

Transnational Networks at Holland House: Staël, Foscolo, and Byron

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Leigh Hunt's impressively documented two-volume account *The Old Court Suburb; or, Memorials of Kensington* (1855) devotes its central chapters (XIII–XVIII) to a detailed exploration of Holland House, which he describes as “the only important mansion, venerable for age and appearance, which is now to be found in the neighbourhood of London.”¹ In his memoirs, Hunt acknowledges not only the physical splendour but also the intellectual significance of the most famous Whig salon of the age; that is to say of the circle's political legacy before condemning its physical demolition, which he interprets as the end of a period of fecund literary enthusiasm and Romantic sociability. For Henry Richard Fox (Lord Holland) and his wife Elizabeth Vassall Fox (Lady Holland), Holland House played a major institutional role in the development of collective identities, a view which was grounded in their first-hand experience of the Grand Tour. During that time the Hollands not only started to reflect on those broader changes in politics, manners, customs, and opinions that were taking place in the Continent after the signing of the Treaty of Amiens in 1802 and before the outbreak of the Spanish risings (1807–14), but also became acquainted with the European concept of a salon as a multicultural space. This diverse social, educational, and political background and the knowledge assimilated during their various trips appeared as the “Prelude” for cross-cultural encounters on their return journey to Holland House.

Since the last decade of the eighteenth century, Holland House had been honoured with visits from illustrious British intellectuals such as Matthew ‘Monk’ Lewis, Lord Byron, Humphry Davy, Samuel Rogers, Walter Scott, William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Leigh Hunt, whose letters, journals, fiction, and poetry reveal, in one way or the other, the significance of different sets of scholars.² Yet, the connection

1 Leigh Hunt, *The Old Court Suburb; Or, Memorials of Kensington* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1855), 119.

2 On British Romantic writers' involvement with Holland House, see in particular, Walter Scott, *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott, from the Original Manuscript at Abbotsford*, 2 vols (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1891), II, 183; and *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years 1787–1805*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), II, 218, 253, 272; and *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years 1821–1853*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, rev. Alan G. Hill, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978–88), IV, 153, 183; VI, 452–3.

for which Holland House remains most significant lies – I argue – in its European context. Leigh Hunt himself rhetorically queried: “What foreigner, with any taste for English wit and localities, visits London without going to see it?” (Hunt 119). It is an essential stop for anyone interested in discussions around the cultural implications of social cohesion in the name of human rights discourses. Many of the European writers gathering around “the House of all Europe” – as the memoirist Charles Greville has suitably put it – thought and wrote about the artistry of exile (Germaine de Staël), the necessity of self and community improvement in a Europe that they perceived as dis-unified and still dividing (Ugo Foscolo), the global reach of British Romantic writing as part of a network of correspondences, links and connections between nations, countries and regions (Lord Byron).³ “It was this open-mindedness,” Linda Kelly suggests, “this readiness to embrace new people and ideas,” which would make Holland House such a powerful institution in the years to come.⁴

Princess Liechtenstein’s two-volume account *Holland House* (1874) includes in its list of illustrations a view of the House’s Portuguese Garden (later to be named the Dutch Garden).⁵ This image interestingly features a bronze bust of Napoleon commissioned by Lady Holland in 1815 from the most celebrated neoclassical artist in Europe, the Italian Antonio Canova and set up on a column of Scottish granite with a Greek inscription on its pedestal from Homer’s *Odyssey* [FIGURE 1] (see also Kelly 93–4). The illustration not only showcases the Hollands’ admiration for Napoleon as they saw in him an embodiment of liberty and opposition to monarchical power, but also, in its mindful celebration of six different nations (Portugal, Netherlands, France, Italy, Great Britain, and Greece), it appears executed in the spirit of Europeanness and offers a close visual equivalent for the poetics and politics of migration and transculturality, which featured well within the Holland House community.⁶

The first half of this essay reads the British salon culture of *Holland House* in relation to international Romantic sociability with a specific focus on Staël’s and Foscolo’s London experience in order to demonstrate not only that the Holland House set can be seen as an assemblage of literary and political friendships, but above all that transnational interaction can best be understood as a way of fusing aesthetic consciousness and cultural anxieties within the European Romantic community of Holland House. The second part of this essay focuses on Byron’s engagement with the Romantic sociability that was cultivated at Holland House (Staël and Foscolo in particular) and aims at recasting his two poems *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1807–8; published 1809) and *The Bride of Abydos: A Turkish Tale* (1813) as featuring

3 Charles Greville, *The Greville Memoirs: A Journal of the Reigns of King George IV and Queen Victoria*, ed. Henry Reeve, 8 vols (New York and Bombay: Longmans, 1899), 236.

4 Linda Kelly, *Holland House: A History of London’s Most Celebrated Salon* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 28.

5 Princess Marie Liechtenstein, *Holland House, With Numerous Illustrations*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1874), 112.

6 On the Hollands’ enthusiasm for Napoleon see also Susanne Schmid, *British Literary Salons of the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 88–92.

