If anyone doubts that *some* people, at least, have a programmed-in tendency to self-destruction, this correspondence should convince them.

Few things are more disturbing (or funnier) than hearing someone being ironical, while pretending to themselves that they aren’t being ironical. The best or worst example is Macbeth, speaking of the witches:

> Infected be the air whereon they ride,
> And damned all those that trust them!

… seeming unconscious of the fact that *he* trusts them, and is about to embark, encouraged by their words, on a further career of murder that will end in his death.

“When I find ambiguities in your expression,” writes Annabella to Byron on August 6th 1814, “I am certain that they are created by myself, since you evidently desire at all times to be simple and perspicuous”. Annabella (born 1792) is vain, naïve, inexperienced, and “romantic”, but she’s also highly intelligent, and it’s impossible not to suspect that she knows his “ambiguities” are not “created by” herself, and that she recognizes in him someone who is the least “perspicuous” and most given to “ambiguities” who ever lived. The frequency with which both she and she quote *Macbeth* casually to one another (as well as, in Byron’s letters to Lady Melbourne, *Richard III*) seems a subconscious way of signalling that they both know that nothing they’re about will come to good. “… never yet was such extraordinary behaviour as her’s” is Lady Melbourne’s way of describing Annabella on April 30th 1814: I imagine she’d say the same about Byron.

A courtship which takes place through the post, with minimal personal acquaintance, is fraught with risk at the best of times (imagine these two on Facebook): here, both parties seem aware that what they’re doing is dangerous, but do it anyway (or rather, “and so go ahead”).

Byron’s skill was manoeuvring others into spots where, although he had not told them what he wanted them to do, they had no alternative. We see this most clearly in his “proposal” letter of September 9th 1814, in which no proposal of marriage is actually made, but which is read by Annabella as a proposal, and which she accepts. He employs the same technique when throwing her out of the house in January 1816. It is the method of one who is unable to take responsibility for his own life. As he writes to Lady Melbourne on April 29th 1814:

> I am quite irresolute—and undecided—if I were sure of *myself* (not of her) I would go—but I am not—and never can be—and what is still worse I have no judgement—and less common sense than an infant—this is *not affected humility* …

Whenever he makes jokes in his letters to Annabella, he apologises in advance.

Those who blame the subsequent failure of the marriage on Annabella, saying she was dour, dogmatic, and humourless, are falling into the same trap, and saying exactly what Byron would wish them to say.
The roles of Augusta Leigh and Lady Melbourne are vital. Byron needs Lady Melbourne’s reassurance throughout; and Augusta, confident that wives and sweethearts come and go, but a sister is for life, is happy to encourage both victims.

I have not seen the originals of many of these letters, and would not be allowed to reproduce them on the Internet if I had. My texts for the letters of Annabella, Augusta, and Lady Melbourne are conglomerates from various books, and I am very grateful to John and Virginia Murray for permission to quote most of Byron’s from Byron’s Letters and Journals, ed. Leslie A. Marchand (John Murray 1973-1994).

Seaham Hall, County Durham.

March 25th 1812: Byron and Annabella meet for the first time (see his letter of September 26th 1814, ii).

September 13th 1812: Byron, still dallying with Caroline Lamb, tells Lady Melbourne, Caroline’s mother-in-law, that he is “attached to” her niece, Annabella Milbanke.

September 29th 1812: Lady Melbourne warns Byron not to get into a scrape until he is free from his present one.

October 1812: Byron, using Lady Melbourne as intermediary, proposes to Annabella.

October 14th 1812: Annabella explains to Lady Melbourne why she cannot accept Byron as a husband. Lady Melbourne forwards the letter to Byron.

October 17th 1812: Byron assures Lady Melbourne that he understands perfectly.

Byron embarks on an affair with Lady Oxford.

Late March 1813: first (private) edition of The Giaour published.

Some time before April 1813: Waltz published.

May 1st 1813: Annabella says she has read Pride and Prejudice, and is impressed with Mr Darcy.
Early May 1813: Annabella sees Byron several times at London parties.

June 5th 1813: first public edition of *The Giaour* published; 684 lines.

June 28th 1813: Lady Oxford departs for the Mediterranean.

July 5th: Caroline cuts herself with a glass fragment at Lady Heathcote’s ball.

July 1813: Byron and Augusta are continually in one another’s company for the first time ever.

Summer 1813: Annabella sees Byron sitting on a sofa with Augusta, and is impressed by his playful and affectionate manner towards her.


From Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, August 22nd 1813:

(Text edited from printed sources)

Annabella's first letter to Byron, who is living at 4, Bennet Street, London.

I have received from Lady Melbourne an assurance of the satisfaction you feel in being remembered with interest by me. Let me then more fully explain this interest, with the hope that the consciousness of possessing a friend whom neither Time nor Absence can estrange may impart some soothing feelings to your retrospective views. You have remarked the serenity of my countenance, but mine is not the serenity of one who is a stranger to care, nor are the prospects of my future years untroubled. It is my nature to feel long, deeply, and secretly, and the strongest affections of my heart are without hope. I disclose to you what I conceal even from those who have most claim to my confidence, because it will be the surest basis of that unreserved friendship which I wish to establish between us—because you will not reject my admonitions as the result of cold calculation, when you know that I can suffer as you have suffered. Early in our acquaintance, when I was far from supposing myself preferred by you, I studied your character. I felt for you, and I often felt with you. You were, as I conceived, in a desolate situation, surrounded by admirers who could not value you, and by friends to whom you were not dear. You were either flattered or persecuted. How often have I wished that the state of Society would have allowed me to offer you my sentiments without restraint! ... My regard for your welfare did not arise from blindness to your errors; I was interested by the strength & generosity of your feelings, and I honored you for that pure sense of moral rectitude, which could not be perverted, though perhaps tried by the practice of Vice. I would have sought to rouse your own virtues to a consistent plan of action, for so directed, they would guide you more surely than any mortal counsel.

In a letter to Ly Melbourne (after I had informed you of my sentiments) you expressed a determination to render your conduct as conformable to my wishes, as if your attachment had been returned. I now claim that promise, and I do not fear that you will answer “You have no right.” I have the right of a constant and considerate zeal for your happiness, and the right which you have given, and will not unreasonably withdraw. I entreat you then to observe more consistently the principles of unwearied benevolence. No longer suffer yourself to be the slave of the moment, nor trust your noble impulses to the chances of Life. Have an object that will permanently occupy your feelings & exercise your reason. Do good. Every human being has a circle of influence more expanded than would be conceived by one who has not systematically tried its extent. But to benefit man you must love him, and you must bear with his infirmities—that forbearance which is recommended as the dictate of selfish prudence, is the more exalted dictate of philanthropy. Feel benevolence and you will inspire it—you will do good, for to excite such dispositions is to bless. You have so frequently received the advice of those whose conduct was false to their doctrine that you will naturally doubt the agreement of mine with my principles. I confess they have often but ill accorded—yet imperfect as my practice is. I have enjoyed the happiness of giving, peace & awakening virtue on occasions which only this habitual direction of my thoughts could have enabled me to seize. Your powers peculiarly qualify you for performing these duties with success, and may you experience the sacred pleasure of having them dwell in your heart! Will you undertake this task, and will you lay aside the seeming misanthropy which repels the affection of your fellow creatures?

I have lately had very little information concerning you on which I could depend. On ill reports I never rely, for if I desire to be a Christian, it is more especially in the Charity which thinketh no evil.
Need I say that such information from yourself would be received with gratitude? I request your secrecy as to this communication and its contents. Only my parents are aware of it. In particular I would not have it known to Ly Melbourne. I am indebted to her kindness, but we have little sympathy, and she is perhaps too much accustomed to look for design, to understand the plainness of my intentions. I trust them to your candour. You must be sensible of my great confidence in you, since I mention opinions which I should be very sorry to have repeated. Believe in the sincerity of a regard, which, though it never can change to love, deserves to be considered as more than worldly friendship.

Yours most faithfully

A. I. MILBANKE.

I shall be obliged to you at least to acknowledge the receipt of this letter, that I may not apprehend it has fallen into other hands.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 4, Bennet Street, August 25th 1813:
(Source: text from LJ III 397-9; BLJ III 98-9)

Byron answers the previous item.

4, Bennet St. 25 Aug. 1813.

I am honored with your letter which I wish to acknowledge immediately. Before I endeavour to answer it, allow me—briefly if possible—to advert to the circumstances which occurred last autumn. Many years had occurred since I had seen any woman with whom there appeared to me a prospect of rational happiness. I now saw but one, to whom, however, I had no pretensions—or at least too slight for even the hope of success. It was, however, said that your heart was disengaged, and it was on that ground that Ly Melbourne undertook to ascertain how far I might be permitted to cultivate your acquaintance, on the chance (a slender one I allow) of improving it into friendship and ultimately to a still kinder sentiment. In her zeal in my behalf—friendly and pardonable as it was—she in some degree exceeded my intentions, when she made the more direct proposal, which yet I do not regret, except in so far as it appeared presumptuous on my part. That this is the truth you will allow, when I tell you that it was not till lately that I mentioned to her that I thought she had unwittingly committed me a little too far in the expectation that so abrupt an overture would be received. But I stated this casually in conversation, and without the least feeling of irritation towards her or pique against yourself. Such was the result of my first and nearest approach to that altar, to which, in the state of your feelings, I should only have led another victim. When I say the first, it may perhaps appear irreconcilable with some circumstances in my life, to which I conceive you allude in part of your letter. But such is the fact. I was then too young to marry, tho’ not to love; but this was the first direct or indirect approach ever made on my part to a permanent union with any woman, and in all probability it will be the last. Ly M. was perfectly correct in her statement that I preferred you to all others; it was then the fact; it is so still. But it was no disappointment, because it is impossible to impart one drop more to a cup which already overflows with the waters of bitterness. We do not know ourselves; yet I do not think that my self love was much wounded by the event. On the contrary, I feel a kind of pride even in your rejection—more I believe than I could derive from the attachment of another, for it reminds me that I once thought myself worthy of the affection of almost the only one of your sex I ever truly respected.

To your letter—the first part surprises me—not that you should feel attachment [but that it] should be “without hope.” May you secure that hope with its object! To the part of your letter regarding myself I could say much; but I must be brief. If you hear of me, it is probably not untrue, though perhaps exaggerated. On any point in which you may honor me with an interest, I shall be glad to satisfy you—to confess the truth, or refute the calumny.

I must be candid with you on the score of friendship. It is a feeling towards you with which I cannot trust myself. I doubt whether I could help loving you; but I trust I may appeal to my conduct since our éclaircissement for the proof that, whatever my feelings may be, they will exempt you from persecution; but I cannot yet profess indifference, and I fear that won’t be the first step—at least in some points—from what I feel to that which you wish me to feel.

You must pardon me and recollect that, if any thing displeases you in this letter, it is a difficult task for me to write to you at all. I have left many things unsaid, and have said others I did not mean to utter. My intended departure from this country is a little retarded by accounts of Plague, etc., etc., and I must bend my course to some more accessible region—probably to Russia. I have only left myself space to sign myself,

Ever your obliged servant,

BYRON.

I: B. seems not to have shown this letter to Lady Melbourne; he does later ones.
Late August 1813: fourth edition of The Giaour published.

Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, late August 1813:
(Text edited from printed sources)
Annabella answers the previous item.

I will trouble you no more—only this to express—what I cannot withhold—my heartfelt thanks for your most kind, most indulgent answer. Nothing in your letter can displease me—the recollection of my own may. I ought more to have respected your sorrows, and I cannot forgive myself for having intruded on them from the impulse of an ill-judged kindness. That I may not encrease the error—farewell. I will not regret the friendship which you deem impossible, for the loss is mine, as the comfort would have been mine.

God bless you.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 4, Bennet Street, London, August 31st 1813:
(Source: this text from BLJ III 103-4)

4 Bennet Street St. J’s London
August 31st 1813

It is not my wish to draw you into a correspondence—yet I must say a few words on your last letter or rather on my own reply to your first.—Neither Ly. M. nor yourself could possibly be to blame—if any one was wrong it was myself—and after all she (Ly. M[elbourn]) merely saved me from a personal repulse.—My intention was too plain to admit of misrepresentation—though under existing—or perhaps any circumstances—it was presumptuous—& certainly precipitate.—I never did nor ever can deny that I aspired to the honour which I failed in obtaining.—That I never even sought to conceal my ill success—the following circumstance will convince you—and may at least afford you a moment’s amusement.—My equally unlucky friend W. Bankes—whom I have known many years—paid me a visit one evening last Winter with an aspect so utterly disconsolate that I could not resist enquiring into the cause.—After much hesitation on his part—and a little guessing on mine—out it came—with tears in his eyes almost—that he had added another name to our unfortunate list.—The coincidence appeared to me so ludicrous that not to laugh was impossible—when I told him that a few weeks before a similar proposal had left me in the same situation.—In short we were the Heraclitus & Democritus’ of your Suitors—with this exception—that our crying and laughing was excited not by the folly of others but our own—or at least mine—for I had not even the common place excuse of a shadow of encouragement to console me.—Do not suppose because I laughed then—that I had no feeling for him or for myself—the coincidence of our common grievance—and not the circumstance itself provoked my mirth—and I trust I need not add that want of respect to you made no part of the feelings or expressions of either—nor had I mentioned this at all could it place him in an unfavourable point of view.—For myself—I must also beg you to believe that whatever might be my momentary levity—your answer to me had been received with respect and admiration rather encreased than diminished by the dignified good sense which dictated your decision & appeared in your reply.—There is not the least occasion for any concealment of the rejection of my proposal—it is a subject I have never sought nor shunned—I certainly have nothing to boast of—but it would be meanness on my part to deny it.————

—I hope I did not accuse Ly. M. of misrepresentation—it certainly was not my intention—I thought my overture was too abrupt—but in the proposal itself—and indeed in every thing else the fault was & must be mine only.—Your friendship I did not reject—though in speaking of mine I expressed some doubts on the subject of my own feelings—whatever they may be I shall merely repeat that if possible they shall be subdued—at all events—silent.———If you regret a single expression in your late 2 letters—they Shall be destroyed or returned—do not imagine that I mistake your kindness or hope for more.—I am too proud of the portion of regard you have bestowed upon me to hazard the loss of it by vain attempts to engage your Affection—I am willing to obey you—and if you will mark out the limits of our future correspondence & intercourse they shall not be infringed.—Believe me with the most profound respect

ever gratefully yrs.

BYRON

2: Bankes had, like B., and like George Eden, been turned down by Annabella.
3: Heraclitus is said by Montaigne to have been the weeping philosopher; Democritus the laughing one.
P.S.—I perceive that I begin my letter with saying “I do not wish to draw you into a correspondence” and end by almost soliciting it—admirably consistent!—but it is human nature—and you will forgive it—if not you can punish——

Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, September 3rd 1813:

(Text edited from printed sources)

Annabella answers the previous item.

I shall wait with patience for as little or as much of your regard as you may be able to give. My esteem for you is confirmed by our recent intercourse and I shall always be gratified by any proof of your remembrance. Act then towards me as best accords with the state of your mind—there is no reason for constraint on our correspondence, which is sanctioned by the concurrence of my father & mother. I do not feel the slightest uneasiness respecting my letters, for I consider them as secure in your possession as in mine.4 Write therefore, if you think me deserving of so much confidence, whenever it is possible that you may find relief in the disclosure of your feelings, or of any events past or present, to one who promises you in return truth and kindness. I said the comfort would be mine, for the idea—is it a vain dream—of alleviating the bitterness of your despondency if only by the wish to do so, would give me real comfort. It is my happiness to feel that in some degree I live for others. For the purposes of consoling and calming the mind, I believe the friendship of women often better adapted than that of men, and I regret your general prejudice against the former. There are some whose wish to serve you might be of more avail than mine, but you must not look for them in the circle where I have met you.

from Byron to Lady Melbourne, from London, September 5th 1813:

(Source: text from NLS Ms.43470 f.73; 1922 I 177-8; Q I 172; BLJ III 108)

… she seems to have been spoiled – not as children usually are – but systematically Clarissa Harlowed into an awkward kind of correctness – with a dependence upon her own infallibility which will or may lead her into some egregious blunder – I don’t mean the usual error of young gentlewomen – but she will find exactly what she wants – & then discover that it is much more dignified than entertaining. –

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, September 6th 1813:

(Source: text from LJ III 399-401; BLJ III 108-10)

Sep’t. 6th. 1813.

Agreed—I will write to you occasionally and you shall answer at your leisure and discretion.— You must have deemed me very vain and selfish to imagine that your candour could offend—I see nothing that “could hurt my feelings” in your correspondence—you told me you declined me as a lover but wished to retain me as a friend—now as one may meet with a good deal of what is called love in this best of all possible worlds—and very rarely with friendship I could not find fault—upon calculation at least—I am afraid my first letter was written during some of those moments which have induced your belief in my general despondency—now in common I believe with most of mankind—I have, in the course of a very useless and ill-regulated life, encountered events which have left a deep impression. Perhaps something at the time recalled this so forcibly as to make it apparent in my answer; but I am not conscious of any habitual or at least long continued pressure on my spirits. On the contrary, with the exception of an occasional spasm, I look upon myself as a very facetious personage and may safely appeal to most of my acquaintance (L. M. for instance) in proof of my assertion. Nobody laughs more; and though your friend Joanna Baillie says somewhere that “Laughter is the child of Misery”5 yet I do not believe her (unless indeed in a hysteric, tho’ I think it is sometimes the parent. Nothing would do me more honour than the acquaintance of that Lady, who does not possess a more enthusiastic admirer than myself. She is our only dramatist since Otway6 and Southerne;° I don’t except Home.8 With all my presumed prejudice against your sex, or rather the perversion of manners and principle in many which you admit in some circles, I think the worst woman that ever existed would have made a man of very passable reputation. They are all better than us, and their faults such as they are must originate with ourselves. Your sweeping sentence “in the circles where we have met” amuses me much when I recollect some of those who constituted that society After all, bad as it is, it has its

4: Annabella seems to be defying B. to show her letters to Lady Melbourne.
5: Baillie quotation untraced.
6: Thomas Otway (1652-85) author of Venice Preserv’d.
7: Thomas Southerne (1660-1746) author of Oroonoko, a dramatization of Aphra Behn.
8: John Home (1722-1808) author of the tragedy Douglas.
agrément. The great object of life is sensation—to feel that we exist, even though in pain. It is this “craving void” which drives us to gaming—to battle—to travel—to intemperate but keenly felt pursuits of every description, whose principal attraction is the agitation inseparable from their accomplishment. I am but an awkward dissembler; as my friend you will bear with my faults. I shall have the less constraint in what I say to you—firstly because I may derive some benefit from your observations—and next because I am very sure you can never be perverted by any paradoxes of mine. You have said a good deal and very well too on the subject of Benevolence systematically exerted; two lines of Pope will explain mine (if I have any) and that of half mankind—

“Perhaps Prosperity becalmed his breast;
Perhaps the Wind just shifted from the East.”

By the bye you are a bard also—have you quite given up that pursuit? Is your friend Pratt one of your critics? or merely one of your systematic benevolents? You were very kind to poor Blackett which he requited by falling in love, rather presumptuously to be sure—like Metastasio with the Empress Maria Theresa. When you can spare an instant I shall of course be delighted to hear from or of you—but do not let me encroach a moment on better avocations——Adieu

ever yours

B.


from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, September 16th 1813:
(Text edited from printed sources)

Annabella answers the previous item.

“As your friend I will bear with your faults,” and my patience for them is more than you will exhaust. Therefore I shall not be repelled by the irritable feelings of self-dissatisfaction which I imagine that you sometimes disguise under an appearance of levity. All these I will attribute to the East wind … The world is slow to do you justice … you will be still slower to do justice to yourself, and I must anticipate the goodwill of both.

… Have you not defied or disdained general opinion—not reflecting, I am sure, on the mischief occasioned by such a disposition when associated with your mental endowments … Surely that craving for excitement, the motive of thousands as restless as yourself,—is caused by the absence of a principle, which, if established in the mind, would prove a strong & constant, if not an impetuous source of feeling & action. But I shall disgust you by returning to my old theme—if my ideas respecting it are mixed with delusion, your superior penetration & experience may enlighten me, and I expect from you the same plain-spoken freedom as you permit me to use.

You may be gay, but you have not convinced me that you are content. My reason for persisting in a different opinion is—though you are better than most of the righteous who stand high in public estimation, I do not think you good enough to possess the only real peace,—that of reflection … Once or twice I have fancied that I have detected in your countenance a laughter “false to the heart”. Do you not sometimes laugh when you feel, because you are too proud to accept of sympathy? Remember that in regard to any parts of your character which I misconceive, your simple & serious assertion of the contrary is sufficient to convince me. I had unjustly concluded that you were prejudiced against women from a remark which you once made to me in conversation,—I thank you for undeceiving me.

May I know your sentiments concerning Religion. Do not suppose I have a fancy to convert you—first, I do not believe you need conversion—secondly, I do not believe it in my power to convert from infidelity … I am not a bigot to Church Establishments, which in my opinion deviate widely from the purity of the Christian dispensation—and I am disposed to spare those who doubt, because I have doubted.

From September 21st to October 5th 1813, Byron is with the Wedderburn Websters at Aston Hall, Yorkshire, thinking about seducing Frances but never doing so.

10: Samuel Jackson Pratt was a a patron of …
11: … Joseph Blackett, cobbler-poet assisted by Annabella and mocked by B. (without being named) at EBSR 765-72.
12: B. is facetious; I find no record of Metastasio (=Blackett) being infatuated with Maria Theresa (=Annabella).
Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from Aston Hall, Yorkshire, September 26th 1813:
(Source: text from LJ III 401-4; BLJ III 119-121)

Byron answers the previous item.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—for such you will permit me to call you—On my return to town I find some consolation for having left a number of pleasant people in your letter—the more so as I begun to doubt if I should ever receive another. You ask me some questions, and as they are about myself, you must pardon the egotism into which my answers must betray me. I am glad that you know any “good deed” that I am supposed ever to have blundered upon, simply because it proves that you have not heard me invariably ill spoken of. If true I am sufficiently rewarded by a short step towards your good opinion. You don’t like my “restless” doctrines—I should be very sorry if you did—but I can’t stagnate nevertheless. If I must sail let it be on the ocean no matter how stormy—anything but a dull cruise on a level lake without ever losing sight of the same insipid shores by which it is surrounded.

“Gay” but not “content”—very true. You say I never attempt to “justify” myself. You are right. At times I can’t and occasionally I won’t defend by explanations; life is not worth having on such terms. The only attempt I ever made at defence was in a poetical point of view—and what did it end in? not an exculpation of me, but an attack on all other persons whatsoever. I should make a pretty scene indeed if I went on defending—besides by proving myself (supposing it possible) a good sort of quiet country gentleman, to how many people should I give more pain than pleasure? Do you think accusers like one the better for being confuted? You have detected a laughter “false to the heart”—allowed—yet I have been tolerably sincere with you and I fear sometimes troublesome. To the charge of pride I suspect I must plead guilty, because when a boy and a very young one it was the constant reproach of my schoolfellows and tutors. Since I grew up I have heard less about it—probably because I have now neither schoolfellows nor tutor. It was however originally defensive—for at that time my hand like Ishmael’s was against every one’s and every one’s against mine.13 I now come to a subject of your enquiry which you must have perceived I always lirtheto avoided—an awful one—“Religion.” I was bred in Scotland among Calvinists in the first part of my life which gave me a dislike to that persuasion.14 Since that period I have visited the most bigotted and credulous of countries—Spain, Greece, Turkey. As a spectacle the Catholic is more fascinating than the Greek or the Moslem; but the last is the only believer who practices the precepts of his Prophet to the last chapter of his creed. My opinions are quite undecided. I may say so sincerely, since, when given over at Patras in 1810, I rejected and ejected three Priest-loads of spiritual consolation by threatening to turn Mussulman if they did not leave me in quiet. I was in great pain and looked upon death as in that respect a relief—without much regret of the past, and few speculations on the future. Indeed so indifferent was I to my bodily situation, that, tho’ I was without any attendant but a young Frenchman as ill as myself,15 two barbarous Arnouts and a deaf and desperate Greek Quack—and my English servant (a man now with me) within two days journey—I would not allow the last to be sent for—worth all the rest as he would have been in attendance at such a time because—I really don’t know why—unless it was an indifference to which I am certainly not subject when in good health. I believe doubtless in God, and should be happy to be convinced of much more. If I do not at present place implicit faith on tradition and revelation of any human creed, I hope it is not from a want of reverence for the Creator but the created, and when I see a man publishing a pamphlet to prove that Mr. Pitt is risen from the dead (as was done a week ago), perfectly positive in the truth of his assertion, I must be permitted to doubt more miracles equally well attested; but the moral of Christianity is perfectly beautiful—and the very sublime of virtue—yet even there we find some of its finer precepts in earlier axioms of the Greeks—particularly “do unto others as you would they should do unto you”16—the forgiveness of injuries and more which I do not remember. Good Night; I have sent you a long prose, I hope your answer will be equal in length—I am sure it will be more amusing—You write remarkably well—which you won’t like to hear so I shall say no more about it.

