

OBITUARY:
PROFESSOR LESLIE A. MARCHAND

Peter Cochran

Although when a great man dies at the age of ninety-nine no-one can feel so very sad, one's regret is always that fate did not allow him to round it up properly, and die at 100. Leslie Alexis Marchand, the leading Byron scholar of this and probably of either of the two available centuries, was born on a wheat ranch near Bridgeport, Washington, on February 13th 1900, son of a French-speaking homesteader – whether or not descended from Napoleon's valet, whose name was also Marchand, I do not know; but he always preferred the second syllable of his surname to be stressed *à la manière française*.¹ He died in his sleep, eight months short of a centenary, on July 11th 1999, at his home in Englewood, Florida. He is survived by his wife, Marion.

Marchand studied journalism at Seattle, taking a B.A. in 1922 and an M.A. in 1923. He then did postgraduate work at Munich and the Sorbonne. He was Professor of English and French at Farthest North, the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines, from 1923 to 1927 and from 1934 to 1935, and then lecturer at Columbia University in 1936 and 1937. During the thirties he also worked as editor, reporter, book reviewer and tourist guide. In 1940 he was awarded a PhD at Columbia, his thesis being on "The Athenæum: A Mirror of Victorian Culture": it was published in 1941. In 1945 he produced (a rehearsal for what was to come) an edition of *The Letters of Thomas Hood from the Dilke Papers in the British Museum*. From 1937 to 1966 he was at Rutgers University, rising from Instructor via Assistant Professor and Associate Professor to Professor Emeritus. In 1958 and 1959 he was Fulbright Professor at the University of Athens. He was awarded the James Russell Lowell prize in 1973, and the Ivan Sandrof Award of the National Book Critics Circle in 1982.

It was at Rutgers that Marchand became aware of the massive need for both a new biography of Byron, and a new edition of the letters and journals. Therefore, after the war, starting in July 1947, he embarked on an expedition of scholarly discovery which, in essence, never ceased. Armed with a portable typewriter, a colour Kodak, and with access in London to a technological innovation in the shape of a microphotographic camera (photocopying, it's important to remember, had not yet been invented) he first scoured the John Murray Archive at Albemarle Street, where he was given a room of his own, and the south of England, where he found some notebooks of Annabella, and microphotographed scores of pages from Hobhouse's diary – discovering, what no-one had known about, the source for *Beppo*. He also inspected, through the courtesy of Lord Abinger, numerous letters and documents relating to Claire Clairmont, Mary Shelley, and Trelawny. He visited Newstead, Southwell, and Annesley.

He then went to Geneva, seeing Diodati, Coppet, and Chillon, and, on the Simplon-Orient Express, to Milan and Venice, where he was lucky enough to be invited to tea at the otherwise inaccessible Palazzo Mocenigo. The monks of San Lazzaro were their usual courteous selves. In Rome he met Iris Orgo, who showed him, among many other things, the manuscript of *La Vie de Lord Byron en Italie*.

Via Istanbul he went to Greece, with which he fell in love at first sight, even though it was in a state of civil war. Dodging guerillas, bandits and train-crashes, he voyaged from Athens to Missolonghi. As is the case today, anyone who admired Byron was considered a friend to Greece, and Marchand was entertained warmly in Patrass, on Ithaca, and on Cephalonia – where he met an old man whose father had known Byron. Those of us fortunate enough to have shaken hands with Leslie Marchand can thus claim to have shaken hands with a man, who had shaken hands with *another* man, whose father ...

Though the territory around Ioannina was dangerous, Marchand flew there, and, helped by a French-speaking Greek liaison officer, went over the ruins of Ali Pasha's palace. His

1: Marchand was also the name of the hostelier with whom Byron stayed while at Pera in Constantinople in 1810.

luck held when, discovering much unpublished Byron material, he also discovered the only micro-photographing machine in Greece, on which he recorded it all. Via Rome and Florence, Pisa, Leghorn, Bologna and Ravenna, he returned first to Venice and then to London, where he took a further 1,600 microphotographs at Murray's. Armed with photographs, microphotographs, and a superb memory, he re-crossed the Atlantic, with enough material for the most comprehensive life of Byron the world had known.²

He was ten years working at it.

