

Clara Tuite, ed., *Byron in Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. xxix + 343. £79.99. ISBN 9781107181465.

Lord Byron is a poet who frequently demands to be read with an awareness of context, so this latest addition to Cambridge University Press's Literature in Context series is a welcome one. This is a big book of small parts. It showcases 37 chapters, each running to approximately 4,000 words, in keeping with the remit of the series. As such, the reader gets the benefit of great coverage, without the volume ever appearing monumental or unapproachable. Even when tackling it in its entirety, it never feels baggy.

The first thing to be said is that, despite its comprehensiveness, a book of this kind still involves balancing acts and choices about what to include and exclude, and that goes for both editor and contributor. Clara Tuite has done a splendid job of assembling a roster of well-known and newer names that parades the current depth of Byron studies. There are four sections: Life and Works; Political, Social and Intellectual Transformations; Literary Cultures; Reception and Afterlives. The section on the life of the poet plays it safe by sticking to an ages and stages model, although there is reason for this given that the biography divides quite neatly into the early years, years of fame and years of exile scheme. There is also a largely chronological approach to section four, which moves from contemporary reception to a chapter on 'Byron Now'. The middle sections offer the big political, cultural, literary and intellectual contexts for reading Byron alongside some quite focused themes, where we find some of the most intriguing new contexts, including Susan J. Wolfson's reappraisal of Byron and Robert Southey.

For authors, the fairly brief space means making choices between summary and advancing new arguments and balancing the attention given to Byron and the context under focus. One benefit is that there is little wastage and we cut to the core of matters quickly. Manifestly, some subjects, particularly the ones on the life, demand more of the summary mode. There are some slick exchanges of the biographical baton in the first section, even as it would be nice to know more about, for instance, Diego Saglia's argument about the centrality of Byron's body in 'The Years of Fame'. The danger is the tendency to cram, list, or leave a final thought hanging, although this is avoided in most chapters.

Tuite's careful arrangement of subjects provides cohesion. This works particularly well when contexts arise and expand across a series of chapters, as in the sequence that runs from Mirka Horová's account of the Satanic school of poetry to Caroline Franklin's discussion of Byron's attitude to the bluestockings, where we are reminded that Byron's tendency towards antagonism and opposition often occludes more congenial moments. The sequence speaks back to John Beckett's chapter on Byron's politics, which usefully demonstrates the historical situatedness of Byron's statement from Canto XV of *Don Juan*, 'I was born for opposition', in the context of a long period of Tory government.

Recurring themes across the book include the attention given to Byronic theatricality and his manipulation of readers, established by Saglia and Jane Stabler. It is picked up in different contexts by Laura J. George on fashion and dandyism, Adam Komisaruk's chapter on libertinism, and by Alan Rawes, whose excellent chapter on autobiography provides an intriguing context in itself for reading many of the chapters that make up Part Four, particularly Julian North's 'Recollections, Conversations and Biographies'. The idea that Byron wrote an 'autobiographical mode of discourse to achieve un-autobiographical ends' (232) reworks, without announcing it, the territory of Tom Mole's and Tuite's recent investigations of scandalous celebrity – touchstones in this book and throughout Byron studies right now – and Andrew Stauffer's work on readerly alienation.

Recurring contexts reveal something of current literary preoccupations. There is quite a lot here that addresses Byron's place in contemporary print culture. The chapters by Mole on

editions of Byron's works, Mary O'Connell on Byron's publishers, and Gary Dyer on pirated editions of Byron's works find echoes later on when Tuite writes about literary theory and Andrew Franta addresses periodical culture. Materiality – textual and bodily – and its relation to mind and spirit has been a characteristic concern of Byronists and new work on the history of the book demonstrates critics retain, in different guises, pronounced interests in issues of Byronic embodiment.

Overall, this book is a fine achievement that will provide a route into studying Byron for students and also give new insights for scholars in the field. It is no easy job to represent a field of study that has developed over 200 years, whilst allowing scope for new directions, and Tuite does it very successfully. Byron lends himself rather well to the fairly rapid changing of lenses, voices or subject positions we get here, partly because, as North puts it, he maintained a 'skeptical resistance to the single vision' (282).

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