

William St Clair  
 The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period  
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This long-awaited book fulfils all expectations, enlarges the scope and enriches the detail of St Clair's essay *The Impact of Byron's Writings: an Evaluative Approach*, in Andrew Rutherford's *Byron: Augustan and Romantic*. It at once becomes indispensable to those who study writing of all sorts in the Romantic period.

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St Clair leads up to his account of the period with a history of the way government and law, once printing had been invented, controlled what reading the public had access to:

One effect of the coming of print to England ... was ... simultaneously to invent and to privatise the intellectual property rights implicit in much of what is now called popular culture. A ballad singer who, for a small fee, wrote down the text of an old song that had hitherto existed only in manuscript or oral performance, and sold it to a printer ... had established in that printer's hands a monopoly in the subsequent printing and sale of the printed text of that song (p. 49).

Not the performing rights to the song (see pp. 150-4); but St Clair compares the situation to land enclosure, in the way that what had been common property now became monopolised:

The monopoly of knowledge claimed by the English political and ecclesiastical state now coincided with a commercial monopoly in the supply of the texts in which the truth in all branches of knowledge was to be inscribed (p. 59) ... the occasional hanging, mutilation, imprisonment, public pillorying, and ruination of printers/publishers who remained outside the structures, or who trespassed beyond the tolerated textual limits, provided reminders of the advantages of keeping within them (p. 65).

The interests of legislators and capitalists were one. Governments needed to keep people under control, and printers and publishers found advantage in keeping books under control (especially the printer: it was to be the accountable printer, not the publisher, who insisted that Shelley re-write *Laon and Cythna*). In 1757, Soame Jenyns delivered himself of the following memorable statement:

... to 'encourage the poor man to read and think, and thus to become more conscious of his misery, would be to fly in the face of divine intention' (quoted p. 109).

One is reminded of King Ferdinand II of Naples (grandson of Nelson's friend) in the century following: "My people have no need of thought: I myself take care of their well-being and dignity".

Even Shakespeare had to be controlled. Such was the price of the First Folio that its effect was to "immobilise him indoors"; it "removed him from most of the nation's readers" (p. 147). Monsters like the single-volume, double-column Byron which Murray produced for the nineteenth century had a similar immobilising effect. Such books, for all the address "To the Great Variety of Readers", were not designed to be *read*.

Kings, bishops, politicians, and booksellers all stood to gain from monopoly – and monopoly, St Clair demonstrates, was strong and corrupt in the London book trade in the eighteenth century, the trade into which the father of Murray, Byron's publisher, bought his way.

But after the Lords' decision of 1774, which made illegal the idea of perpetual copyright as it had been practised since 1710, what St Clair describes as "the old-style canon" (authors, roughly, from Chaucer to Smollett, including Shakespeare) became available to a much wider readership than hitherto:

The old-style canon texts made their way into the village school room, to the smoke room of the ale house, to the ingle nook of the shepherd, to the wallets of ploughmen in the fields, the weaver at his handloom, and artisan at his bench, the bored lady and the unhappy schoolboy. During the romantic period the reading nation was probably, to a large extent, commensurate with the reach and availability of these texts (p. 138).

Why is it the lady who's bored and the schoolboy who's unhappy? The shepherd's life is very dull, and many artisans were unhappy. Still, it beats today's *Sun* and *Mirror*.

But few of the hitherto-disinherited read any Keats or Shelley – later to be declared luminaries of the new-style canon. This book's great glory is its appendices, in which St Clair supplies the most comprehensive breakdowns of print-runs, prices, pirates, and remainderings, which the period has ever been given. We find that *Lyrical Ballads* had three editions between 1798 and 1802, selling two thousand copies at 6s; but was still seen as a failure (p. 161). The first run of Keats' *Poems* of 1817 (either 750 or a thousand: also 6s) had not been exhausted by 1824; *Endymion* (9s), published in April 1818, had only sold about eight copies by October 1818; and the *Isabella* volume, published at 7s 6d in an edition of perhaps a thousand in 1820, was still in 1828 being offered at the original price. Shelley published *Alastor* (5s), *The Revolt of Islam* (10s 6d), *The Cenci* (4s 6d), and *Adonais* (3s 6d), all at his own expense. *Prometheus Unbound* (9s), given a print-run of 500 in 1820 ("probably"), was still available in 1824, two years after his death. We are relieved to see that *The Excursion*, with a print-run of 500 in 1814 (and priced at £2 2s!), still hadn't sold out by 1834, and had in the previous decade sold just one copy a year; still, of Shelley's works, only the heavily-pirated *Queen Mab* had a wide circulation. On the other hand, Scott's first publication, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802), had had five editions by 1812, and sold over six thousand copies. It alone beats the complete published works of Keats and Shelley without difficulty.