Byron A Biography was published in three volumes by Knopf in 1957: a new single-volume version called *Byron A Portrait*, at once cut and in parts expanded, allowing greater frankness about Byron's bisexuality, followed fourteen years later. It is said that the *Biography* was distilled from material twice its final bulk. These biographies remain standard today, despite, or rather owing to, the quality of more recent attempts. Here is Marchand's version of the aftermath of the incident between Polidori and the Austrian officer at La Scala:

Byron, though he was concerned for the foolish Doctor, and though he had no liking for the arrogant Austrians, had to admit that Polidori had courted trouble. But the poet had had his first view of the Austrian tyranny, and the ideas he had already imbibed from Pellegrino Rossi and others in Switzerland were confirmed. His contempt for Austrian rule in Italy was now fixed, and was to govern his attitudes and actions henceforth. On the other side, not only the officer of the guards but also the highest Austrian authorities noted his associations, and from this time his movements were watched with interest by the secret police; and, while the authorities paid polite respect to his English title and his literary fame, they were constantly suspicious.

The Polidori affair, coming fast upon letters from England, had the effect of depressing Byron's spirits still further. Henri Beyle observed: "The morning after Polidori's departure, Byron, in a tête-à-tête with me, complained bitterly of persecution."³

Here is a more recent version:

Byron, worried that when reports of the doctor's arrest and banishment reached England he, too, would be implicated, wrote detailed accounts of the case to both Murray and Augusta. To his sister, especially, his self-exculpatory remarks have a hysterical edge: "I had nothing to do with his squabble – & was not even present – though – when he sent for me – I tried of course to get him out of it – as well as Mr. Hobhouse – who tried also for him – but to no purpose. I tell you all this because in England – by some kind of mistake – his squabbles may be set down to me – and now (if this should be the case) you have it in your power to contradict it."

His fears – unheroic and unguarded – expose another painful truth: For Byron, England was the only court of judgment that counted; English opinion – as a poet and a man, a public or private citizen – would always remain the real measure of his worth.⁴

The contrast between Marchand's interest, in the first version, in doing justice to the complexity of the facts, political and personal, and, in the second version, the writer's palpable intention to ignore that complexity, and to use material from anywhere to make Byron look weak and foolish somehow, is very striking – as a glance at the complete letter to Augusta quoted (BLJ V 122) will show.

Legend has it that Marchand was offered by OUP the job of bringing out a Complete Poetical Works of Byron, after it had become clear that OUP's first choices, Doris Langley Moore and G. Wilson Knight, were "temperamentally incompatible". But he had already accepted the job of editing the Letters and Journals, and recommended, in lieu of himself, a promising young academic called Jerome J. McGann.

2: The quality of some of the microphotography must have been poor, to judge from at least one serious misreading from Hobhouse's diary: the sentence "The Edleston has been accused of indecency" used by Marchand at *Byron A Biography* p. 245n and *Byron A Portrait* p. 85, in fact runs "the collection has been accused of indecency" (B.L. Add. Mss. 56529 f. 56r). It was not Byron's Trinity friend, but Hobhouse's book *Imitations and Translations*, which was accused of going too far.

3: *Byron A Biography*, pp. 668 - 669.

4: Benita Eisler, *Byron Child of Passion Fool of Fame* (1999) p. 544.

Byron's Letters and Journals ("BLJ") emerged in twelve volumes between 1973 and 1982, with a supplementary volume, containing newly-discovered material, in 1994. Previous editions had been those of Thomas Moore, who had incorporated numerous letters in his 1830 *Life*, and Rowland E. Prothero, who had edited the entire corpus as it was then known and considered printable, between 1898 and 1901. Prothero had printed 1198 letters. But now the text was re-edited by Marchand, with many letters being published for the first time, and scores of paragraphs, sentences and words being restored in their original wit and indecency, to universal amazement and delight. Three thousand letters were printed, and the Byron that we know and love, but to whom no-one had previously had access, stood before the world for the first time: wilful and defiant as in the cliché version, but also humorous and, above all, charitable, in way that no-one except perhaps Teresa Guiccioli had recognised.

