

**“To have, when the original is dust”  
A Founder’s History of the Byron Society Collection**

**By Marsha Manns, Co-Founder, with Leslie A. Marchand,  
Byron Society of America and Byron Society Collection**

**Third International Student Byron Conference  
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The Third International Student Byron Conference focused on “Byron: Romanticism, and the Olympic Spirit. When Rosa Florou asked me to present a founder’s history of the Byron Society Collection, I wondered how that might naturally tie into the conference theme. My mind kept returning to the idea of the runner—and of running with endurance the race that is set before us. “Will he who swims,” Byron writes in *Hints from Horace*, “not to the river run?” It occurs to me that those of us who decided—some years ago—some of us more recently—to spend our lives living with literature, are indeed running our own race. We are students, and teachers, and writers, and collectors. We have been faithful in our love of Byron and his poetry, we have studied, written, and traveled—and welcomed friends old and new to the race that has been set before us. This then is the story of the Byron Society Collection. . . .

In thinking through how best to provide a brief history and a real sense of the evolution of the Byron Society Collection, I thought it might be appropriate to begin with Byron’s words: “To have,” Byron writes in the first canto of *Don Juan* (stanza 218, lines 1743-44), “when the original is dust, / A name, a wretched picture, and a worse bust.” What a wonderful example of Byronic irony with which to start, for the Byron Society Collection brings together the very things that the author of *Don Juan* writes of as the “end of fame.”

- There is Byron’s “name”: We have rare books in the Collection—Leslie Marchand’s large paper copy, for example, of *Don Juan*, Cantos I-II. There is autograph material—a February 11, 1807, letter from Byron’s mother to the solicitor John Hanson and a framed address leaf of May 27, 1813, from Byron to a Mrs. Moore. There are the archives of the Byron Society of America, which was founded in 1973, 149 years after the “original [was] dust.”

- Then, there is Byron's "picture." The collection boasts numerous images of Byron rendered in various mediums. An early nineteenth-century lithograph of Byron by the American artist Rembrandt Peale (1778-1860) after the Richard Westall portrait came from my collection when the Byron Society Collection was originally created. What's notable about Peale's lithograph is that it is one of the first, or perhaps the first, lithograph produced in America, issued by the Boston firm of Pendelton in late 1825 or early 1826. Among other images are a late nineteenth-century jasper relief and a pastel portrait of the poet painted by the late Jacqueline Voignier-Marshall, the founder of the Australian Byron Society and a benefactor to the Byron Center in Messolonghi.
- And finally, there are the "busts." There is a parian bust of Byron manufactured circa 1870 by Robinson and Leadbetter of Stoke-on-Trent, England, and a pair of spelter statues of Byron and Shakespeare, probably from the early twentieth century, both from the collection of Michael Rees. And there is a mysterious Staffordshire relief donated to the Collection by an elderly English antique dealer, now deceased, who insisted the image is an unrecorded likeness of Byron by the Staffordshire potters.

As I began to think about these verses from *Don Juan* in relation to my talk on the Byron Society Collection, it seemed that the very poet I have lived and worked with most of my adult life was once again raising the essential questions about the impact of literature on life that *every* collector of things literary must necessarily confront in the formation of a collection. The verses, also seemed to be providing a framework in which to tell the story of the Byron Society Collection, how it came to be, and the ideas that it hopes to embody.

The Byron Society Collection's journey has been full of dramatic twists and turns, much like the life of the poet it represents. The Collection was founded in 1995 in partnership with the Byron Society of America and the University of Delaware and grew rapidly upon founding. The Byron Society left Delaware in 2006 and subsequently deeded the Collection in 2009 to Drew University Special Collections Library, where it resides today. By nature, this collection is interdisciplinary and sits at the institutional intersection of the museum and the library.