Ever yours most sincerely

BYRON

P.S.—I shall post-scribble this half sheet. When at Aston I sent you a short note for I began to feel a little nervous about the reception of my last letter. I shall be down there again next week and merely

15: His lover, Niccolo Giraud.
16: Biblical; Matthew 7:12.
left them to escape from the Doncaster Races—being very ill adapted for provincial festivities—but I shall rejoin the party when they are over. This letter was written last night after a two days journey with little rest and no refreshment (eating on the road throws me into a fever directly); you will therefore not wonder if it is a meagre performance. When you honour me with an answer address to London. Present my invariable respects to Sir R. and L[3]. Mil[e] and once more receive them for yourself. Good Morning.

**Late September 1813: sixth edition of The Giaour published.**

**from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, October 1st 1813:**

(Text edited from printed sources)

I fear that the experience of your early years gave a melancholy ground for this disposition … It is true that by many you are thought of with a kind of vague horror but amongst my acquaintance almost all those for whose judgments I have the highest respect, believe your mind capable of excellence, & replete with the best feelings. They wish that your religious principles were more fixed …

Nothing can be more satisfactory or more agreeable to my wishes than your open & explicit manner of answering my enquiries. You are very liberal in not estimating Christian morality by the Professors who disgrace it. As I think that every one must principally be convinced by the suggestions of his own understanding, I am not desirous that you should study the arguments of the popular advocates for Religion. I have not a very high opinion of most Orthodox vindications … I believe, as you assert, that the maxims of the Gospel may be found *unconnectedly* in heathen writings, but were they ever united in a system so wonderfully & so wisely adapted for the good of mankind? In my moderate acquaintance with the Ethics of the Ancients, I have found only scattered lights amongst insufficient or impracticable doctrines … I will not expatiate further on this topic, being persuaded that I cannot offer you any idea which would not occur from your own attentive reflection …

I do not insist on your following the same peaceful path in life, which I should choose. You possess great powers, and may require to be placed in scenes of stronger action …

If you are fatigued by the too great seriousness of my thoughts, you must excuse it at this time as the unavoidable consequence of sorrow which I do not indulge. My most valued friend Miss Montgomery is going abroad by medical advice, in a state of health that renders her return extremely precarious. You will conceive that in these circumstances our approaching separation must be a severe trial … By attributing my depression to this cause, I do not seek to invalidate what I once hinted of another impression—subjected as it is to reason, I need not blush to own it. I should blush to be its slave …

**from Byron to Lady Melbourne, from Aston Hall, Yorkshire, October 8th 1813:**

(Source: text from NLS Ms.43470 f.82; 1922 I 190-3; Q1 181-3; BLJ III 133-6)

**Byron mocks Annabella’s “mobility”. He refers to the previous item.**

… I have heard from A— but her letter to me is melancholy—about her old friend Miss M’s departure &c. – &c. – I wonder who will have her at last – her letter to you is gay – you say – that to me must have been written at the same time – the little demure Nonjuror! -- -- --

**from Annabella Milbanke to Lady Melbourne, from Seaham, early October 1813:**

(Text edited from printed sources)

… The description of Love [in The Giaour] almost makes me in love. Certainly he excels in the language of Passion … I consider his acquaintance as so desirable that I would incur the risk of being called a Flirt for the sake of enjoying it, provided I may do so without detriment to himself—for you know that his welfare has been as much the object of my consideration as if it were connected with my own.

**The Battle of Leipzig, October 16th-19th 1813, temporarily eclipses Bonaparte.**

**November 1st-8th 1813: Byron drafts The Bride of Abydos, which is fair-copied by November 11th.**

**Byron to Annabella Milbanke, November 10th-17th 1813:**

(Source: text from LJ III 404; BLJ III 158-61)
A variety of circumstances and movements from place to place, none of which would be very amusing in detail, nor indeed pleasing to any one who (I may flatter myself) is my friend, have hitherto prevented me from answering your two last letters—but if my daily self-reproach for the omission can be any atonement, I hope it may prove as satisfactory an apology to you—as it has been a “compunctious visiting”\(^{17}\) to myself.

Your opinion of my “reasoning powers” is so exactly my own that you will not wonder if I avoid a controversy with so skilful a casuist, particularly on a subject where I am certain to get the worst of it in this world, and perhaps incur a warmer confutation in the next. But I shall be most happy to hear your observations on the subject, or on any subject. If anybody could do me much good, probably you might—as by all accounts you are mistress of the practice as well as theory of that benevolent science (which I take to be better than even your Mathematics); at all events it is my fault if I derive no benefit from your remarks. I agree with you quite upon Mathematics too, and must be content to admire them at an incomprehensible distance—always adding them to the catalogue of my regrets. I know that two and two make four, and should be glad to prove it too if I could; though I must say if by any sort of process I could convert 2 and 2 into five it would give me much greater pleasure. The only part I remember which gave me much delight were those theorems (is that the word?) in which after ringing the changes upon A—B and C—D &c. I at last came to “which is absurd—which is impossible”\(^{18}\) and at this point I have always arrived and I fear always shall through life—very fortunate if I can continue to stop there.

I perceive by part of your last letter that you are still a little inclined to believe me a very gloomy personage: those who pass so much of their time entirely alone cannot be always in very high spirits; yet I don’t know—though I certainly do enjoy society to a certain extent, I never passed two hours in mixed company in my life without wishing myself out of it again. Still, I look upon myself as a facetious companion, well respected by all the wits, at whose jests I readily laugh, and whose repartees I take care never to incur by any kind of contest, for which I feel as little qualified as I do for the more solid pursuit of demonstration. I am happy so far in the intimate acquaintance of two or three men with whom for ten years of my life I have never had one word of difference, and, what is rather strange, their opinions, religious, moral and political, are diametrically opposite to mine—so that when I say “difference” I mean of course serious dispute—coollynness—quarrel—or whatever people call it. Now for a person who began life with that endless source of squabble—satire—I may in this respect think myself fortunate. My reflections upon this subject qualify me to sympathize with you very sincerely in the departure of your friend Miss Montgomery; the more so as, notwithstanding many instances of the contrary, I believe the friendship of good women more sincere than that of men, and certainly more tender—at least I never heard of a male intimacy that spoilt a man’s dinner, after the age of fifteen, which was that when I began to think myself a mighty fine gentleman, and to feel ashamed of liking anybody better than oneself. I have been scribbling another poem,\(^{19}\) as it is called—Turkish, as before—for I can’t empty my head of the East—and, horrible enough, though not so sombre quite as the Giaour (that unpronounceable name) and for the sake of intelligibility it is not a fragment. The scene is on the Hellespont, a favourite séjour of mine, and if you will accept it I will send you a copy—there are some Mussulman words in it which I inflict upon you in revenge for your Mathematical and other superiority.

When shall you be in town? By the bye, you won’t take fright when we meet will you? and imagine that I am about to add to your thousand and one pretendats?—I have taken exquisite care to prevent the possibility of that, though less likely than ever to become a Benedick—indeed I have not seen (with one exception) for many years a Beatrice—and she will not be troubled to assume the part. I imagine that I am about to add to your thousand and one pretendants?—I have taken exquisite care to prevent the possibility of that, though less likely than ever to become a Benedick—indeed I have not seen (with one exception) for many years a Beatrice—and she will not be troubled to assume the part. I

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17: Shakespeare; *Macbeth*, I v 42.
18: Compare DJ XVI, 5, 8.
19: *The Bride of Abydos*.
20: Annabella had recently turned down a proposal from Frederick Douglas.
21: Falstaff at Shakespeare, *Henry IV* I, ii 85; compare Jan 17 1813 (to H.); Nov 12 1813 (to Gifford); Mar 15 1814 (London Journal); May 1814 (to Moore) July 15 1818 (to K.); Aug 4 1819 (to H.); and Nov 19 1820 (to Mu.).
Stael has published her Anti-suicide\(^{22}\) at so killing a time—November too! I have not read it, for fear that the love of contradiction might lead me to a practical confutation. Do you know her? I don’t ask if you have heard her? Her tongue is “the perpetual motion.”

ever yrs.

B.

P.S. Nov. 17\(^{th}\).—The enclosed was written a week ago and has lain in my desk ever since—I have had forty thousand plagues to make me forget not you but it—and now I might as well burn it—but let it go and pray forgive ye. scrawl and the Scribe
ever yrs.

B.

If you favour me with an answer, any letter addressed here will reach me wherever I may be, I have a little cousin Eliza Byron\(^{23}\) coming—no—going to some school at Stockton—will you notice her? it is the prettiest little blackeyed girl of Paradise, and but 7 years old.

Annabella Milbanke to Lady Gosford, from Seaham, November 26th 1813:
Annabella’s real thoughts and feelings about Byron are seen for the first time.

Surely the survey of Heaven-born genius without Heavenly grace must make a Christian clasp the blessing with greater reverence & love, mingled with a sorrow as Christian that it is not shared. Should it ever happen that he & I offer up a heartfelt worship together—I mean in a sacred spot—my worship will then be almost worthy of the Spirit to whom it ascends. It will glow with all the devout & grateful joy which mortal breast can contain. It is a thought too dear to be indulged—not dear for his sake but for the sake of man, my brother man, whosoever he be, & for any poor, unknown tenant of this earth I believe I should feel the same. It is not the poet—it is the immortal Soul lost or saved! Now I have written & thought till my tears flow ...

Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, November 27th 1813:
(Text edited from printed sources)
Annabella answers Byron’s last letter.

Pray let me have your new composition\(^{24}\)—I have received more pleasure from your poetry than from all the Q.E.D.s in Euclid. Though I think Mathematics eminently useful, they are by no means what I like and admire most, & I have not a friend more skilled in them than yourself. People of methodised feelings are to me very disagreeable, being myself so undemonstrative as to prefer, if not always to approve, those generous spirits “who are pleased they know not why, & care not wherefore.” I hope I have not appeared to assume either mathematical or any other superiority. Everyone has in some point what another wants, & thus the weakest may afford some aid to the strongest. On that principle I thought it not presumptuous to offer mine … Perhaps I have occasionally forgotten the humility which should have regulated my opinions, and in giving advice I may have taken occasion to show my own wisdom at my neighbour’s expense, but could you read my thoughts—and I hoped you could—you would know that my general feeling is very different. I never meant to engage you in religious controversy—you will remember that I owned myself not qualified for converting—I would only persuade you to take the means of convincing yourself. …

I cannot now have the least fear of your entertaining a wish for more of my regard than you possess. By enabling you to form a closer estimate of my character, I was aware that the charm which Distance confers with persons of a warm Imagination would vanish, & that I must find my just level. But if I have thus permanently secured your peace (as far as I am concerned) and if I have spared you but a single regret … I resign my vanity, & wish the sacrifice could make me your equal in disinterestedness. I look forward to meeting you next spring in London as one of the most agreeable incidents which my residence there can produce. I shall not be distressed if the design to captivate should be imputed to me (which I think probable); but if my father & mother should be rendered

\(^{22}\): de Staël, *Réflexions sur le Suicide* (1813).
\(^{23}\): Compare *London Journal*, first entry: “To-day Henry Byron called on me with my little cousin Eliza. She will grow up a beauty and a plague; but, in the mean time, it is the prettiest child! dark eyes and eyelashes, black and long as the wing of a raven. I think she is prettier even than my niece, Georgina,—yet I don’t like to think so neither; and though older, she is not so clever.”
\(^{24}\): BoA.
uneasy … I shall try to avoid the occasions, & shall then frankly tell you why I do so, and what I wish—since you will not unkindly suppose that a doubt of your intentions can actuate me. . . .

Me. de Stael’s manners were to my taste disgusting —and as I am not an adorer of Genius for itself, I did not seek to know her. The more I see of Authoresses, the more I admire in Joanna Baillie a perfect exception to their professional failings. I must repeat my wish that you knew her, and if yours has not abated, might not the introduction be easily accomplished? . . .

I was afraid you had experienced some vexations when Lady Melbourne wrote to me a short time ago that you were not looking well. You will never be allowed to remain at peace. Everyone (I must include myself) seems determined to interfere with your repose. After this reflection my conscience obliges me to conclude.

P.S.—I shall like very much to be the playfellow of your little cousin if I can contrive it, for Stockton is 22 miles from hence, & we never go there except in our journeys to and from London. We will gladly send for her, if she may have leave to spend some holidays here.

Whenever you are inclined to improve me by your criticisms, I will pay the poetical debt which I am to have the pleasure of incurring. Unfortunately Mathematics have sobered my Muse—not myself!

Augusta Leigh to Byron, November 29th 1813:
(Source: text from Michael and Melissa Bakewell, Augusta Leigh, Chatto and Windus 2000, pp.141-2)

My dearest B +
As usual I have but a short allowance of time to reply to your tendresses + but a few lines I know will be better than none – at least I find them so + It was very very good of you to think of me amidst all the visitors &c &c. I have scarcely recovered mine of yesterday – La Dame did talk so – oh my stars! But at least it saved me a world of trouble – oh, but she found out a likeness in your picture to Mignonne who is of course very good humoured in consequence + I want to know dearest B + your plans – When you come + when you go – … umph! when the writings travel – when y’ Cake is to be cut – when the Bells are to ring – &c &c – &c – &c – by the bye my visitors and acquainted with a & did praise her to the skies – they say her health has been hurt by Studying &c &c &c I have not a moment more my dearest + except to say ever thine [scrawl]

Annabella answers Byron’s last letter.

No one can assume or presume less than you do, though very few with whom I am acquainted possess half your claims to that “superiority” which you are so fearful of affecting. Nor can I recollect one expression since the commencement of our correspondence, which has in any respect diminished my opinion of your talents,—my respect for your virtues. My only reason for avoiding the discussion of sacred topics was the sense of my own ignorance and the fear of saying something that might displease—but I have listened, and will listen to you with not merely patience but pleasure. When we meet—if we do meet—in Spring—you will find me ready to acquiesce in all your notions upon the point merely personal between ourselves—you will act according to circumstances—it would be premature in us both to anticipate reflections which may never be made—and if made at all—are certainly unfounded. You wrong yourself very much in supposing that “the charm” has been broken by our nearer acquaintance—on the contrary, that very intercourse convinces me of the value of what I have lost, or rather never found. But I will not deny that circumstances have occurred to render it more supportable.

You will think me very capricious and apt at sudden fancies. It is true I could not exist without some object of attachment, but I have shewn that I am not quite a slave to impulse. No man of tolerable situation in life who was quite without self command could have reached the age of twenty-six (which I shall be—I grieve to speak it—in January) without marrying and in all probability foolishly.—But however weak (it may merit a harsher term) in my disposition to attach myself (and as society is now much the same in this as in all other European countries it were difficult to avoid it) in my search for the “ideal,”—the being to whom I would commit the whole happiness of my future life,—I have never yet seen but two approaching to the likeness. The first25 I was too young to have a prospect of obtaining, and subsequent events have proved that my expectations might not have been fulfilled had I

25: The Bakewells have this as a letter of late 1814; but it is stamped “29-11-13”.
26: Either Mary Duff or Margaret Parker.
ever proposed to and secured my early idol. *The second*—the *only* woman to whom I ever seriously pretended as a wife—had disposed of her heart already, and I think it too late to look for a third. I shall take the world as I find it, and I have seen it much the same in most climates. (A little more fiery perhaps in Greece and Asia—for there they are a strange mixture of languid habits and stormy passions.) But I have no confidence and look for no constancy in affections founded in caprice, and preserved (if preserved) by accident, and lucky conformity of disposition without any fixed principles. How far this may be my case at present, I know not, and have not had time to ascertain.

I can only say that I never was cured of loving any one but by the conduct—by the change—or the violence of the object herself—and till I see reason for distrust I shall flatter myself as heretofore—and perhaps with as little cause as ever. I owe you some apology for this disquisition—but the singularity of our situation led me to dwell on this topic—and your friendship will excuse it. I am anxious to be candid with you though I fear sometimes I am betrayed into impertinence. They say that a man never *forgives* a woman who stands in the relation which you do towards me—but to *forgive*—we must first be offended—and I think I cannot recall—even a moment of pique at the past to my memory—I have but two *friends* of your sex—youself and L. Melbourne—as different in years as in disposition—and yet I do not know which I prefer—believe me a *better-hearted* woman does not exist—and in talent I never saw her excelled and hardly equalled—her kindness to me has been uniform—and I fear severely and ungratefully tried at times on my part—but as it cannot be so again—at least in the same manner—

I shall make what atonement I can—if a regard which my own inclination leads me to cultivate—can make any amends for my trespasses on her patience. The word *patience* reminds me of the book I am to send you—it shall be ordered to Seaham tomorrow. I shall be most happy to see any thing of your writing—of what I have already seen you once heard my favourable and sincere opinion. I by no means rank poetry or poets high in the scale of intellect—this may look like Affectation—but it is my real opinion—it is the lava of the imagination whose eruption prevents an earth-quake—they say Poets never or rarely go *mad*—Cowper and Collins are instances to the contrary (but Cowper was no poet) it is however to be remarked that they rarely do—but are generally so near it that I cannot help thinking rhyme is so far useful in anticipating and preventing the disorder. I prefer the talents of action—of war—or the Senate—or even of Science—to all the speculations of these mere dreamers of another existence (I don't mean *religiously* but *fancifully*) and spectators of this. Apathy—disgust—and perhaps incapacity have rendered me now a mere spectator—but I have occasionally mixed in the active and tumultuous departments of existence—and on these alone my *recollection* rests with any satisfaction—though not the *best* parts of it.—I wish to know your Joanna—and shall be very glad of the opportunity—never mind *ma cousine* I thought Stockton had been your Post town and nearer Seaham.—Mr. Ward and I have talked (I fear it will be only talk as things look undecided in that quarter) of an excursion to Holland—if so—I shall be able to compare a Dutch canal with the Bosphorus.—I never saw a Revolution transacting—or at least completed—but I arrived just after the last Turkish one—and the *effects* were visible—and had all the grandeur of desolation in their aspect—Streets in ashes—immense barracks (of a very fine construction) in ruins—and above all Sultan Selim’s favourite gardens round them in all the wildness of luxurient neglect—his fountains waterless—and his kiosks defaced but still glittering in their decay.—They lie between the city and Buyukderé on the hills above the Bosphorus—and the way to them is through a plain with the prettiest name in the world—"the Valley of Sweet Waters". But I am sending a volume not a letter.

ever yours most truly


December 8th 1813: Byron writes *The Devil's Drive*, and fair-copies it on December 9th.

December 18th-31st 1813: Byron writes and fair-copies *The Corsair*.

Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, December 26th 1813: (Text edited from printed sources)

*Annabella answers the previous item (Byron has not gone to Holland).*

Having heard that you are still in England—for very soon after I received your last welcome letter a report reached me that you & Mr. Ward had *left* London to embark—another day shall not pass

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27: Mary Chaworth.
28: BoA.
29: Sultan Selim III, reformist Sultan who had been bowstrung the year before B. visited Constantinople.
before I account for my silence, which without excuse would have been ungrateful both for your verse and prose. Though I wish to make some observations relative to the subjects on which you have lately touched, I will defer them till there is a greater probability that they will find you. I hope that (hiring your stay abroad you will not deny me the pleasure of hearing from you. Can you foresee the length of your absence? If you should not return till summer I shall have one reason the less for regretting the postponement of our journey to London, which on my account will not take place so early as I had expected. Though at present recovered from a severe illness, I remain more unequal than before to the labours of a London life.

Every blessing attend you—is the wish of your faithful friend.

Augusta Leigh to Byron, November 29th 1813:
(Text edited from printed sources)

Partager tous vos sentiments
ne voir que par vos yeux
n’agir que par vos conseils, ne
vivre que pour vous, voila mes
vœux, mes projets, & le seul
destin qui peut me rendre
heureuse.

[lock of hair, with signature on paper « Augusta »]

Byron writes:

La Chevelure of
the one whom i
most loved +

January 17th 1814: Byron and Augusta go to Newstead.

February 1st 1814: The Corsair published.

February 6th 1814: Byron and Augusta leave Newstead.

from Byron to Lady Melbourne, from 4, Bennet Street, London, February 6th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 48)

… One of my great inducements to that brilliant negociation with the Princess of Parallellograms was the vision of our family party—& the quantity of domestic lectures I should faithfully detail with our mutual comments thereupon.——You seem to think I am in some scrape at present by my unequal spirits—perhaps I am—but you shan’t be shocked—so you shan’t—I wont draw further upon you for sympathy.

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, February 10th 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)

I cannot, without serious disappointment, inform you that our hope of meeting is deferred. My strength will not yet enable me to enter into the general society of London, & my father & mother think that I shall receive more benefit from a residence in the Country during this year. Do not however suppose that my health is at all alarmingly impaired … You have thought we perfectly understood each other. I hope I shall not give you reason to retract that opinion by any future false estimates of your character. Those which wronged you no longer exist ... You have understood me at least as well as I understood myself. Both may have been partly deceived, though unwittingly by me, but I have found that Wisdom (often the most difficult Wisdom, Self-knowledge) is not less necessary than Will for an absolute adherence to Veracity. How I may in a degree have forsaken that—and under the influence of an ardent zeal for Sincerity—is an explanation that cannot benefit either of us. Should any disadvantage arise from the original fault, it must be only where it is deserved. Let this then suffice—for I cannot by total silence acquiesce in that, which, if supported when its delusion is known to myself would become deception.
I was sensible of many excellencies in Lady Melbourne. Your opinion will incline me to look for more ... You know her much better than I do, since I have seldom been with her except in mixed company, for a few hours ... [I] thought it more attentive to answer immediately, but on reflection it appears that in reality have shown you more respect, had I postponed writing until I was capable of giving undivided consideration to what I wrote ...

... [I have been] deeply interested [in The Corsair, and have argued] with some of your moral censors, who perceive an immoral tendency in the imposing grandeur with which you clothe the Victims of Remorse & Despair” [even though they admire Milton’s Satan as] the noble broken fragments of an immortal mind in ruins ... the prejudices against you are subsiding ... [you should read] Locke’s Treatise on the Reasonableness of Christianity as evidence that “if you regard only what is philosophically good you cannot think it a misuse of Time thus to improve the Reason & the affections. / I am not expecting an answer. I only request to be informed whenever my communications become unacceptable that I may discontinue them, & when you partially disapprove them pray tell me, that I may perceive my error … Are you going to leave England? … I am anxious to know.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 4, Bennet Street, London, February 12th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 55-7)

Byron answers the previous item.

