Byron said, threw a sort of Levant fury of expression into his actions and face, to which we Orientalists had been accustomed, and which we could appreciate. His stabbing himself was a masterpiece.

NOTES

After visiting Constantinople with Byron, Hobhouse had parted from him on 17 July 1810 and had made his way back to England.

1. John Murray, Byron’s publisher, wrote to him early in February 1814 to tell him that 10,000 copies of The Corsair had been sold on the day of publication – ‘a thing perfectly unprecedented’. Within the next few weeks Murray ‘printed seven editions and sold twenty-five thousand copies’ (Marchand, p. 433). On 22 February 1812, at a banquet held at Carlton House, the Prince Regent had ‘abused all his Whig friends in violent language. His little daughter, Princess Charlotte, who was present, wept at her father’s treachery to those who had befriended him and to the party in which she and her mother had put all their hope. She was ordered out of the room with the Duchess of York’ (Marchand, pp. 318–19). Early in March, Byron sent a poem, ‘Sympathetic Address to a Young Lady’, to the Morning Chronicle, to be published anonymously. It appeared on 7 March 1812. When its authorship became known, the attack on the Regent (‘A Sire’s disgrace, a realm’s decay’) aroused an outcry.

2. Edmund Kean (1789–1833), Shakespearean actor. Byron, accompanied by Thomas Moore, had seen Kean on 7 May, and Byron and Hobhouse had seen him as Richard III on 19 February.

First Impressions I (1809)*

JOHN GALT

It was at Gibraltar that I first fell in with Lord Byron. I had arrived there in the packet from England, in indifferent health, on my way to Sicily. I had then no intention of travelling. I only went a trip, intending to return home after spending a few weeks in Malta, Sicily, and Sardinia; having, before my departure, entered into the Society of Lincoln’s Inn, with the design of studying the law.

At this time, my friend, the late Colonel Wright, of the artillery, was


N. Page (ed.), Byron
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secretary to the Governor; and during the short stay of the packet at the
Rock, he invited me to the hospitalities of his house, and among other
civilities gave me admission to the garrison library.

The day, I well remember, was exceedingly sultry. The air was
sickly; and if the wind was not a sirocco, it was a withering levantert –
oppressive to the functions of life, and to an invalid denying all
exercise. Instead of rambling over the fortifications, I was, in conse­
quence, constrained to spend the hottest part of the day in the library;
and, while sitting there, a young man came in and seated himself
opposite to me at the table where I was reading. Something in his
appearance attracted my attention. His dress indicated a Londoner of
some fashion, partly by its neatness and simplicity, with just so much of
a peculiarity of style as served to show, that although he belonged to
the order of metropolitan beaux, he was not altogether a common one.

I thought his face not unknown to me; I began to conjecture where I
could have seen him; and, after an unobserved scrutiny, to speculate
both as to his character and vocation. His physiognomy was prepos­s­
sessing and intelligent, but ever and anon his brows lowered and
gathered; a habit, as I then thought, with a degree of affectation in it,
probably first assumed for picturesque effect and energetic expression;
but which I afterwards discovered was undoubtedly the occasional
scowl of some unpleasant reminiscence: it was certainly disagreeable –
forbidding – but still the general cast of his features was impressed
with elegance and character.

At dinner, a large party assembled at Colonel Wright's; among
others the Countess of Westmorland, with Tom Sheridan and his
beautiful wife; and it happened that Sheridan, in relating the local
news of the morning, mentioned that Lord Byron and Mr Hobhouse
had come in from Spain, and were to proceed up the Mediterranean in
the packet. He was not acquainted with either.

Hobhouse had, a short time before I left London, published certain
translations and poems rather respectable in their way, and I had seen
the work, so that his name was not altogether strange to me. Byron's
was familiar - the Edinburgh Review had made it so, and still more the
satire of English Bards and Scotch Reviewers, but I was not conscious of
having seen the persons of either.

On the following evening I embarked early, and soon after the two
travellers came on board; in one of whom I recognised the visitor to the
library, and he proved to be Lord Byron. In the little bustle and
process of embarking their luggage, his Lordship affected, as it seemed
to me, more aristocracy than befitted his years, or the occasion; and I
then thought of his singular scowl, and suspected him of pride and
irascibility. The impression that evening was not agreeable, but it was
interesting; and that forehead mark, the frown, was calculated to
awaken curiosity, and beget conjectures.