Its founding principle is to establish, through donation and bequest, a material history of Byron literary and cultural studies from the nineteenth century to the present day. The Collection's holdings integrate the traditional elements employed in the study of a literary figure—rare books and autograph material--together with visual representations of the poet such as statuary, Staffordshire figures, mezzotints, and engravings--along with other decorative arts and material objects that demonstrate the impact of Byron's life and works on his readers, both past and present. It is being developed to attract scholars, students, and individuals interested in the Romantic period in literature, in publishing history, in nineteenth-century decorative arts, and in cultural studies. The archives of the Byron Society of America, including correspondence with scholars, authors, poets, actors, publishers, and playwrights, all engaged in the study of literature, also form an important part of the Collection. Members of the Byron Society have been, to date, the primary donors. Interestingly, the correspondence within their Society membership files often reveals how their own varied collections were built and why. Thus, the lives and stories of the individuals reading, studying, and teaching Byron are integrated into the collection and help form its organic nature.

The seeds of the collection were planted, although I could not have known it at the time, in 1972, when Leslie Marchand and I were asked to start an American Committee of what is now the International Byron Society with independent societies in forty countries. The fledgling American society grew quickly and I served as its executive director for many years. During that time, my correspondence with Byronists all over the world was extensive. We were all deeply absorbed in creating our own libraries and often related in letters to one another the stories of the search for sought after editions and titles. At some point in the correspondence, the writer of the letter would invariably tell me the story of how she or he had come to the study of Byron's poetry. Often these stories were very dramatic, sometimes perceived of as life-changing by the individual involved.

There were always, though, questions apart from the interest in the written word. "Which portrait," members would ask me, "do *you* think most resembles Byron?" "What did he really look like?" Here, of course, is a natural curiosity about a famous person before the days of photography. Nevertheless, I would sometimes wonder if this was Byron's "end of fame?"

There was, however, another often asked question that seemed the most significant one because it appeared to deal with the circumstances of life, with time and place—and with the notion of transcendence. It came from members in widely differing situations and professions who had written to me about how Byron’s poetry or letters or biography had touched their lives: “I wonder if I would have read—or encountered—or known—about Byron,” they would invariably muse, “if I had lived in the nineteenth century?” “If I had been born in another country?” “I wonder if my experience of the poetry would have been the same if I had spent my life in another profession?” Because these musings were being shared with me over and over again, I couldn’t escape them. I began to realize that the questions were not really about time or place, but about the very nature of the poetry itself.

So it was that I began to search for answers to these often asked questions, if only for myself. My regular outings to hunt for books began to expand into a search for nineteenth-and early twentieth-century busts and other images that I could reasonable afford at the time. Slowly, I did begin to find images, most of which were made for a middle-class market. There were parian, bronze, plaster and chalk busts, jasper and ivory medallions and painted miniatures, paired bronze and spelter statues. Perhaps my favorites, though, are the Staffordshire pottery figures, created by the potters for a mass market and originally sold for pennies at the fairgrounds. Byron and his characters were a great favorite of the potters.

In his extensive catalog of the *Staffordshire Portrait Figures*, Gordon Pugh gives us a street song about the Staffordshire pottery images written in 1842 by a Mr. Thomas Hudson. It is titled “Buy My Images” and opens with an homage to Byron:

Will you buy images, I images cry

Very fine, very pretty, very cheap, will you buy

Poor Italiano, him never in de glooms

All sort images beautify your rooms

First one, prima LORD BYRON head

Byron live a longtimes after him dead,

Loves tales *Poeta*—all very true one

Everybody knows him call[ed] DON JUAN

Will you buy images, I images cry

Very fine, very pretty, very cheap, will you buy?

My fascination with these objects and the stories they told about who was reading Byron, or in some other way experiencing the poetry, began to grow. My collecting interests started to shift toward the objects, which were now being integrated with my book collection and reflected my own experience of the literature. About this time, a long-time member of the Byron Society, Jacqueline Palmer, died unexpectedly and much-too-young at 53. Suddenly I found myself the recipient of her cherished Byron collection of autograph material and books that she had begun to assemble when she was a teenager. Jackie lived in Verona, New Jersey in a former mayor's house that was a wedding gift from her adoring husband, Richard. When her husband died of a sudden heart attack in his early forties, she returned to elementary school teaching to maintain her beloved home in Verona and to modestly continue to build her Byron collection. I knew that each autograph or letter or antique map of Greece represented a sacrifice on her part to acquire. I also knew that she wanted, as many collectors do, to have her collection remain intact after her death. With her unexpected bequest to me, it was clear that she had trusted me to find a way to do just that.

