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A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

# BYRON'S POETRY AND PROSE



AUTHORITATIVE TEXTS  
CRITICISM

*Selected and Edited by*

ALICE LEVINE  
HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY



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## 153

But lo! the dome—the vast and wondrous dome,<sup>7</sup>  
 To which Diana's marvel<sup>8</sup> was a cell—  
 Christ's mighty shrine above his martyr's tomb!  
 I have beheld the Ephesian's miracle—  
 Its columns strew the wilderness, and dwell  
 The hyaena and the jackall in their shade;  
 I have beheld Sophia's bright roofs<sup>9</sup> swell  
 Their glittering mass i' the sun, and have survey'd  
 Its sanctuary the while the usurping Moslem pray'd;

## 154

But thou, of temples old, or altars new,  
 Standest alone—with nothing like to thee—  
 Worthiest of God, the holy and the true.  
 Since Zion's desolation,<sup>1</sup> when that He  
 Forsook his former city, what could be,  
 Of earthly structures, in his honour piled,  
 Of a sublimer aspect? Majesty,  
 Power, Glory, Strength, and Beauty, all are aisled  
 In this eternal ark of worship undefiled.

## 155

Enter: its grandeur overwhelms thee not;  
 And why? it is not lessen'd; but thy mind,  
 Expanded by the genius of the spot,  
 Has grown colossal, and can only find  
 A fit abode wherein appear enshrined  
 Thy hopes of immortality; and thou  
 Shalt one day, if found worthy, so defined,  
 See thy God face to face, as thou dost now  
 His Holy of Holies, nor be blasted by his brow.<sup>2</sup>

## 156

Thou movest—but increasing with the advance,  
 Like climbing some great Alp, which still doth rise,  
 Deceived by its gigantic elegance;  
 Vastness which grows—but grows to harmonise—  
 All musical in its immensities;  
 Rich marbles—richer painting—shrines where flame  
 The lamps of gold—and haughty dome which vies  
 In air with Earth's chief structures, though their frame  
 Sits on the firm-set ground—and this the clouds must claim.

7. "The church of St. Peter's."

8. The Temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the world, which Byron mistakenly took for the ruins that he saw at Ephesus in 1810.

9. The Hagia (or Santa) Sophia at Constantinople, originally a Christian church, later a mosque.

1. The destruction of Jerusalem and its temple by the Romans in 70 C.E.

2. Referring to an Old Testament idea that no living person may look upon the face of God.

## 157

Thou seest not all; but piecemeal thou must break,  
 To separate contemplation, the great whole;  
 And as the ocean many bays will make,  
 That ask the eye—so here condense thy soul  
 To more immediate objects, and control  
 Thy thoughts until thy mind hath got by heart  
 Its eloquent proportions, and unroll  
 In mighty graduations, part by part,  
 The glory which at once upon thee did not dart,

## 158

Not by its fault—but thine: Our outward sense  
 Is but of gradual grasp—and as it is  
 That what we have of feeling most intense  
 Outstrips our faint expression; even so this  
 Outshining and o'erwhelming edifice  
 Fools our fond gaze, and greatest of the great  
 Defies at first our Nature's littleness,  
 Till, growing with its growth, we thus dilate  
 Our spirits to the size of that they contemplate.

## 159

Then pause, and be enlighten'd; there is more  
 In such a survey than the sating gaze  
 Of wonder pleased, or awe which would adore  
 The worship of the place, or the mere praise  
 Of art and its great masters, who could raise  
 What former time, nor skill, nor thought could plan;  
 The fountain of sublimity displays  
 Its depth, and thence may draw the mind of man  
 Its golden sands, and learn what great conceptions can.

## 160

Or, turning to the Vatican,<sup>3</sup> go see  
 Laocoön's<sup>4</sup> torture dignifying pain—  
 A father's love and mortal's agony  
 With an immortal's patience blending;—Vain  
 The struggle; vain, against the coiling strain  
 And gripe, and deepening of the dragon's grasp,  
 The old man's clench; the long envenom'd chain  
 Rivets the living links,—the enormous asp  
 Enforces pang on pang, and stifles gasp on gasp.

3. The palatial residence of the pope in Rome.

4. A magnificent Greek statue of Apollo's priest Laocoön with his two sons, who were crushed by serpents (*Aeneid* 2.199–227).