Still less did the previously-disinherited read Moore, or Byron-published-by-Murray. *Childe Harold* I and II, even in its 12s octavo manifestation, would have cost a carpenter half his weekly wage. *Lalla Rookh*, supposing that a carpenter might want to read it, would have cost him still more (p.195). Books were more expensive than at any previous time in history (p. 196), and *The Excursion* was "perhaps the most expensive work of literature ever published in England" (p. 201). "Wordsworth," writes St Clair, "did not number many leech gatherers among his readers" (pp. 201-2).

There was "a huge unmet demand for reading" (p. 205), to which not all writers were sympathetic, for reasons that Soame Jenyns and Ferdinand II would have understood. "Southey and Coleridge ... had little but contempt for the new growing reading public, and had no wish to encourage it to grow" (p. 207). When an author went out of copyright, his sales rocketed to meet the unmet demand. Thus the poets most often published in the romantic period were ... Cowper and Thomson (p. 207). Austen's Anne Elliott would have been delighted.

St Clair writes that "The brief copyright window of the romantic period" (1774-1842) "coincided with one of the most dynamic periods of British history in terms of books, readers, and education" (p. 442). What he doesn't assert is that it was any more than a coincidence.

He calculates that the one poem which sold most copies was Bloomfield's *The Farmer's Boy*. I guess I'll have to read it (prior to writing this review I'd never heard of it: see *EBSR* 777). But don't worry, I'm now doing an edition of it.

After the French Revolution ("... and I presume you know what that unfortunate movement led to", as Lady Bracknell puts it), publishers had to be careful again. The Napoleonic wars had to be depicted as patriotic and glorious: "soldiers and sailors mutilated by the war but content with their chew of tobacco ... had their allotted place in the scheme of

things” (p.287). St Clair has a chapter on establishment propaganda, such as Blair’s *Sermons* (see *Don Juan II*, 165, 7), Paley’s *Natural Theology*, Hannah More’s tracts (see *Don Juan I*, 16, 4), and the numerous conduct books such as *Hints to Young Females*. These were “not primarily Christian, or even religious” (p. 275), and it’s perhaps because of this omission that Mr Collins tries to read one to the Bennet sisters in *Pride and Prejudice*. The tracts tried to instil in the reading and / or listening nation a sense of decency and apt decorum, of which Lady Bracknell (Mr Collins with trousers on), would herself have approved. Byron seems to link them, via Donna Inez, with Annabella. The government was anxious, not so much about the salvation of the souls of its population, but about the security of its gilt-edged stocks (p. 277): the stocks Byron often urged Kinnaird to buy him out of, not because he disapproved of the government, but because he feared for their stability, with, as he thought, a revolution pending.

The most famous feminist riposte to the conduct books – *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* – reached a much smaller readership (pp. 277-8).

As before 1774, care about surfaces, and profit, were made to go hand-in-hand. The conduct books sold in thousands – and the government stocks didn’t depreciate. Some errors of judgement were made elsewhere: I can’t believe that Longmans ever regretted turning down *Laon and Cythna*; but they may have regretted the caution which made them turn down *Frankenstein*, *English Bards*, and *Rejected Addresses* (p. 160). Writers, too, learned to be circumspect: Hemans would always check a subject’s suitability (that is, its marketability) before even starting to write (p. 160). She was a professional; the more vulnerable Austen and Shelley, at the opposite extreme, in profit-sharing and “vanity-publishing” exercises respectively, were overcharged (pp.164-5). Not without reason did Campbell alter the biblical text to read “Now Barabbas was a publisher” (p. 161). The picture St Clair creates, of publishers on the one hand rooking their authors, and on the other finding ways of avoiding publication, is all too convincing. Books were left out of trade catalogues; royalties were not paid, as if by way of discouragement; books available were said to be unavailable; orders were received but not delivered. Expensive volumes were destroyed rather than allowing them to be remaindered. One has heard such tales from one’s own friends, even in the twenty-first century.

