addressed to her in Greek speaks of Byron’s philhellenism and of his charity to “one of our brothers named Lukas, who was very much loved by the unforgettable Lord Byron, but who died in the midst of the war and in the midst of the happiness which Byron had procured for him.”

Since the Greek war of independence dragged on for another five years after Byron’s death, this would place Lukas’s death sometime before 1829. An extract from a journal by Trelawny, published in the *London Literary Gazette* for February 12, 1831, throws some further light on the matter. In the course of his career as an adventurer in Greece, Trelawny had turned violently against Prince Mavrocordatos; the journal accuses the prince (probably unjustly) of appropriating the money Byron had assigned to Lukas from the Missolonghi debt. Trelawny makes the charge that Lukas’s “family was left in utter destitution at Byron’s death” and that “the young man died six months after, in want of the necessaries of life.”

Trelawny’s contention that Lukas died destitute is contradicted by the sister’s declaration that he died “in the midst of the happiness which Byron had procured for him” and may have been made, on the basis of little or no knowledge, to further dramatize the alleged iniquity of Mavrocordatos. His statement that Lukas survived Byron by only a few months is, however, quite compatible with what his sisters say and may well be the truth.

30. *LLB*, p. 182.
EPILOGUE

The Truth Appears

News traveled slowly in a Europe still without railways or telegraphs. Though he must have been the first person in London to be informed, John Cam Hobhouse did not hear of Byron's death until May 14. Then, when the shock of the news passed, his overwhelming concern was with Byron's manuscript memoirs. Byron had begun his autobiography in Venice in 1818 and added to it substantially in 1820 and 1821, entrusting the pages to Thomas Moore to publish after his death. With Byron's permission, Moore had later sold the manuscripts to John Murray. But Hobhouse wanted them destroyed and was now able to bring Augusta and (more surprisingly) Murray himself around to his point of view. Three days later, over Moore's protests, the pages were consigned to the flames in Murray's office in Albemarle Street.

Did the memoirs make any revelations about Byron's bisexuality? Were fears on this score behind Hobhouse's obsessive determination to obliterate Byron's record of his life? Doris Langley Moore has given a full and vivid account of the events preceding the burning and has probed the motives of the participants. In effect, Hobhouse was able to create a mood of hysteria in which "gentlemanly" considerations for the dead man's fame were invoked to override Thomas Moore's scruples. Doris Langley Moore has argued that no explosive secrets were revealed in the memoirs. Though Hobhouse and Murray had not read them, we know that perhaps a score of people had since they circulated widely. William Gifford, who read the manuscript at Murray's request, had pronounced it "fit
only for a brothel," but the consensus is that Gifford was overreacting. Byron had told Murray that "the life is Memo-
randum—and not Confessions—I have left out all my loves (ex-
cept in a general way)."7 The first part, dealing with his life
up to the point of his exile, was especially discreet. Part
two, on his life in Venice, was more candid, but by this
time the two most controversial questions—Byron's incest
and his bisexuality—were behind him (or so, at least, he
presumably thought). Moreover, since the memoirs were
intended as an apologia, giving Byron's side of the contro-
versy surrounding his separation from Lady Byron, he was
unlikely to afford occasions of scandal. To have written
openly would have played directly into the hands of his
enemies.

Why then was Hobhouse so frightened? Obviously, he
did not trust Byron's discretion. Another possibility is that
he feared Moore had read passages the import of which
he had failed to grasp. Hobhouse was well aware of By-
ron's passion for communicativeness and his love of veiled
confessions. As we have seen, he had made Byron destroy
his Cambridge journal when they were traveling in Al-
bania. It was no doubt Hobhouse's reaction on this occa-
sion that led Byron to give the memoirs not to him but to
Moore. Hobhouse must have felt that Byron could not be
trusted to eschew innuendoes in what Charles Skinner
Matthews had called "the mysterious style." If Moore un-
wittingly published something of this sort, what was to
prevent some enemy of Byron's, or of the liberal-radical
wing of English politics with which he was associated,
from unraveling the clue and exposing his relations with
Augusta or, worse, with Edlestone or Giraud? The Clogher
case was not two years old. The radicals Hobhouse worked
with had made much of it against the Tories. Defenders of
the government would seize with delight a chance to em-
barrass the opposition in a similar fashion.

1. Venice, October 29, 1819, BL, 6:236.
Then there was Hobhouse's own vulnerability. No man in England was more closely connected with Byron in the public eye. The unpublished defense of Byron he wrote after the separation from Lady Byron complained that some of the rumors circulating about Byron were damaging to his friends. The common assumption has been that Hobhouse was shocked by Byron's bisexuality and averse to pederasty. Doris Langley Moore thinks that "Hobhouse disapproved severely of sexual deviation," citing as evidence "what is explicit in his Travels in Albania" and "implicit in the tenor of his conduct" to Byron. But, as we have seen, Hobhouse's language was merely the required stereotype of the age, and his conduct can be interpreted as resting on fear of exposure rather than moral disapproval. Matthews's Falmouth letter seems to imply that Hobhouse was a fellow "Methodiste." The fullness of detail in Byron's "Greek epistles" is unintelligible unless Hobhouse shared Byron's interests.