The text was a revelation. Moore and Prothero had assumed implicitly that Byron wrote in a rush, and that he would have wanted his prose tidied up. Here is Prothero:

Mr. Coleridge may console himself with the "fervour, – the almost religious fervour" of his and Wordsworth's disciples, as he calls it. If he means that as any proof of their merits, I will find him as much "fervour" in behalf of Richard Brothers and Joanna Southcote as ever gathered over his pages or round his fireside. He is a shabby fellow, and I wash my hands of and after him.

My answer to your proposition about the 4th canto you will have received, and I await yours; – perhaps we may not agree. I have since written a poem (of 84 octave stanzas), humorous, in or after the excellent manner of Mr. Whistlecraft (whom I take to be Frere) on a Venetian anecdote which amused me: – but till I have your answer, I can say nothing more about it.

Mr. Hobhouse does not return to England in November, as he intended, but will perhaps winter here; and as he is to convey the poem, or poems, – for there may perhaps be more than the two mentioned, (which, by the way, I shall not perhaps include in the same publication or agreement,) I shall not be able to publish so soon as expected; but I suppose there is no harm in the delay.⁵

But BLJ has it thus:

Mr. Coleridge may console himself with the "fervour – the almost religious fervour" of his and Wordsworth's disciples as he calls it – if he means that as any proof of their merits – I will find him as much "fervour" in behalf of Richard Brothers and Joanna Southcote – as ever gathered over his pages – or round his fireside. He is a shabby fellow, and I wash my hands of, and after him. – – My answer to your proposition about the 4th Canto you will have received – and I await yours – perhaps we may not agree. I have since written a poem (of 84 octave stanzas), humorous, in or after the excellent manner of Mr. Whistlecraft (whom I take to be Frere), on a Venetian anecdote – which amused me – but till I have your answer – I can say nothing more about it. – Mr. Hobhouse does not return to England in Novr. as he intended, but will perhaps winter here - and as he is to convey the poem, or poems – for there may perhaps be more than the two mentioned (which by the way I shall not perhaps include in the same publication or agreement) I shall not be able to publish so soon – as expected – but I suppose there is no harm in the delay.⁶

Byron's preference for the dash over all other punctuation marks, revealed in all its haphazard glory by Marchand, gives his style a patrician indifference to the very grammar-school correctness which Prothero's semi-colons try and teach it. *a Venetian anecdote which amused me* is a dull statement of fact, whereas *a Venetian anecdote – which amused me* – is Byron's way of saying that although it may not amuse anyone else, the fact that it amused *him* conveys quality on it *ipso facto*, and so it will have to satisfy everyone else. As the anecdote was the one on which *Beppo* was based, his confidence seems justified.

As the series unfolded, mild criticisms began. It was pointed out that, in order to accommodate the reader with the lower concentration spell, Marchand had introduced paragraphing where Byron, in his desire to conserve space on the sheet of paper, had used none. It has also been said that comparison with the original ms often reveals Byron's apparently spontaneous flow to have been in part crafted, with evidence of crossing-out and

5: *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals*, ed. Prothero, IV 172-3.

6: BLJ V 267-8.

rephrasing which BLJ does not always preserve. Here is part of the account of the assassination of the military commandant of Ravenna, from BLJ VII 247 (December 9th 1820, written, claims Byron, with the man dead before him):

As Diego could only cry and wring his hands – and the Priest could only pray – and nobody seemed able or willing to do anything except exclaim shake and stare – I made my Servant & one of the mob take up the body – sent off Diego crying to the Cardinal – – the Soldiers for the Guard - & had the Commandant carried up Stairs to my own quarters. – But he was quite gone.