Fy 12th 1814
I am just returned to London after a month’s absence and am indeed sorry to hear that your own will be so much longer—and the cause is not of a description to reconcile your friends to it entirely although the benefit you will derive to your health will prevent us from regretting anything but the time—if the effect is accomplished.—All expressions of my good wishes to you and for you would be superfluous.—Mr. Ward postponed our Dutch expedition—but as I have now nearly arranged my domestic concerns—or at least put them in train—and the Newstead business is set at rest in my favour—the world is all before me”[30] and all parts of it as much a country to me as it was to Adam—perhaps more so—for Eve as an atonement for tempting him out of one habitation might probably assist him in selecting another & persuade him into some “valley of sweet Waters” on the banks of the Euphrates.—In thanking you for your letter will you allow me to say that there is one sentence I do not understand—as you may have forgotten I will copy it—it follows one which is in itself a maxim & which I need not repeat—“How I may have forsaken that—and under the influence of an ardent zeal for Sincerity—is an explanation that cannot benefit either of us—should any disadvantage arise from the (original fault it must be only where it is deserved—Let this then suffice that I cannot by total silence acquiesce in that which if supported when it’s delusion is known to myself would become deception.”——This I believe is word for word from your letter now before me.—I do not see in what you have deceived yourself—& you have certainly never been otherwise than candid with me— and I have endeavoured to act accordingly—in regard to your kind observations on my adoption [sic] of my conduct to your wishes—I trust I should have been able to do so even without your suggestion—the moment I sunk into your friend—I tried to regard you in no other light—our affections are not in our own power—but it would seem strange indeed—because you would not like me that I should repine at the better fortune of another—if I had ever possessed a preference—the case would have been altered—and I might not have been so patient in resigning my pretensions—but you never did—never for an instant—trifle with me nor amuse me with what is called encouragement—a thing by the bye—which men are continually supposing they receive without sufficient grounds—but of which I am no great judge—as except in this instance I never had an opportunity.—When I say “this instance” I mean of course any advances on my part towards that connection which requires duty as well as attachment—and I begin to entertain an opinion that though they do not always go together—their separate existence is very precarious.—I have lately seen a singular instance of ill fortune.—You have perhaps heard that in my childhood I was extremely intimate with the family of my nearest neighbours—an inheritor of the estate of a very old house & her mother—she[31] is two years older than me—and consequently at so early a period any proposal on my part was out of the question—although from the contiguity of our lands—& other circumstances of no great importance—it was supposed that our union was within the probabilities of human life.—I never did propose to her—and if I had it would have answered very little purpose—for she married another.—From that period we met rarely—and I do not very well know why—but when we did meet—it was with coldness on both sides.—To cut short a tale which is growing tedious—eight years have now elapsed—and she is separated from her husband at last after frequent dissensions arising entirely from his neglect and I fear—injuries still more

30: Milton, Paradise Lost, last line but three.
31: Mary Chaworth.
serious.—At eight & twenty—till in the prime of life—beautiful (at least she was so) with a large fortune—of an ancient family—unimpeached & unimpeachable in her own conduct—this woman’s destiny is bitter.—For the first time in many years I heard from her—desiring to see me—there could be nothing improper in this request—I was the friend of her youth—and I have every reason to believe—to be certain—that a being of better principles never breathed—but she was once deep in my heart—and though she had long ceased to be so—and I had no doubts of her—yet I had many of myself—at least of my own feelings if revived rather than of any consequences that might arise from them—and as we had not met since I was 21—to be brief—I did not see her.—There is the whole history of circumstances to which you may have possibly heard some allusion from those who knew me in the earlier part of my life—I confide them to you—and shall dwell upon them no further—except to state—that they bear no relation whatever to what I hinted at in a former letter as having occurred to prevent my reviving the topic discussed between us—at least with a view to renewal.— I have to ask for an answer—when you have leisure—and to thank you for your description which brings the scene fully before me—are you aware of an amplified coincidence of thought with Burns—?

"Or like the snowflake on the river
A moment shine—then melts forever."

The verses are very graceful & pleasing—my opinion of your powers in that way I long ago mentioned to another person—who perhaps transmitted it to you.— I am glad you like "the Corsair" which they tell me is popular.—God bless you—ever yrs

B

P.S.—I am not perhaps an impartial judge of Lady M. as amongst other obligations I am indebted to her for my acquaintance with yourself—but she is doubtless in talent a superior—a supreme woman—& her heart I know to be of the kindest—in the best sense of the word.—Her defects I never could perceive—as her society makes me forget them & every thing else for the time.—I do love that woman (filially or fraternally) better than any being on earth—and you see—that I am therefore unqualified to give an opinion,

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 4, Bennet Street, London, February 15th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 60)

Byron is not answering a letter from Annabella.

Febry. 15th 1814,

In my letter of ye 12th in answer to your last I omitted to say that I have not for several years looked into the tract of Locke’s which you mention—but I have rede it formerly though I fear to little purpose since it is forgotten-& have always understood that and Butler’s Analogy to be the best treatises of the kind. Upon the subject of which it treats—I think I have already said—that I have formed no decided opinion—but I should regret any sceptical bigotry as equally pernicious with the most credulous intolerance. Of the Scriptures themselves I have ever been a reader & admirer as compositions particularly the Arab—Job—and parts of Isaiah—and the song of Deborah.—Your kind congratulations on the subject of certain prejudices against me having subsided is a little premature—for in discussing more agreeable topics—I quite forgot to mention what you perhaps have seen in some of the journals—viz—a series of attacks—some good and all hearty which have been called forth by the republication & avowal of some lines on the $[princ]e[s]$ C[harlott]e weeping in 1812—at the time when the Prince assailed Ld. Lauderdale at a public dinner—soon after his own abandonment of Grey & Grenville.—These still Continue and rather more violently than ever—except that I think the destruction of the Custom House has a little interfered with mine—and Buonaparte’s recent advantage has usurped the column generally devoted to the abuse of a personage who however unimportant appears to be very obnoxious.—I have hitherto been silent—& may probably remain so—unless something should occur to render it impossible. ———You will have received so long a letter from me before this arrives—that I will not at present intrude upon you further.—Pray take care of yourself—consider how many are interested in your health and welfare—and reconcile us to your absence by telling us that you are the better for it.

ever yrs
BYRON

32: The lines are not by Burns.
33: Locke’s Treatise on the Reasonableness of Christianity.
34: Joseph Butler, The Analogy of Religion (1736); an anti-deist tract.
P.S.—My best respects to Lady Milbanke & Sir Ralph.

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, February 17th 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)
Written before receipt of the previous item, but on receipt of Byron’s of the 12th.

I have twice implied that I suffered from Disappointment. It was an effort to make such a disclosure, but I thought it could only have been withheld, when it might be beneficial, from selfish considerations. I resolved to overcome a reluctance that seemed so ungenerous—to extenuate nothing to give the greatest possible force to my confession. In this fever of Sincerity I first made & afterwards repeated the allusion to my attachment; yet even then I had doubts which prevented me from expressing it more fully & distinctly. I had certainly felt greater interest for the character I attributed to one man (with whom my personal acquaintance was comparatively slight) than for any other within my knowledge.

In believing him deserving of happiness, I earnestly wished he might enjoy it; but he had never given me any reason to think I could bestow it; nor was my partiality discovered by himself or any other person. I indulged no hope, & had hope been offered, should have rejected it from regard to the views and wishes of others. Circumstances have since made it impossible for me even to dream of Hope. If an inclination which has so far prevailed without support, had been encouraged either by myself or its object, and the esteem on which it was solely founded, confirmed by habits of intimacy, I imagine it might have gained an ascendancy over the obstacles that actually checked its progress. As it is, I have sometimes regretted that lost chance of domestic happiness—sometimes I have doubted if I should have possessed the characteristical happiness of married life, that of making happy—and lately such doubts have, by additional proof, been converted into a certainty which destroys every wish for the trial. You can now judge if I deviated from the language of fact in representing my own feelings—if my view of them were not partly delusive—from what I remember of my expressions, I think so. Yet as my intention was blameless I reflect upon my error without pain. ... When I know Truth I follow it, or return to it, come what may.

I have time only to add—you may feel secure that your secret rests with me alone. My father & mother being perfectly satisfied as to the general nature of our communication, with their usual generous confidence, enquire no further. Your decision was undoubtedly right and wise, but the story is melancholy, and must have grieved you.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 4, Bennet Street, London, February 19th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 65-7)

Byron answers the previous item.

Feb'ly 19th 1814

Many thanks for your answer which has cut the knot—but I had no right to interrogate you on such a subject—& had I been at all aware that my question would have led to any explanation of feelings to which you do not like to recur—of course I should have remained in silence & in darkness.——

Still it is not [to] be regretted in one point of view even on your own account—as it sets all apprehension of the revival of a subject already discussed long ago between us—at rest—it is true that it was not in any great peril of revival before—but it is now more completely “numbered with the things that were” and never can be again.—Ignorant as I am of the person & the circumstances to whom & which you allude—I can form no opinion—except—that if he has put it out of his power to avail himself of such a disposition in his favour—he is fortunate in not knowing that it ever existed.———I was rather sorry (though probably they would not believe me) for Bankes & Douglas—who are both very clever & excellent men—and attached to you—and as I had contrived to make my own fortune like Sir Francis Wronghead—I confess that (that terrible pronoun I being put out of the question) I should have been glad to have seen one of them in a fair way for happiness—but I shall grow impatient which will do them no good—& me some harm—and so Adieu to the subject.——

Since my last letter I believe I have sent another of omitted replies to part of your own—and I must shorten this—or you will think me more tedious than usual.—I am at present a little feverish.—I mean mentally—and as usual—on the brink of something or other—which will probably crush me at last—and cut our correspondence short with every thing else—till then—I take as much of it as I can get—and as to my own epistolary offerings—you will only find them too profuse. Besides these domestic

35: A reference to B.’s account of his disappointment with Mary Chaworth. Annabella had thought of marriage with Hugh Montgomery, brother of her friend Millicent.
36: Quotation unidentified.
37: In Vanbrugh and Cibber, The Provok’d Husband.
stimulants—I have the further satisfaction of still finding the Prince Regent’s friends & Newspapers in gallant array against me—the latter very loud—the former I don’t see—if I did our dialogue would probably be very short—but more to the purpose.—I am told also that I am “out of Spirits” which is attributed to the said paragraphs—he must however be a happy man who has nothing deeper to disturb him.—Ly. Melbourne. I have not yet seen—but I believe she is well—and I hope to find her so shortly.—Pray how old are you?—it is a question one may ask safely for some years to come—I begin to count my own—a few weeks ago I became six & twenty in summers—six hundred in heart—and in head & pursuits about six,

ever yrs very truly

BN

Pray make my best respects acceptable to Sir Ralph & Ly. Milbanke.

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, February 24th 1814:

(Text edited from printed sources)

Annabella answers the previous item.

Ere now I hope Lady M. has assisted you to recover a happier and a better state of mind. I should not fulfil my duty towards you were I not to reprove the temper of feeling which you suffered to prevail when you wrote on the 19th. “The heart know its own bitterness”—the heart and One besides, by whom alone it can be removed, to whom it should first be offered. Had you humbly bowed before the Chastener, that fever of spirit would have been calmed, & this world would have lost its power to make you guilty, even were you still to be overwhelmed by its sorrows. To signify some calamity impending over you, yet to leave me in painful suspense as to its nature and the possibility of averting it, is not quite considerate towards one who so anxiously desires your welfare. You can only wrong me by doubting that—by refusing me a participation in your cares. It might possibly a little decrease their burden to you, & could not grieve me more than the vague conjectures which I am left to form. If the causes of those attacks of anguish ought to be secret, I will not seek to divine them—but if the secrecy be only self-imposed, cannot my prayer dissolve it? I was twenty-one last May. My prospects are full of uncertainty, and inspire me with doubts respecting my future peace. On the whole I think myself formed for domestic ties, but I cannot seek them on the principle of Self-love or Expediency. Could my choice have been regulated by such views, perhaps it might not have been deceived in either of your friends. I was early sensible that they could not attach me as I feel I could be attached—and I fear, must, since the capacity for affection is destined some time to be concentrated. It is now shared amongst some excellent friends, who improve whilst they fill my heart. Joanna is not one of the oldest in point of acquaintance, & I therefore consider myself the more obliged to her. If you have made use of my introduction pray tell me what opinion you conceive of her.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 4, Bennet Street, London, February 25th 1814:

(Source: this text from BLJ IV 71)

Byron answers the previous item.

Fy. 25th. 1814

I have not availed myself of your kind introduction to Mrs. Baillie—because I hope time or chance will one day bring us into the same society—and then you will do it in person—and although I wish much to be acquainted with her & have the sincerest admiration of all I see & hear of her—yet—in short I have a strange awkwardness & repugnance in making new acquaintances—and have had ever since I was a child—and you will easily believe this is not at all diminished by the respect I may entertain for the person to whom I am to undergo presentation.—This is constitutional—and not all I have seen—or all I may see—can or could ever cure it entirely—I conceal it as much as possible—so well indeed—that many would believe it affection in me to say this—with you I have no such apprehensions in stating the simple truth.————I am very glad that she likes ye Corsair—because she is one of the very few—who can understand the passions & feelings I have endeavoured to describe—but not even my Vanity can get the better of me in ye respect I have mentioned above.———I have troubled you lately with so much scribbling—that I feel some remorse in intruding on you again so soon

ever yrs. most sincerely

BYRON

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, late February, 1814:

(Text edited from printed sources)

Am I mistaken in imagining that you are disposed to visit us? … Yet—I must account to her [Lady Melbourne] for your visit, if purposed. Do you think it necessary to say more than that you have been
invited to Seaham whenever you again travel northwards? My father will kindly express to you that invitation, if you will give us a reason to hope it will be accepted. Perhaps these are idle speculations, and then think of them no more.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 4, Bennet Street, London, March 3rd 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 78)

March 3d. 1814

My dear Friend—In your last you stated that you were about to quit Seaham for a short time—I trust that you have derived benefit—that is better health—from your excursion.—I have to regret having perhaps alarmed you by something I said—writing hastily in one of my late letters—I did not very well—at least I do not recollect exactly what I said—it was the “hectic of a moment” probably—occasioned by a variety of unpleasant circumstances pressing upon me at the time—and arising from follies (or worse) into which I betray myself—& escape I cannot tell how—unless there be such a thing as Fate in this best of all possible worlds.————You allude in your last to the very indignant newspapers—whose assaults I would most willingly encounter every morning for the residue of my life—provided I could exchange for them some of my own reflections & recollections on very different subjects which assail me much more formidably.—I thank you very much for your suggestion on Religion—but I must tell you at the hazard of losing whatever good opinion your gentleness may have bestowed upon me—that it is a source from which I never did—& I believe never can derive comfort—if I ever feel what is called devout—it is when I have met with some good of which I did not conceive myself deserving—and then I am apt to thank anything but mankind—on the other hand when I am ill or unlucky—I philosophize as well as I can—& wish it over one way or the other without many glimpses at the future—why I came here—I know not—where I shall go it is useless to enquire—in the midst of myriads of the living & the dead worlds—stars—systems—infinity—why should I be anxious about an atom?——— I am writing to you with “the night almost at odds with morning” 38 and you are asleep—perhaps I were better so too—& for fear my letter should prove a commentary on Pope’s line “sleepless himself to give his readers sleep” 39 I will conclude by wishing that you may awake to the most agreeable day—dreams which the “pure in heart” desire & deserve

ever yrs most truly

B

P.S.—I was told today that you had refused me “a second time” so that you see I am supposed to be the most permanent of your plagues—& persevering of Suitors—a kind of successor to Wellesley Long Pole—if this multiplication table of negatives don’t embarrass you—I can assure you it don’t disturb me—if it vexed me I could not—& if I thought it would do otherwise than amuse you, I certainly should not have mentioned it.—

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, March 12th 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)

… In regard to the despicable opinion you hold of man, & of yourself as man—true, we are atoms in the universal scale, but is an atom nothing or worthless to the Infinite Being? ... Man must be endeared and exalted to man, by the conviction that man is an object of benevolent interest to the Supreme Being. [quotes the incident of the Samaritan woman in John 4] He who looks up to a “Father in Heaven” will take a kind interest in his own existence. I always touch the sacred subject with reverential fear. My interest for you will not be altered because at present you cannot be convinced—or by me. Despair not of yourself—I still hope the best for you, and whence soever it may come, though not through my means, it will add to my happiness … As for the report, it is absurd enough to excite a smile—false in name as well as number. In avoiding the possibility of being in a situation to refuse, I cannot consider myself as having refused. They who credit such tales must know little of you.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 4, Bennet Street, London, March 15th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 82)

March 15th 1814

To rob you of my conversion some pious person has written & is about to publish a long poem—an “Anti-Byron” which he sent to Murray—who (not very fairly) sent it to me—and I advised him to print it—but some strange sort of book-selling delicacy won’t let him—however some one else will.—I

thought some parts of the verse very good—the author’s object is to prove that I am the systematic reviver of the dogmata of Epicurus—and that I have formed a promising plan for the overthrow of these realms their laws & religion by dint of certain rhymes (Runci (?) I suppose) of such marvellous effect that he says they have already had the “most pernicious influence on civil society”.—Howbeit—with all this persuasion of mine evil intents—what I saw was very decent invective & very grave—no humour nor much personality—a great deal about Gassendi Locke &c. and a learned refutation of my supposed doctrines. The preface is all about the 8 lines (ye. tears) which have I believe given birth to as many volumes of remarks answers epigrams &c. &c. so you see like the fly on the wheel in the fable “what a dust we create.”—In addition to these—I do not think that there be 50 lines of mine in all touching upon religion—but I have an ill memory—& there may be more—however I had no notion of my being so formidable an Encyclopedist—or a Conspirator of such consequence.—Now—can anything be more ludicrous than all this?—yet it is very true—I mean the Anti-person of whom I am speaking—he assumes at first setting out my Atheism as an incontrovertible basis & reasons very wisely upon it—the real fact is I am none—but it would be cruel to deprive one who has taken so much pains of so agreeable a supposition—at least unless he believed that he had convinced me of that which I never doubted.—I will send it to you ye. moment it is out to shew you what an escape you have had—for there is a long prose passage against my marrying—or rather anyone’s marrying me—on account of ye. presumed philosophy wherewithal I am incessantly to lecture ye. future Ly. B. and the young Spinozas tutored in the comfortable creed with which I have already inoculated “civil society” & which they are to take instead of the Vaccine.—You do not know how much I wish to see you—for there are so many things said in a moment—but tedious upon the tablets—not that I should ever intrude upon your confidence any thing (at least I hope not) you should not hear—but there are several opinions of yours I want to request—and though I have two or three able & I believe very sincere male friends there is something preferable to me in ye. delicacy of a woman’s perceptions.—Of this at least I am sure—that I am more liable to be convinced by their arguments.—As for ye report I mentioned—I care not how often it is repeated—it would plague me much more to hear that I was accepted by anybody else than rejected by you.——I have passed the bourne of my paper—& must leave Me. de Stael—Miss Byron and somewhat more of Egotism for another opportunity.—You are better—and God knows I am glad of it.—I am interrupted by a visitor—and you won’t regret it—and I must not.

March 28th 1814: Byron moves into No 2, The Albany.

April 2nd 1814: Byron visits Augusta at Six Mile Bottom.

April 10th 1814: Byron writes the Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte, and fair-copies it the next day.

April 11th 1814: Napoleon abdicates.

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, April 13th 1814:

I have been prevented once or twice when I was going to write to you. Am I mistaken in imagining that you are disposed to visit us? Perhaps you think of repeating your journey to Yorkshire and would extend it. My father & mother desire me to say, in case you should have any intention of doing them that favour, that they shall have most sincere pleasure in seeing you as their guest. I agree with you that the pen is unsatisfactory in discussing interesting topics, and I could not object to converse with you on any, even Religion which I am in the habit of declining sometimes because I do not like the practice of familiarizing it … I still do not wish to inform my Aunt of all the circumstances of our intercourse, yet I must account to her for your visit, if purposed. Do you think it necessary to say more than that you have been invited to Seaham whenever you again travel northwards? My father will himself express to you that invitation, if you give us reason to hope it will be accepted. Perhaps these are idle speculations, and then think of them no more.

April 15th 1814: Medora Leigh born at Six Mile Bottom.

Byron to Lady Melbourne, from 4, Bennet Street, London, April 18th 1814:

40: Pierre Gassendi (1592-1655) mathematician and moderate sceptic.
41: Lines to a Lady Weeping.
Ly. M[elbourn]e.—As I had no chance of seeing you except under that living padlock fixed upon you yesterday—I did not venture to your palace of Silence this afternoon.—I have as yet no mention of serving my sovereign “in the North” and I wish to know whether (if I did incline that way) you would not put Richard’s question to me?—Though I think that chance off the cards—and have no paramount inclination to try a fresh deal—yet as what I may resolve today—may be unresolved tomorrow—I should be not only unwilling but unable to make the experiment without your acquiescence.—Circumstances which I need not recapitulate may have changed Aunt’s mind—I do not say that Niece’s is changed—but I should laugh if their judgments had changed places & exactly reversed upon that point.—In putting this question to you—my motive is all due selfishness—as a word from you—could & would put an end to that or any similar possibility—without my being able to say anything but “thank you”.—Comprenez vous?—all this mystery? it is what no one else will—I think I need hardly be more intelligible.—To conclude with a quotation “all this may be mere speculation if so think no more of it.”

ever yrs.

B

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, April 20th 1814:

Byron answers the last item but one.

Albany, April 20th, 1814

If I could flatter myself that my visit would not be disagreeable to you or yours I should very willingly avail myself of Sir Ralph’s possible invitation.—Distance is no object with me—and time can hardly be misspent in your society—besides a good deal of mine is generally passed in my own company—so that I could almost hope that I should not be found an intruder upon your studies or amusements.—you will do as you please—only let it be as you please—and not to gratify any supposed or real wish of mine that you make this sacrifice at the shrine of Hospitality,—I quite coincide with you upon religious discussion—it should at all events be treated with some degree of respect—if for no other reason than that it is so easy—so common and so unfit a subject for would be witticisms.—Upon that score I may have as a scribbler something to answer for—(I allude to some notes on some of the things of the last 2 years) but they have been as it were wrung from me—by the outcry on the subject—the common effect of contradiction upon human Nature.—It gave me much pleasure to hear from you again—I thought you unwell or indisposed to correspond with me farther—in either case I had no claim to trespass upon your health or patience.—All ye world are for Paris—Italy is my Magnet—but I have no particular wish to be of the vanguard or forlorn hope of foolish travellers—and shall take my time without much regretting a summer month or two in this country more or less—besides I have some previous business to arrange—for if I do once cross the channel I know my own loitering disposition well enough to fix no precise period for my return.—Buonaparte has fallen—I regret it—and the restoration of the despicable Bourbons—the triumph of tameness over talent—and the utter wreck of a mind which I had thought superior even to Fortune—it has utterly confounded and baffled me—and unfolded more than “was dreamt of in my philosophy.”—It is said the Empress has refused to follow him—this is not well—men will always fall away from men—but it may generally be observed that no change of Fortune—no degradation of rank or even character will detach a woman who has truly loved—unless there has been some provocation or misconduct towards herself on the part of the man—or she has preferred another for whom her affection will endure the same.—I have brought my politics & paper to a close—and have only room to sign my abdication of both.

ever yrs.

B

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Durham, April 23rd 1814:

I wish to see you, and am happy to think I shall not wish in vain. I promise you that neither on this or any future occasion will I make any sacrifice for your sake, because the neglect of my comfort or advantage could not, in my estimation, be friendly towards you, and when I consult my own well-being

42: Shakespeare, Richard III, I i 227-8 (“Was ever woman in this humour wooed? / Was ever woman in this humour won?”); or, IV iv 484-6; Stanley: No, my good lord, my friends are in the north. / Richard: Cold friends to Richard: what do they in the north? / When they should serve their sovereign in the west? 43: The last thing B. wants to do is to take an initiative, and visit Seaham because he wants to. 44: Hobhouse went to Paris on April 17th. B. refused to accompany him. 45: Shakespeare, Hamlet, I v 166-7; the epigraph to Manfred.
I believe you would thank me for regarding it. Will you adopt the same principle towards me? I am from home, but shall return to Seaham tomorrow or the day after, & shall then know what time my father can propose for your visit—not when we expect an influx of company, for you shall not be made a Lion.

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, late April 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)
I cannot find the full text of this letter in print.

… I have written by this post to Lady Melbourne informing her of my father’s invitation to you, which I think she will be glad to learn … [encloses an eight-line poem “To a friend who wished to correct me of a habit of frowning”]

April 1814: Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte published.

Byron to Lady Melbourne, from 4, Bennet Street, London, April 29th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 109-10)
Byron encloses the previous item.

