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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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Whose shock was as an earthquake's, and opprest  
The land which loved thee so that none could love thee best.

## 173

Lo, Nemi!<sup>6</sup> navell'd in the woody hills  
So far, that the uprooting wind which tears 1550  
The oak from his foundation, and which spills  
The ocean o'er its boundary, and bears  
Its foam against the skies, reluctant spares  
The oval mirror of thy glassy lake;  
And, calm as cherish'd hate, its surface wears 1555  
A deep cold settled aspect nought can shake,  
All coil'd into itself and round, as sleeps the snake.

## 174

And near Albano's scarce divided waves  
Shine from a sister valley;—and afar 1560  
The Tiber winds, and the broad ocean laves  
The Latian coast where sprang the Epic war,<sup>7</sup>  
“Arms and the Man,” whose re-ascending star  
Rose o'er an empire:—but beneath thy right  
Tully<sup>8</sup> reposed from Rome;—and where yon bar  
Of girdling mountains intercepts the sight 1565  
The Sabine<sup>9</sup> farm was till'd, the weary bard's delight.<sup>1</sup>

## 175

But I forget.—My Pilgrim's shrine is won,  
And he and I must part,—so let it be,—  
His task and mine alike are nearly done;  
Yet once more let us look upon the sea; 1570  
The midland ocean breaks on him and me,  
And from the Alban Mount we now behold  
Our friend of youth, that ocean, which when we  
Beheld it last by Calpe's rock<sup>2</sup> unfold  
Those waves, we follow'd on till the dark Euxine<sup>3</sup> roll'd 1575

6. “The village of Nemi was near the Arician retreat of Egeria, and, from the shades which embosomed the temple of Diana, has preserved to this day its distinctive appellation of *The Grove*. Nemi is but an evening's ride from the comfortable inn of Albano.” The basin of the Lago di Nemi is the crater of an extinct volcano, hence the imagery at the end of the stanza.

7. The conquest of Rome as told in Virgil's *Aeneid* (19 B.C.E.), which opens with “Arms and the Man” (line 1562).

8. See p. 309, n. 6.

9. Ancient people of northern Italy subjugated by the Romans.

1. “The whole declivity of the Alban hill is of unrivalled beauty, and from the convent on the highest point, which has succeeded to the temple of the Latian Jupiter, the prospect embraces all the objects alluded to in this stanza: the Mediterranean; the whole scene of the latter half of the *Aeneid*, and the coast from beyond the mouth of the Tiber to the headland of Circaeum and the Cape of Terracina.”

2. Gibraltar.

3. The Black Sea, between Europe and Asia; in classical myth, the Clashing Rocks (“Symplegades,” line 1576) barred ships from entering the Euxine.

176

Upon the blue Symplegades: long years—  
 Long, though not very many, since have done  
 Their work on both; some suffering and some tears  
 Have left us nearly where we had begun: 1587  
 Yet not in vain our mortal race hath run, 1588  
 We have had our reward—and it is here;  
 That we can yet feel gladden'd by the sun,  
 And reap from earth, sea, joy almost as dear  
 As if there were no man to trouble what is clear.

177

Oh! that the Desert were my dwelling-place, 1585  
 With one fair Spirit for my minister,<sup>4</sup>  
 That I might all forget the human race,  
 And, hating no one, love but only her!  
 Ye Elements!—in whose ennobling stir  
 I feel myself exalted—Can ye not 1590  
 Accord me such a being? Do I err  
 In deeming such inhabit many a spot?  
 Though with them to converse can rarely be our lot.

178

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,  
 There is a rapture on the lonely shore, 1595  
 There is society, where none intrudes,  
 By the deep Sea, and music in its roar:  
 I love not Man the less, but Nature more,  
 From these our interviews, in which I steal  
 From all I may be, or have been before, 1600  
 To mingle with the Universe, and feel  
 What I can ne'er express, yet can not all conceal.

179

Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean—roll!  
 Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;  
 Man marks the earth with ruin—his control 1605  
 Stops with the shore;—upon the watery plain  
 The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain  
 A shadow of man's ravage, save his own,  
 When, for a moment, like a drop of rain,  
 He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan, 1610  
 Without a grave, unknell'd, uncoffin'd, and unknown.

4. Lines 1585–88 suggest Byron's thoughts of his sister; cf. "Epistle to Augusta" (p. 241) and *Manfred*, 2.2 *passim* (p. 261).