But was there any justification in the manuscript itself for Hobhouse's apprehensions? Fortunately, despite the destruction of the memoirs and of the known copies, we do have evidence from readers as to its details, which Doris Langley Moore has painstakingly pieced together. Part one dealt mainly with Byron's life after he became famous in 1812, though there was something about his first journey to Greece. Lord John Russell recalled that Byron's "early youth in Greece, and his sensibility to the scenes around him, when resting on a rock in the swimming excursions he took from the Piraeus, were strikingly described." One wonders if Byron mentioned Giraud's presence on these occasions. The passage that caused the most speculation referred to what Thomas Moore in a letter called "a name-

3. E.D., p. 90.
less person whom he calls his 'love of loves.' Byron's friend, the Whig hostess Lady Holland, to whom Moore had lent a copy of the memoirs, thought this was Augusta, but he persuaded her that she was wrong. But who then was this "love of loves"? Doris Langley Moore plausibly suggests it was either Mary Chaworth or "Thyrza," that is, John Edleston. Probability seems to favor the latter since Byron's love for John seems to have made the more powerful and lasting impression.

But beyond these impenetrabilities it seems unlikely anything more was said in the memoir. Byron had reserved his reflections on this side of his emotional life. Three months after he had finished the first installment of part two in October 1820, he wrote in his Ravenna journal of the "violent, though pure, love and passion" he felt for Edleston. Then, when he had finished his second supplement to the manuscript, he jotted down, in sections 72 to 76 of his "Detached Thoughts," the reflections we have examined in Chapter 6. These were clearly details he dared not put in his formal autobiography. The irony is that Hobhouse in destroying the memoirs and Moore in excising the Ravenna journal left untouched what were probably Byron's most revealing comments on the subject that most frightened them both.

To compensate himself for his loss—he had had to repay Murray the £2000 advance on the memoirs—Moore undertook to write a life of Byron. This venture presented many difficulties. Hobhouse was hostile, Lady Byron cool, and Augusta inevitably uneasy. Obviously Byron's life was full of pitfalls for any biographer who attempted any candor. Even Moore, whose long suits were tact and diplomacy, was taxed. While he was still at work on the biography in 1829, Charles Fulke Greville dined with him in


London and reported in his journal that Moore, who talked at length about his book, was "nervous about it." Indeed, it was on this occasion that Moore denied that Byron had any "fancy for Boys" in a way that left Greville suspicious. We do not know if Greville or someone else brought the matter up or whether Moore chose on his own to discount what he understood to be common gossip.

This treacherous topic challenged all Moore’s considerable ingenuity. In one way he was daring, for he published Byron’s letters to Elizabeth Pigot about Edleston and the passage about his “violent, though pure, love,” gave details of the will in favor of Nicolo Giraud, and discoursed at length about his partiality for his Harrow schoolfellows and Robert Rushton. But having made the disclosures, he then tried, as we have seen, to gloss over these affairs as romantic friendships and to obscure the origin of the Thyrza lyrics. On the whole, his ploy succeeded. Whatever questions knowledgeable or suspicious readers (such as Greville) may have had, the reviewers and the press acquiesced to Moore’s view of Byron’s same-sex attachments, and it remained the publicly accepted one for over a century.

By an irony of fate, it was the nervous Hobhouse whose writings first effectively dissipated the smoke screen Moore had laid down. When Hobhouse read Moore’s book in 1830, he peppered the margins with disputatious comments. Among them were those that bore on Byron’s homosexuality. They included his comment on Lord Grey, his allegation that Byron wanted no Englishman near him in Greece, and his pointed remark that Moore knew nothing, or would tell nothing, of the real nature of Byron’s boyish friendships. Doris Langley Moore thinks he meant to erase his pencillings, but this is not certain. Totally unwilling to trust others—or Byron himself—where Byron’s reputation was concerned, insisting that evidence he could not per-

sonally control be destroyed, he nevertheless carefully preserved the “Greek epistles,” which give us an unequivocal account of Byron’s homoerotic adventures and in addition saved at least two crucial Lukas poems. He was willing that the truth should see the light of day eventually, provided it was delayed long enough and ultimately appeared through his own revelations. No doubt he prided himself, as Doris Langley Moore suggests, on being in possession of Byron’s most closely kept secrets. If Thomas Moore, of whom he was always jealous, had got the memoirs, he himself held one of the most important keys to Byron’s character. It was one thing that proved that Hobhouse and not Moore was closest to Byron.