I wanted to honor Jackie's wish, but the many boxes piled up in the living room of my Manhattan apartment for months seemed an overwhelming obstacle. I was at an emotional impasse when Leslie Marchand, who always came to town for the annual Keats-Shelley directors meeting, arrived to help me sort through the materials. We spent the day carefully examining Jackie's treasures. She had an excellent working library, a good assemblage of the early editions

of the poetry, and many of the nineteenth-century biographies. There were autographs of Edward John Trelawny, the Duke of Wellington, and Frances Hodgson, the classical scholar and friend from Byron's Cambridge days. Jackie prized a then unpublished letter of Thomas Moore dated October 10, 1841, a letter and envelope of Lady Byron, dated July 1840, and the 1813 address leaf franked by Byron mentioned earlier in this talk. Her collection also contained a parian bust of Byron after Thorvaldsen's original commissioned by John Cam Hobhouse and sculpted from life. Byron wrote to his publisher John Murray about the bust on June 11, 1817: "Thorvaldsen has done a good bust of me at Rome for Mr. Hobhouse . . . He is their best after Canova." The original of this bust is in the Thorvaldsen museum in Copenhagen; Jackie's is a copy made for a middle class market.

As Leslie and I worked and talked, we came up with the idea of forming a living collection where Society members, and others, if they chose, could donate their own collections. Individually, a collection might not have amounted to much on the open market. But collectively, and well integrated with the collections of others, there was the promise of something quite valuable. Leslie and I both committed to donating our own collections to such an endeavor, if it could be established, with Jackie's bequest to me being the inaugural gift. Thus it was that the Byron Society Collection was founded in 1995 as an organic and living collection defined by the integration of multiple parts into a greater whole. Almost immediately, we began to see the collection grow more rapidly than we could have imagined, primarily through the generosity of devoted Byron Society members.

There is in the heart of every collector an impulse—a desire for understanding—perhaps even a longing—that shapes and defines the collection that emerges from the quest. "Soft hour!" Byron calls it in *Don Juan*, Canto 3 (stanza 108, lines 953 and 956), "Which wakes the wish and melts the heart . . . Or fills with love the pilgrim on his way." Here are brief collecting histories of three Byronic pilgrims-- Leslie Marchand, Michael Rees, and Jerome McGann—whose literary pilgrimages are represented in their donations to the Byron Society Collection.

In his obituary of Leslie Marchand, written for the *Keats-Shelley Journal*, Leslie's close friend Carl Woodring reflects that "Byron had spoken [to Leslie] in Hamlet's words: "Tell my story." "No other biographer," he goes to say, "has listened so closely." Leslie's commitment to the creation of the Byron Society Collection and his gift of books, papers, and ephemera proves a testimony to the power of listening.

Leslie was 95-years-old when the collection was created and he very much hoped to see it solidly underway before he died. We were, thankfully, able to accomplish that. At the time of his death at the age of 99, he was still a pilgrim, seeking unpublished Byron letters to supplement his thirteen-volume edition of *Byron's Letters and Journals* and proudly learning email so that he could maintain a large correspondence with Byronists around the world. Among Leslie's numerous contributions to the Byron Society Collection are the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *Glenarvon* with Lady Caroline Lamb's Preface; an early issue of Polidori's *The Vampyre*; and a marked copy of the first edition of his monumental biography of Byron. The markings provide corrections and, at the same time, indicate deletions and revisions so that he could transform the three-volume biography into the one-volume *Byron: A Portrait*. Also from Leslie, we have relics of the true cross—strands of Byron's hair formerly in the possession of Elizabeth Pigot, Byron's friend and neighbor when, as a young man, he lived at Burgage Manor, Southwell. The strands were given to Leslie by her great nephew, Cuthbert B. Pigot in October 1947. Another relic is a piece of flock taken from the pillow on which Byron died on April 19, 1824, and given to Leslie by the late John (Jock) Murray, Byron's publisher, during the London bicentennial celebrations of Byron's birth in 1988.