The manuscript reads:

As Diego could only cry and wring his hands – and the Priest could only pray – and nobody seemed able or willing to do anything except exclaim <& tremble> shake & stare <stand still shaking>; – I made my Servant & one of the mob take up the body – sent off Diego crying to the Cardinal – – the Soldiers for the <Colonel> Guard – & had the Commandant carried up Stairs to my own quarters. – But he was quite gone. ⁷

Even with a still-warm dead body in the room, Byron rephrases and corrects himself.

The text is not always accurate. At VI 104, at the start of Byron's letter to Murray of April 3rd 1819, announcing *Don Juan* II, BLJ has

You have had the second Canto of “Don Juan” which you will publish with the first – if it please you.

... leading us to think that the second canto was finished earlier than April 3rd. But the manuscript (it is in fact part of the poem's fair copy) reads

You have here the second Canto of “Don Juan” which you will publish with the first – if it please you. ⁸

... revealing that Byron put the final flourish to the second canto of his greatest work on the day he met and fell in love with Teresa.

Not all the erasures styled illegible in BLJ are so. At VIII 193 the first erasure in the following passage is read correctly, but the second is rendered as “[line crossed out]”. In fact the sentence goes as follows:

But if I do not give Mr. Milman <Mr. Southey> – & others of the crew something that shall occupy their dreams! <I am not what I was – that is all>. ⁹

Marchand worked for a year at what was supposed to be the final BLJ volume, aptly entitled *The Trouble of an Index*. Although very reliable for the most part, it has gaps. Try looking for *Frankenstein*, for example, and you will be frustrated, apart from the reference in the Mary Shelley biographical note; but there is at least one reference to the novel in a letter - at VI, 126.

It is always a good idea, when reading the notes to BLJ, to supplement them with a look at those of Prothero, who (in part because he has fewer Byron letters) also has space to incorporate letters to, and in answer to, Byron.

The thirteenth and last number of BLJ, *What Comes Uppermost*, came out in 1994, but Marchand knew the task was not completed, and that it never would be. At least three letters and two fragments have been discovered since. Andrew Nicholson published two letters to

7: John Murray Archive.

8: Ibid.

9: Ibid.

James Dearden in the 1998 *Byron Journal*;¹⁰ and, as adjunct to his obituary in the *Independent*, William St. Clair printed part of a newly-discovered 1811 letter to Hobhouse. Here is my own humble contribution, which is Hobhouse's complete diary entry for Thursday, December 22nd 1814 (with Byron's words italicised):

A letter from Byron today has this postscript: "*Poor Frederick Kinnaird died last night. He made a most heroic or rather philosophical end. Hume's was hardly better.*" I shall write a short letter to his brother Douglas. Wrote journal from Tuesday week. At home doing nothing - ¹¹

As I write, yet another letter, to Lord Holland, has been discovered in Newcastle.

Short, bronzed, quiet and self-effacing, Leslie Marchand's image was the reverse of Byronic. But he contributed more to the world's understanding of Byron than anyone else. The only thing to elude him remains the dream of all us left-over Byron scholars – the discovery that what had been burned in the grate at 50, Albemarle Street on Monday May 17th 1824, was a cunning copy, and that Byron's Memoirs survive intact. (– P.C.)

10: Andrew Nicholson, *That Suit in Chancery: Two New Byron Letters*, *Byron Journal* 1998, pp. 50 - 56.

11: To contextualise the fragment, here is the entry for the following day:

Friday December 23

rode up to London [] saw Byron who said he was going to morrow. Heard from him that Fred: Kinnaird died nobly. He talked of indifferent subjects - of religion he said he should have liked to have had his mind made up by some sensible man – Douglas mentioned his friend Smedley – [“no[,”] said he[,”] [“Smedley is a clergyman – but I know his notions already[”]. The last thing he said was [“I feel confused in my head – – – <of/>don't ask me a question that requires an answer”]: he died in ten minutes – I rode down to Whitton & dined – (B.L. Add. Mss. 47232, 47r.)