Those who were in the dark about Byron remained unenlightened after reading Thomas Moore’s Life. The few in the know now had more clues to work on. They did not, however, so far as we are aware, commit their speculations to paper. There was, nevertheless, one striking exception. The anomaly was the mysterious and remarkable poem entitled Don Leon, written a few years after Moore’s biography, but known to us only in a version printed a generation later in 1866. This polemical narrative, which purport ed to be Byron’s own account of his homosexual experiences, is one of the major puzzles of English literary history. It fills fifty pages and has fifty pages of notes by some other unknown writer or writers. It does, in fact, set forth something very close to the truth concerning Byron’s relations with Rushton, Edleston, and Giraud. But who wrote it and how did it happen that this revealing document was ignored for more than a century, until C. Wilson Knight rescued it from obscurity in 1954 and suggested that its revelations should be taken seriously?

The authorship of Don Leon remains a riddle, but it is possible to understand why the poem was resolutely ignored by nineteenth-century writers on Byron. Part of the difficulty lay in the form in which the poet chose to convey his revelations. The obviously fabricated side of the pub-
lication suggested that it belonged to the extensive category of pseudo-Byroniana that appeared after Byron’s death with no further aim than to titillate readers and relieve them of their shillings or francs. The title page describes the work as a “Poem by Lord Byron, Author of Childe Harold, Don Juan, &c. &c. and Forming Part of the Private Journal of His Lordship, Supposed to Have Been Entirely Destroyed by Thos. Moore.” No knowledgeable contemporary reader would have been taken in by this claim. No one had ever suggested that Byron’s memoirs were in rhymed couplets, and the poem makes reference to dozens of events that took place in the decade following Byron’s death. This playful pretense that Byron himself is speaking the lines—an obvious impossibility—would in itself have militated against the credibility of these “confessions,” though we now know that on many substantial points they come startlingly close to the truth.

The other consideration that led to the general dismissal of the poem as a record of fact stemmed from its shady provenance. Apparently some earlier printed version of these fifty rhymed pages existed, but the only copies known to us come from an edition printed by the London publisher William Dugdale in 1866. Since Dugdale’s main line was erotic “curiosa,” this led readers to dismiss the lines as a purely fictive concoction prepared for the under-the-counter trade. Even so sophisticated an expert on sexuality as Henry Spencer Ashbee, the one nineteenth-century authority to take any notice of the work, assumed there could be no truth in the poem’s implication that Byron was a bisexual.

But who was the poet who knew so much about Byron that he was able to write so revealingly? Knight has sug-

8. A correspondent signing himself “I. W.” in Notes and Queries 7 (1853): 66, refers to “a poem (about 1500 lines) which professes to be written by Lord Byron, is addressed to Thomas Moore, and was printed abroad many years since.” This is the only evidence we have for the existence of an earlier edition, no copy of which has as yet been identified.
gested that the author was the playwright George Colman the younger whose wit and conviviality Byron enjoyed during their work together at Drury Lane Theater in 1815, the year of his marriage. The parallels between Don Leon and some of Colman's satires are striking, but ascriptions of authorship on stylistic grounds are always tenuous. Besides, Colman was old and ill at the time the poem was written—he died in 1836 at seventy-three. On these and other grounds Doris Langley Moore has argued against Colman's authorship and proposed another candidate. At present the authorship must be regarded as an unsolved mystery.

Indeed, all we can say with certainty about the Leon poet is that he had a clever wit, a talent for writing forceful couplets, and a remarkable knowledge both of Byron's life (on its homosexual side) and of British parliamentary affairs in the decade following his death. Written with great verve and cleverness, Don Leon, though not quite the masterpiece it has been called, is nevertheless a work of real literary significance. The poem itself is full of ideas and information, much of which (especially the detailed parliamentary part) is inevitably obscure to the modern reader. Since the kaleidoscopic turns of thought of Don Leon are so many that even someone who has read it two or three times may have only a confused idea of its structure and logic, a fairly extended summary may be useful. It will also communicate, as no other approach can, the concentrated energy of the poem.

But before we look at these details, it is necessary to appreciate another side of the work, a side that was its real


10. In the "Editorial Note" added to the 1977 edition of The Late Lord Byron, Moore identifies him (p. viii) as Richard Paternoster, of Madras, who contributed to a Byron monument fund in 1826 and then quarreled with the committee. See also L.L.B, pp. 210-13; and L.B.A.R, pp. 449-53.
raison d'être. So far, commentary on Don Leon, on the few occasions that it has been noticed, has been concentrated on its Byronic aspects. Nevertheless, what moved the Leon poet to write was not, apparently, the revelations he had to make about Byron, sensational as they were, but the problem that had obsessed Jeremy Bentham, the problem of repealing the death penalty for sodomy. Bentham had died in 1832, the year of the Reform Bill. The next year, under the new dispensation, a new parliamentary commission on criminal law reform was set up under Lord John Russell, who had strong Benthamite views. It was this development and two other events of 1833 that seem to have moved the Leon poet to write his passionate plea for reform. One of these was the sentence of death pronounced on Captain Henry Nicholas Nicholls on August 12 of that year. Hangings for homosexual relations had continued unabated after Byron's death, despite their rapid decline for other crimes. In the years 1826-1830 there were seven; another took place in 1831, three in 1833 (including Nicholls's), four in 1834, and three in 1835. This was the case in spite of the fact that in this era of rapid reform the status of many minority groups in England had improved. Nonconformists had been relieved of their disabilities by the repeal of the Test Act in 1828, Catholic emancipation had come in 1829, and the reformed House crowned decades of agitation by finally ending black slavery in 1833. The death penalty had already been repealed for dozens of nonviolent crimes, but conviction in sodomy cases had actually been rendered easier by a change of the law in 1828, and the new reform commission seemed unwilling to brave public opinion on this matter.