Michael Rees, a much loved figure in the Byron Society world, believed in the principles of the Byron Society Collection and really put it on the map with the gift of his 1,500-volume Byron library and fascinating ephemera. Michael Rees served for many years as the Director of the International Council of The Byron Society and also as a Vice President of the The Byron Society (London). Michael discovered the Byron world when he attended a program sponsored by the The Byron Society at the Royal Institution on Albemarle Street in the early 1970s. A brilliant administrator in his professional life, he was Administrative Manager for Europe of the Burroughs-Welcome pharmaceutical giant. He had a passion for the spoken and

written word, and was fluent in six languages. The Byron Society, astutely recognizing his many talents, quickly assigned him the role of Secretary, later Director, of the International Council of what were to rapidly develop under his direction into the forty international Byron Societies. One of Michael's primary responsibilities was to organize the international society's annual seminars and tours to a member country. Michael, like Leslie Marchand in pursuit of material for his Byron biography, happily became a Byronic pilgrim, traveling in advance of the tour to Belgium, Greece, or Malta—using his language and administrative skills to uncover every possible Byron or Byron-related association, no matter how small or remote the host country. On his travels, he found editions of Byron's works in many languages, including Russian, German, Italian, and Greek. He developed a huge correspondence with a staggering number of Byron scholars and collectors, kept meticulous journals of his travels, and again like Leslie, received many unusual gifts in the form of Byronic ephemera from grateful friends around the world that are now part of the Byron Society Collection.

Jerome McGann, the important critic of Romanticism and Byron studies, and the editor of *Byron: The Complete Poetical Works* (Clarendon Press, The Oxford English Texts series, 1980-1993), was a founding member of the Byron Society of America and has served on the Society's board of directors for many years. An early supporter of the Byron Society Collection, he donated many nineteenth-century editions, as well as microfilms. Then, in 2011, he gave his Byron papers to the Byron Collection at Drew.

The materials in the McGann collection are primarily of three general types. They include his working files for the OET Byron edition—his editorial materials, notes, and correspondence, as well as a selection of proofs of different volumes of the edition; a large set of facsimiles of Byron MSS and associated Byroniana; and a collection of scholarly and critical materials—books, pamphlets, editions, and catalogues—acquired and used in his work on Byron, the edition, and the general context of the period. Jerry described the gift by saying: “Probably the most significant part of these materials is the set of facsimiles. Along with the early editions and facsimiles already in the collection, these will make it possible for a person to carry out



significant primary research on Byron's writings and publications without leaving Drew's special collections." With this generous gift, the Byron Society Collection now houses the books and papers of the two most significant Byron scholars of the twentieth century.

I hope this gives you a sense of the Byron Society Collection—and some of the people who have come together to create it. To date, the collection has received gifts in kind or entire collections from more than 100 individuals. Just recently, Margaret Howell, a 1971 founding member of the reactivated Byron Society in London, now retired from teaching in Vancouver, made an estate plan that will provide funds for the cataloging of her own collection—as well as support undergraduate scholarships at Drew. She is one example of how very exciting it is for Byron Society members to see the excellent progress Drew has made with the Collection's catalogue, which can be found on the Drew Library website at [www.drew.edu/library/special-collections](http://www.drew.edu/library/special-collections). In April 2014, Drew hosted a conference and exhibit on "Collecting Byron" that both launched and celebrated the Byron Society Collection. Today, the Byron Society of America looks forward to the use of the collection by students and other Byronic pilgrims who can now experience first-hand its organic nature through direct access to the material--and by becoming acquainted with the stories of many collectors who loved literature in general and one poet in particular.

Perhaps then, there is another side to Byron's "end of fame." In the case of the Byron Society Collection, we do hope it is expressed in the freedom the collection has been given to develop organically by embracing the ideas and experiences of many varied collectors and their own collections. We then hope that the spirit of the work, flowing through the literature itself, will breathe its life into the enterprise, reflecting—to again cite familiar lines from Byron--"the flame with which it was wrought"—that which "tires torture and time . . . something unearthly. . . like the remembered tone of a mute lyre."