180

His steps are not upon thy paths,—thy fields  
 Are not a spoil for him,—thou dost arise  
 And shake him from thee; the vile strength he wields  
 For earth's destruction thou dost all despise, 1615  
 Spurning him from thy bosom to the skies,  
 And send'st him, shivering in thy playful spray  
 And howling, to his Gods, where haply lies  
 His petty hope in some near port or bay,  
 And dashest him again to earth:—there let him lay. 1620

181

The armaments which thunderstrike the walls  
 Of rock-built cities, bidding nations quake,  
 And monarchs tremble in their capitals,  
 The oak leviathans,<sup>5</sup> whose huge ribs make  
 Their clay creator the vain title take 1625  
 Of lord of thee, and arbiter of war;  
 These are thy toys, and, as the snowy flake,  
 They melt into thy yeast of waves, which mar  
 Alike the Armada's<sup>6</sup> pride or spoils of Trafalgar.

182

Thy shores are empires, changed in all save thee— 1630  
 Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage,<sup>7</sup> what are they?  
 Thy waters wash'd them<sup>8</sup> power while they were free,  
 And many a tyrant since; their shores obey  
 The stranger, slave, or savage; their decay  
 Has dried up realms to deserts:—not so thou, 1635  
 Unchangeable save to thy wild waves' play—  
 Time writes no wrinkle on thine azure brow—  
 Such as creation's dawn beheld, thou rollest now.

183

Thou glorious mirror, where the Almighty's form  
 Glasses itself in tempests; in all time, 1640  
 Calm or convulsed—in breeze, or gale, or storm,  
 Icing the pole, or in the torrid clime  
 Dark-heaving;—boundless, endless, and sublime—  
 The image of Eternity—the throne  
 Of the Invisible; even from out thy slime 1645  
 The monsters of the deep are made; each zone  
 Obeys thee; thou goest forth, dread, fathomless, alone.

5. I.e., great ships; "leviathans" refers to huge sea creatures (biblical).

6. The Spanish fleet launched against England in 1588; at Cape Trafalgar (southwest Spain) in 1805, the English navy defeated the allied French and Spanish fleets.

7. *Assyria* . . . : the great empires of the ancient world.

8. *washed them power*: misprinted as "wasted them" in the first and subsequent editions, including 1832.

## 184

And I have loved thee, Ocean! and my joy  
 Of youthful sports was on thy breast to be  
 Borne, like thy bubbles, onward: from a boy 1650  
 I wanton'd with thy breakers—they to me  
 Were a delight; and if the freshening sea  
 Made them a terror—'twas a pleasing fear,  
 For I was as it were a child of thee,  
 And trusted to thy billows far and near, 1655  
 And laid my hand upon thy mane—as I do here.

## 185

My task is done—my song hath ceased—my theme  
 Has died into an echo; it is fit  
 The spell should break of this protracted dream.  
 The torch shall be extinguish'd which hath lit 1660  
 My midnight lamp—and what is writ, is writ,—  
 Would it were worthier! but I am not now  
 That which I have been—and my visions flit  
 Less palpably before me—and the glow  
 Which in my spirit dwelt is fluttering, faint, and low. 1665

## 186

Farewell! a word that must be, and hath been—  
 A sound which makes us linger;—yet—farewell!  
 Ye! who have traced the Pilgrim to the scene  
 Which is his last, if in your memories dwell  
 A thought which once was his, if on ye swell 1670  
 A single recollection, not in vain  
 He wore his sandal-shoon, and scallop-shell;  
 Farewell! with *him* alone may rest the pain,  
 If such there were—with *you*, the moral of his strain!

**BEPPO** Byron wrote a first draft of *Beppo* on October 9–10, 1817, while he was staying at La Mira. Over the next several months he continued to write additional stanzas, revise, copy, and eventually correct proofs for the poem, which was published, anonymously, in February 1818. With *Beppo* Byron simultaneously broke away from the emotionally fraught poems of 1816–17 (of which he, his publisher and, they feared, his readers were beginning to tire) and discovered a genre and stanza that he would use with consummate virtuosity in his great final comic works, *Don Juan* and *The Vision of Judgment*. The genre is, broadly, narrative satire, only the traditionally reformatory goals of social satire continually compete, on the one hand, with the poet's irrepressible impulse "to giggle and make giggle" (*BLJ* 6:208) and, on the other, with a sense of the pervasiveness of human foibles, self-deception, and the irony of human ideals. The narrative, moreover, is perpetually interrupted by a chatty, cosmopolitan, and facetious narrator, whose opinions and digressions upstage the story—as in fact does the sheer verbal ingenuity of the verse. The stanza form is *ottava rima*, eight iambic pentameter lines rhyming abababcc, which, though it is used in an overtly clever and highly artful way, still manages to give