With more rage and despair than hope, the Leon poet makes himself the spokesman for England's gay community by urging the abolition of hanging for sodomy. In the pursuit of this aim, he especially directs his arguments to members of Parliament. In the interval since Byron's death, several members of the House of Commons had joined
him in exile, committed suicide, or faced trials. Besides Nicholls's hanging, the other event of 1833 that seems particularly to have spurred him to write was the arrest of Byron's Cambridge friend and fellow parliamentarian William Bankes, which had taken place on June 7. In the notes to the poem, which fill another fifty pages and were apparently written at different times between 1833 and 1859, the last date mentioned in them, legal matters and newspaper reports of scandals bulk far larger than references to Byron.

Thus it is that a poem purporting to be Byron's autobiography opens with a protest against a hanging that took place nine years after his death and against the continuing entrapment of homosexuals by the police:

Thou ermined judge, pull off that sable cap!
What! Can'st thou lie, and take thy morning nap?
Peep thro' the casement; see the gallows there:
Thy work hangs on it; could not mercy spare?
What had he done? Ask crippled Talleyrand,
Ask Beckford, Courtenay, all the motley band
Of priest and laymen, who have shared his guilt
(If guilt it be) then slumber if thou wilt;
What bonds had he of social safety broke?
Foundst thou the dagger hid beneath his cloak?
He stopped no lonely traveller on the road;
He burst no lock, he plundered no abode;
He never wrong'd the orphan of his own;
He stiled not the ravish'd maiden's groan.
His secret haunts were hid from every soul,
Till thou did'st send thy myrmidons to prowl.13

(lines 1–16)

13. My earlier references to Don Leon have been to the Arno Press reprint of 1975 (a facsimile of the suppressed 1934 Fortune Press edition), the most readily accessible edition. For quotations from the text of the poem in this chapter, however, I have used the 1866 Dugdale version. The discussion of the poem that follows was published, in a somewhat fuller version, in "Don Leon, Byron, and Homosexual Law Reform," Journal of Homosexuality 8 (Spring-Summer 1981): 53–71. This version has details on the history of law reform, parliamentary scandals, etc., not reprinted here.
The sable cap is, of course, the black cap English judges wore when they were about to pronounce the sentence of death. The annotator of *Don Leon*, in his first footnote, preserves only the thinnest pretense that Byron had written these lines: "In reading the opening of this poem, it would almost seem that the author of it had in his eye Mr. Justice Park [who pronounced death on Nicholls] were it not that the supposed date of the poem would imply an anachronism." Because the *Leon* poet purports to be speaking in the person of Byron, I shall refer to him as "Byron" in the rest of my summary, though in fact the pseudo-Byronic mask is often all but completely dropped in the argumentative sections.

After the opening protest, "Byron" begs Moore to give a sympathetic ear to his "swelling rage" and to print his thoughts unaltered. (This is almost the only reference in the text to the pretense that the poem has some connection with the famous memoir.) England, he complains, tolerates the most open forms of prostitution but condemns "poor misogynists" to the gallows and vilifies them incessantly in the press. The Sodom story is urged against them, though many other ancient cities have vanished without anyone's interpreting their disappearance as instances of divine displeasure. The venal clergy approve only those unions that bring them marriage or baptismal fees and are blind to a love that will "Produce no other blossoms than its own" (line 126).

"Byron" now speaks of his own life and of his hidden affections. During his teens, he tells us, he was aware of an instinct that drew him to other boys. Social custom allowed him to express his love for Mary Chaworth and Margaret Parker, but not these other longings. Now, looking back, he realizes that his feelings for his page Robert Rushton, which once passed for lordly patronage, had a sexual element:

Full well I knew, though decency forbid
The same caresses to a rustic lad;
Epilogue  349

Love, love it was, that made my eyes delight
To have his person ever in my sight.

(lines 169–72)

At Cambridge, he feels alienated from the common revels and longs for a kindred soul who might return his affection. He hears John Edleston singing in the choir, and friendship ripens into love:

Oh! 'tis hard to trace
The line where love usurps tame friendship's place.
Friendship's the chrysalis, which seems to die,
But throws its coils to give love wing to fly.