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The book abounds in eye-openers. The three main reviews (*Blackwoods*, the *Edinburgh*, and the *Quarterly*) were all owned by publishers. If half of a 750-copy print run sold, the book was reckoned to have covered all its costs (p.169). Taylor and Hessey employed two people – Taylor, and Hessey. Charles and James Ollier had likewise only two employees – but Longmans employed sixty clerks, and created jobs for 250 more people. Many publishers, like Murray, were also booksellers, as Byron often said with contempt; but Murray was the first publisher to withdraw from bookselling.

As for the Waverley Novels (see pp. 636-41 for the statistics), their impact is almost impossible for us to imagine today, when obtaining a complete set in a modern edition is so hard. The initial print runs of the successive volumes were greater than most authors sold in a lifetime. Macaulay remembered walking out along the London road to meet the stage bringing the next one. Circulating libraries existed, as it seemed, to facilitate their reading. Shops which had never previously handled books went into the business solely to sell them. The Cambridge University Library refused all modern fiction (to judge from its present catalogue, it also refused the *Edinburgh Review*), but made an exception in the case of *The Antiquary*. Scott was of all romantic writers the one most concerned to avoid giving offence; the Jewish Rebecca must never pair off with the Christian Ivanhoe. In addition, Scott controlled the whole media-package, from initial choice of subject, via the reviewing, to the casting of the theatrical adaptation. Had there been *Old Mortality* toys, badges, t-shirts, baseball caps, video-games, fast-food tie-ins, and DVDs (the “writing-of”), he would have controlled them too.

The strange experience of going around Abbotsford will be even stranger from now on. Whether or not the “anonymisation” of the Waverley novels was, as St Clair suggests (p. 175), “part of an attempt to turn novels into uniform and mutually substitutable commodities” (like Standard Oil), we can’t deny that their success helped prose fiction upwards from duodecimo to octavo, while poetry was demoted (“supply-pushed”) from quarto to duodecimo (p.176); and in this, the period most famous for poetry’s writing.

Hannah More taught that women should not read novels at all (“The circulating library is no unfrequent road to Doctor’s Commons”: p. 283). But she fought a losing battle – in great part through the success of the conservative and inoffensive Scott. Despite anything the reactionary powers could do, women became “literature abusers” (p. 281), like Laura the servant-girl in Flora Thompson’s *Lark Rise to Candleford*, seduced and corrupted (as Moira Haslett would have us think) by *Don Juan*:

How fascinating the book was! She felt she simply had to know what came next, and the blue skies and seas of those foreign shores and the seaside loves and golden sands and the wit of the author and the felicity of his language and the dexterity of his rhymes enchanted her. She was shocked by some of the hero’s adventures, but more often thrilled. Laura learned quite a lot by reading *Don Juan*.

John Todd, first Professor of Eng. Lit. at London University, was a formidable proponent of the same admonitory line as More: “Allow me to lift up a loud voice against the ravings of the imagination ... by which the mind is at once enfeebled, and the heart and feelings debased and polluted” (p.284). Reading *Don Juan*, he advises in a note (a Latin note), will lead to self-abuse, weakness, madness, and an early death – just the effects, he says, that its writing had on the author.

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As we read on, publishers’ and writers’ villainies multiply. Cawthorne sold 20,000 more copies of *English Bards* than he was entitled to. Murray’s numbering of the editions of *Lara* jumped from first to fourth with no intervening second or third; later he produced two first editions of *Childe Harold III* and *The Prisoner of Chillon*, without distinguishing them. Hannah More’s *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* (see again *Don Juan* I, 16, 4) had only odd-numbered editions. Scott’s novels were often sent to the printer a sheaf at a time while they were being written, which accounts for many minor inconsistencies: later he corrected them, and claimed copyright on both versions. Wordsworth dictated some new notes for his works in 1843, and his heirs were thereby enabled to assert a new copyright. Everyone was either on the make, or sitting like the dog in the manger. St Clair doesn’t mention *Beppo*, three editions of which were published by Murray before Byron had even finished writing it (despite which, 2,600 copies were remaindered in 1822); or *The Vision of Judgement*, which had to be published twice by Hunt because Murray, from whom he took it, hadn’t known it had a prose preface.

