

*'I am never long, even in the society of her I love, without yearning for the company of my lamp and my library' : Byron as bibliophile*

Byron was flamboyant in many of his aspects, but not when it came to displaying the breadth of knowledge he had absorbed from a habit of compulsive reading from a very young age. He took the act of reading very seriously, as is evident from his reading list (drawn up in 1807) that methodically lists the writers whose works he had read, often supplemented with an opinion to refresh his memory of the work. Sales catalogues of his library, as well as references to his purchases and books that he was reading, provide fertile ground for investigations into Byron's tastes and habits. They also provide an alternative model for assessing nineteenth century literary tastes and trends in general, as this has often been obscured by the imposition of more canonical conceptions of Romanticism. A feature of Byron's writing that differentiated him from his contemporaries was its narrative richness. His ability to spin a good yarn was arguably honed by his catholic reading which included 'thousands of novels' and the intellectually unambitious 'light and miscellaneous literature of the day'. In keeping with his aristocratic education he was well versed in the classics, but had an insatiable appetite for current and popular literature as well. Byron's attitude towards the materiality of books was one of a bibliophile, concerned about their condition when he was away and attending book auctions in search of a bargain. The success of *Childe Harold* brought him books both unsolicited and desired, the latter often through the agency of John Murray, his publisher, an experience he both enjoyed and encouraged.

My paper will draw on the sources I have mentioned in order to convey a more accurate understanding of Byron's reading practices and hence those of the 19<sup>th</sup> century reader.