(lines 219–22)

(These lines echo Byron's youthful poem "L'Amitié est L'Amour Sans Ailes.") He is tormented by the intensity of his emotions and struggles to understand them. Moral law opposes his desires, but to him they seem natural since they spring from his inner being. He begins to question traditional standards—after all, he is not about to ruin a virgin, betray a husband, or beget a bastard. He seeks to divert himself from these anxieties by losing himself in the pleasures of classical poetry but is inadvertently driven back to the question. Horace, he discovers, loved youths, Virgil sighed for Alexis, Socrates and Plato spoke openly of kissing ephes, and Plutarch praised the love of Epaminondas for Cephidorus. He rejects these loves as pagan perversions, but when he turns to the history of Christianity, he discovers such attachments again in the lives of popes, devotees, kings, scholars, jurists, and poets:

Nay, e'en our bard, Dame Nature's darling child,
Felt the strange impulse, and his hours beguiled
In penning sonnets to a stripling's praise,
Such as would damn a poet now-a-days.

(lines 315–18)

(Here the poet seems to draw on the comment on Shakespeare that Byron made to George Finlay, which Leicestet Stanhope had published in 1825.) Obviously, "the great,
the wise, the pious, and the good” have had the same susceptibility. In alarm he rejects books and history as morally dangerous guides. But untutored schoolboys take the same path even if they are “in Justine unread.” This may be better, however, than their risking disease through harlotry. School authorities should quietly ignore such “illicit play”: only fools would make a public issue of it.

Edleston dies (the poem is inaccurate in making this occur before Byron left England for Greece in 1809), and, weary of Cambridge, “Byron” seeks the freedom of the East, with admissions that parallel the real Byron’s Falmouth letter to Matthews:

Love, love, clandestine love, was still my dream,
Methought there must be yet some people found,
Where Cupid’s wings were free, his hands unbound
Where law had no erotic statutes framed,
Nor gibbets stood to fright the unreclaimed.

(lines 423–27)

The account of Byron in Greece is particularly full and striking. In Constantinople he is excited by the traditional tourist visit to taverns with dancing boys but hides his feelings from his friend Hobhouse, affecting to be horrified. (The Leon poet was either unaware that Hobhouse shared any knowledge of Byron’s tastes or, if he knew, sought to protect him.) He feels alienated from his countrymen and is relieved when he parts from Hobhouse at Zea. “Byron” warmly praises the latter’s political work for radical causes in England but himself follows other pursuits: “A demon urged, and with Satanic force / Still goaded on” (lines 494–95). He is enraptured by the historical associations of Athens, moves to the capuchin convent, and then takes up residence in the nearby Lantern of Demosthenes.12

While searching through the ruins of the city, “Byron” is invited home by a citizen. There the man’s son attends the guest in Oriental fashion. This, it turns out, is the poet’s

12. In n. 31, the annotator to Don Leon points out that this is a mistake: Byron wrote poems in the Lantern but did not live there.
account of Byron’s meeting with Nicolo Giraud, who is identified by name in line 678. (The *Leon* poet follows Moore in mistakenly assuming that Nicolo was Lusieri’s son rather than his brother-in-law.) “Byron” is struck by the boy’s beauty, courts him, and is urged by the father to take him as his page. He tries to cultivate the boy’s mind, gazes on him with affectionate lust while he sleeps, and cares for him with tender solicitude. The dual fires of poetic inspiration and carnal desire rage in him. Though he has met the Macri sisters, they inspire him only poetically; his real passion is for this boy, who finally gratifies him: “So boldly I set calumny at naught, / And fearless utter what I fearless wrought” (lines 690–91). (At this point, the poet comes strikingly close to Byron’s “Greek epistles.”) There follows a description of how the then Waiwode (or mayor) of Athens was attended by a beautiful catamite on public occasions; such openness, we are told, is common at every level of Turkish society.

The *Leon* poet, dropping any effort to relate his plea to the experience of the historical Byron, now embarks on a frank apology for homosexuality. First, Malthus has dramatically shown the danger of overpopulation, which must breed starvation if not controlled. One must also take into consideration the great diversity of sexual tastes. Some men (such as the English ambassador to Constantinople) are born exhibitionists. Others seek cunnilingus, flagellation, or fellation from women. Incest and lesbianism are not uncommon. Some women have died to preserve their virginity, but others, like the Countess of Blessington, have risen to wealth and social prominence by judiciously losing theirs. When bench and pulpit endlessly maintain that the sexual behavior of the English is morally superior to other nations, they are hypocritical and never more so than when, in the case of homosexuality, they give the impression

That self-condemned, decried, ineffable,  
Innominate, this blackest sin of hell,
Had fled dismayed to some Transalpine shore
To sultry Albion's pudic cliffs no more.