Those who would have it that romantic texts are a product of social collaboration rather than agonised, isolated genius will find here much evidence for their case: though the questions remain, “Was the collaboration helpful?” and “Should we take it into account when editing them?”

St Clair is informative about the advent of stereotyping, which replaced moveable type and made it impossible for poets to revise after the first edition – as Wordsworth did, relentlessly. *The Giaour* would not have been able to lengthen out its rattlesnake coils if Murray’s printer had used stereotypes. I’d like to know when the Murray printers took up stereotyping – the one-volume Byron of 1837 is stereotyped – and what kind of type John Hunt used (he was his own printer for *The Liberal*). In World War I many publishers gave their stereotype plates for melting down and re-use in the armaments industry. Churchill said it was necessary for the war effort (p. 431). In 1916 Routledge even sent their plates of the Waverley Novels for melting.

As evidence of what, from people's reading, they felt most worthy of recall, St Clair examines the contents of private albums, or commonplace books. Anthologies of contemporary verse were illegal, so people hand-copied their own, and if they were lucky, asked poets to contribute to them. Southey would have had albums banned, as well as anthologies. St Clair's findings here make sad reading. No-one knew any Keats or Shelley, so neither *To Autumn* nor *Ozymandias* appears. Instead, they would copy "Breathes there a man with soul so dead" from *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, Campbell's *Battle of Hohenlinden*, or Charles Wolfe's *The Burial of Sir John Moore at Corunna*. Byron's *Fare Thee Well!* (an ethically dubious piece) went next to stanza 23 from *Childe Harold II* ("'Tis night when Meditation bids us feel ..."). Another favourite was *'Tis the Last Rose of Summer*. It's intriguing that St Clair finds extracts from *Don Juan* in the commonplace books – but he doesn't say which extracts. The publishers, seeing another weakness to be exploited, or another appetite to be controlled, soon turned out pre-digested commonplace books, with names like *The Keepsake* or *Book of Beauty*. Their success, too, is depressing. As St Clair points out (p. 234), what such readers seem not to have been interested in was poetry about the world around them. Perhaps *The Sun* or *The Mirror* would have been an improvement, after all.

The first complete edition of Keats that St Clair's appendix finds is a French one, and includes Shelley and Coleridge as well – three strange bedfellows. It's a Galignani of 1829/30, and is a tribute to that publisher's critical acumen as well as his initiative: the three poets could not, by 1830, be found printed in England at all. American readers had a similar privilege (p. 387). Galignani, along with Baudry, also of Paris, and others like Brønner of Frankfurt, published English poets for a continental readership; but his prices were so much lower than those of London that people passing through Paris were asked to bring home a Galignani Byron by their friends. In addition, his editions were more complete than those of Murray, including titles like *English Bards* and *The Curse of Minerva*, which Murray didn't carry.

Galignani's ventures were a standing indictment of English short-term memory, critical indifference, and commercial malpractice. Wordsworth and Southey hated him, as did the London publishers. Wordsworth and Southey both longed for a larger readership, but loathed the means by which such a readership was to be reached. Galignani said in any case that Southey wouldn't sell. A novel published in London would be on sale in Paris within three days (!), well-printed and at a quarter of the London price. A Galignani complete Byron in 1840 cost 18s, as opposed to 42s for a Murray. Smuggled proofs were often the source of the text. Under French law, Galignani's books were not pirates; and all a returning traveller had to do was sign their name on the endpaper to prove to the customs that the book was not for resale. This state of affairs continued until the international copyright convention of 1850. Ruskin, Clare, Tennyson, Godwin, Gladstone, and even Wordsworth, all owned Galignanis. St Clair says Richard Brinsley Sheridan owned one too (p. 302), but as he died in 1816 we may doubt it. Galignani's editions were available wherever English were to be found on the continent – thus the expatriate community was better served than the domestic one (one lady used the continental popularity of Byron and Moore as evidence of the vitiated taste of expatriates).

The reputation and colossal influence Byron and Scott had on the literature of Europe is as much owing to the availability of Galignanis as it was to French translations. In England, Byron and Scott were seen as polar opposites, though they were friends in private: in France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Poland and Russia, they were complementary giants whose influence on literature, music and painting has still to be studied fully. It was via their respectability that Shakespeare's reputation became at last established in Europe. Had the English publishers had their way, none of this would have happened.

