conversation, which, though highly ludicrous and amusing, was anything but romantic, threw my mind and imagination into a mood not at all agreeing with the scene. . . . [Later, during dinner] Had much curious conversation with him about his wife before Scott arrived. He has written his memoirs,¹ and is continuing them; thinks of going and purchasing lands under the Patriotic Government in South America. Much talk about Don Juan; he is writing a third canto; the Duke of Wellington; his taking so much money; gives instances of disinterested men, Epaminondas, etc. etc. down to Pitt himself. . . .

NOTES

Thomas Moore (1779–1852), Irish poet, met Byron in November 1811 at Samuel Rogers’s house (see p. 18). They saw each other frequently in London, but met only once, on the occasion described in this extract, after Byron left England. Moore’s life of Byron appeared in two volumes in 1830–1.

¹. The subsequent history of Byron’s memoirs is complex: for full details see Marchand, p. 1245 ff., and Doris Langley Moore, The Late Lord Byron (1961) ch. 1. Moore told Hobhouse that, while the first part of the memoirs was innocuous except for isolated passages, the second part ‘contained all sorts of erotic adventures’. William Gifford, as John Murray’s literary adviser, read them at Murray’s request, and reported them ‘fit only for a brothel’, predicting that, if published, they ‘would doom Lord B to everlasting infamy’. Moore, with his projected biography in mind, was eager to publish at any rate a selection of the less offensive portions, but Hobhouse insisted on their wholesale destruction and was supported by Murray. On 17 May 1824, four weeks after Byron’s death, they were burned in Murray’s office in Albemarle Street, in the presence of Murray, Hobhouse, Moore and other witnesses. Later in the year, reviewing Medwin’s Conversations, Blackwood’s Magazine, XVI (Nov 1824) 530, remarked severely, ‘Moore has much to answer for – He stands guilty of having violated a sacred trust confided to him by one of the master-spirits of the age’.

Moore Recalls his Visit*

THOMAS MOORE

I was a good deal struck . . . by the alteration that had taken place in his personal appearance. He had grown fatter both in person and face,

*The Life of Lord Byron, pp. 410–12.

N. Page (ed.), Byron
© Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited 1985
and the latter had most suffered by the change – having lost, by the enlargement of the features, some of that refined and spiritualised look, that had in other times, distinguished it. The addition of whiskers, too, which he had not long before been induced to adopt, from hearing that some one had said he had a *faccia di musico*, as well as the length to which his hair grew down on his neck, and the rather foreign air of his coat and cap – all combined to produce that dissimilarity to his former self I had observed in him. He was still, however, eminently handsome: and, in exchange for whatever his features might have lost of their high, romantic character, they had become more fitted for the expression of that arch, waggish wisdom, that Epicurean play of humour, which he had shown to be equally inherent in his various and prodigally gifted nature; while, by the somewhat increased roundness of the contours, the resemblance of his finely formed mouth and chin to those of the Belvedere Apollo had become still more striking.

His breakfast, which I found he rarely took before three or four o’clock in the afternoon, was speedily despatched – his habit being to eat it standing, and the meal in general consisting of one or two raw eggs, a cup of tea without either milk or sugar, and a bit of dry biscuit. Before we took our departure, he presented me to the Countess Guiccioli, who was at this time, as my readers already know, living under the same roof with him at La Mira; and who, with a style of beauty singular in an Italian, as being fair-complexioned and delicate, left an impression upon my mind, during this our first short interview, of intelligence and amiableness such as all that I have since known or heard of her has but served to confirm.

We now started together, Lord Byron and myself, in my little Milanese vehicle, for Fusina – his portly gondolier Tita, in a rich livery and most redundant mustachios, having seated himself on the front of the carriage, to the no small trial of its strength, which had already once given way, even under my own weight, between Verona and Vicenza. On our arrival at Fusina, my noble friend, from his familiarity with all the details of the place, had it in his power to save me both trouble and expense in the different arrangements relative to the custom-house, remise, etc.; and the good-natured assiduity with which he bustled about in despatching these matters, gave me an opportunity of observing, in his use of the infirm limb, a much greater degree of activity than I had ever before, except in sparring, witnessed.

As we proceeded across the Lagoon in his gondola, the sun was just setting, and it was an evening such as Romance would have chosen for a first sight of Venice, rising ‘with her tiara of bright towers’ above the wave; while, to complete, as might be imagined, the solemn interest of the scene, I beheld it in company with him who had lately given a new life to its glories, and sung of that fair City of the Sea thus grandly: –