(lines 854–57)

The press exposes arrested men with cruel glee and entertains its readers with scabrous police reports. The rich and secure feign horror, never taking into account what may have led a man into these paths: perhaps he was corrupted when young, perhaps he shrank from the idea of seducing a woman, perhaps he was ugly or shy or averse to the ribaldry or diseases of harlots.

Every rank of English society is involved. The average British soldier or tar is a praiast prone to take his pleasure where he finds it. Teachers relish flogging half-naked schoolboys. Parliament itself is not immune. Looking into the future, “Byron” prophesies that a member famed for his learning and book collecting will be forced to flee the country and later will be cruelly maligned in a libel suit brought by a father against an editor for having linked his son’s name to the exile’s. Another, a young officer who fought in Sicily, will be tragically drawn into the case. A third member, a pious advocate of prison reform and the rights of blacks, will also face the bitterness of exile. The poet complains indignantly that Peel’s revisions of the law have worsened matters. Liberal legislators such as RichardMartin, who led the movement to protect animals from cruelty, and legal reformers such as Sir James Mackintosh, remain callously indifferent to the plight of homosexuals.

Near the speaker’s chair where Charles Manners-Sutton presides and waits for his peerage sits Sir Stephen Lushington, whom “Byron” curses for having turned Lady Byron against him. He recalls some of his happy moments with his wife; in a bedroom colloquy he describes Muslim

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13. The annotator tells us the bibliophile is Hobhouse’s friend, Richard Heber, member for Oxford, and conjectures that the officer who committed suicide was James Stanhope. The reformer is identified as Henry Grey Bennett, the well-known humanitarian (fn. 63, 65, 66).
manners to her and pictures the life of harem women and the Turkish passion for boys. Lady Byron expresses curiosity, and "Byron" enlightens her about Anacreon, Virgil, and Catullus. She is somewhat shocked but allows him to practice anal relations (which he extols) with her because her pregnancy makes ordinary relations awkward. Later, when they are estranged, Lady Byron is pressed to reveal this secret, and friends use it to separate her from her husband.  

After a second appeal by "Byron" to Thomas Moore to tell the truth and not bowdlerize his life—if Moore should ever write it—the poem abruptly flashes back to Parliament to cast a spotlight upon another figure, a friend (William Bankes) whom Byron had known since college days. Despite his wealth, the fame of his travels, and his high social standing, Bankes will eventually suffer Byron’s fate. Bankes’s friend Peel, when he passes Bankes’s darkened house and remembers what a staunch supporter he has been in Parliament, may then regret his failure to reform the law.

In conclusion, "Byron" bitterly recalls what abuse he suffered as a man after being praised so highly as a poet. But England is not the universe: its prejudices cannot stand before the light of reason. God’s law is higher than Parliament’s; it is as outrageous to persecute sexual as religious heresy. Then with a final impish gesture the poet ends with a series of crude and exuberant epigrams on the pleasures of anal intercourse.

Obviously the "Byron" of this poem is something more than the historical Byron. Besides giving a candid account of his own pederastic experiences, Leon-Byron is a spokes-

14. This theme of marital sodomy is central to Leon to Annabella, a companion piece to Don Leon, published with it in the 1866 edition, which deals entirely with this subject and ignores the question of homosexuality. Some contemporaries, including Hobhouse and Lord Holland, speculated that Byron had attempted anal intercourse with his wife and that this had been one reason for the separation (BB, 2:367n.).
man for a persecuted minority, a prophetic voice looking forward to future tragedies, a scandalmonger, and a purveyor of marital secrets. The Leon poet exploits Byron's reputation as an opponent of social injustice, plays on curiosity about the burned memoirs, and uses the poem for revelations about the side of Byron that Moore had tried to obscure. The poem's most striking features are, of course, the challenge it posed to contemporary prejudices against homosexuality and the new (and largely true) facts it revealed about Byron's own sexuality. There are, however, material facts the Leon poet was not aware of. He did not realize, for example, that the Thyrza lyrics were elegies on the death of Edleston; and he had no inkling of Byron's love during the final months of his life for Lukas Chandalurutansos. But whatever its source, the story is worked out with much sensitive detail. The gradations by which ardent friendship melts into erotic awareness are depicted with some subtlety. It is difficult to think of any comparable description of the awakening of homosexual feeling in English literature before the twentieth century. As a portrait of an adolescent struggling toward self-awareness, Don Leon adumbrates Forster's Maurice, which was not written until eighty years later. This sympathetic dramatization of the stages by which Byron realized his feelings for the male sex works in two ways—as a biographical revelation and as a rhetorical device to moderate homophobic sentiment by showing the anguish of a sensitive boy. The "argument from antiquity" is cleverly handled by having "Byron" discover the truth about Greek and Roman society from his reading.