I delivered “Mamma’s message” with anatomical precision—the knee was the refractory limb—was it not? injured I presume at prayers—for I cannot conjecture by what other possible attitude a female knee could become so perverse.—Having given an account of my embassy—I enclose you a note which will only repeat what you already know—but to obviate a possible Pharisaical charge—I must observe that the first part of her epistle alludes to an answer of mine—in which talking about that eternal Liturgy—I said that I had no great opinion one way or the other—assuredly no decided unbelief—and that the clamour had wrung from me many of the objectionable passages—in the pure quintessence of the spirit of contradiction &c &c.—She talks of “talking” on these same metaphysics—to shorten the conversation I shall propose the Litany—“from the crafts & assau”—ay—that will do very well—what comes next “Deliver us”—an’t it?—Seriously—if she imagines that I particularly delight in canvassing the creed of St. Athanasius—or prating of rhyme—I think she will be mistaken—but you know best—I don’t suspect myself of often talking about poets—or clergymen—of rhyme or the rubrick—but very likely I am wrong—for assuredly no one knows itself—and for aught I know—I may for these last 2 years have inflicted upon you a world of theology—and the greater part of Walker’s rhyming dictionary. 

April 30th 1814:

from Lady Melbourne to Byron, April 30th 1814:

46: See Beppo, 52, 4.
47: Shakespeare, Henry IV I II iv 352 (“a hot June”; the line is not Falstaff’s but Hal’s: “if there be a hot June … we shall buy maidenheads as they buy hobnails, by the hundreds”).
Now as to your going there I think ye objections you make nonsense, for no one will suppose you go, without being invited; & in that case it is much more likely the truth should suggest itself & ye world will say she has repented, & wished to draw him on Again but he would not be caught—and in fact there is no reason why you should—You go there in perfect liberty either to behave like a friend—or declare yourself a Lover. I dont think you will fall in love with her—that you may think her a proper person to marry is just possible, & she will understandably make a friend (a female one) of any person you may point out—and all friends is very much to be wished.—You know you had leave to marry—but leave is freely given on all occasions which imposes a Sort of restraint upon You—who are unlike any other person breathing—and when I knew that to be ye reason—with me, the effect would cease.—You say if ye wishes when you are there should tend to ye point I have named it would put you "out" of humour if you fail'd—I can not believe you would, but still she is so odd a person—but surely you could easily discover that, tho' I know you are more likely to err—to ye own disadvantage—in short I have written so much that I will write no more except to say—that no one ever went to a place so perfectly at liberty to act in any way that may please themselves.

If you don't like her you may talk only on the prayer Book & if you should like her that subject will cease to make way for another, without any effort. I am afraid it will be treated like the Hazards at Billiards on another occasion—and admittedly if she persists in conversing on ye two Subjects you mention, Religion & Rhyme you will not remain there long—there never yet was such extraordinary behaviour as her’s & after all I gave her credit for being perfectly undesigning, she has been Spoiled & allowed to do exactly what she liked from her Childhood—and like most persons, who reason much, she bewilders and deceives herself.

There can be no doubt ye she likes you, altho' I should not be Surprized if she was not aware of the extent of that liking; & yet saying how much she wishes to see you, & telling me ye y' society will make her amends for that which she loses by not coming to Town, when in all former Letters she has stated how much she regretted the society she should have had in Town is altogether unaccountable & therefore I shall leave it.

May 15th 1814: Byron starts Lara, and finishes it June 12th.

from Lady Melbourne to Annabella Milbanke, May 25th 1814:
This paragraph is slipped into the middle of the letter, as if of no great importance.

I was very glad to hear of my B’s Invitation to L’s. B— & should he accept it, I am sure you will be highly delighted with his Society, & I have no doubt you will all think me justified in the Character I have always given you of him—

During June Byron meets Charlotte Leveson-Gower several times, and thinks of marrying her, since she is a friend of Augusta.

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, early June, 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)
I go to the ’squerade—shall you—tell your sister to try & not dislike me. I am very unworthy of her I know it & feel it but as I may not love you nor see you, let her not judge me harshly—let her not pass me by as Lady Gertrude Sloane does, & Lady Rancilffe. Tell her, I feel my faults my crime sooner—but try & make her forgive me, if you can, for I love that Augusta with my heart because she is yours and is dear to you.

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, mid-June, 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)
I wish to see you, and am happy to think I shall not wish in vain. ... Your ode to Buonaparte was read in the company which I have just left. It was thought not perfectly lyrical—of this I cannot judge, but it appeared to me like a spontaneous effusion. ... I was amazed indeed when his “magic of the mind” melted into air. I rejoice in the hope of peace, yet could not join in the triumphant exultation over his fall—a very serious, if not melancholy contemplation. ... I cannot make excuse for a silence which cost you a doubt, unless you will accept as such that I did not once conjecture you would feel it any loss. In the disposition whence this arose, our characters may have some analogy; therefore it will not, I hope, appear incomprehensible or strange.
Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, June 21st 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 130)

I have not found a printed version of the letter to which this responds.

June 21st, 1814

I have delayed writing from day to day first because you were absent from Seaham—and 2dly. I wished to fix a time when I might have the pleasure of availing myself of Sir Ralph’s very welcome invitation.—You may be assured that “my kindness” as you are pleased to call it—is “undiminished” you have much more cause to apprehend it’s troublesome progress—than conjecture its decay.—You make me laugh about “forms & expressions” I will not say that I wish you to be less formal because I had rather you pleased yourself—but Me. Scudery herself could not have imagined a more correct correspondent —as to “meanings” I hope you do not think that I have presumed to mistake them—and if I do not—I know not who else has any business with them except Sir. R. & Lady Milbanke—who have permitted our correspondence.————— I shall wait your answer and your convenience before I pretend to name any period when I can hope to see you—believe me—it will give me great satisfaction—I do not find my comparisons very favourable to those in the crowd where I have lately mingled—and this may in some measure augment a regret which is now useless.—You have been “charged with this correspondence” might I ask by whom?—it is no great matter—unless with these very discerning persons who think that between people of our time of Life and in our situation there can be but one topic of discussion.—If all this has not alarmed you—let me hear from you again and at all events believe me

very affectly. & truly yrs

BYRON

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, late June, 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)

Annabella answers the previous item.

Dear Lord Byron

I am made very happy by your letter and the certainty which it affords of your intention to visit us … The formality and coldness which are, I know, sometimes observable in my manners as well as in my writing, have a source that is painful to myself—therefore pray do not allow me to seem what to you I can never mean to appear. After each time that I met you last year in London, I was vexed by the idea of having been repulsively cold towards you. It would have remained a source of great regret had not the means of removing so false an impression (did you receive it?) been in my power. I was as anxious then as since to make my real feelings known to you. The recollection of that needless & in part involuntary constraint, only gives me a greater degree of satisfaction in asking you to believe me

Ever affectionately yours

July 3rd 1814: Byron visits Augusta again at Six Mile Bottom.

Byron now goes to Hastings with Augusta, from July 20th to August 11th. As with The Corsair, he’s out of town when Lara is published.

Sir Ralph Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, July 19th 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)

I have the pleasure to acquaint your Lordship with the certainty of Lady Milbanke’s return this week, and hope the delay occasioned by her journey will not have rendered it inconvenient to you, to favour us with your Company at as early a period after this, as you are disposed to fix.

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, July 19th 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)

Annabella encloses the previous item.

Before we meet all uncertainty and obscurity should be removed, and this object is too essential to be sacrificed by either to false delicacy. There is one expression in your last letter which on recollection appears ambiguous … You spoke of circumstances that “might encrease a regret which is now useless”. I was sensible of an allusion to myself in that regret, … and I rejoiced … To speak as openly as I always do with you, I believe it is not in my power to withdraw a regard which after two years of active and progressive exercise … may be termed affection … I thought this affection, imperfect as it is, might
be to you a bond of peace with yourself, with your God—and of late, so far from apprehending to have it returned too largely, I have evinced some fear of a decrease so great as to prevent my advances towards that end. If I have been mistaken, God forbid I should aggravate a regret which I cannot remove! . . . I would only use it as the guide to your peace. If you love me, make it your first object as it is the first object to me . . . You are responsible for a part of my peace in consulting your own. Above all, do not conceal anything from reluctance to give me pain . . . I have now only to ask that if I am in any respect mysterious to you, if you desire any explanation of the past or present, you will believe that I shall give it most willingly . . .

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, late July, 1814:

Pray write to me—for I have been rendered uneasy by your long silence, and you cannot wish to make me so. Though my Conjectures as to the cause—which has much and anxiously occupied my thoughts—have been various, they have never assumed any motive on your part but the best. On mine I do not feel equally confident. I have perhaps been too careless of forms and expressions, having expressed & omitted so injudiciously that it might be impossible to understand my meaning. Or my meaning itself may have been faulty; and if so, whilst I hope that your kindness is undiminished, I should expect correction from you—it would be received with grateful attention. Lest there should have been any failure in the delivery of my letters, I have written thrice since I had the pleasure of hearing from you—briefly each time, for being prepossessed (too strongly perhaps) with the idea of a better mode of communication, I suppressed much. I have been charged with this correspondence. The direction of letters were, I know, observed once or twice. If you should hear of it, do not suffer yourself to be embarrassed by my injunction of secrecy. . . . No t wishing to attract observation of any kind, I should have preferred silence, and still I may not be called upon to break it, if the report dies away; but I should acknowledge without a blush that I have sought your friendship.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from Hastings, August 1st 1814:

Your letter has only reached me this day from London (where I shall return in a short time)—otherwise it had been answered immediately.———Allow me to avail myself of your permission to request “an explanation” which—as I do not recollect the “ambiguous expression” to which you allude in my last letter is necessary for me to understand yours.—I am the more anxious to receive it as this is my second answer to your letter—the first I have destroyed—because on considering yours more attentively—it appeared to me that I had misunderstood you and that my reply would in that case only produce perplexity.—Pray then—write to me openly and harshly if you please —if there is anything you wish to know or to say—I am ready to (answer or to listen—but whether present or absent—in enmity or in charity you are the last person I would wish to misunderstand.———My best thanks are due to Sir R. for the invitation which accompanied your letter—it is however as well that I have delayed accepting it—as I have not interfered with your Durham gaieties of the 6th.—I hope on my return to London to receive your reply—I shall be there next week.————

ever most affectionately yours

BYRON

[P.S.]—I have read your letter once more—and it appears to me that I must have said something which makes you apprehend a misunderstanding on my part of your sentiments—and an intention of renewing a subject already discussed between us.—Of this I am not conscious—and whatever my regrets or my regards might have been—or may be—I have not so far lost all self-command as to betray either to an extent that would render them troublesome to you; and my memory is still retentive enough not to require the repetition that you are attached to another.—

August 6th 1814: Lara published with Rogers’ Jacqueline.

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, August 6th 1814:

I thank you for the forbearance which made you pause and suspend a judgment of my meaning till it should be elucidated, as I hope it now will, beyond doubt. When I find ambiguities in your expression I
am certain that they are created by myself, since you evidently desire at all times to be simple and perspicuous.

When I last wrote I feared from some reconsiderations that you might still be in danger of feeling more than friendship towards me; and if so, that my intercourse which has been governed, especially of late, by a contrary opinion, might have been, or might be, promotive of that tendency. I have not entertained the least apprehension that your self-command would fail in any way that could affect me disadvantageously or disagreeably. On the contrary I feared the silence more than the confession of those sentiments, should they arise, because to the owner silence is the most dangerous. I must have smiled, had I not been almost vexed, at your reiterated and most kindly intended assurances to destroy my supposed dread of a renewal, when after your first assurance I should never have doubted that your determination was irremovable. The rest, you may think, was not my concern, but what can touch your happiness has been always much more my concern than the trivial inconveniences to which I could be exposed. Exemption from them, if you should suffer, would be consolation to me. Instead of fancying you likely to conceive my regard greater than it is, I have invariably observed that you did not understand how great it was. You do not appear to know how very little I am inclined to consider my own interests in comparison with yours, nor how much of the former I should, without a sacrifice, disregard for the sake of the latter. If I am secure from trouble and embarrassment, you seem to think I must be free from anxiety.

My doubt then is—and I ask a solution: Whether you are in any danger of that attachment to me which might interfere with your peace of mind? I am not apt to believe that I inspire such attachment, and in admitting a possibility which as your friend it seems that I ought not to neglect, if I err, it is not from vanity. Next, on the supposition of a reply unfavourable to my wishes, I would ask you to consider by what course the danger may be avoided …

Some time ago I had meant to acknowledge clearly, knowing that you would not mistake the motives of my acknowledgment, that I had been deceived (and too willingly, inasmuch as you were concerned) in thinking I had ever formed a decided attachment. The reasons which led me to believe the character of one person suited to my own, have disappeared with opportunities of fuller investigation, and though I am far from being indifferent to him, and shall probably always continue the very sincere & unembarrassed kindness of which he is the deserving object, nothing could now induce me to marry him. You are therefore mistaken if you deem this the cause, or any part of the cause, why I am not even more affectionately yours.

P.S.—is there not a print published from your portrait?—and will you send an impression to one who will place on it no common value?

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from Hastings, August 10th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 155)

Byron answers the previous item.

August 10th 1814

I will answer your question as openly as I can.—I did—do—and always shall love you—and as this feeling is not exactly an act of will I know no remedy and at all events should never find one in the sacrifice of your comfort.—When an acquaintance commenced—it appeared to me from all that I saw and heard—that you were the woman most adapted to render any man (who was neither invertebately foolish nor wicked ) happy—but I was informed that you were attached if not engaged—and very luckily—to a person for whose success—all the females of the family—where I received my intelligence—were much interested.—Before such powerful interest—and your supposed inclinations—I had too much humility or pride to hazard imporuntiy or even attention—till I at last learned—almost by accident—that I was misinformed—as to the engagement—the rest you know—and I will not trouble you with “a twice told tale” “signifying nothing.”48 What your own feelings and objections were and are I have not the right and scarcely the wish to enquire—it is enough nor me that they exist—they excite neither astonishment nor displeasure—it would be a very hard case—if a woman were obliged to account for her repugnance—you would probably like me if you could—and as you cannot—I am not quite coxcomb enough to be surprized at a very natural occurrence.—You ask me how far my peace is—or may be affected by those feelings towards you?—I do not know—not quite enough to invade yours—or request from your pity what I cannot owe to your affection.—I am interrupted—perhaps it is as well upon such a subject.—

ever most truly yrs.

B

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, August 13th 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)

I shall not doubt on the same subject again, and I regret that my recent doubts should have compelled me to extort from you the profession of sentiments to which you would have wished me rather to comprehend in your silence. Before a certain stage, our affections are I believe under our command, at least I have had some cause to think so, and I hoped that yours were checked in time. The determination that mine towards you shall remain at that stage, is founded, if you care at all to know why, on a very simple yet well-considered reason—which would always have been presented by a comparative view of your character and my own—that they are ill adapted to each other. Not believe me, that I depreciate your capacity for the domestic virtues ... Nevertheless you do not appear to be the person whom I ought to select as my guide, my support, my example on earth, with a view still to Immortality.

From Lady M—— I learned that the present Lord Auckland was unjustifiably named as the object of my attachment. Never having imagined him to be so, I could not have to persuade any one that he was ... I must add in exculpation of him, since he deserves from me the highest tribute of esteem, that I am persuaded he would have felt as much indignation as any one at the busy zeal of his unauthorized advocates. They had heard from myself, what I since rely believed, that my heart was unengaged, though I was afterwards led, by a combination of ill understood feelings, to deviate from this opinion—but not in regard to Lord Auckland.

To conclude this topic of discussion—You are the only man with whom I should not scruple to continue our intimacy in these relative circumstances, but as my father and mother trust equally to my discretion and to your honour, I will only request you to use or discontinue my intercourse, now and always, as it may be found to give pleasure or pain ...

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, August 16th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 158-9)

Byron answers the previous item.

August 16th. 1814

Very well—now we can talk of something else.— Though I do not think an intimacy which does not extend beyond a few letters and still fewer interviews in the course of a year could be particularly injurious to either party—yet—as—if I recollect rightly—you told me that some remarks had been made upon the subject—it is perhaps as well that even that should end—this is a point upon which yourself can best determine—and in which I have nothing to do but to acquiesce.—I shall leave London in a few days—but any letter addressed to me here will be forwarded—should you deem it proper to answer this.——You have not said anything of your health lately from which I infer that it is improved—you have had a good escape from the last town winter which was bustling beyond precedent and has I dare say provided invalids for the next ten years.——Pray make my best respects to Sir R. and Lady M. and accept them for yourself.—

ever yrs. very sincerely

B

August 20th 1814: Byron and Augusta visit Newstead again.

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, August 21st 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)

Annabella answers the previous item.

In one case only should I willingly relinquish the pleasure of your correspondence—if its exercise were become disagreeable to you. I shall now try to make a better use of it than of late, since I infer from your silence that my dream of seeing you soon is to end .. What are your principal occupations? your projects? How is your health? In giving you so oft the example of Egotism I wish it to be followed. I continue well, with prudence, but any approach towards the ways of the fashionable world occasions a return of complaints which originated there. Without so good a reason, a fashionable life must always be slavery to me, though I endured it as patiently & cheerfully as possible because my Mother was made unhappy by my repugnance to scenes where she deemed it advantageous for me to appear. I entered them at the age of seventeen with a caricatured opinion of their follies and vices, and looked on them with coldness and indifference .. Of these faults you have perhaps not suspected me. After leaving London that year in disgust, I spent the months of seclusion in salutary reflection, and returned with a little more charity. I had become sensible that it was pride in mortals to be offended at what God beholds and suffers ... This then became my task—to perceive the loveliness of human character
through all the incumbent shades of error ... I do not study much. My constitution requires many hours of sleep and exercise, & besides I do not enjoy the general acquisition of knowledge for its own sake. Books of poetry & philosophy are the only ones I wish to read ... Yet on some subjects I desire to be less ignorant. Will you tell me what books of modern history you think I might peruse with most advantage & pleasure? I am now engaged with Sismondi’s Italian republics.

I have read Lara. In the last Edinburgh Review I find an opinion which I had formed before it prevailed as it does at present—that Shakespeare alone possessed the same power as you have shown, of diving into the great deep of the human heart ... The range of characters you have chosen is most interesting to me, being that through which my imagination has naturally wandered, but amongst models purely imaginary till you gave them life. I have been often startled by finding the creatures of my visions with the colours which, though I could not bestow, I think I am able to admire. As one of many traits preconceived by me, I may point out that exultation of Despair, that exhilaration of Misery, which you have embodied. In some early essays of mine, I could show you these and other conceptions, feebly similar to yours, and I do not repent the indulgence of poetical inclinations if it has only enabled me to feel the truth of your touches more exquisitely.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from Newstead Abbey, August 25th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 161-3)

Byron answers the previous item. His reading list is of great interest.

You can hardly have a better modern work than Sismondi’s—but he has since published another on the Literature of Italy—Spain &c. which I would willingly recommend though it is not completed and contains only the South as yet—if you have not got it—on my return to London I would gladly forward it.—In his Italian Commonwealths there are two characters which interested me much—Eccelin, and Giovanni Galeazzo to say nothing of many others—I am a very bad French scholar—but you know without my telling you are the best “modern Historians”—and Gibbon is well worth a hundred perusals—Watson’s ‘Philips’ [sic] of Spain—and Coxe’s Spain & Austria are dry enough—but there is some advantage to be extracted even from them—Vertot’s Revolutions—(but he writes not history but romance)—the best thing of that kind I met with by accident at Athens in a Convent Library in old & not “very choice Italian”—I forget the title—but it was a history in some 30 tomes of all Conjurationi whatsoever from Cataline’s down to Fiesco of Lavagna’s in Genoa—and Braganza’s in Lisbon—I read it through (having nothing else to read) & having nothing to compare it withal thought it perfection.—I have a Tacitus with Latin on one page & Italian on the other among my books in town—I should think the original by itself a little severe on a feminine reader & will send you that if you would like it—it is a foreign edition.—The only books I brought with me here are a few Novels—Essayists—and plays—with one classic—and a volume of Machiavel containing his Principe and life of Castruccio.—You should read Denina’s Greece also—and Roscoe’s Lorenzo & Leo—

“All partial evil’s universal Good”

even mischief is remotely productive of advantage to some one or something in this best of all possible worlds—now the worst of civilization & refinement is that we are reduced to a most insipid medium between good and harm and must get very much out of the beaten path to do either.—It will give me
much gratification some day or other to see the “early essays” you mention and in the mean time I shall not like my own the worse for resemblance.

very sincerely yrs.

B

P.S.—I wrote my last so hurriedly being on ye eve of leaving London—that I omitted to mention (with my best thanks & respects to Sir R.) that I regret it will not be in my power to proceed to Seaham during the present year—My Northern expedition (with a son of Sir Jno. Sinclair’s to his father’s) during the commencement of which I could have had the pleasure of joining you for a few days has been put off—and I shall not see Scotland with which I wished to have renewed my acquaintance for some time to come.

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, September 2nd 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)

Annabella answers the previous item. This text is incomplete.

My father & mother sincerely regret the change of plan which deprives us of your visit—and I, but I need not speak of what should be as well known to you as to myself. We had avoided every engagement which might interfere with that more welcome one. Now, we shall probably remain here some time longer, expecting to be joined by Lord Wentworth … I fear again to rest my hope of seeing you on any determinate period … I do not quite like your ridicule of “this best of all possible worlds.” Without subscribing to all the assumptions of Optimism in admitting this not to be the best of all possible worlds, we should have the consolatory idea of a better, and from experience that all present is vanity and vexation of spirit, should spring the hope that Disappointment is of “a temporal, not of an eternal nature.” Is it a proof of reverence for the Governor of all worlds to mock his government in this? … I have just been in company where (not a singular occurrence) you were mentioned with great goodwill by those who are personally strangers to you. It is to me a very agreeable circumstance that the persons most attached to me are free from prejudice against you, though I have not influenced their opinions. I can listen with immovable calmness to the censures which may be passed on my friends, but when any one awakens my sympathy by a sound of kindness, I should find it difficult, if it were necessary, to appear less interested than I am. The date of your letter surprises me—I thought you had sold Newstead. It is time for me, though unwillingly, to bid you farewell …

P.S.—I should like to burn this letter—for the same reason as I have burned others—“but let it go.” If we could have met, all my apparent inconsistencies would have been dispelled. I must now find comfort in reflecting that the burden of them rests solely with me, and ought therefore to be supported cheerfully.

If it be not very irksome to you—as I sometimes fear it is—pray write soon. I have no right to ask it, but—I do ask it, and if I can be justified, you will justify me.

If we could have met, all my apparent inconsistencies would have been dispelled. . I must now find comfort in reflecting that the burden of them rests solely with me, and ought therefore to be supported cheerfully…. If it be not irksome to you—as I sometimes fear it is—pray write soon. I have no right to ask it—but I do ask it, and if I can be justified, you will justify me.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from Newstead Abbey, September 7th 1814:
(Source: text from Ethel Coburn Mayne, The Life of Lady Byron, New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1929, pp.108-9; BLJ IV 168-9)

Byron answers the previous item.

Newsstead Abbey. Sept. 7th. 1814

It is Porson’s letter to Travis to which you allude and—if I recollect rightly—one of his remarks (the highest praise to be passed on an Historian) is that amidst the immensity of reading through which he had tracked Gibbon, not one of his authorities was misquoted or perverted even unto a syllable. Perhaps I am wrong in giving this as from P’s preface, for years have elapsed since I saw it—but of the fact as P’s opinion—and no one could be a better judge—I am certain.

Porson was slowly extinguishing, while I was a Cantab. I have seen him often—but not in “his happier hour,” for to him that of “social pleasure” could not be so termed. He was always—that is daily—intoxicated to brutality. I hate to think of it, for he was a perfect wonder in powers and attainments.
Newstead is mine again—for the present—Mr. C., after many delays in completion, relinquished his purchase. I am sorry for it. He has lost a considerable sum in forfeiture by his temporary inability or imprudence; but he has evinced a desire to resume or renew his contract with greater punctuality, & in justice to him—though against the advice of lawyers, and the regrets of relations—I shall not hesitate to give him an opportunity of making good his agreement. But I shall expect—indeed I will not endure such trifling for the future.

I am much amused with your “sovereign good” being placed in repose. I need not remind you that this was the very essence of the Epicurean philosophy, and that both the Gods (who concerned themselves with nothing on earth) and the Disciples of the illustrious idler the founder of that once popular sect, defined the “Τό Καλόν” 60 to consist in literally doing nothing—and that all agitation was incompatible with pleasure. The truth possibly is that these materialists are so far right; but to enjoy repose we must be weary—and it is to “the heavy laden” that the invitation to “rest” 61 speaks most eloquent music.