As Anglo-Scots we may feel proud of the influence the two writers had; but the finest quotation in the book is one lamenting the effect Scott had on, specifically, the Southern States of America:

then comes Sir Walter Scott with his enchantments, and by his single might checks this wave of progress, and even turns it back: sets the world in love with dreams and phantoms; with decayed and swinish forms of religion, with decayed and degraded systems of government; with the silliness and emptiness, sham grandeurs, sham gauds, and sham chivalries of a brainless and worthless long-vanished society. He did measureless harm; more real and lasting harm, perhaps, than any other individual that ever wrote (p. 390: the passage is from *Life on the Mississippi*, Chapter 46).

Scott was, wrote Mark Twain, notoriously Europhobic author of the above, “in great measure responsible for” the American Civil War. Thus Scarlett O’Hara fantasises about Ashley / Ivanhoe, while all the time in denial of the fact that her real love is Rhett / Harold / Juan (N.B., neither Mark Twain nor William St Clair says this; and Rhett Butler is far sexier than any Byronic hero). Ruskin, on the other hand, thought the Waverley Novels would “encourage correct moral judgement, and therefore virtuous conduct” (p. 420).

In 2004, Austen outsells Scott and all the rest of the period’s writers many times over; she is studied, taught, filmed, televised and fantasised about in ways that would have stunned both her and the “romantic” period. The story of her contemporary sales is all the more amazing. The third edition of *Pride and Prejudice* was remaindered in the year of its printing (1817). 489 copies of the second, Murray, edition of *Mansfield Park* were remaindered four years after its 1816 printing. 535 copies of *Emma* were remaindered five years after its first printing, thirty having been sold in the previous two years. Thus the whirligig of time brings in its revenges. Similar fates awaited the early editions of Hemans, a writer doomed to be much more popular later in the century (p. 607). Perhaps more vigorous and systematic puffing, such as books get nowadays, would have helped. One can’t tell.

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St Clair gives an excellent analysis of the membership and reading habits of book clubs, which sprang up in large numbers between 1770 and 1820, were largely male, largely upper-middle-class in membership, and contrasted with keepers of *Keepsakes* by concentrating on religion, classics, and works about exploration. Concentrated, that is, until the Waverley Novels started to be published. These were at once acceptable, and remained the only fictional works to be purchased by the clubs until the middle of the century. The clubs were exclusive, and imposed large fines against lending books already borrowed, as a means of excluding undesirable radicals from the illicit enjoyment of their property. Their members would, suggests St Clair, have formed Coleridge’s “clerisy”, had anyone tried to form such a thing (pp. 258-9).

But they didn’t. They didn’t have to, for the government and the publishers tried to make sure that most interesting literature was out of most people’s reach, in a way that Coleridge would have wanted his clerisy to. They tried to, but didn’t succeed. The Bishop of London lamented the current lack of “humble docility and prostration of the understanding” on the part of the poor, which had previously made it easier to control them (p. 309), and John Murray, for example, publisher to the Admiralty, was on his side. The average price of a first edition of Byron was 5s 6d – far too high for the man in the street. *Childe Harold* I, II and IV sold at 12s in octavo. The Murray octavo of *Don Juan* I and II was 9s 6d. You didn’t need censorship with prices like these. Murray claimed to be keen on extending the availability of most of Byron’s work to a wider public:

I am now meditating, or rather have made preparation, to print a uniform edition of your poems in three octave volumes. ‘Childe Harold,’ four cantos, with your own notes, will form the first volume; all the ‘Tales,’ including ‘Beppo,’ will constitute the second; and the ‘Miscellaneous Poems,’ ‘Manfred,’ &c., will fill the third. These I intend to print very handsomely, and to sell very cheap, so that every facility shall be given for their popularity (letter of June 16th 1818; Smiles, *A Publisher and his Friends*, I 394).