As for the sociological arguments for tolerance, it is interesting to compare these to Bentham's. There is the same citing of Malthus (who did indeed list "unnatural acts" as a check to population): "Economists, who seek the world to thin, / 'Tis you who teach this so named deadly sin" (lines 775–76). Both protest strongly against the sensationalism and virulence of the British press. Like Bentham, the Leon
poet also argues that homosexuality is less of a social evil than extramarital pregnancies and adultery. Bentham, in his prospectus addressed to William Beckford, painstakingly enumerated every kind of sexual conduct in order that prejudice might be "perplexed and weakened" by their sheer numbers. The Leon poet does something similar, dwelling on a variety of heterosexual techniques with some relish. This is perhaps the least acceptable part of the poem: there is something offensive in his lubrificious bandying of names and initials. Where Bentham presents his list in a scientific spirit with dry logic, the Leon poet writes with a smirk that is rather reminiscent of Martial; his approach is too much like blackening the kettle to brighten the pot.

Once again, one is brought up short by the language. Like everything else published on homosexuality in its day, this passionately antihomophobic poem uses virulently homophobic expressions. This diction, however, is more difficult to explain than in Byron's Beckford stanza, Hobhouse's paragraph on the Albanians, or Bentham's early manuscript notes and essays. In other contexts such language might be explicable on rhetorical grounds or grounds of prudence. But such considerations would scarcely seem to hold for the Leon poet, who frankly celebrates the joys of same-sex intercourse. To find this enthusiasm coupled with references to homosexuality as a "morbid lust," "sport obscene," "rank disease," "impure delinquency," etc., is startling. G. Wilson Knight explains the anomaly as an attempt at "balance," but the effect is more like linguistic schizophrenia.

It is also difficult, given the deadly seriousness of the poem's plea for law reform, to account for the playful eroticism of some of the later pages. Though it is a minor element, there is enough in this vein to have tempted most nineteenth-century readers to dismiss the production as a mere essay in pornography, as the Victorians understood the term. This must have drastically limited its circulation
and weakened its impact on all but the least prudish. One possibility is that the more glaring passages—the bedroom scene and the final peroration—were not added until after 1841, by which time all hopes for homosexual law reform, as we shall see, had been finally laid to rest. Perhaps the author felt that, given the circumstances, the only channels of distribution open to him were illicit sales in shops dealing in erotica. This may have prompted him to add these passages. Ironically, this spice, which, under Victorian law, would itself have justified the pamphlet's destruction by the authorities, in fact preserved it since the erotic sections seem to have been what motivated Dugdale to print his 1866 edition.

Some of the contrasts with Bentham, both in tone and argument, reflect the change that had taken place in the political situation between the Regency (when Bentham did most of his writing) and the 1830s. In 1818, when Bentham finished his most extensive notes in favor of the decriminalization of sodomy, criminal law reform in England was still in the future. By 1833, the death penalty had been abolished for many offenses. It was this movement, originating in the House of Commons, that had particularly aroused the hopes of homosexuals. The poem is consequently full of minutiae relating to Parliament and parliamentarians. Though these create many obscurities for the modern reader, they also give it substance and reality. As if specifically addressed to its members, Don Leon contains detailed accounts of four men in the House who found themselves threatened by the law in homosexual scandals, and a fifth is mentioned in the notes. Of these, two, Richard Heber and William Bankes, had connections with Hobhouse and Byron.

Writing from Ravenna in 1821, Byron had asked Hobhouse to congratulate Heber on his recent election as a member from Oxford.19 When Heber, a famous book col-

15. September 12, 1821, BLJ, 8:207.
lector, died in exile twelve years later, the English press was full of lengthy obituaries, most of which ignored or made only veiled references to the ostracism he had suffered in his last years. Sir Walter Scott had praised him as "Heber the magnificent" for his library, rendered him thanks in the notes to the Waverley novels, and celebrated their friendship in the sixth canto of Marmion. Heber's collection of early English books was the most impressive yet assembled; he left eight houses full of volumes in England and on the Continent. Then in 1826, he was accused of homosexual relations, and he fled to Brussels. Scott noted in his journal that "his life was compromised but for the exertions of Hobhouse under Secy of State who detected a warrant for his trial passing through the office." 16 (This Hobhouse was, in fact, not John Cam but his cousin Henry.) In a long account of Heber's scholarship and politics, the Annual Register reported with unusual candor: "In the year 1831, he returned to England, but not into the society which he had left; for rumors had been in circulation degrading to his moral character. With the exception of his visits to the auction-rooms and booksellers' shops, he lived entirely secluded among his books at Pimlico or Hodnet." 17