You accuse yourself of “apparent inconsistencies.” To me they have not appeared; on the contrary, your consistency has been the most formidable apparition I have encountered. There seem to be no grounds for complaint on one side nor vindication on the other; and as to explanations—they are always a puzzle. After one or two letters which lately passed between us, and to which I must request your pardon for recurring—we—at least I (to speak for myself)—could hardly have met without some embarrassment, possibly on both sides, certainly on one. This has been avoided—and so far is a subject of congratulation.

Your letters are generally answered on the day of their arrival so that it can’t be very “irksome to me to write soon.”

On my return to London which will not take place immediately I shall have great pleasure in forwarding the book offered in my last. The “Agricola” is beautiful. It is a pity that there are so many objections to a like perusal of Suetonius also; whose portraits are but too faithful even in their coarsest features. You must be partial to Sallust but after all there are none like Tacitus & him you have.

ever yours
B.

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, September 13th 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)

The “apparition” of my Consistency ought not to be “formidable” to you, since like other apparitions, it may owe its effect chiefly to the imagination of the spectator, and might vanish with the light of day. I do not pique myself on its solidity. … After much reflection it is my opinion that you could not have suffered by our meeting … Though our meeting must at first be attended with some mutual embarrassment, I hope that would soon have been removed. Explanations on paper I shall, according to your advice, not attempt again … I do not recollect my quiescent tenets. Probably I exalted the blessing of repose at the moment because I did not possess it. In fits of cowardice I envy the Oyster … interrupted—and I never like to resume.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from Newstead Abbey, September 9th (postmarked 10th) 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 169-0)

Byron’s “proposal” is a masterpiece of circumlocution. He answers the previous item.

Newstead Abbey. Sept. 9th. 1814

You were good enough in your last to say that I might write “soon”—but you did not add often—I have therefore to apologize for again intruding on your time—to say nothing of patience. There is something I wish to say; and as I may not see you for some—perhaps for a long time—I will endeavour to say it at once. A few weeks ago you asked me a question which I answered I have now one to propose—to which if improper, I need not add that your declining to reply to it will be sufficient reproof. It is this. Are the “objections” to which you alluded insuperable? or is there any line or change of conduct which could possibly remove them? I am well aware that all such changes are more easy in theory than practice; but at the same time there are few things I would not attempt to obtain your good opinion. At all events I would willingly know the worst. Still I neither wish you to promise or pledge yourself to anything; but merely to learn a possibility which would not leave you the less a free agent.—— —When I believed you attached, I had nothing to urge—indeed I have little now, except that having heard from

60: Compare Manfred, III i 13.
yourself that your affections are not engaged, my importunities may appear not quite so selfish, however unsuccessful. It is not without a struggle that I address you once more on this subject: yet I am not very consistent—for it was to avoid troubling you upon it that I finally determined to remain an absent friend rather than become a tiresome guest. If I offend it is better at a distance. is———With the rest of my sentiments you are already acquainted. If I do not repeat them it is to avoid—or at least not increase—your displeasure.

ever y’s most truly

B

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, early September 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)
Annabella reads the previous item the way Byron wants her to, and accepts him.

I have your second letter—and am almost too agitated to write—but you will understand. It would be absurd to suppress anything—I am and have long been pledged to myself to make your happiness my first object in life. If I can make you happy, I have no other consideration. I will trust to you for all I should look up to—all I can love. The fear of not realizing your expectations is the only one I now feel. Convince me—it is all I wish—that my affection may supply what is wanting in my character to form your happiness. This is a moment of joy which I have too much despaired of ever experiencing—I dared not believe it possible, and I have painfully supported a determination founded in fact on the belief that you did not wish it removed—that its removal would not be for your good. There has in reality been scarcely a change in my sentiments. More of this I will defer. I wrote by last post—with what different feelings! Let me be grateful for those with which I now acknowledge myself

Most affectly yours.

A.I.M.

Byron to Lady Melbourne, from Newstead Abbey, September 18th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 175)
Byron needs Lady Melbourne's consent.

My dear Lady M[elbourn]e.—Miss Milbanke has accepted me:—and her answer was accompanied by a very kind letter from your brother—may I hope for your consent too? without it I should be unhappy—even were it not for many reasons important in other points of view—and with it I shall have nothing to require except your good wishes now—and your friendship always.—I lose no time in telling you how things are at present—many circumstances may doubtless occur in this as in other cases to prevent it’s completion—but I will hope otherwise.—I shall be in town by thursday—& beg one line to Albany to say you will see me at your own day—hour—& place.—In course I mean to reform most thoroughly & become “a good man and true” in all the various senses of these respective & respectable appellations—seriously—I will endeavour to make your niece happy not by “my deserts but what I will deserve” of my deportment you may reasonably doubt—of her merits you can have none.—I need not say that this must be a secret—do let me find a few words from you in Albany & believe me ever most affectly yrs.

B

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from Newstead Abbey, September 18th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 173-4)
Byron answers Annabella’s acceptance.

Your letter has given me a new existence—it was unexpected—I need not say welcome—but that is a poor word to express my present feelings—and yet equal to any other—for express them adequately I cannot.—I have ever regarded you as one of the first of human beings—not merely from my own observation but that of others—as one whom it was as difficult not to love—as scarcely possible to deserve:—I know your worth—& revere your virtues as I love yourself and if every proof in my power of my full sense of what is due to you will contribute to your happiness—I shall have secured my own.—It is in your power to render me happy—you have made me so already.—I wish to answer your letter immediately—but am at present scarcely collected enough to do it rationally—I was upon the point of leaving England without hope without fear—almost without feeling—but wished to make one effort to discover—not if I could pretend to your present affections—for to these I had given over

63: Shakespeare, Much Ado About Nothing, III iii 1.
64: Shakespeare, Richard III, IV iv 414 (“Plead what I will be, not what I have been”).
all presumption—but whether time—and my most sincere endeavour to adopt any mode of conduct—
that might lead you to think well of me—might not eventually in securing your approbation awaken
your regard.——These hopes are now dearer to me than ever; dear as they have ever been;—from the
moment I became acquainted my attachment has been increasing—& the very follies—give them a
harsher name—with which I was beset & bewildered—the conduct to which I had recourse for
forgetfulness only made recollection more lively & bitter by the comparisons it forced upon me in spite
of Pride—and of Passions which might have destroyed but never deceived me.————I am going to
London on some business which once over—I hope to be permitted to visit Seaham;—your father I
will answer immediately & in the mean time beg you will present my best thanks & respects to him &
Lady Milbanke.—Will you write to me? & permit me to assure you how faithfully I shall ever be
yr most attached and obliged Sert.

[BYRON]

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from Newstead Abbey, September 19th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 176)

Newstead Abbev. Septr. 19th. 1814

I wrote to you yesterday—not very intelligibly I fear—and to your father in a more embarrassed
manner than I could have wished—but the fact is that I am even now apprehensive of having
misunderstood you and of appearing presumptuous when I am only happy—in the hope that you will
not repent having made me more so than I ever thought to have been again.——Perhaps in some
points our dispositions are not so contrasted as at times you have supposed—but even if they were—I
am not sure that a perfect sameness of character (a kind of impossibility by the bye) would ensure the
happiness of two human beings any more than an union of tempers and pursuits of very dissimilar
qualities.—Our pursuits at least I think are not unlike—you have no great passion for the world as it is
called—and both have those intellectual resources which are the best—if not the only preventatives of
ennui of oneself or others;—my habits I trust are not very antidomestic—I have no pleasure in what is
named Conviviality—nor is Gaming nor Hunting my vice or my amusement—and with regard to other
and perhaps far more objectionable faults & levities of former conduct—I know that I cannot exculpate
myself to my own satisfaction—far less to yours—yet there have been circumstances which would
prove that although “sinning” I have also been “sinned against.”—I have long stood alone in life—
and my disposition though I think not unaffectionate—was yet never calculated to acquire the
friendships which are often born to others—the few that chance or circumstances have presented I have
been fortunate enough to preserve—and some whom I could little have hoped to number amongst
them.———I wont go on with this Egotism—will you write to me soon?—I shall be in London on
Thursday I think—I do not answer oftener than is least irksome—but permit me to address you
occasionally till I can see you—which I wish so much—and yet I feel more tremulously alive to that
meeting than I quite like to own to myself—when your letter arrived my sister was sitting near me and
grew frightened at the effect of it’s contents—which was even painful for a moment—not a long one—
nor am I often so shaken.—I have written—yet hardly a word that I intended to say—except that you
must pardon me for repeating so soon how entirely I am
yr. attached & sincere

BYRON

P.S.—Do not forget me to your father & mother—whom I hope to call mine.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from Newstead Abbey, September 20th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 177)

Newstead Abbey—Sept. 20th. 1814

There is one point on which—though you have not lately pressed it—I am sure you feel anxious on my
behalf—and to this will I speak, I mean—Religion.—When I tell you that I am so convinced of it’s
importance in fixing the principles—that I could never have had perfect confidence in any woman who
was slightly impressed with it’s truth—you will hardly believe that I can exact more tolerance than I
am willing to grant.—I will not deny that my own impressions are by no means settled—but that they
are perverted to the extent which has been imputed to them on the ground of a few passages in works
of fiction—I cannot admit to those whose esteem I would secure—although from a secret aversion
from explanations & vindications I have hitherto entered into none to those who would never have
made the charge but from a wish to condemn rather than convert.—To you—my conduct must be

65: Shakespeare, King Lear, III ii 59-60.
different—as my feelings—I am rather bewildered by the variety of tenets—than inclined to dispute their foundation—in a word—I will read what books you please—hear what arguments you please—and in leaving the choice to your judgment—let it be a proof that my confidence in your understanding & your virtues is equal.—You shall be "my Guide—Philosopher and friend" my whole heart is yours—and if possible let me make it not unworthy of her to whom it is bound—& from whom but one event can divide it.—This is my third letter in three days—I will therefore shorten it—I proceed on my way to London tomorrow.—With every sentiment of respect—and—may I add the word?—Love—

ever yours

BYRON

September 21st 1814: Byron and Augusta leave Newstead.

My dear friend,

I am released from obligations of secrecy by this post—therefore you see that I do not long delay my promised communication to you. The "Thane" is found—I am engaged to marry Lord Byron. If his character had not been greatly misconceived in the world (as you know characters sometimes are both for better and worse) he would never have been the object of a choice in which I feel myself honoured. Convinced that he deserves my highest esteem as he certainly possesses my strongest attachment, I look forward to the most rational happiness, and in those views I have the satisfaction of finding that my father and mother fully and confidently join. You do not know him, but you know me, and if you estimate his principles and character by mine you will certainly not form too favourable an opinion. I therefore hope, my dear brother Hugo, for your sanction. I am sure I shall have Poll's if Jealousy will permit.

... As I know not if my future will approve of a correspondence with handsome young Batchelors I must here relinquish it, hoping at the same time very often to hear of you and I shall expect an answer to this with some impatience. Afterwards my Mother will gladly receive from you any communications concerning Poll's affairs ...

On your part every thing seems explained. I cannot at least remember those accusations which, whilst I made, I answered as well as you could. On mine something shall be said for your satisfaction or your amusement, of that phantom of an attachment. A "horrible shadow" to me, since it stood between us—though I should have some obligation to it, for had I not conjured it into being, my impulse to write to you would probably not have prevailed against principles that forbade the measure. Till the time of my acquaintance with you I had never been in danger of an attachment. Placed by Lady Melbourne's precipitancy in a situation where I thought decision a duty, I feared to risk a disappointment to you, and though aware that you could excite affection, I doubted if your character, as I then misconceived it from false accounts, could support that affection in one who loves only where she can honour. I resolved then to resign—irrevocably I thought—all power over your affections. Lest mine should become engaged to you I sought an object for them, and fixed on—Mr Montgomery, the brother of my friend, and who so far from showing affection to me, had bestowed it elsewhere. On the foundation of cold esteem for a person whom when present I had never thought agreeable, my imagination elevated in his absence that visionary attachment by which I deemed myself justified in being your friend. Yet it was almost intolerably painful to me that you should think my heart devoted to another. Nevertheless I would not be conscious of the true cause. Some time after I commenced my correspondence with you, he came here. The illusion could not withstand the presence of its object—for I had not seen him since its creation—and he was no more to me than he had always been. Then ensued my long silence to you. Having lost this only defence against my feelings I tried to write, but could not without disclosing them. At last I did write, still determined not to know myself, and when you asked an explanation on this particular subject, I was more inclined to revive than to remove the error. A sort of quiet despair possessed me, for you had assumed an impossibility of renewal on your part, and you repeated it more

66: Quotation untraced.
67: Shakespeare, Macbeth, III iv 106.
strongly in the answer to that very letter. It haunted me till I heard from you last week, and forced me into those hopeless determinations. Mr M—— was here for a fortnight some time ago, and we were very good friends, though I could not quite forgive him for having innocently been your rival. It is natural that you should suppose his sister had a share in misleading me, but she never even wished for the connection. The folly was all mine—you cannot condemn it more severely than I do, since it pained you as much as myself. Do not apprehend from these proofs of my potent imagination in absence, that it has been acting in your case. No, I remember too well what I last felt in your presence, under that coldness—my only resource and at the same time my vexation. What I may seem to feel when we meet again I cannot guess—I could shrink from it too, yet let it be as soon as possible...

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, September 26th 1814 (i):
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 180-2)

Byron answers the previous item.

Sept. 26th. 1814

Your letter has relieved me from the remaining doubts which still lingered round me—it is difficult at first to believe our dearest hopes realized.——I had struggled on in the full conviction that your heart was another’s—and at times in the delusion of having recovered mine—but the sight of your handwriting—the casual mention of your name by any third person—all and every thing which recalled you to my memory—and there were few things that did not by connection or contrast—conspired to tell me in the sensations they produced that I still coveted “a pearl—worth all my tribe.”——I did not require nor expect the explanation you have afforded—but it has removed a weight from my heart—and a restlessness from my brain that would have made me—I know not what—now I am yours—and being dear to you will I hope make me better as it has left me nothing to desire beyond deserving your affection and retaining it.——I came to town on business—which I thought it as well to arrange before I proceed to Seaham—my Agent is in the country whence I expect him in a few days—if not—I shall join him there for a day—I thought the delay would sit easier at present—for if I had been with you it had been painful to me to quit you so soon—and yet expedient—since “the heart that little world of ours” is not the only world we must live in—and I have some points to discuss with him upon the subject of Newstead (which is mine again) and a property I have in Lancashire—with a view to your comfort as well as mine—all I can do shall be done—and in all my future views you must be my principal object—and my tenderest care.——I am glad that you have heard from Lady Melbourne—her conduct has been uniformly kind—considerate—and even indulgent to me—and I have only to regret the unhappy circumstances which prevent my being on the same terms of friendship with all her family.——It is some satisfaction to me to have retained hers—and had my conduct been altogether inexcusable all things considered I could hardly have retained it—she has much regard for you—but that is not extraordinary—I have also heard from her—and perhaps I may see her before we meet.—I am anxious—and shall be uneasy till I see you—yet I cannot fix a day till I have seen my lawyer—and you know the “the law’s delay”——extends to the personal movements of it’s professors—I try to keep myself in patience but I begin to think the famous exclamation of “Ye Gods—annihilate both time & space—and make two &c.”—not half so absurd as I used to do.—Dearest Annabella—allow me for the first time to use that expression—do write to me—and do not grow tired of hearing me repeat seemingly by rote but really by heart how faithfully I am your most attached and unalterable

B

P.S.—I have just been going through a curious scene[.] Sir W. Knighton brought Spurtzheim (I believe is the name) the craniologist to see me—a discoverer of faculties & dispositions from heads.—He passes his hand over the head & then tells you—curious things enough—for I own he has a little astonished me.—He says all mine are strongly marked—but very antithetical for every thing developed in & on this same skull of mine has its opposite in great force so that to believe him my good & evil are at perpetual war—pray heaven the last don’t come off victorious.—

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, September 26th 1814 (ii):
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 182-5)

Byron writes again on the same day.

Sept. 26th. 1814

68: Shakespeare, Othello, V ii 351.
69: B. alludes to his liaison with Caroline Lamb.
70: Shakespeare, Hamlet, III.
71: Pope, The Art of Sinking in Poetry, Chp. 11.
I wrote in the morning but I cannot go to rest without once more conversing with you as well as I can at this distance.—My letters always leave me dissatisfied—something—so much is unsaid:—since I have given way to those feelings—which almost since our first acquaintance I have repressed but never could conquer even when I thought them most hopeless—you have never left me for a moment—you never shall—you never can.—You do not perhaps recollect the first time we ever met—at M[elbourn]e House—an abode with which—except in the instance of our Aunt that is to be—I cannot always associate the most pleasing ideas—but to me it is a yesterday—although I have lived nearly a life of events since that day.—You struck me (as it is called) particularly—I did not know your name and the room was full of morning—visitors—I was myself almost a stranger & felt awkward & shy—for which I have a natural talent at that time increased by my recent return from a country where society comprised of men & women is unknown—I set you down as the most puzzling person there—for there was a quiet contempt of all around you & the nothings they were saying & doing in your manner that was so much after my own heart—I could hardly refrain from telling you so—still & calm as you appeared—you went away at last—with Miss Mercer I think—and the moment you were gone I enquired all the who’s & what’s of mine hostess—your name was answer sufficient for I had heard of you long before—even while I was abroad through particular circumstances—little dreaming then how much I should in future dream of you.—There was a simplicity—an innocence—a beauty in your deportment & appearance which although you hardly spoke—told me I was in company with no common being.—Not very long after this I confided to one whom I then thought only a friend how much I admired—for I dared not do more—how superior you seemed to me to all I perceived in the crowds where I was wandering—at first my confidante was all acquiescence and approbation—but I was soon informed that you were—but why should I retrace misrepresentations & their consequences for which I shall never forgive myself? I thought you attached & engaged—regret was useless—but how much would have been spared to me had I been aware that your heart was your own—that it could even be exchanged for mine—in very truth—from my heart of hearts—dearest Annabella—I can now tell you—that then—at the very time when I became unworthy of being yours—it was to you my attachment had turned—it was you from whom it was wrenched—those feelings cannot be quelled—only removed—and my sole resource was to suppose that I felt for another the love which you would not accept.—In the autumn I was undeceived with regard to your prepossession for another—but confirmed by the ill success of my kind friend Ly. M[elbourn]e in my opinion that we never should be what I still tremulously hope—for till you are mine I shall tremble—well—"Rebellion lay in my way" and like Hotspur I found it—I became the fool of a similar delusion—loving you still.—Since that time I have proceeded “seeking for rest & finding none” at moments retiring within myself and gathering my thoughts And the recollection of my passions & observations into rhimes—with which as the world are pleased to take them well—at least in quantity—I have only to be pleased too—and think myself a very clever gentleman—you will think this affectation—but it is not—I have never thought very highly of poetry nor poets merely as poets—and my I becoming one—if indeed I am so—is the result of temporary solitude & accident—it is not “my vocation” and I once thought I was meant for something better—but that is past.—I yet wish to be good—with you I cannot but be happy—but I never shall be what I would have been—luckily I do not wish to be so now—reflection & experience have taught me that all pursuits which are not founded on self-esteem & the good of others—lead but to the same result—and far astray as it has led me—I am thankful that the wildness of my imaginations has not altogether prevented me from recovering the path of peace.—What an unmerciful prose have I sent you—or rather am sending—but pardon me—I will compress in future my language—as I have already my feelings—my plans—my hopes—my affection into love—I could almost say—devotion to you—forgive my weaknesses—love what you can of me & mine—and I will be—I am whatever you please to make me.—I am at least above the paltry reluctance of not submitting to an understanding which I am sure is superior to mine—I do not flatter you—I am certain that you are wiser than me—more reflective —more dispassionate—surely more good—you say that “you will look up to me” were you my inferior I should perceive it—I should require it—but it is not so—and yet I do not think humbly of myself when I estimate you more highly.—I do not mean that I should rely on you for that protection which it is my part to give—and my pride to prove—but that you should be not only my Love—but my first friend—my adviser—my reprover—when necessary—that my head should at times be as much indebted to your counsels—as my heart is to your regard.—In difficulty or danger I would not call upon you to share it or extricate me—I would not throw upon you the weight of my griefs or my perils—but I would ask you if I had done well or ill—and upon your answer would materially depend my estimation of my conduct.—I write to you as if you were already my wife—“the wife of

73: What Annabella actually wrote was, “I will trust to you for all I should look up to”.
Tuesday—[Sept. 27]
P.S.—I have just heard a distressing piece of intelligence to our family—my first cousin Sir Peter Parker is killed in the late action with the Americans—he was a very gallant & popular officer—young & not long married—and his death will be very generally regretted.—I have not seen him since we were boys—but my sister knew him very well—and I do not [know] whether—or how to tell her or not—Lady P[arke]r was particularly attached to him—in short—it is very bitter to us all.—

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, September 28th 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)

My Mother has been ill … partly I believe from agitation. You will conceive that she must experience it in these circumstances, though they are “to her heart’s desire.” It is rarely that so fond a mother is so little selfish. Her indulgence is for my sake—not her own. Are you not afraid that such a spoiled child will prove a Xantippe?

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, September 29th 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)

My letters to my Mother at that time [spring 1812], for she gave them to me lately to read, show how much you had occupied my attention—my interest. Though I tried to see in you what I had heard of you, mystery & mischief; your character appeared to me very simple. Of your truth, of your deep and disinterested feelings, I never doubted.

Yet I do not claim a perfect superiority to the contagion of Prejudice. In some points I deferred too much to the authority of others. My friend Grahame once warned me most earnestly to beware of this disrespect for my own judgment, entreating me to consult, and confide in it, even if opposed by opinions of seeming validity. He added “If you do not, you will suffer”—and the words would have been prophetic, if at last I had not trusted to myself. During the last part of the season you ceased to notice me at all. I had not attributed your notice to any serious motive, and I did not seriously account for its discontinuance. My interest for you had not depended on your attention—was not altered by the loss of it. At one supper party, where you sat between Lady Melbourne and me, but conversed only with her, I heard you say, “Thank God, I have not a friend in the world.” You knew not the pang which you inflicted on a friend so near. Those words of bitterness chilled me. When I returned home to solitude I wept over the recollection of them, and prayed that you might receive consolation from a friend below, as well as from a friend above.

On October 1st, Augusta Leigh writes the first of many letters she will send to Annabella before the end of the year. She says she can not restrain herself any longer from writing to one whom she hopes soon to call her sister, and whom she already loves as such.

