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Nic Panagaopoulos and Maria Schoina, eds. and intro., *The Place of Lord Byron in World History: Selected Papers from the 35th International Byron Conference*. Peter W. Graham, foreword. Lampeter, Wales: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2013. Pp. 323. ISBN 97807730429314.

Byron in World History is a series of essays edited by Nic Panagaopoulos (University of Athens) and Maria Schoina (Aristotle University of Thessalonika). It is based on a week-long conference that took place in September 2009 in Messolonghi. This was a fitting location not only because – as Peter W. Graham puts it in his eloquent foreword – it is

the place that 'Byron saw as he first breathed the air of mainland Greece' and 'the landscape that surrounded him as in April 1824 he breathed his last' (xvii). But also, more sadly and ironically, it was a suitable locale because, as we have all seen to our disbelief, History with a big Hegelian 'H' has come shockingly and terrifyingly to Greece in the last few years. Byron's Gibbonian conception of history as a cycle of destruction and renewal speaks thereby with particular pertinence to the urgency of the present moment in this region.

As Caroline Franklin here reminds us, 'the most cursory glance at Byron's *oeuvre* demonstrates the centrality of history to virtually anything he wrote' (85). And one of the particular strengths of this collection is that its range echoes the complexity and magnitude of Byron's engagement with this topic. As Panagolopoulos and Schiona point out in their 'Introduction': 'Byron's perception of History...operates on multiple levels: as fact, imagined event, metaphysical design, scepticism, personal myth, antiquity, progress, past and present, cultural and political milieu, philosophical concept' (xxi). As an illustration of this, the collection proceeds in five engaging and enlightening sections, encompassing: Byron's relationship with other cultures and histories; his engagement with the philosophy and aesthetics of history; Byron's constructions of history; his personal history; his status in cultural history; and role as anti-model.

One of the most salutary aspects of this work is its attention to Byron's transformative effect on many different cultures. Maria Kalinowska, for instance, provides a thoughtful account of the impact of Byron on the leading Polish Romantic poet, Adam Mickiewicz. She cites Mickiewicz's stirring description of Byron's work as 'a mass of combustible, underground materials' (quoted: 6). The volume demonstrates keenly that Byron's corpus has a habit of creating political explosions. The poet has resurfaced 'at critical moments in Greek history' (27), as Maria Schiona shows us, in her absorbing account of the role played by the commemoration of Lord Byron in the collapse of the seven-year Greek dictatorship in 1974. In a completely different, but related, context, She-

Ru Kao describes how the Chinese poets Liang Qichao and Su Manshu found Byron's poems sufficiently 'pliable' (295) to arouse revolutionary anger in early twentieth-century China. If we are to build a truly global and holistic understanding of Byron's infamous 'mobility', we need more work like this.

The many contexts in which Byron has participated alert us also to the multivalent status of history in his work. As Michael O'Neill informs us, 'what Byron grasps about History is the fundamental ambivalence enshrined in the word: that history is both experimental data and a mode of narrative' (104). An excellent essay, providing an eloquent example of this ambiguity, is James Pott's description of how those moments at which Byron associates Greece with eroticism, femininity and death complicate the poet's otherwise more utopian construction of the nation. As Potts demonstrates, 'the ambiguous materiality of Byron's Greece as a woman at the point of death shows Byron radically departing from his contemporary's utopian ideals of Greece' (121). In another fine essay, Mark Sandy describes how 'Venice exists as a mythical and historical reality which, for Byron, delights in those blurred boundaries between personal memory and public record, ruin and whole, and nature and cultural artifice' (131-2).

If I had one criticism of this collection it would be that the language of 'ambiguity' and 'ambivalence' does not always give adequate testimony to the manic-depressive oscillation between idealism and cynicism, fact and opinion, collecting and discarding, totality and fragmentation we find in Byron's work, life and afterlife. But this is a minor charge against a volume whose diversity and richness is impossible fully to encapsulate in an eight-hundred word review. As Jerome McGann puts it in his welcome contribution, Byron's work is still 'burning fiercely like some stellar hypergiant....the centre of an enormous gravity field' (143). At this critical juncture in Greek history, the book demonstrates that Byron can still provide new stimulus.

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