During his first year at Trinity College Byron identified William Bankes and Edward Noel Long as his closest student intimates. He called Bankes his "collegiate pastor, and master, and patron" and often joined him and Matthews in Bankes's rooms. 18 Later their paths crossed again under ironic circumstances. Bankes proposed to Annabella Milbanke shortly after Byron had made his first proposal and, like him, was turned down. When Bankes ventured on a long voyage to the East, Byron wrote recommendations for him in Albania and, impressed by his scholarly


discoveries, took a vicarious pride in his "perilous researches." 19 "Bankes is a wonderful fellow," Byron wrote Murray in 1820, "I love and esteem him." 20 That same year Byron wrote an unusually warm invitation to Bankes to join him in Ravenna to celebrate the carnival. After his return to England, Bankes made his country house in Dorset a showplace for antiquities and became a close friend of the Duke of Wellington. From 1822 to 1826 he sat in Parliament as the member from Cambridge; later he represented Marlborough and Dorset. Then in June 1833, he was arrested and accused of sexual misconduct with a guardsman in a public convenience near the House of Commons. At his trial in December the duke testified as a character witness. So did the headmaster of Harrow and a phalanx of members from both houses. The jury, duly impressed, found both men not guilty and "without the least stain on their characters." 21 Eight years later, when Bankes was again arrested for a similar offense, he followed in Byron's footsteps by retiring to Venice, where he died in 1855. 22

Don Leon was written to forward homosexual law reform, but the cause did not prosper. When the Commission on Criminal Law, appointed in 1833, issued their second report in June 1836, they recommended reducing capital offenses to eight crimes, all of which (except sodomy) involved violence or danger to life. But their only reference to homosexuality was a single sentence: "A nameless offense of great enormity we, at present, exclude from consideration." 23 A bill to abolish the death penalty for

20. August 31 and October 8, 1820, BLJ, 7:188, 195.
rape and sodomy passed the Commons in 1841 (where the debate touched only on rape), but the sodomy law reform was killed in the House of Lords. On June 17, the Earl of Wicklow argued that if the Lords passed such a law, “they would lower themselves in public opinion; for as the organ of the public voice, they would sanction what the people of this country would never confirm—that sodomy and rape were not crimes of so heinous a character as to deserve death.” Next day, the Earl of Winchelsea proposed an amendment to retain capital punishment for homosexuality alone. “Their Lordships, he was convinced, would do great violence to the moral feelings of a very large class of the community, if they exempted this crime from the penalty of death.” 24 Not until 1861, when a comprehensive measure consolidating and revising portions of the English criminal law was passed, was the death penalty for sodomy reduced to life imprisonment, a sanction that remained unchanged for more than a century.

Though it is impossible to speak with real certainty of the author and the date of Don Leon, certain considerations do suggest themselves. First, it seems altogether likely that, whatever additions or changes were made later, the poem was completed substantially in its present form sometime in the late summer or early fall of 1833. 25 The two cases that seem to have provoked the work were the arrest of William Bankes in June and the execution of Nicholls in June 17, 1841. Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates (London: Hansard, 1841), 3rd ser., vol. 58, cols. 1557, 1558.

24. There have been two principal arguments advanced for a date later than 1833. One is that Charles Manners-Sutton, the speaker, did not get the peerage (referred to in line 1042) until March 1833. But as I show in my article, “Don Leon, Byron, and Homosexual Law Reform,” Manners-Sutton’s longed-for peerage was a publicly debated issue in 1833 when the reform Parliament met. The other argument is that line 987 predicts that Henry Grey Bennett will die abroad. Bennett did die in Florence on June 16, 1836. But, as Knight points out, this may simply be a reasonable guess as to what would happen. It is also possible that the poem was revised at a later date.
August. The Bankes episode may have suggested to the poet that members of Parliament would now be ready to listen to reformist arguments since a distinguished Tory member of the lower house had become a victim of the law. Because Bankes's acquittal in December made his case moot, it is likely that the section of the poem devoted to Bankes (which is very near the conclusion) was finished before his trial took place. There is also the curious fact that the substantial list of arrests for 1833, in note 56, includes cases dated February, April, May, June, and early August, but none later. Probably, then, the note was compiled in late August or shortly afterward.

As for the author, one is struck by his minute knowledge of details pertaining to the Commons. He notes, for instance, that Sir Stephen Lushington sat near the speaker and that the "youth with courtly manners" (who may or may not have been James Stanhope) shared the same row with the "elder Bankes," that is, Bankes's father. No one who had not frequented the House often and been closely familiar with its membership would have been aware that these two obscure parliamentarians sat in the same row or could have told the reader that James Brodgen spoke in a shy manner at certain moments (as in line 1012). If the author was not an elected representative, he was certainly someone whose duties or interests brought him into close relation with Parliament. His intimate knowledge of Byron's life also suggests that if he had not known Byron, he was at least a confidant of some friend of his. Possibly this friend was William Bankes himself, who, on visiting Byron in Italy on the way home from his Eastern travels in 1821, may have exchanged confidences with him.

But whoever he was, the *Leon* poet has left us a unique document. No further candid discussion of Byron's homosexuality appeared in English until 1935 when Peter Quennell published his *Byron: The Years of Fame*. Not only did the *Leon* poet set forth the main facts about Byron's homosexuality a full century before Byron's more conventional biog-