October 1st 1814: Hobhouse hears about Byron’s engagement from a third party.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, October 1st 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 189-91)

Octr. 8d. 1814

I am happy to hear that Lady Milbanke is better—but wish to hear that she is well—pray tell me so—you probably know that Lady Cowper has met with an accident—but is not dangerously ill.—I am still detained here waiting for my agent’s arrival: it is my intention to part with Newstead once more—the late purchaser being unable to fulfil his engagements at the proper time—was under the necessity of forfeiting £25000—and resigning the purchase which was hard upon him but indispensable—he may still have the option of completing his purchase if disposed & competent to renew it.—When I had once determined to sell that estate—I conquered or stifled those feelings which attach one to an old patrimony in the conviction that it was better for many reasons it should be so.—my Lancashire inheritance consists merely of a very extensive & uninclosed manor with the mineral & all other

74: Shakespeare, Macbeth, III iv 126.
rights—I wished to have sold it instead—but was dissuaded and am still—and told that it will ultimately be very valuable—perhaps more so than the other—on account of the collieries which have never yet been worked to the proper extent because I could not spare the requisite sum and at the same time discharge my debts till N[ewstead] was sold—a part of Rochdale but not the most considerable by any means has been subject to a lawsuit which I have gained three times but it is not yet decided!—you know the law—this also would have been arranged by the completion of the N[ewstead] purchase.—My R[ochdale] rights extend over better than eleven thousand acres—and these have been ours since the Conquest I believe—they wish to enclose but cannot without my consent—it is also further valuable on this account—as of course besides the reservation of the minerals to me from the extent of the royalty a considerable portion of land would in that case be added.—Of the actual or exact value of R[ochdale] or of Newstead I cannot speak with any certainty—it is to ascertain this—and to take the proper steps for making every settlement in my power upon you that I wish to see my Agent and determine these points before I join you at Seaham.—My debts are reduced very much within the last three years—and a few thousand pounds will cover the rest—considerably above half have been already paid.—The last price of N. was £140-000—since that time land has fallen—but I can afford to sell for £25000 less at all events—and if the late purchaser renews & completes there will be no loss at all.—The rents have been more than tripled—almost quadrupled—but the income is still far short of what I should derive from the produce of the sale—besides the expense of keeping up the place in any kind of order.—This is more like a factor’s letter than anything else—but as you said something on the subject—I thought it as well to get over it at once, your father’s agents & mine will of course canvas the business more fully.—With regard to your expectations I have neither conjecture nor curiosity—my motives in addressing you were not founded upon these—and in such respects there will be no disappointment to me—and I will make it my endeavour that there shall be as little to you & yours as I can help.—I have said so much—at least so many words on the above topic that I have not left myself time for others:—indeed what I could say would be merely repetition of that which you already know & which years (if spared to me) will only confirm.—You do not yet know how dear you must ever be to your most attached & sincere

B

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, October 5th 1814:

(Source: this text from BLJ IV 193-4)

Octr. 5th. 1814

You will be as much surprized as I have been displeased—Dearest Annabella—to perceive in the M[orning] Chronicle a contradiction of a paragraph in the D[urham] & other papers announcing our intended marriage.—I have written to Perry—but can easily guess the personage who has thought proper to perform this piece of petty malignity—which has hurt me—but no matter—I shall probably know in a few hours whence it originated.—My reasons for suspecting the personage to whom I allude—are—that it is not the first nor the fiftieth of these monkey-tiger tricks that she has played me—one in particular of forging a letter in my name so exactly that the person to whom it was addressed was completely deceived: the cause was a picture—and Murray (in whose care it was—& who ought to know my handwriting perfectly, was the dupe—after this (which was above a year ago) you can hardly wonder at my want of Charity on this occasion in fixing upon the same object for my present conjectures.—The fact you may depend upon—you cannot conceive what persecution I have undergone from the same quarter—nor the pains I have taken to save that person from herself—I do not mean very recently—but since my first acquaintance—she has crossed my every path—she has blighted or at least darkened my every prospect—it is bitter to speak harshly of that which we once thought loved us—and yet in this instance to speak truly & kindly at the same time is difficult—I will therefore close the subject.—Mr. Hanson is still at Ld. Portsmouth’s detained by business—but I expect him daily—and have written to him peremptorily—in the mean time I trust he is doing what I have desired him—and will tell me so when we meet—nothing but this—and it is a necessary though irksome delay detains me from you. All my connections & friends are delighted—they could not but be proud of you—my feelings are dashed with doubt—if I valued you less—I should be more confident—but you seem to me so much more than I deserve—that I can scarcely persuade myself that you are to be mine: yours I must be ever from my heart of hearts.—

B

P.S.—I enclose you Perry’s answer & the note which I retain “pour des raisons”[.] I have seen—and do not think it is the person I believed but cannot guess the writer pray have I done right or wrong in this? it could not merely be passed by silently—particularly as it first appeared in the D[urham] paper—the

75: Caroline Lamb.
contradiction was like an insult, As I wish to let you into the character of a man with whom I have passed much of my youth—I send you also 3 epistles of my friend Hobhouse—the son of Sir B[enjamin] H[obhouse]—and my fellow traveller during the first part of my stay in the East—I think the dry & cynical turn of his style will amuse you—but I can assure you he is all heart notwithstanding & a great admirer of you—as one of his letters will prove to you.—ever my Love—thine

Keep them till we meet.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, October 8th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 202-3)

Octr. 8th. 1814

I have directed Mr. Hanson to communicate with Mr. Hoar in compliance with your father’s kind request which I this day received.—Between them I will for the present leave the discussion.—Were I to follow my own inclination—my more than inclination—I should now be with you & yours at Seaham—but my presence here will forward arrangements which must be completed before we can meet free from all anxiety—& then I trust we shall meet never to part till that moment which will be bitterest to the survivor.——I have long accustomed myself to lean as little upon hope—or rather on certainty—as I can help—I do not foresee anything that can prevent the accomplishment of our intentions—but if such did occur—I know not how I should bear it now—but were I with you—near you—and then to relinquish you—I could not bear it at all.—When I say this—do not imagine—that under any circumstances I would now recede—but if malice—or any of the thousand somethings or nothings which so often “give us pause”76 should interpose between us—it would cost you less& so far be some relief to me—than if we were together only to separate———It is for both our comforts indispensably necessary that a “freedom from embarrassments” should precede our marriage—this I am endeavouring—& in this the arrangements I am proposing must ultimately succeed—that delay will arise—I know—but it is expedient & must be borne, & I would much rather owe the extrication to my own endeavours and resources than to those of others—however highly I may regard them.—With this view I told Ly. Mel[bourn]e that your situation—be it what it might—would make no difference to me further than that of parting with N. now instead of a few months hence—but that I thought it better not to join you till all Was settled on my worldly concerns.———Lady M[elbourn]e with that uniform friendship she has ever shown me—is very anxious that I should lose no time—I will lose none—but I would rather lose every thing—than precipitate you perhaps into repentance.—I do not wish you to “profess”[;] write to me as you feel—or if that seem more than I should request—write to me as you please—I shall find no fault.———So you were once called a “savage”—I never was called anything else—but I hope my ferocity resembles yours.—With my best remembrance to Sir R. & your mother (in whose recovery I rejoice) believe me

ever yrs.

B

Caroline Lamb to Byron, before October 9th 1814:
(Source: text from The Whole Disgraceful Truth, Selected Letters of Lady Caroline Lamb, ed. Paul Douglass, Palgrave 2006, pp.126-7)

Caroline has heard Byron is to be married, but does not know to whom. Her hysteria brings a touch of reality to the proceedings.

I will go out everywhere see every thing & try all I can to forget you to love you—to love is a double crime—

I do not believe I never will believe you can have had the heart to suffer me to be so treated—what I have gone through—it is neither my wish or intention to repeat—Women who walk in the streets alone in Pagan cloathes must encounter insult & barbarity but from you—henceforward you are safe—the means you took to frighten me from your door are not in vain. I have been very severely ill—however it is over & in future I will go out every where & try to command myself better. You shall be quite freed from me—you are to be married I am told I hear it on all sides & I heard it jestingly as I concluded from you—why should it give me pain if it will give you happiness selfish as I appear to you—from my heart I wish you all that those who love you best can wish all that I am sure you will find—the girl you love is beautiful & chaste & has everything likely to Make you happy. at least if it is Lady Adeline whom I know but little—who I never more must speak to—for your wife shall never be intended upon by me—I remember too well your bitter words—I am not worthy to appear before her &

76: Shakespeare, Hamlet, III i 68.
never shall. Lord Byron while yet I may address you while yet you are free to act for yourself, if you refuse to see me—tell me at least that you had no hand in the cruel treatment I experienced the other night let me not suppose so—for the thought is very bitter—I beg of you to send me back all the letters notes pictures & drawings you have left of me—it is quite different now. I consider you as belonging to one much better in every respect than I am—but let her not judge me—judge me not either yourself—if ever you have yielded to the violence of feelings you would not control if ever you should—then remember my suffering & do not dispise me—if in future by word or look or thought I seek you—if even I allow the World to think I still love—then dispise me—but not till then—send back what I ask for & the ring with the dates in particular & the Book I gave you & all the drawings this I do request I have a right to ask or insist but I trust to your honour & good nature that you will not refuse me—the servant who takes this can bring them—do not refuse me—I am not in a state of mind to bear it—cruelty—oh beyond all others—no Man ever yet suffered a Woman to bear so much—pray send back those rings & the drawings and Book all shameful witnesses of my misery & eternal disgrace—farewell for ever oh for ever—I will not see nor write nor think of you again—but I pray God to bless you & your Wife & to grant you both every possible happiness & delight only this if you have a child—once let me See him only once just to see him I never can see his father no never more

**Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, October 9th 1814:**

(Source: this text from BLJ IV 203-4)

Octr. 9th. 1814

I have had a letter from a person whose name you will guess without a large expense of conjecture—it is the first I have received from that quarter for some time—and is quiet and rational enough—the passage I have cut out refers to you—and confirms a statement which—I think—I made to you—for that reason I send it.——With regard to the writer—whom I have not seen nor heard from for months—I would fain hope that she may yet retrieve herself[,] I do not speak as far as regards me—that has of course been long over but on subsequent circumstances with which I have no concern except to regret—that since there never were so many opportunities of amendment & [remission?] presented to any being as to her—she should not avail herself of them—to me she has been the cause of much wretchedness not unattended with self reproach—and yet I did try to preserve her—I would have sacrificed myself at one time to have made her happier but that was not called for by her connections nor even herself—her whole disposition is a moral phenomenon (if she be not mad) it is not feminine—she has no real affection—or if any it is to the very man she has most injured W[illiam] [Lamb]—but every thing seems perverted in her—she is unlike everybody—but not even like herself for a week together. I have not discovered our paragraph-scribe—my mind misgave me it might be Mr. Claughton—on the supposition that he might conceive my marriage would interfere with any intention of repurchase of N. on his part—but Mr. Hanson on comparing the writing says it is unlike—and that he would not be so silly.—It matters not—we shall one day laugh at it—your “assurance”—dearest A—makes mine “double sure” but I wish our lawyers would be quicker—my Philosophy begins to be a little fractious.—I believe you dislike bustle as much as I do—you shall please yourself & yours as to the where & when the ceremony (which I suppose you would not like to be very ceremonious) is to take place—but as it is usual to separate for a time from all but ourselves I wish to fix on our retreat—Newstead will hardly be in the state I could wish it to be in to receive you—but I will make it my care to provide us a suitable abode.

ever yr. attached

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, October 13th 1814:

(Source: this text from BLJ IV 206-7)

Octr. 13th. 1814

Mr. Hanson has just left me—he will be in Durham early next week (Wednesday I hope) to meet Mr. Hoar—he is in full possession of my intentions & the proper papers—the legal arrangement I leave to his discretion subject to any observations your father may think proper to make—Mr. Hoar answered his letter & they agree that a personal interview will save time and trouble.—I must be at Newstead for a few days next week after which we shall meet—my Love—I do not know how to thank you for your letter received this morning—I never doubted you—I know you to be Truth herself—but I dreaded—I will not say—I dread—lest a happiness which I do not deserve should be

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77: Caroline Lamb: see previous item.
dashed from me—but I will not yield to these “thick coming fancies”\(^79\)—forgive me for even hinting at them.——My delays—dearest A—have arisen from various causes & some not very important—though equally provoking—when I addressed you from N[ewstea]ld. it was with so little hope—that I had actually prepared every thing to go abroad with my friend Hobhouse\(^80\)—and now I have to do & undo fifty things connected with my then resolution—I made that as a last effort in the thought that before my return you might perhaps give me some encouragement—or by your answer crush my presumption at once—but I had as little belief that you loved me—that you would be mine—as I now have that I can ever be another’s.——I will not do you nor myself such injustice as to suppose that any misconception could now arise on either part—of the state of our affections—our present feelings & our future intentions—it is for common minds to attribute little motives—I have none—nothing but wishes & fears the former I need not repeat—the latter I hardly know how to define—or to account for—except by a Superstition to which I am not generally subject.—But “something too much of this”—\(^81\)the latter end of next week I intend to be at Newstead & as soon after as some business there will permit—at Seaham.—My best regards to all around you—who will receive them—ever—my beloved Annabella

yrs.

B

P.S.—Your mother’s letter pleased me beyond its kind contents—in confirming your assurance of her recovery.

**Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, October 14th 1814:**

(Source: this text from BLJ IV 207-8)

I cannot find a printed text of the letter this answers.

Octr. 14th. 1814

I have not seen the paragraph you mention—but it cannot *speak* more humbly of me in the comparison than I *think*.—This is one of the lesser evils to which notoriety and a carelessness of fame—in the only good sense of the word—has rendered me liable—a carelessness which I do not now feel since I have obtained something worth caring for. The truth is that could I have foreseen that your life was to be linked to mine—had I even possessed a distinct hope however distant—I would have been a different and a better being—as it is—I have sometimes doubts—even if I should not disappoint the future nor act hereafter unworthily of you—whether the past ought not to make you still reject me—even that portion of it with which you are not unacquainted.—I did not believe such a woman existed—at least for me—and I sometimes fear I ought to wish that she had not—I must turn from the subject.—

Yesterday I answered your letter—will you repeat my thanks to Lady Milbanke for hers—& believe me

yrs. ever

B

On October 15th, Augusta Leigh writes the second of her letters to Annabella. She wishes they could speak instead of write, and understands Annabella’s fears about her ability to make Byron happy. It is very provoking that his proposed trip to Seaham should have met with so many impediments. He hopes, she says, to see Annabella very soon.

On another date in October, Augusta thanks Annabella and her parents for their invitation to come to Seaham. She remembers the first time she saw Annabella, and is conscious that a calm demeanour often conceals the strongest feelings. She thinks Annabella would understand Augusta’s attachment to Byron, surpassing that of sisters in general.

**Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, October 16th 1814:**

(Source: this text from BLJ IV 210)

In arranging papers I have found the first letter you ever wrote to me—read it again—you will allow that mine appeared a very unpromising case—but I can forgive—that is not the word—I mean I can forget even the reality of your sentiments then—if you do not deceive yourself now.—It was this epistle to which I always recurred—which haunted me through all our future correspondence—and now farewell to it—and yet your friendship was dearer to me than any love—but your own.

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\(^80\): B. never had any intention of going abroad with Hobhouse.

\(^81\): Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III ii 72; see also CHP III 8, 1.
—I very well recollect recommending Lady C[aroline] to your regard—or rather to your care—but that was before I was acquainted with her real disposition—and she—no matter what—but I thought you might do her some good—& was very sure no principle in your mind could be shaken even by the guilty—far less the giddy—as I then conceived her to be—it is all very well—only do not take my recommendations for the future.—You would I think be amused or perhaps surprized if you knew how much of my late life I have passed alone—I began this on Saturday—and break off very abruptly—the rest of the letter merely referred to Mr. H’s journey which I have touched upon in the other.—

Monday Morn

October 17th 1814: Byron writes to Hobhouse asking him to be best man (actually what he says is “I wish – whenever this same form is muttered over us – that you could make it convenient to be present”).

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, October 17th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 210-11)
I cannot find a printed text of the letter this answers.

In my last letter I mentioned Mr. Hanson’s intention of meeting Mr. Hoar on Wednesday next—he has since gone into the country & writes to me that some indispensable business will delay him some days longer—but that after those he will make all possible haste in joining Mr. Hoar at Durham and forwarding our arrangements.—It is impossible for me to express how much I am disappointed by these procrastinations—but words are useless—and I must not add loss of temper to that of time—I have written to him by this post—and as he appeared & appears as sensible as myself of the importance of his commission to me—I am sure he will not willingly defer his journey.——My own departure from London will take place about the same time—and I shall shorten my stay at Newstead—or pass it by altogether.——In your last you hinted that Lady Milbanke was still weakly—I had hoped that her strength was sufficiently reestablished since her visit to Elemore.—If there were no other inducements for me to wish to leave London—the utter solitude of my situation with only my Maccaw to converse with—would be sufficient—though he is not the least rational of my acquaintance—I read—but very desultorily—and as to writing except to you—and Augusta—and where I must on duty or business—it is out of the question.—However—solitude is nothing new—nor even disagreeable to me—at least it was not till now—but I much question whether I shall ever be able to bear it again—I hope not to be put to the test—Write to me—if only a few words—and regard me as unalterably yours

B

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, October 19th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 215-6)
I cannot find a printed text of the letter this answers.

Octr. 18th. 1814

I return you Mrs. S[jiddo]n’s very kind and—after all unaffected letter—her style to be sure is vastly poetical—and her epithets would be no worse for weeding than her periods for pruning—but then with her dramatic habits all this is but natural and you ought to be very thankful it was not in blank verse.——Our “incognito” enquirer—seems a little after the heroic mode also—who or what he is—or why he came there—I cannot conceive nor guess—all my intimates are sufficiently acquainted with your name and “most blest conditions”82 to render such queries useless—nor do I know one sufficiently interested about me to take the trouble on my account—and yet it could scarcely be a stranger—but be he who or what he may—it is odd enough—and of a piece with some of my past adventures which have occasionally been extravagant as those of a dull romance.—I once thought it might be Bruce—but he is not in England or at least that part of it—it was like one of his high-flown experiments. I remember when I came down from Constantinople—meeting him & Lady Hester Stanhope at Athens:—some time after when they were embarking by night at the Piraeus just as we parted he made me (for the first time of his life) a most “eternal “ profession of friendship—after which he went upon the waters—and I mounted my horse and galloped back through the olives upon a steed as black as the “Giaours” and much on such an evening—since that time we never met.———I am only waiting for Mr. Hanson’s return to forward him—and set out myself to meet you.—We should find New[stea]d sufficiently spacious—indeed too much so—but not quite comfortable in its present state for a permanent residence—besides—we should certainly grow fond of it—and it would then be disagreeable to part with it—Augusta dotes on it—that is natural—but there is no reason why you

82: Shakespeare, Othello, II i 246.
should be encumbered with our family prejudices.———I will take your word for the "world" and "it’s kindness" without desiring to prove it’s favours further—being only too much obliged to it for containing you.

Ever—my Love—

most affectly yrs

B

P.S.—Assure Mrs. Siddons of my respect—and the pleasure I shall feel in improving my acquaintance with her—and give my duty to our Papa & Lady M.—and all our relations.——If you are fond of the drama you must see Kean—he is the triumph of mind over matter for he has nothing but countenance & expression—his figure is very little & even mean—but I never saw the Passions so expressed—on the stage at least—except by Mrs. Sid[don].—

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, October 20th 1814:

(Source: this text from BLJ IV 219-20)

I cannot find a printed text of the letter this answers.

Octr. 20th. 1814

I have been so much amused with your “extracts” though I had no idea what evil spirit I then appeared in your eyes—you were quite right however as far as appearances—but that was not my natural character—I was just returned from a far country where everything was different—and felt bewildered & not very happy in my own which I had left without regret & returned to without interest—I found myself I did not very well know why—an object of curiosity which I never wished to excite—and about a poem which I had no conception was to make such a fuss—my mind & my feelings were moreover occupied with considerations which had nothing in common with the circle where I was whirling—so that no wonder I was repulsive & cold—I never could conquer my disposition to be both in a crowd from which I was always wishing myself away.——Those who know me most intimately can tell you that I am if anything too childish with a greater turn for the ridiculous than anything serious—and—I could hope—not very illnatured off the stage—and if angry never loud—I can’t say much for these qualifications—but I have such a regard for yours—that I am sure we shall be a very happy couple—I wish you had a greater passion for governing—for I don’t shine in conducting myself—and am very docile with a gentle guide.—One of Augusta’s friends writes to her & says she is so afraid—now I am to be married “that I shall become a good sort of man” an awful anticipation!—the P[rince] R[egent] has been at Brocket & talked on the subject to Ly. M[elbourne] by no means ill-naturedly—as is his usual way—& might be excuseable enough as far as I am concerned—among other things he said “between her prose & his poetry what may we not expect” as if—we were to do nothing else but make books—I am sure the employments the Morning Post found out for us would be much more useful & quite as entertaining—particularly the care of the poultry &c. &c.——I am only waiting for Mr. Hanson’s return to set him off—and follow myself.—if—Dearest——these men of parchment can settle us—or put us in the way of being settled within a reasonable time—you will not long defer taking a name to which you will do more honour than has been conferred upon it since it’s first inscription in “Domesday Boke” with the signature of my Progenitors Erneis & Ralph—so you see your papa—and the papa of all my papas were synonimous—ever my Love yr. own

B

P.S.—Oh—I must tell you one of my present avocations.—D[ouglas] Kinnaird (a friend of mine brother to Lord Kd) applied to me to write words for a musical composer83 who is going to publish the real old undisputed Hebrew melodies which are beautiful & to which David & the prophets actually sang the “songs of Zion” & I have done nine or ten—on the sacred model—partly from Job &c. &c. and partly my own imagination—but I hope a little better than Sternhold & Hopkins—it is odd enough that this should fall to my lot—who have been abused as “an infidel”—Augusta says “they will call me a Jew next."

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, October 22nd 1814:

(Source: this text from BLJ IV 221-2)

I cannot find a printed text of the letter this answers.

Octr. 22d. 1814

83: Isaac Nathan.
I fear that the letter which accompanied the enclosure of your first contained something or other that has not quite pleased—but I judge merely from the tone of your answer rather than the words—indeed dearest—if so it was most unintentional—and any vexation which I bring on you must recall tenfold on myself as is the case now.—You will not—I hope—wonder that I should seek to “forget” a delusion that had embittered my thoughts—and made me careless of my conduct—for so long a period—but I by no means wished to convey the slightest reflection on you—which would be equally selfish & ridiculous.——I did not like to destroy the letter because it was yours—and it was not too pleasant to retain it—because you are mine—and that letter says you never will be so.—Do you think—my love—that happiness depends upon similarities or differences in character?—I doubt it—I am rather inclined to lay more stress upon intellect—than is generally done—much upon temper—affection must do the rest.—When a sensible person is wrong—they must eventually perceive & own it without much struggle—but a fool is never to be convinced—and after all not worth convincing.——I shall only bewilder myself with metaphysical distinctions if I go on about mind and I am sure that of my own character I know nothing—or could I if my existence were at stake tell what my “ruling passion” is—it takes it’s colour I believe from the circumstances in which I am placed—there are a few which at one period or other of my life have not affected me—but I could not fix on one which like “Aaron’s serpent swallowed all the rest”———“Happy with you” nay—if you doubt—at least do yourself justice—and reverse it—it is your happiness which is & ought to be chiefly consulted—mine is in the hope of not diminishing it—if I can add to it my own will proportionally increase.——I am as I have already said—waiting—& with increased impatience for Mr. Hanson—at all events—I can not remain much longer here.—You ask me if Augusta is not “shy”—to excess—she is as I tell her—like a frightened hare—with new acquaintances—but I suppose has made a grand effort to overcome it in this instance.—She is now nursing—which will I fear prevent her accepting your father’s very kind invitation—I wish with all my heart—she could.—“My thoughts” —I have written to you daily—and am only fearful of tiring you with words.—You do my “Maccaw” much honour—but are quite right to avail yourself of the only opportunity you could ever have of exerting the amiable passion of which you menace him with being the object.—

Ever thine

B

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, October 25th 1814:

Ocr. 25th 1814

I cannot find a printed text of the letter this answers.

It is with great regret that I shall miss meeting Lord Wentworth at Seaham—but so it is—I could till now fix no precise day—and whatever appearance or consequences these delays may have or create—I must bear them.——Hanson whom I have been expecting & urging from day to day—now writes that he is ill—but will send his son—this will not do—it was his duty & is to be present and to meet Mr. Hoar in person—and he shall do so—or it shall be our last difference. Whether the man is mad—or only wishes to make me me—so—I know not—I have been acquainted with him since I was ten years old—which gives him a kind of claim upon what good-nature I possess—which he is pushing a little too far.——However—let that rest—I will set off on Saturday—and leave out Newstead & Newmarket on my way which I had at first intended to visit—if I can get away a day before—it shall not be lost—but I fear that I cannot remain at Seaham under the present circumstances above a few days—nothing would have made me deliberate so long—but the hope that when we did meet—the previous pause would render parting again unnecessary—but these things we can discuss in person.——If you can—convince your father—that he cannot be more vexed than—no wonder he is so—in short I can only say that I meant all this for the best—and my meaning turns out I think like one of those “good intentions” with which the Portuguese proverb tells us that a certain place (never to be mentioned by divines to “ears polite”) is paved——— I make all my apologies to your father rather than to you—for I am very sure you know me too well—not to understand my feelings on the subject without further explanation.—The very circumstances that might appear tardy on my part—are in fact a proof of my impatience for it was to render all further interruptions & delays unnecessary that I submitted to these.—But enough of this—if I am alive I will set out on Saturday.—

ever most yrs.