St Clair's assertion that Murray was not anxious for *Don Juan* to be so widely read is perhaps contradicted by the evidence, which shows that Murray "tranches down to 8VO sooner than usual" (p. 683) – in the same year (1819) as the expensive first edition – and by the 1820 Crown octavo edition, which is "trunched down to a size only a little larger than 12mo. The speed with which he tranches down," St Clair comments, "is another sign that Murray had lost many traditional customers" (p. 684). But could it be that Murray just wanted to capitalise on his scandalous new property? His solicitor, Sharon Turner, thought a downmarket move would be immoral:

The evil if not stopped, will be great. It will circulate in a cheap form very extensively, injuring society wherever it spreads (Smiles I 406: letter of October 21st 1819)

He, however, was speaking of the consequence of really cheap piracies – the sort which might be read by working-class people, a market for which Murray never provided.

Byron never expressed dissatisfaction with Murray's policies – despite his new, demotic style, and despite what St Clair writes on p. 325: "He had never been sympathetic to Murray's policy of high prices which cut him off from most of his potential audience". He may here be paraphrasing the American George Ticknor, quoted on p. 387, but Ticknor only reports the poet's approval of cheap American editions, not his disapproval of expensive English ones. Byron was always polite to Americans. He still wrote *Don Juan* for an English élite. He was on the Bishop's side in practice, if not in theology. Wordsworth, too, was on the Bishop's side: when he "accepted the office of Distributor of Stamps in Westmoreland he became a direct personal beneficiary of an abuse of state power aimed at discouraging reading" (pp. 310-11). I suppose so few people bought his poems that it didn't matter.

The Duke of Wellington was on the Bishop's side. He patronised the Society for the Suppression of Vice, which employed snoopers and entrapment to weed out seditious literature. He also patronised the Constitutional Association, which prosecuted *The Vision of Judgement*. "My people have no need of thought ..."

At last, enter the real heroes: the English pirates. Enter Onwhyn, who first pirated *Don Juan*. Enter William Benbow, enter Sherwood, Neely and Jones, who pirated *Wat Tyler* for two shillings; enter William Dugdale, Richard Carlile (and Mrs Carlile) who pirated *Queen Mab*, enter Erasmus Perkins, and James Watson; enter Cleave, Dove, Smith, Morris, Cornish, Daly, Love, Milner, and Dicks. Between them they brought down the price of a complete *Don Juan* from £2 17s in 1824 to sixpence in 1870 (table 16.3 on p. 330). The Bishop of London was decisively rebuffed, and Flora Thompson's housemaid Laura emerged as the winner.

For the fatuous paradox was that, on the one hand, a person who prosecuted the pirate of a work considered seditious, libellous, or blasphemous, would lose his case, while on the other, once the work had been so declared, anyone was free to pirate it. This happened with both *Wat Tyler* and *Queen Mab*. *Don Juan* was never prosecuted, as *The Vision of Judgement* was; but it was pirated, over and over. St Clair claims that Byron was sympathetic to poor publishers: "When Dugdale was in court, Byron's lawyer was instructed not to press the full rigour of the law – Dugdale was a poor man – he should not be driven out of business. A nod was as good as a wink ..." (p. 322). He gives us no reference for this statement, and I find no references to Dugdale in Byron's *Letters and Journals*. However, Dugdale pleaded that *Don Juan* was immoral, and that he could therefore print it! If it were widely read, he argued,

... the demoralising principle would go on increasing, until at last we should behold a revolution, as great, as awful, and as dangerous as the French revolution ... (p. 325)

Byron would, he argued, in such circumstances, raise himself to the throne! One is reminded of Wellington, fantasising about Hobhouse taking the role of President in a post-Cato Street republic. The law was an ass, and so was Wellington. Dugdale won his case, and Murray was deprived of his intellectual property right over *Don Juan*.

The great mystery of the whole tale is this: what was Byron's attitude to the fact that he suddenly became available to such a wide readership? How did he feel about leaving Murray and joining Hunt? Was he delighted, or mortified? Did he even realise what was happening? Was he so taken up with his last journey to Greece that he felt it made no difference? Was the suicidal impulse to go to Greece in part motivated by the knowledge that his greatest work was now common property? On p. 325 St. Clair quotes his sensible, indirect advice to Murray (via Kinnaird) that *Don Juan* should be printed not just in octavo, but in a small format too, to combat piracy: what we can't sense is how he feels about such a necessity.