## 161

Or view the Lord of the unerring bow,<sup>5</sup>  
 The God of life, and poesy, and light—  
 The Sun in human limbs array'd, and brow  
 All radiant from his triumph in the fight;  
 The shaft hath just been shot—the arrow bright 1445  
 With an immortal's vengeance; in his eye  
 And nostril beautiful disdain, and might  
 And majesty, flash their full lightnings by,  
 Developing in that one glance the Deity.

## 162

But in his delicate form—a dream of Love, 1450  
 Shaped by some solitary nymph, whose breast  
 Long'd for a deathless lover from above,  
 And madden'd in that vision—are exprest  
 All that ideal beauty ever bless'd  
 The mind with in its most unearthly mood, 1455  
 When each conception was a heavenly guest—  
 A ray of immortality—and stood,  
 Starlike, around, until they gather'd to a god!

## 163

And if it be Prometheus<sup>6</sup> stole from Heaven  
 The fire which we endure, it was repaid 1460  
 By him to whom the energy was given  
 Which this poetic marble hath array'd  
 With an eternal glory—which, if made  
 By human hands, is not of human thought;  
 And Time himself hath hallow'd it, nor laid 1465  
 One ringlet in the dust—nor hath it caught  
 A tinge of years, but breathes the flame with which 'twas wrought.

## 164

But where is he, the Pilgrim of my song,<sup>7</sup>  
 The being who upheld it through the past?  
 Methinks he cometh late and tarries long. 1470  
 He is no more—these breathings are his last;  
 His wanderings done, his visions ebbing fast,  
 And he himself as nothing:—if he was  
 Aught but a phantasy, and could be class'd  
 With forms which live and suffer—let that pass— 1475  
 His shadow fades away into Destruction's mass,

5. The statue Apollo Belvedere in the Vatican.

6. The Titan Prometheus stole fire from the gods and gave it to mankind; Promethean fire is associated with godlike ability, creativity, and life.

7. This is the first reference to Harold in Canto IV.

## 165

Which gathers shadow, substance, life, and all  
 That we inherit in its mortal shroud,  
 And spreads the dim and universal pall  
 Through which all things grow phantoms,<sup>8</sup> and the cloud 1480  
 Between us sinks and all which ever glow'd,  
 Till Glory's self is twilight, and displays  
 A melancholy halo scarce allow'd  
 To hover on the verge of darkness; rays  
 Sadder than saddest night, for they distract the gaze, 1485

## 166

And send us prying into the abyss,  
 To gather what we shall be when the frame  
 Shall be resolved to something less than this  
 Its wretched essence; and to dream of fame,  
 And wipe the dust from off the idle name 1490  
 We never more shall hear,—but never more,  
 Oh, happier thought! can we be made the same:  
 It is enough in sooth that *once* we bore  
 These fardels<sup>9</sup> of the heart—the heart whose sweat was gore.

## 167

Hark! forth from the abyss a voice proceeds, 1495  
 A long low distant murmur of dread sound,  
 Such as arises when a nation bleeds  
 With some deep and immedicable wound;  
 Through storm and darkness yawns the rending ground,  
 The gulf is thick with phantoms, but the chief 1500  
 Seems royal still, though with her head discrown'd,  
 And pale, but lovely, with maternal grief  
 She clasps a babe, to whom her breast yields no relief.

## 168

Scion of chiefs and monarchs, where art thou?  
 Fond hope of many nations, art thou dead? 1505  
 Could not the grave forget thee, and lay low  
 Some less majestic, less beloved head?  
 In the sad midnight, while thy heart still bled,  
 The mother of a moment, o'er thy boy,  
 Death hush'd that pang for ever: with thee fled 1510  
 The present happiness and promised joy  
 Which fill'd the imperial isles so full it seem'd to cloy.

8. Lines 1477–80: cf. Shakespeare, *The Tempest* 4.1.151–56.9. Burdens; cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 3.1.78.

1. Princess Charlotte, only daughter of the Prince Regent (eventually King George IV), died after giving birth to a stillborn son in November 1817, while Byron was writing Canto IV; she had been wed for one year to Leopold of Saxe-Coburg (the "lonely lord" of lines 1519–21), and her death caused general mourning throughout England, inspiring elegies by nearly all the poets of the period.