B

84: Biblical: Exodus 7:12, misquoted (“Aaron’s rod swallowed up their rods”).
85: He leaves out Newstead, but not Newmarket.
P.S.—The oldest friend— that is the earliest though not the kindest I ever had—is now lying between life and death a few streets from me—she was seized with a fever and delirium about a fortnight ago— I only heard of this within these few days—her husband (from whom she was separated) & her mother are now with her—her life has been a melancholy one though on her part blameless—I have not seen her for several years—and probably never may again—nor do I wish it—but I always wished her happy & to live while life could make her so.—You will think my letter—at least the postscript a collection of casualties and melancholy accidents—but—did you know Lady Roseberry? very young—very pretty—& very unwise it should seem—for the “on dit” is that she has gone off with Sir H. Mildmay (her sister was his late wife) I foresaw this in the summer—and all I can now say—is—that I hope it is not come to pass—and it is not unlikely to be false having been in the Newspapers.—If it turns out so—I ask her pardon—& yours at any rate for repeating such gossip.—

On October 26th, Augusta writes to Annabella saying how much Byron regrets the delay which will make it impossible to meet Lord Wentworth. She blames John Hanson’s illness.

On October 27th she writes again, saying that Hanson has assured Byron that he can depart shortly, and stressing how she feels for Annabella in these circumstances, and how sad she is at the impending loss of Newstead. Byron, she says, is the most fortunate of human beings.

Annabella subsequently thought these two letters calculated to remove her apprehensions at Byron’s delay at setting a date for their wedding.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, October 27th 1814:

(Often: this text from BLJ IV 226-7)

I cannot find a printed text of the letter this answers.

My Love—Mr. Hanson is on his way from Devon at last—but if he does not arrive before Saturday—I shall not wait for him—Augusta wishes me so much to pass that way that I shall make “mine inn” at her abode for a short time and thence to our Papa’s.—I console myself for not being in time to be presented to Ld. W[entworth] with the thought—not very agreeable after all—that perhaps he would not have liked me—and though I prefer the old school & courtly deportment of the past generation—I can’t flatter myself with the hope of recommending me to it’s good graces—by a display of my own— if I may so quibble upon that important word in Ld. Chesterfield’s dictionary.—You laugh at me—about your serious letter—which is very mischievous—it made me quite elegiac—not in words though—don’t you think it a little odd—that I have not once “woefully balladed your eyebrow”?—one can’t paint a storm upon deck though one may in port from recollection—neither could I—(almost a professed scribbler as I have been) ever rhyme or write upon any subject upon which my heart was set—till it was lost or won and some time had elapsed—and yet I have dealt less in fiction—than most bards—I will venture to say—than almost any of the day.—How sorry I am that Hobhouse is not in London—he would be so pleased with the prospect of seeing you—and yet I don’t know—he is—when & where he likes—so very pleasing—that I think it may be as well not to present him till I can introduce you by our name—“Did Michael Cassio when you wooed my Lady—know of your love?”—oh no—not at all—what a world of tragedy would have been saved could the Moor’s ancient have received that response.—As I do not know the distance—I cannot fix day & hour—but I shall probably arrive in an Evening—not late—at least too late—I bring no servant—except my valet—the others I shall leave—here or at Newstead.—A thousand thanks to you for calling me “Byron”—it sounds—it never sounded so sweetly to me before) as if we had been married already—I hope Mr. Hoar will keep his promise of speed—I have been scolding Hanson till my rage is quite exhausted—& he seems (upon paper) in great haste and contrition.—The person I mentioned in my last—is better—but still very ill & weakly—her loving Lord has left London & her in this state! and yet this very woman made his fortune—& brought him love & beauty besides. “These be your Christian husbands”

ever thine dearest—

P.S.—Don’t forget me to your father and Lady M[ilbanke]e—

86: Mary Chaworth-Musters.
87: Shakespeare, As You Like It, II vii 149.
88: Shakespeare, Othello, III iii 95-6.
89: Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice, IV i 290.
October 29th 1814: Byron leaves London for Seaham.

October 30th-31st 1814: he stops off to visit Augusta at Six Mile Bottom.

November 2nd-16th: Byron is at Seaham with Annabella.

Byron to Lady Melbourne, from Seaham, November 6th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 229-30)

Novr. 6th. 1814
My dear Lady Melbourne.—Annabella & I go on extremely well—we have been much together and if such details were not insipid to a third person it would not be difficult to prove that we appear much attached—& I hope permanently so.—She is as you know a perfectly good person—but I think not only her feelings and affections—but her passions stronger than we supposed—of these last I can’t as yet positively judge—my observations lead me to guess as much however—she herself cannot be aware of this—nor could I except from a habit of attending minutely in such cases to their slightest indications & of course I don’t let her participate in the discovery, in which after all I may be mistaken.—Our lawyers are in a fair train of concluding their parchment passports to matrimony—and I am happy to say—in the most amicable way without disputes—demurs—or more delays—when quite done—which may be in a fortnight—we are to marry quietly—and to set off by ourselves to Halnaby for the Moon—and afterwards probably to a house (Farleigh) which I have taken in Hampshire—a large & comfortably retired mansion which I know by having been there some years ago—& I think it will suit us very well.—Lady Milbanke will probably have informed you of the settlements &c. I am making all the proposed arrangements about N[ewstead] & R[ochdale] and her present fortune is to be £20-000—which is all that is certain—I would not as you may suppose embarrass the old ones by boring them to bind themselves down about futurity—they say that Lt. W[entworth] has declared her by will his heiress—indeed he himself went over to Durham & told Hoar so in positive terms—but he best knows whether he will adhere to such intention—though I firmly believe her—I could bear—indeed I could hardly regret any posthumous disappointments—unless I thought that she suffered from her connection with me.—I am not—however—romantic nor indifferent to these—which are good things in themselves—but simply do not wish to set our hopes too high since their completion will not be the less pleasant because they were temperate—while their moderation in case of the contrary would save us any violent vexation.—

—–I think we all improve—& suit very well—I endeavour to conform to their habits which is not difficult—& I hope that I am not a troublesome inmate—they are very kind—and A[nnabella] & I of course still kinder—I hope she will be happy—I am sure she can make & keep me so if she likes.—I wrote to you a day or two ago—& hope to sign myself soon—more entirely

Yours

B

P.S.—A[nnabella] showed me your remarks upon her requisites for a spouse—you can’t think how sensible & amusing they are—I mean the comments.—I wish you would write to her—she seems to feel very kindly towards you—and I should love her were it only for that.

Byron to Lady Melbourne, from Seaham, November 13th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 231)

Byron starts to panic.

Novr. 13th. 1814
My dear Lady Melbourne.—I delivered your letters—but have only mentioned ye receipt of your last to myself.———Do you know I have great doubts—if this will be a marriage now.—her disposition is the very reverse of our imaginings—she is overrun with fine feelings—scruples about herself & her disposition (I suppose in fact she means mine) and to crown all is taken ill once every 3 days with I know not what—but the day before and the day after she seems well—looks & eats well & is cheerful & confiding & in short like any other person in good health & spirits.—A few days ago she made one scene—not altogether out of C[aroline]’s style—it was too long & too trifling in fact for me to transcribe—but it did me no good—in the article of conversation however she has improved with a vengeance—but I don’t much admire these same agitations upon slight occasions.—I don’t know—but I think it by no means impossible you will see me in town soon—I can only interpret these things one
way & merely wait to be certain to make my obeisances and “exit singly.” I hear of nothing but “feeling” from morning till night—except from Sir Ralph with whom I go on to admiration—Ly. M[ilbanke] too is pretty well—but I am never sure of A[nnabella]—for a moment—the least word—and you know I rattle on through thick & thin (always however avoiding anything I think can offend her favourite notions) if only to prevent me from yawning—the least word—or alteration of tone—has some inference drawn from it—sometimes we are too much alike—and then again too unlike—this comes of system—& squaring her notions to the Devil knows what—for my part I have lately had recourse to the eloquence of action (which Demosthenes calls the first part of oratory) & find it succeeds very well & makes her very quiet which gives me some hopes of the efficacy of the “calming process” so renowned in ‘our philosophy.’—In fact and entre nous it is really amusing—she is like a child in that respect—and quite caressable into kindness and good humour—though I don’t think her temper bad at any time—but very self-tormenting—and anxious—and romantic:———In short—it is impossible to foresee how this will end now—anymore than 2 years ago—if there is a break—it shall be her doing not mine.

ever yrs. most truly

B

November 16th 1814: Byron leaves Seaham.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from Boroughbridge, November 16th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 232)

Boroughbridge—Novr. 16th. 1814

My Heart—We are thus far separated—but after all one mile is as bad as a thousand—which is a great consolation to one who must travel six hundred before he meets you again.—If it will give you any satisfaction—I am as comfortless as a pilgrim with peas in his shoes—and as cold as Charity—Chastity or any other Virtue.—On my way to Castle Eden I waylaid the Post—and found letters from Hanson—which I annex for the amusement of Lady Milbanke who having a passion for business will be glad to see any thing that looks like it.—I expect to reach Newstead tomorrow & Augusta the day after.—Present to our parents as much of my love as you like to part with—and dispose of the rest as you please.—ever thine

P.S.—I will begin my next with what I meant to be the postscript of this.—

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, November 16th 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)

Dearest B, If I do repent you shall not have the satisfaction of knowing it. If our present and I hope last separation should spare you the anxiety which my troubled visage has sometimes communicated, it is enough. When you return my troubles will be ended—or very nearly. The Elders are not in very good humour with me as accessory to your departure, which they regret for their own sake at least.

Are you quite sure that I love you? Why did you doubt it? It is your only trespass. As for my trespasses I must not think of them—I wish we were married, and then I could do my best, and not quarrel with myself for a thousand things that you would not mind. I expect you will write me a lecture—and it shall be studied con amore. I must write to our sister—plead for me with her—and plead for me too with my Lord and master—beseeching him still to “love and cherish” his undutiful wife.

AIM

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, November 17th 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)

Your scrawl is—no—nothing but yourself can really be welcome to me now. My own dearest, there is not a moment when I would not give my foolish head to see you. I knew it would be so, and think it a salutary chastisement for all my misdemeanours. I am in my most sober senses, I assure you. What says our Sister? It is odd that I can write all my goosishness to her, and cannot name you to any of those who have been used to receive my thoughts.

Dad & Mam are quite disconsolate without you. You made yourself agreeable here with so much success that amongst all who have seen you there is not a difference of opinion as to your perfection—I am in “dim eclipse.” Even Billy Hoar told his wife you were “fascinating.” Your interest in his boy must have formed a great part of the charm—lest you should be too vain I tell you so. … My mother is reading Hanson’s letter, and seems very well pleased therewith.
Wilt thou take me to thy heart? My home “till Death do us part”—and don’t turn me out of doors in revenge as you threatened.

Ever thine

AIM

November 18th 1814: Byron visits Cambridge.

November 19th-22nd 1814: Byron visits Augusta at Six Mile Bottom.

November 24th 1814: Byron returns to London.

from Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, November 19th 1814:

(Text edited from printed sources)

My own Byron—I must say goodnight before I go to rest. It is my comfort to think of that kind promise that you would make yourself as happy as possible. The spirit of Self-denial, which has always strangely possessed me, must have tyrannised over me when I agreed to your departure. All my present as well as past reflections convince me that to you I may entrust not only my happiness, but every other interest of most importance—and if I could not—my feeling is that I would rather share distress with you than escape it without you. My fear was that I should create it by disappointing you—anything but that would have been supportable.

I certainly was not myself during your stay. “Now being gone, I am a—what?—again.”

Before you pass sentence on me finally, wait to see myself. Myself is by no means the grave, didactic, deplorable person that I have appeared to you.

I am only sage under some visitation of anxiety. This I wanted you to understand, and to help me out of that atmosphere of sober sadness in which I was almost suffocated. Those who have seen me quite as a domestic animal have had more reason to complain of my nonsense than my sense. It has however always been a long time before I could recover my natural temperament with a new inmate.

What a history of myself! I wish I had as long a one of thyself—God bless thee—do not—

I have forgotten what I was going to say—Remember me as

Thy wife—

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from Six Mile Bottom, November 20th 1814:

(Source: this text from BLJ IV 232-3)

Novr. 20th. 1814

Dearest A———My arrival at the other A’s occurred yesterday at odds with the post-time so that I had not a moment to write to you.—Your two letters have been received with those to Augusta—who tells me that she has answered them.—As I am anxious to meet Hanson & hear further of our arrangements I shall not remain here beyond tomorrow; if Mr. Hoar has finished his part of the papers &c. I will take care that all the subsequent part is got over as soon as possible.—Do not tax yourself to write more frequently or at length than is perfectly agreeable—but address your next to Albany—where I hope to meet it.—How do you go on? is your health better?—and your spirits? I trust that your prescription for the reestablishment of the last has not failed in its effect——Augusta & hers are all in good plight—I am trying to arrange so that she should meet us somewhere —soon after—or before our next interview.————My popularity with “Hoar[”] is a very unexpected pleasure—but I suppose it is a return in kind for the impression you made upon Hanson—I can assure you that any kind feeling on the part of our papa and mamma is most sincerely reciprocal.—To yourself Dearest if I were to write forever I could only come to one conclusion which I may as well make now & that is that I ever am most entirely & unalterably

your attached

B

P.S.—I don’t ask you to consider this as a letter—but merely a memorandum that I am thinking of you now—& loving you ever—my wife.—A sends her hundred loves & regrets very much her absence from S.———

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from Cambridge, November 22nd 1814:

(Source: this text from BLJ IV 233-4)

Cambridge.—Novr. 22d. 1814
My Love—I am detained here on my way to town to vote for a friend who is a candidate for a vacant medical professorship—and shall not get away till tomorrow.—All your letters addressed to me at A’s have been received—they are very kind and delightful—but I can’t thank you for them properly with this horrible pen.—Thank your mother for hers also—and remember me to papa—I feel as if I had left home—and was gone to school again.—Opposite to me at this moment is a friend of mine—I believe—in the very act of writing to his spouse-elect—and complaining like me of his pen & paper to say nothing of absence & being obliged to scribble instead of speak. It gives me spirits to hear you have them—pray keep them now they are reappeared. “My last will have made you anxious to hear again—and indeed I am so myself”—this is a sentence which I have borrowed by permission from my neighbouring suitor’s epistle to his Ladye—I think it does very well in a dearth of periods of mine own.—Your mother talks of Hanson’s coming to S. again—will that be necessary?—I have stolen another pen—but it is worse than the last—and am writing at an Inn—with noise “around above and underneath” with the worst & most intractable of implements—ink like water—and sand like sawdust.—You shall hear from me tomorrow—and from town—where I shall not remain longer than you like—but I don’t wish to hurry you—or to plague you with my assiduities—if I can help it.—Don’t scold yourself any more—I told you before there was no occasion—you have not offended me.—I am as happy as Hope can make me—and as gay as Love will allow me to be till we meet and ever my Heart—thine

P.S.—Do write—and—never mind—I have several things to say of no great consequence—which I will postpone—in the mean time once more—Sweet Heart—Good morning.——

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from Cambridge, November 23rd 1814:

Nov. 23d. 1814

My Love—While I write this letter I have desired my very old & kind friend Mr. Hodgson to send you a note which I will enclose as it contains a piece of information that will come better from him than me—and yet not give you less pleasure.—I think of setting off for London tomorrow—where I will write again—I am quite confused & bewildered here with the voting & the fuss and the crowd—to say nothing of yesterday’s dinner & meeting all one’s old acquaintance the consequence of which is that infallible next-day’s headache ever attendant upon sincere Friendship.—Here are Hobhouse and our cousin George Lamb—who called on me—and we have all voted the same way—but they say nevertheless our Man won’t win—but have many votes howbeit.—Today I dine with Clarke the traveller—one of the best & goodnatured of souls—and uniformly kind to me.—When we meet I think & hope I shall make you laugh at the scene I went through or rather which went through me—for I was quite unprepared and am not at the best of times sufficiently master of “the family shyness” to acquit myself otherwise than awkwardly on such an occasion.—Well but—sweet—Heart—do write & love me—and regard me as thine

ever & most

B

P.S.—Love to parents.—

P.S.—I have not—and am not to see H’s note so I hope it is all very correct.—

Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, November 24th 1814:

THURSDAY NIGHT (November 24, 1814).

Your letters of somethings or nothings always make me as glad now as they used to make me sorry. Seaham is no longer home to me without you. Make it home when you will—and so soon for my wishes it cannot be. Do not regard my up and down spirits; if I am high and low, I am never hot and cold. You are more likely to be wearied with the constant temperature of my affection than disturbed by its inequalities. Perhaps it is not possible for any thinking person to be in my situation without some anxieties; mine were of such a nature as to prove—that I cannot find a good reason for apprehension. I am not preparing you for a second representation of my dismay—if possible, I will make you forget the

90: Dr. William Clarke (known as “Bones” Clarke).
91: Francis Hodgson.
92: Edward Daniel Clarke (known as “Stones” Clarke: the re was a music scholar, known as “Tones” Clarke).
first. I am so much happier since I have had reason to believe that my father and mother will be placed in more comfortable circumstances than had appeared probable. For their sake and mine you will be glad too,

No to-London post this morning. I do not expect a letter from you to-day—I can live upon yesterday’s for another day at least, so welcome & gladdening was its impression. Your silence is not however a source of disquietude—I think I know what you could say, if it be unsaid.

After post—and a smiling post—I thank the Cantabs, and most of all Mr. Hodgson, whose kindness I shall have pleasure in acknowledging myself. A letter from Newmarket has given me scarcely less pleasure than yours. I shall be too happy—there will be no reverse—whilst you love me there cannot. Remember—I have done with doubts. Since I saw you none have occurred on the subject of our happiness. I was indeed a little unhappy one day that I wrote from Durham. The cause, in which you not a share, I have partly told you. It is all over.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, November 25th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 235)

Novr. 28th 1814

Dearest A—I sympathize with you on the original sin of your Servante—it is a sad affair in a well regulated family—but I am glad it did not occur in ours—that is yours & mine that is to be—I would recommend the next to be as much in years and frightful as possible. There is a deal of confusion in Ld. Portsmouth’s & Hanson’s family—the brother of Ld P wants to lunatize him—or stultify him—and there is law & all kinds of squabble—which of course puts my taking Farleigh out of the question & I must look out for a residence elsewhere.——The settlements are arrived and in progress.———I have hardly yet recovered the bustle & bumpers of Cambridge—but am otherwise in tolerable plight—and quiet enough for London. ———On Saturday I saw Kean’s Macbeth a fine but unequal performance—Miss O’Neill I have not seen.———I think Southey’s Roderick as near perfection as poetry can be—which considering how I dislike that school I wonder at—however so it is—if he had never written anything else he might safely stake his fame upon the last of the Goths——Well—but you are returned to Seaham which I am glad to hear— all your epistles have been regularly received—and I hope that home and those hot luncheons of salubrious memory have quite reestablished you.—It is odd—while I am writing—in comes a clerical relation of mine—& reminds me that he was the first person who ever mentioned your name to me—several years ago.—He tells me—that our Grandfathers were all in the same house at Westminster school &c. &c.—so you see our coming together is quite in the course of events & vastly natural.—The man is talking on—and here is another visitor—so—Good morning—ma Mignonne—ever most entirely and affectionately thine

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, November 29th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 236)

I wish for you, want you, Byron mine, more every hour. All my confidence has returned—never to sink again, I believe. A confidence in the power of my affection to make me anything, everything that you and I wish. Do I understand you? you asked. Surely I do, for I would not understand you otherwise—I should fear to love you less were you different from what has made me love you—I won’t say “not wisely but too well.” I93

Our parents are very cheerful and well pleased with thoughts of your return. My father says “I must have my hair cut before he comes back.” … Come, come, come—to my heart.

P.S.—My uncle is in London … He makes himself sick with anxiety about us, so great is his affection for me. I am his dearest object in the world—now—and you cannot conceive how eagerly he enters into everything that affects us, “with all the warmth of youth.”

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, November 29th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 236)

93: Shakespeare, Othello, V ii 347.
Novr. 29th. 1814

Dearest—Yesterday thine Unc. Ld. W[entworth] called—but I was seized with a fit of the *shys* and not at home—but I am going today to return his visit—which is the greatest bore in the world—but however as I ought I must—and there’s an end.—I have forwarded your epistle to Mrs. Joanna—I was very glad to see not—Southcote.—I am very sorry for the dereliction of your handmaid—as I said before—but you could not act otherwise as the case appears—I hope your next solution will be more fortunate.—Your letters are very kind—my Love—as to the doubts—never mind, you see I have said nothing about them.—My naval cousin George has just bore down—and his tongue is running nine knots an hour—so that I must for the present merely add

ever thine

B

P.S.—Love to Mamma & Sir R. with whom like his friend [Kion?] Long—I hope “to smoke an amazing long pipe.”—

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Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, December 1st 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 238)

Novr.—Decr. 1st. 1814

Ld. Portsmouth and his brother have gone to Law about intellects—and it would be no proof of mine if I were to take Farleigh as a tenant until it is ascertained unto whom the brains and buildings actually belong.—Of course I must look round for another mansion.—Hanson hath gotten the papers—and is dealing upon them.—I have seen your uncle Ld. Wentworth—he called—and I returned his visitation.—It would be difficult under these circumstances for me to fix any precise time for my return—as I wish to hear or see more of or from Claughton—and his intents about Newstead—and we have not heard from him since the letters I enclosed to you for Lady Milbanke.——I am asked to dine at Whitehall today—but I fear I can’t go—for there is a house and debate among the Lords this evening of some importance—which it may be as well to hear.—W[illiam] L[amb] and his moiety are not in town but all the rest I believe.—Hobhouse is in London & will probably return with me when the time is fixed. So—thou hast engaged a Cook for us—I will trust your taste.—I will write tomorrow and if possible name the day or at least the week when we may meet—ever my Love

thine

B

P.S.—Love to our parents.——

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Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, December 2nd 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)

Annabella answers the last item but one.

Dec. 2.

I have pitied the martyrdom of your shyness as much as I admired the “glorious effort.” Lord W. wrote that day immediately after your visit, saying “it left the most favourable impression.” He only regretted that you did not speak louder—i.e. he is rather deaf ... His trepidations lest you should not like him amuse me—they are just like what your “Sweetheart” might have been supposed to feel at an earlier period. He desires me to persuade you that he is not “an old stick of a Courtier” &c. &c.

A good journey to you—not chilled, as your last was by the thought of being welcomed by a stranger. There is a wedding-cake in preparation which “makes Ossa like a wart.”

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Early in December Byron has to write a deposition about Hanson’s son-in-law the Earl of Portsmouth, at whose wedding he stood best man, and whose sanity is being investigated.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, December 3rd 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 239)

Decr. 3d. 1814

My Love—The papers will require about ten days—and I hope also either to see or hear from Clau[ghton] in that time—the moment they are ready—I will set out—oh—by the way—I must not forget ye licence and all that—I will have it special—if you please—because I think it will be quieter to be married in a room—and mamma will lend us a cushion each to kneel upon.—I fear I must trouble your father to lend us Halnaby for a month—as this explosion among the senses of the Portsmouth family—has set me off about another house—as I would rather dwell among the reported sane.—And

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so—thou lovest me very much—we will love a great deal more yet though I hope.—I am glad you miss me—because that is not my fault—and I bear my own penance patiently in the malicious hope that you may wish that I had remained at S.—I told you in my last that I had seen your Unc. Ld. W[entworth] I thought he looked very well.—I am cut off from Melbourne House for the present—because that family firebrand—Ly. C[aroline]—has this day returned to Whitehall—and now I shan’t see Ly. M[elbourne] again for some time which I regret.——

Write—continue to love and to consider me as thine most

P.S.—Make all the duties & remembrances for me to all yours.—

Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, December 4th 1814:

Dec. 4, 1814.

I begin to think that after the great cake is baked, and the epithalamium composed, with all other prologues to the performance, the part of Spouse, like that of Hamlet, will be omitted “by particular desire.” Really you don’t know how sorry I am that you should be detained. Of the causes of delay Hanson’s is the only one which I can conceive that we can not annihilate. I shall be making a visit to the Albany some day, if you stay there much longer. I do all I can to be as patient as you wish I should, during this last separation—reading a good deal, and observing such other discipline as may keep me in my right mind. After this experience of absence I shall not very willingly part with you again for a shorter time. At least I have learned that I cannot enjoy anything without you—these long blank days!