In 1813 he had referred to Leigh Hunt with approval, as reminding him "more of the Pym and Hampden times – much talent, great independence of spirit, and an austere, yet not repulsive, aspect" (BLJ III 228). It was by 1822 no longer possible for him to fantasise the irritating editor Leigh into a hero of the Cromwellian, republican type, so he transferred the idea on to the bold printer John (whom so far as I can tell he never met): "he is a stiff sturdy conscientious man – and I like him – he is such a one – as Prynne – or Pym might be" (BLJ X 69). It would be useless to point out that Prynne and Pym were quite different people: Byron would weave any dream around his new publishers to obscure his own perception of how bourgeois they really were.

John Hunt ran off 17,000 copies of his "common" edition of Cantos VI, VII, and VIII (the Siege Cantos) at one shilling. 17,000 is an impressive figure, indicating great confidence on Hunt's part. By 1826, Harriette Wilson reported that you could buy a *Don Juan* volume for sixpence (p. 327). Thanks to the pirates, St Clair writes, "*Don Juan* was read by more people in its first twenty years than any previous work of English literature" (p. 333). It achieved this place by flaunting both the idiocies of the English law and the timorousness of John Murray.

The book's most controversial chapter is its twentieth, which puts aside the quantifying approach characterising the rest, and tries to answer the question, "How did the reading of books lead to change?" He calls it "the anarchy of actual perception" (p. 406). Much work is done on the influence of politics on books: less on the influence of books on politics: except in the case of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, it's a tricky area. Heaven forbid that books should influence politics, of course: if they did, Harold Pinter would be running England.

Firstly, St Clair doesn't say what the principle changes of the period were. I'd hesitate that they were, in foreign affairs, the defeat of Napoleon; in domestic, the development of heavy industry, Catholic Emancipation, and the 1832 Reform Act. And at once the strangeness of the situation would become clear, for in a reading world dominated above all by the Waverley Novels, the last thing you'd expect to occur would be a cessation of hostilities, lots of new factories, greater religious tolerance, and franchise reform. Reading was one thing, reality another. Secondly, many of the examples which St Clair quotes to illustrate the supposed effect of reading are satirical ones, showing that the readers only *thought* they were reading Scott, Byron, Moore and so on. Does *The Corsair* [see article above] really encourage "the scorn of what is mean and base, the courage, – root of all virtue – that dares and evermore dares in the very last extremity, the love of the illimitable, of freedom, and the cadences like the fall of waves on a sea-shore ..."? (Mark Rutherford's *Revolution in Tanner's Lane*, quoted p. 408). *The Corsair* is such a weird poem, and Conrad such an unmanly, self-defeating protagonist, that I should say anyone who took such feelings away from it did so because they were predisposed to experience the feelings, and because "reading Byron" gave them a flimsy excuse to do so. Austen's reaction is refreshing in its levelling: "I have read *The Corsair*, mended my petticoat, & have nothing else to do" (quoted p. 398). Facetious, too, perhaps, in its hint of cause in the book and effect in the damaged petticoat. As with the continental Byronists like Delacroix, people such as those Austen was satirising were reading a Byron of their own invention. Sainte Beuve wrote that Lamartine "lisait Byron bien moins dans le texte anglais que dans son âme." There is nothing in Byron which would lead to Delacroix's *The Massacre at Chios* or *The Death of Sardanapalus* –



certainly not *The Isles of Greece* or *Sardanapalus* itself. Likewise, Berlioz could have written his *Waverley* and *Rob Roy* overtures without having read a word of Scott; and *Harold in Italy* has nothing to do with Byron's poem at all. Is "the love of the illimitable, of freedom" a political concept anyway? Is it a serious concept at all?

The answer to the chapter's opening question, "How did the reading of books lead to change?" may just be, "It didn't. The changes would have happened if none of the books had been written." Lord John Russell was on the one hand an architect of the 1832 Reform Act, and on the other, literary executor to Thomas Moore. But having read *The Loves of the Angels* would in no way have spurred him to work towards the Act. Perhaps *The Tuppenny Postbag* and *The Fudge Family* series encouraged his liberal tendencies: but I think that his tendencies would have been liberal anyway.