## ILLUSTRATIONS

For

**“To have, when the original is dust”**

**By Marsha M. Manns**

1. Lithograph of Byron by Rembrandt Peale, c. 1825-26.  
Gift of Marsha M. Manns
2. Leslie Marchand’s photographs and handwritten captions taken as possible illustrations for his three-volume *Byron: A Biography*.
3. Parian bust of Byron, Robinson & Leadbetter, circa 1880.  
Gift of Michael Rees
4. Framed address leaf, Byron to Mrs. Moore, May 27, 1813.  
Estate of Jacqueline L. Palmer
5. Byron: Popular Icons in Busts and Statuary on display at Drew University Library’s “Collecting Byron” exhibit, April-June 2014.
6. Staffordshire Byron and the Maid of Athens from the private collection of Marsha M. Manns
7. Greece from the *Malte-Brun Atlas*, published by Pierre Lapis, Paris, 1812.  
Estate of Jacqueline L. Palmer
8. Papers and Ephemera of Jerome J. McGann on display at Drew University Library’s “Collecting Byron” exhibit, April – June 2014.

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Illustrations 5 and 8 courtesy of Lynne Delade and Drew University Library.

Images 1-5, 7-8 reproduced courtesy of Drew University Special Collections Library.









Handwritten notes on lined paper, likely a letter or a page from a diary. The text is written in cursive and is mostly illegible due to fading and the angle of the page. A paperclip is visible at the top left corner of the page.



The  
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Poetical  
Works

VOLUME III



McGANN

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VOLUME IV



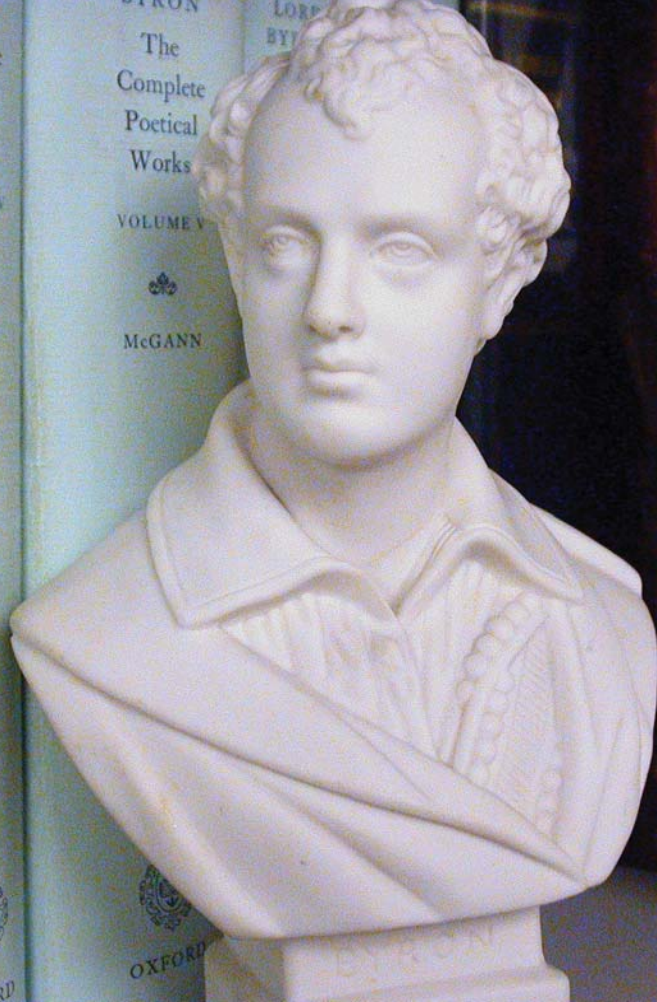
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Lord Byron  
1813

London May twenty seventh

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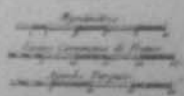






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An American Book Company, New York, N.Y.  
1910

John Murray, American Book Company, New York, N.Y., 1910

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