruism scores heavily'. The strength of Byron's eventual intervention in Greek affairs lay, Minta says, in his ability to transcend the appeal of mere neutrality, in the face of the chaos of the Greek war; and, perhaps most important of all, in his recognition that truly 'helping behaviour' depended on an informed sympathy with local conditions, rather than on the attempted imposition of an external solution. And in that sense, Minta concludes, the Byronic example continues to be relevant nearly two hundred years later.

Roderick Beaton, finally, focuses on the economic aspects both of what Byron wrote before he left Italy in 1823 and of what he did and said during his final months in Cephalonia and Greece. The chapter explores Byron's developing interest in what was then a new, and rapidly growing, field of study: 'political economy', and the ways in which he put this new interest to practical use in Greece. On rather different grounds from those proposed in his monograph on the subject (*Byron's War*, 2013) Beaton again makes the case that there is a fundamental coherence between Byron's writing and his actions, between his poetry and his politics, during the last years of his life.

All the contributions to this volume explore the interrelations between poetry and politics and Byron's life and work from a great variety of viewpoints and using a wide range of methods, and we should not be surprised if there turn out to be as many other approaches to this subject as there are contributors here. Indeed, the international conference in which these chapters had their beginning expanded the number to 70, and no doubt more can be expected to follow. If there is a single unifying thread that could be said to run through the whole book (and is quoted more than once in these chapters), it is the proposition expressed in canto 3 of *Don Juan* that:

words are things, and a small drop of ink,
Falling like dew, upon a thought, produces
That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think[.]

(DJ 3.792–4)

The crux here (which recurs in many different contexts in Byron's writing) is the equivalence between 'words' and 'things', baldly stated as a fact, in defiance of one of the most entrenched category-boundaries in modern thought. This broader issue is taken up by Paul Hamilton in the Afterword.

Ultimately, this is a book not only about one great poet's involvement with politics, but also about the possibilities of interaction between art and the imagination on the one hand, and the political lives of societies on the other: between what Byron himself called 'words' and 'things'.

Note

- 1 Kelsall, *Byron's Politics* 2.