Another enthusiastic supporter of the 1832 Act was J.C.Hobhouse: his Selected Vestries Bill of 1831 was one of its precursors. He read Scott's novels with critical disinterest (never going out of his way to buy any of them); but his favourite poems by Byron were *The Corsair* and *Childe Harold IV*; two poems from which a Whiggish domestic subtext can be deduced only with strain (it's easier in the case of *Childe Harold IV*, if you're Italian). From the most radical of Byron's poems, *Don Juan*, he averted his eyes, in so far as doing so was commensurate with correcting the proofs of its first two cantos. Once that onerous duty had been lifted, he ignored the rest of it until the late 1820s.

St. Clair's nightmare is articulated on the last two pages of his text (pp. 450-1). It's a nightmare in which there is firstly, thanks to the 2002 U.S. Supreme Court ruling, perpetual copyright on all books, and secondly, copyright on the arbitrary signification of each individual word (a fear articulated by "Ms Mei-Mei Wu"); so that reprints of books with expired copyrights become impossible (for copyright never expires); and so does all new creative writing. His analysis of the way copyright law waxed and waned in England during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries makes this appear unlikely. Still, there may be trouble ahead; though not, I hope, such trouble as is implied by the paragraph on p. 625 about Eaton, a publisher of *The Age of Reason*, who was

... stood in the public pillory, the last time in British history, *so far*, that this punishment has been applied [my italics].

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There will be argument about details in St. Clair's book. It won't do, for example, to call Fanny Price "a character in Austen's *Mansfield Park*" (p. 243: it's like calling Rosalind "a character in *As You Like It*"). This may, knowing C.U.P., be a sub-editorial insistence: Maria, or rather "Miss", Crawford is given the same phrase on p. 272. The "lady" at p. 289, whose "only opportunity for poetic sublimity" lies in taking "a muddy walk ... across the fields to visit a neighbouring lady" seems to be Elizabeth Bennet; and Austen's point is that the effect of the walk on her appearance is to nudge Darcy down the path to a reappraisal of his attitude towards her. There is romance in Hertfordshire: you don't have to go to Athens for it. Indeed, according to *Childe Harold II*, you won't find any romance at Athens at all. Mr Darcy is, like Rhet Butler, much sexier than Harold; if, that is, you're a woman.

Hobhouse's *Journey through Albania* was published in 1814, not 1810 (p. 608). De Staël's *Germany* is not a novel (p. 564). Harold does not look upon "the Seraglio of Constantinople" (p. 289). "Wyoming" (p.289) is, in Campbell's poem, a part of Pennsylvania, not the separate state. What St Clair calls an "Adaptation of *Hebrew Melodies*" (p. 587) was not sold in 1829, but in 1815, and was the authentic, musical version, not an adaptation. It was in two volumes. The Hannah More quotation about Byron on p. 288 needs a reference. It wasn't only Byron's enemies who found *Childe Harold* objectionable (p. 290); Shelley described its fourth canto as "the most wicked & mischievous insanity that ever was given forth" (*Letters* ed. Jones II 57-8). I don't think there is a verb "to tranch" (pp. 309, 364, 386), and the noun "progressivity" (p. 436) is a new one. Southey did print *Wat Tyler* in his *Collected Works* (p. 317), as he did *A Vision of Judgement* (p. 655); and his poem is *A Vision*

of *Judgement*, not *The Vision of Judgement* (p. 654). We need a dialogue about the *Ode to Napoleon*: “Murray ... asked Byron to write another stanza ... so that it became a ‘book’ and escaped the pamphlet tax” (pp. 310-11, 587). But Andrew Nicholson, in *Napoleon’s ‘last act’ and Byron’s Ode*, (*Romanticism* 9.1, 2003, p. 68) writes that there was no such condition attached to pamphlet tax. Peter Isaac’s essay *Byron’s Publisher* (full title *Byron’s Publisher and His ‘Spy’: Constancy and Change Among John Murray II’s Printers, 1812-1831*) is neither in the bibliography nor the abbreviations list. It is to be found at *The Library* 19 (1997) pp 1-24. It’s hard to believe that an 1835 pirate *Don Juan* had “six cantos per page” (p. 690).

Finally, I’d like another opinion about how wide a circulation *The Rights of Man* had, in addition to St Clair’s on pp. 257 and 623-4. It deserves another chance, for it places the whole romantic period in such a shockingly different perspective, even from those of Byron or Shelley. In this it resembles William St Clair’s extraordinary volume, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*.