Goodnight—Love—and believe me in all truth

Thine

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, December 5th 1814:

Decr. 5th 1814

Dearest A.—I am glad that Unc. was gracious—I said nothing to you about my fuss lest he should not—but it is all very well—the Cake”! I must try to be ready before it is baked—Hanson is urged & will be ready in ten days.——By the blessing of Hymen—his Godship has given up the white ribbon knots & fooleries which he was heretofore wont to inflict upon his votaries—or rather on their lacqueys—I am told that Nobody has them now—so don’t let us be out of fashion—I am sure I wish we had been married these two years—but never mind—I have great hopes that we shall love each other all our lives as much as if we had never married at all.——I hear all our cousins are getting ready their presents C[aroline] amongst the rest—umph! “timeo Danaos et dona fere ntes” you know you are a blue—so I may quote Latin to you sans pedantry—and if you can’t translate—I will in my next—I think I see your indignation at this disparaging proposition.——To amuse thee I send an extract from the M[ornin]g Herald—you see they have not done with us yet “two such interesting persons” (as Mrs. Locke—do you know her? called us to somebody the other day)—well—but I won’t tell you all the conjectures &c. my journey has given rise to—Ly. M[elbourne] says it has set all the talkers in tattle—and all is contradiction and mystery—she did not half like my coming away—that was no fault of mine—but we will make up for the past.——

Ever thine—Mignonne

Byron answers Annabella’s of December 2nd.

Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, December 5th 1814:

December 5, 1814.

Your malice shall be gratified by knowing that I wish for you only as often as I think of you. “So you love me very much.” If you said so with faith, how can I thank you enough? Shall I tell you a secret? I don’t like to have my love but half-believed, since, being wholly yours, it is to me my first virtue—that of which I am proudest. What else can I do for you but love you ... You have not understood me in this, but do understand me, and though I may have exaggerated the principle of not professing, you must not therefore conclude that “nothing can come of nothing.”96 Oh, if you could know—well, I won’t despair, as I have done, that you will know, and shall wait in patience, not in pride. I believe you are the only man who ever really loved one that had not flattered him—on the

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95: “I fear Greeks bearing gifts”.
96: Shakespeare, King Lear, I.i 89.
contrary—one that has censured with the tongue when she approved with the heart. A very common practice of mine …

I was at Sunderland this morning, suffering the extraction of a tooth, the loss of which contributes much to my comfort …

It is vexatious that you should be banished from Whitehall again. I think Lady Melbourne might visit you, if you can’t visit her. You may tell her I shall not be jealous if she takes possession of your apartments.

Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, December 6th 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)

December 6 1814

You tell me to write. I like nothing so well as to give you my thoughts, but I should tire you with their sameness if I were always to utter those most present. Ever since our correspondence began, a long time, I have had to contend against an inclination to say or signify “I love you”—and to go in quest of foreign subjects. I have burnt more letters than I have written to you for that offence. And when you were here I so often appeared “the most silent woman in the world” because I could not think of anything else. At least I have taught you to interpret my silence—or if ready to talk I could more easily have pronounced a philippic, than have said indifferent things. It must be my comfort to think that I succeeded wonderfully well in my desired object—not to appear to more advantage before than after matrimony—but rather than you should continue to see me so very unloveable, I would have sent you to my father’s friend, Kien Long.97 Though I would not be presumptuously confident, I think I have now assured myself against a relapse. Will you prove your confidence in this assurance by returning before the papers are completed? They do not want an escort, and you have not mentioned any other business to detain you. Take away a few of these wearisome, restless days to me, if not to you, and let me see that you love me. Dearest Love, if you don’t come soon, the snow is beginning, and will keep you at a distance. I am very ingenious in finding reasons for the annihilation of “time and space.” Wish at least to return, if you do not.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, December 7th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 240)

Dec. 7th. 1814

Dearest—I yet hope to be ready before the overture has done being played—and at any rate will only wait for the papers.—Of this temporary separation I can only reecho your own words—with this addition—that though perhaps of my deserving it was not of my desiring.———Moore is in town—I was so glad to see him again—that I am afraid I was rather too “exquisite in my drinking” at dinner yesterday—for I find my head in a whirlwind and my fingers bitten by my abominable parrot this morning—the latter accident I did not discover when it happened—— I’faith I must have taken too much Canaries”98 but I won’t do so again—for I am never improved by it.———“The Cake” dearest—I am in such agitation about it— if it should be spoiled or mouldy—or—don’t let them put too many eggs & butter in it—or it will certainly circulate an indigestion amongst all our acquaintance. I believe I told thee that I rejoiced in Unc’s approbation—of which I rather desponded—but ‘tis all very well.—I have only time to scrawl myself in the midst of 50 interruptions—and despite of them all ever thine

Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, December 7th 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)

Dec. 7, 1814.

Dearest—“I will make up for the past.” Talk and tattle are very harmless and would not depend on your locality. The good people will be tired of conjectures in time—in a very short time, I should think, when we confute the greater part of them.

We have always meant that “the happy nuptials” should be as obscure and ignoble as possible, whether fashionable or not; so you need not fear any “outward and visible signs”—my father’s epithalamium excepted—to which I suppose you will not object, unless from some poetical jealousy. The Morning Herald makes very pretty verses for me, but I am rather off ended that my “poetic spark” should be represented as borrowed. What do you think I have been doing last? Playing a rubber of whist for the amusement of the old gamesters .. Farewell—I will not wish you any prosperity till you are on the road—not “to ruin.”

97: Kien (or “Kion”) Long unidentified.
98: Shakespeare, Henry IV II, II iv 27.
Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, December 8th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 240-1)

Decr. 8th. 1814

Bella—my love—Clau[ghton]'s answer has at last arrived—and will not do—his proposition is inadmissible as it not only involves reduction of price but delay in payment—I have ordered the flattest of all possible negatives in reply and there’s an end.—One is at least out of suspense with him—but it is vexatious enough in our circumstances.—I shall have it sold to some other purchaser—from whom at all events—whether we obtain more or less I can have the whole sum paid down—he wanted me to take £92000—instead of 114,000 remaining after his present forfeiture—(I will not)—and even that by slow degrees—the fact is I take it he has either not the money—or thinks me to be under such engagements as to give him an advantage—whether he is right or wrong—I have done with him.———

Now dearest—I will not add one word as from myself or my own wishes—but leave it to you and yours to determine how far this may—will—or ought to cause any further delay in our marriage—I have lost no time in apprising you of the circumstance—which I allow to be as disagreeable & inconvenient as could have been contrived or imagined.———"your love is not but half-believed" it is too comfortable a creed for me to embrace by halves—I am convinced of it—as of my own.—

ever thine

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, December 10th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 241)

Decr. 10th 1814

Dearest—I have only time to say that I intended to have written to thee this morning—and merely send this—but you should think it odd that I have not—the Post is impatient—and I have been interrupted all day.

ever thine

Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, December 10th 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)

Annabella answers Byron’s of December 8th.

Dec. 10.

Byron, my own, there shall not be any delay to our marriage on account of these circumstances if you are sure you can reconcile yourself to the privations necessarily attendant on so limited an income. I can be as happy with little as with much, provided that little be not exceeded, and debt incurred. Of debt I have so great a horror that I should cheerfully make any exertions to avoid it. You are not perhaps aware of the small establishment which our present means can support, yet I think it may be rendered perfectly comfortable (which to me is luxury) if we live for comfort, not for style—if we do not sacrifice to the absurd pride of keeping up our situation ... As far as I know your taste, I don’t think the present restrictions to our expenditure would interfere with your happiness. We can only keep one carriage, and one house—if it be within a day’s journey from London we may in a great degree unite the advantages of Town & Country, we may receive that quiet kind of society which I think we both prefer. I have never mixed with crowds but on principle. I love retirement—how much more shall I love it with the person who is dearest to me and the few associates whom he may select or approve! ... I shall never desire anything beyond what your fortune can supply. If your opinions differ, tell me—you know I will look to you as the guide—though you would rather let me tumble into a “pond horse,” than show me the right road. It is certainly the extreme of perverseness in a woman not to take her own way when offered.

My father and mother express and feel the greatest desire to see me yours. If Hanson should not fulfil within the promised ten days, I shall begin to think he means to keep you for another Miss Hanson. When Lord Portsmouth’s name so often escaped from his lips, Hoar longed to quote from Blue Beard

“Tis a very fine thing to be father-in-law
To a very magnificent three-tailed-Bashaw.”

My father called me in this morning (it is to be a profound secret, particularly to you) to “minister to his Muse diseased.” A stanza of the Epithalamium was deranged, and I was obliged to prescribe—a new rhyme.

How happy I shall be when you return—Pray—no—I need not ask you—

99: Shakespeare, Macbeth, V iii 40 (“mind diseased”).
Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, December 11th 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)

If you give your consent to our immediate marriage we have only to gain Hanson’s. All my discomposures have arisen from the uncertainty of our situation—it is trying to me, I own—I should be a different being if it were at an end. Of this I meant to say no more till I should have had your answer to my last letter. You have my thoughts as they rise, and if ever they appear other than your wish, I do believe the fault is in their expression... I never wished to escape from time, as time, before. When, when—well—patience.” You see what a philosopher I am!” If I lack wisdom, I lack not love, and am in all truth
Thine

Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, December 12th 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)

I have just received Hoar’s answer to my information. He says “I rejoice to think that I have prepared the Drafts of the Marriage Settlements on the cautious plan which I have adopted. I have done them without any reference to the projected sale to Mr. Cloughton, which I was well aware might end in talk, and I have therefore vested the Newstead Estates in the Trustees for the purpose of Sale generally, and so they must stand. In consequence of this plan there need not be the least delay in the marriage, as you have made up your mind to submit to the difference of yearly income until a Sale actually take place.” He adds afterwards that Mr. Hanson should be urged to have the Ingrations instantly perfected, and sent or brought into the country in their present form, without a day’s further delay—for which there can be no reasonable ground, or even pretext.

Everything rests with you—I can’t say any more than that which is known to you.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, December 12th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 241-2)

Decr. 12th. 1814
Dearest A—I must needs say—that your Bells are in a pestilent hurry—a little like their prototypes of Bow—“turn again Whittington —Lord Mayor of London” I am very glad however that I was out of hearing—deuce take them.-------------------The papers will I suppose be finished in this week or the next—undoubtedly my remaining in London will tend to hasten Hans[on]—I have not seen Lady Melbourne save at a distance—since the return of Medea & her dragons to Whitehall—but I found myself very unexpectedly opposite the whole party at Macbeth on Saturday night—however there was a “great gulph” the whole pit—between us—and a host of fiddlers—I believe she is going on very well—but know nothing about her.——— I feel a little anxious about your answer to my last letter—& must conclude this—I shall probably write tomorrow if only to repeat how affectionately I ever am Dearest

thine
B

P.S.—I perceive in the M[ornin]g Chronicle report—that Sir H. Mildmay in one of his amatory epistles compared himself to Childe Harold—conceive a dandy in despair moralizing or im-moralizing (like the melancholy Jaques) into such a simile.100

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, December 14th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 242-3)

Decr. 14th. 1814
Dearest—I waited an entire day and night in the hope or rather intention of sending thee a most heroic answer—but it won’t do—the truth is my Love—you have made me vain enough to believe that you would marry me if I had not a “denier”—101 and I am very sure I would you—if you never were to have one.———The sale of Newstea[d] would have liquidated all my debts and left us an immediate surplus sufficient for most of our present exigencies and even wishes—as it is “I am cabined—cribbed”102—at least for the present—I should not have cared for the limitation of income—so much as the debts—they

100: Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, II i 44.
102: Shakespeare, *Macbeth* III iii 24; see also CHP IV 127, 6; and DJ IV 75, 1.
have however been lessened during the last year—and might perhaps have been done away—were it not that there were others whom—it was in some instances my duty—and in other my inclination—to assist—but even this would not have signified—had my purchaser kept to his bargain—though poor devil—I can’t blame him—since his forfeiture is heavy enough.—In short—you know pretty nearly as well as I do—how we are situated—things must come round in the end—for even if N[ewstead] & R[ochdale] are one or both sold at a loss—they will at least leave us clear—and your settlement secured into the bargain—well—to marry or not’ that’s the question—or will you wait? perhaps the clouds may disperse in a month or two——do as you please.———I scrawl in the greatest hurry—and half in the dark—and I am not sorry to quit this matter of fact terrestrial topic—but love me & regard me as from my heart of hearts truly thine

Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, before December 16th 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)

Annabella knows that patience is the only remedy.

I think, dearest B, thou art happier since the letter of yesterday. Thine came to-day, saying “this week or the next.” I don’t wish to encrease your vexation of spirit, made manifest in the hideous D’s—but the continuation of these unnecessary delays creates vexation of spirit to my father and mother ... You and I do not mind appearances much, but we must allow them to have more weight with those who are not under the influence of our particular feelings.

After all, suppose tomorrow’s post should tell me that the ring is to wait—well—neither it nor I should change.

Wife or not—always thine.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, December 16th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 243-4)

Decr. 16th. 1814

Dearest A—The parchments are ready which I did not know till yesterday—but I must also compose an epistle to his Grace of Canterbury for the license—I prefer it—because we can be married at any hour in any place without fuss or publicity—when I obtain it—I will write & fix the day of my arrival—which however can hardly take place before the end of next week or the beginning of the one after it.———I find that Claughton still wishes to treat although we have rejected his late proposition—but I have declined answering till I hear from another quarter where Hans[on] has been authorized to offer the purchase or sale or whatever it is or ought to be called.——It would undoubtedly have been better in many points of view to have had this arranged before our marriage—provided no very great delay occurred in the discussion—but—be it as it is forwarded your letter to Lady Melbourne but have not seen her for some time—ever most affectionately yours

Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, December 16th 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)

December 16, 1814.

Let us marry then as soon as the writings are done, and we will disperse “the clouds.” I feel nothing but sunshine in the thought of being thine—thy wife. You have made me most happy. If you had sent the “heroic” reply which you meditated—I won’t tell you what mischief you might have done; so I do hope that without more ifs and Heroics you will end this questionable state forthwith. You still leave your own wishes in sublime mystery—to try my powers of Divination? We have gone on too long with the magnanimity-s that might keep us at a distance for ever; and if you won’t, I must take the responsibility of speaking plain—only—don’t let me marry you against your will. If assured that I shall not, I desire with all my heart to give myself to you. We can have Halknaby as long as we like; therefore do not precipitately determine our future residence—at least not till we have met. When will you come? Your absence is as unwelcome as possible to everybody. A part of your letter—if I do not misunderstand it, makes me regret that I have mentioned to Mrs. Leigh anything of your present difficulties. So far from wishing undone that share of them which either your “duty” or “inclination” may have created, I regret that your means of bestowing so well will not be greater.

Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, December 17th 1814:
(Text edited from printed sources)

Dec. 17, 1814
My only anxiety is to learn that you are coming. Then I am sure we should not find any of these obstacles. If difficulties should continue for a short time, they will be very pretty amusement after we are one. Till we are—the molehills are mountains. Are you aware that in the settlements a provision is made for the payment of debts and other present exigencies before the sale of Newstead? A power being given of raising £20,000 on the Estate by a temporary Mortgage for that purpose—which Mortgage may be made with effect immediately after the marriage. Here is a good reason for doing what we wish, and should probably do without any. Surely the writings will be done before you receive this. What can I say to hasten your journey? I am scolded every day for your absence, besides feeling it most myself. I wish I could retaliate upon you—instead of which, were you but with me, my own Byron, you would know how much I am

Your

ANNABELLA.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, December 18th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 244-5)

My Love—I have written to the Archbishop and hope to set off on Saturday next.—It is proper to add one thing—Ld. Portsmouth’s lunatic business comes on Thursday—if the affair is in the first instance quashed (as is probable) by the Chancellor—there’s an end—but if not—a further trial will come on next week in which my evidence will be required as I was present at his marriage—but let us hope that the first will decide on his Lordship’s intellects.———However—even in case of my being subpoenaed to be in Court next week I will come down if you wish it—but I shall find it difficult to quit you again so soon after our marriage—which on obtaining his Grace’s fiat may take place on any morning or evening in your drawing room—the papers are ready and I have desired Hans[on] to send them off to Hoar—and the signing & sealing may be settled as soon after my arrival as you please.———Dearest—all my anxieties have been principally on your account—but if you are satisfied it is enough—I shall have you and Hope—which are as much as mortal can require.———Claughton is very unwilling to relinquish all hopes of the purchase—but of this—more when we meet.———Ld. Melbourne called on me yesterday—but I have not seen Aunt M. for many days.———“My wishes”—they are too like your own to bear repetition—believe me now and ever your most attached

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, December 20th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 245)

Dearest Bella—There’s the Archbishop’s answer for you—and now we have only to get the license—and become one forthwith. I hope papa & Mamma will be kept in good humour by his Holiness’s gratulation and am vastly sorry that you were scolded for my absence of which you are perfectly innocent—as you must recollect with what zeal you opposed my departure. As I must set out to settle divers concerns—and see after this same passport to our union—excuse my Laconism and believe me much more diffusely and attachedly ever thine

Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, December 20th 1814 (i):
(Text edited from printed sources)

If you think there would have been some convenience in having Newstead sold before our marriage, I wish it had been so—but as it must be a long business, and the settlements are adapted to that contingency, it really appears to me that the previous sale is of little importance compared with other considerations. But I feel that these pros and cons have been already too much discussed between us ...

I have one request to make for myself. If you conceive or feel there is any cause which can render you dissatisfied, or less satisfied, with your intended return next week—that you will prefer it to all I have said in favour of that measure. Your letters leave something for conjecture. We shall have the more to talk of—and—if I don’t forget it all as usual in your presence, I have many things to ask and hear. But it is useless to think of them before, so I will try and go to sleep.

P.S.—Why should I not own to some conjectures which, if the mere workings of imagination, I am not too proud to submit to censure—if not, it is for my good they should be confirmed. I will then ask—Are you less confident than you were in the happiness of our marriage? You will never deceive me—to that promise I trust—entirely and exclusively.

Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, December 21st 1814 (i):
(Text edited from printed sources)
Annabella answers Byron’s of December 18th.

Dec. 21.

“Saturday.” The hope, though not quite expectation, rejoices me—but do not come to part again after we are married. Then I could bear still worse to be far from you. However, I will hope with you that no more delays of any sort will be found. Feel no “anxieties on my account”—I cannot imagine any circumstances in which for my own sake I would not be your wife.

I have heard from a person who has been with some relations of Claughton’s, that he is far from having the means of making the purchase good. It is a subject of which I always think with regrets that I must not indulge, lest I should join in tormenting you on your inflexible determination. As I shall not inherit any place where I should ever wish to reside, I could have adopted as an additional happiness every association that more particularly attracted you to one spot.

Dad says, “Fly swiftly ye moments till Comus return”—and my Mother stitches with much more alacrity since your mention of Saturday. Dearest—you and happiness will come together, and I cannot wish you a better compagnon de voyage—but I hope Mr. Hobhouse will be bodkin.

Annabella Milbanke to Byron, from Seaham, December 21st 1814 (ii):
(Text edited from printed sources)

Was I not a little in the heroics yesterday? I cannot play that part two days together. If we do not marry under circumstances that might afterwards cause you to wish it had been delayed, I care little what they are. I am in hopes that the expediency of a definite postponement, which would not be liable to the same objection as a protraction from week to week, will be best determined when you come. At least we all think so, in part because we all wish that time were arrived. I shall accede to whatever is thought best, and propose nothing myself ... Opposition of every sort has always been an exertion to me, and made from principle solely—whether right or wrong. Very unfeminine!

In the present instance I think I may indulge myself, and leave the decision to be made for me.

Mrs. Leigh seems very sorry that she cannot accompany you; but the obstacles are not to be removed by wishes, or mine would have some share in the effect.

Forgive my heroics in consideration that they are first cousins to yours—their best apology to myself.

P.S.—For fear you should forget me I present myself in rather a rough shape, but I had no instrument of operation but the wrong end of a quill.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, December 22nd 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 245-6)

Decr. 22d. 1814

Dearest A—I am to have the license tomorrow—and am just returned from my first visit to Doctor’s Commons (and my last too I presume) where I have been swearing my way to you.—The deeds are to be sent off to Hoar—and it will not be amiss if the said Hoar be ready at [Seaham] (or to arrive there) to get through the reading & signing and sealing—and then we can be married on any afternoon—or morning if you prefer it—our passport comprehends all time and any place.———It is my hope to set off on Saturday[,] I believe Hobhouse accompanies me.—I have your letter sans date—with doubts in itself—and questions in the postscript—thereby approving the ancient adage that the important part of a Lady’s epistle is generally comprized in that appendix.—“Any cause?” and “less confident?” a pretty pair of queries—“happiness” &c.—with regard to the last it would be presumptuous enough to feel too certain of uninterrupted felicity inasmuch as that depends not altogether on persons but things —and there are little incidents in the shape of disease—misfortune—and disappointment—which few grow old without encountering by way of episode.———I do not see any good purpose to which questions of this kind are to lead—nor can they be answered otherwise than by time and events.—You can still decide upon your own wishes and conduct before we meet—and apprize me of the result at our interview—only make sure of your own sentiments—mine are yours ever

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from 2, the Albany, London, December 23rd 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 246)

103: Not a quotation from Comus.
104: Bodkin means here “a person jammed uncomfortably between two others in a space designed only for two”.
105: Byron’s unwillingness to commit himself to any definite statement about Hobhouse.
Decr. 23d. 1814

Dearest A—If we meet let it be to marry—had I remained at S[eaham] it had probably been over by this time—with regard to our being under the same roof and not married—I think past experience has shown us the awkwardness of that situation—I can conceive nothing above purgatory more uncomfortable.—If a postponement is determined upon—it had better have been decided at a distance—I shall however set out tomorrow—but stop one day at Newmarket.—Hobhouse I believe accompanies me—which I rejoice at—for if we don’t marry I should not like a 2d. journey back quite alone—and remaining at S[eaham] might only revive a scene like the former and to that I confess myself unequal.—The profile—it is like—but I think more like the Sphinx—I am puzzling myself to imagine how you could have taken it unless opposite a mirror—or two mirrors—or—or—how?

ever dearest A—
yrs
B

December 24th 1814: Byron leaves London with Hobhouse, ostensibly for Seaham, but visits Augusta at Six Mile Bottom first (leaving Hobhouse in Cambridge).

On December 25th Augusta writes Annabella the last of her letters, including a reference to a long one written the previous day – which seems lost. She says that Byron arrived quite well the previous night, and speaks of a lady’s maid whom they think would suit Annabella well.

Byron to Annabella Milbanke, from Six Mile Bottom, December 25th 1814:
(Source: this text from BLJ IV 248)

Decr. 25th. 1814

Dearest A—I am thus far on my way and as warm as Love can make one with the thermometer below God knows what—tomorrow I proceed Northward and if the Snow don’t come down impossibly hope to reach S[eaham] in tolerable time—the license is in my portfolio—it is a very droll composition—but enables us to marry in the house—so pray let us[.] I am sure we shall catch cold kneeling any where else, to say nothing of being without a cushion.—Hobhouse is “bodkin” and takes up rather more room than “Happiness” who I believe won’t join us till the last stage. We have heard of a treasure of a Maid for you—who is I believe past the usual age of indiscretion though there is no saying where that ends.—Col. L[eigh] is opposite to me making so many complaints of illness and calls for medicine—that my attention is called off and the rest of my letter will be like a prescription if I don’t leave off.—A[ugusta] is looking very well—and just as usual—in every respect—so that better can’t be in my estimation.—She writes to you with this—ever dearest
thine
B

P.S.—My love to Ly. M[ilbank]e & papa—I hope they will acquit me “of these my crimes supposed” since I went at last like Lord Grizzle “in hurry post haste for a license—in hurry ding-dong I come back” with some apprehension of finding you like Huncamunca already “married to Tom Thumb.”—I wish you much merriment and minced pye—it is Xmas day.—

December 30th 1814: Byron and Hobhouse arrive at Seaham.

Seaham Hall in winter
January 2nd 1815: Byron and Annabella are married at Seaham Hall.

December 10th 1815: Augusta Ada is born at 13, Piccadilly Terrace.

January 15th 1816: Annabella leaves Byron and returns to her parents.

April 25th 1816: Byron leaves England for good.