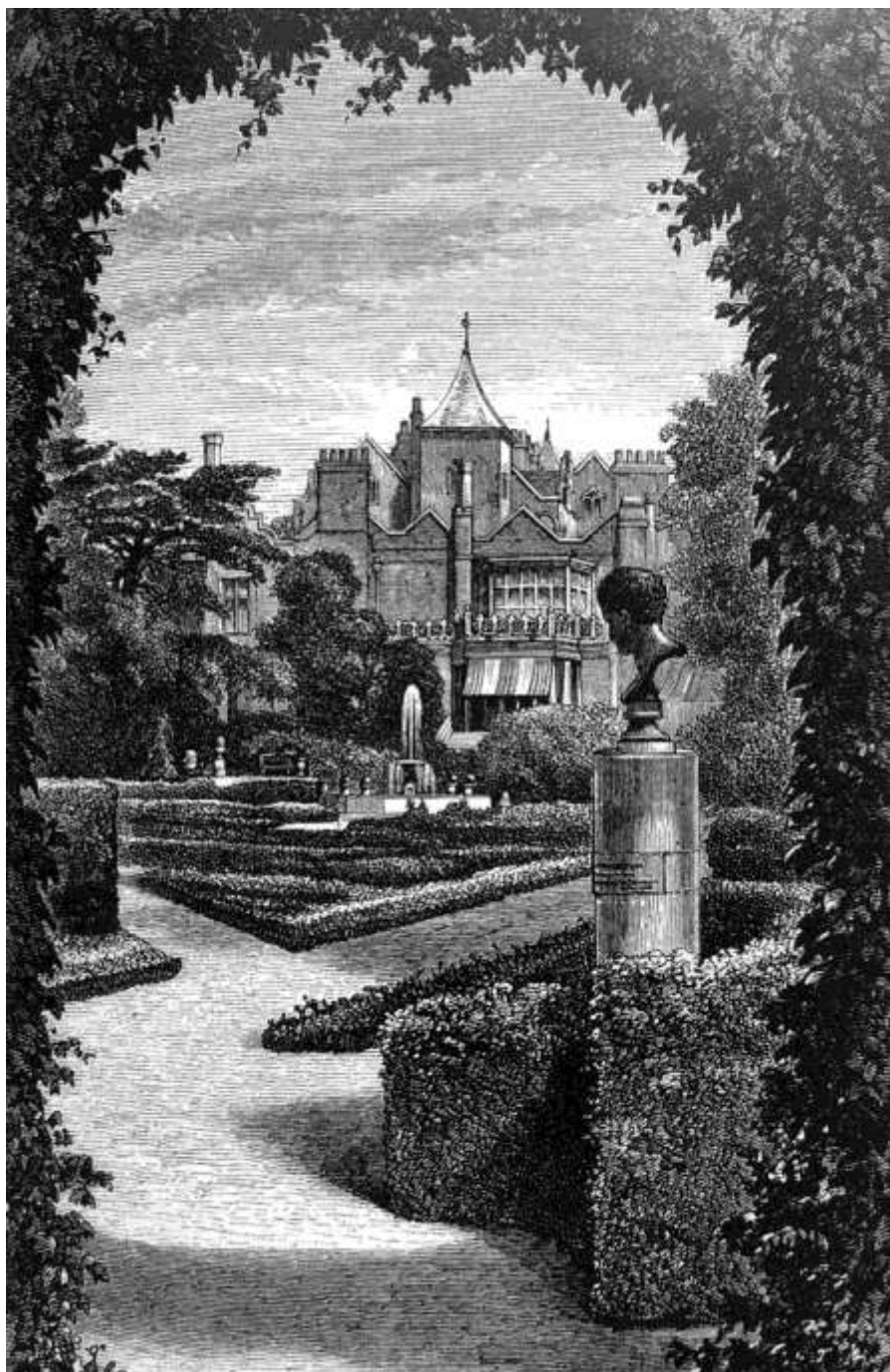


figure 1: *The Portuguese Garden (The Dutch Garden)*, from Princess Marie Liechtenstein, *Holland House*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1874).

a more cosmopolitan outlook than has been previously acknowledged, particularly because they both shed valuable light on Lord Holland and his entourage. The aim of this essay is thus, first, to redress the image of Holland House as a place primarily devoted to debates around British culture, arguing instead that the prolific discussions which took place there demonstrate a clear engagement with transnational social and political concerns as in discourses around the Ionian and the Spanish Questions, which are at the heart of both poems. It is the cosmopolitan dimension rotating around Holland House, and the influence of both Staël and Foscolo, that account for Byron's attentive concern with European social and political debates.

Writings about Holland House intimate the way in which the role of the artist in society, as Michael Wiley has astutely noticed, is made valuable thanks to "the transnational aesthetics of expatriate artists."⁷ Swiss by origin, French by adoption, German by taste, and Swedish by marriage, the impression that Staël made when she visited London for the first time in 1813 was by all means extraordinary.⁸ A victim of Napoleon's persecutions, she, rather enthusiastically, saw in the English the opponents to Bonaparte and the motives of this appreciation were reciprocal. She was greeted as "the literary lioness of the season"⁹ or, to say it in James Mackintosh's words, as "one of the few persons who surpass expectations," with "every sort of talent" and "universally popular."¹⁰ As part of her stay in London, she became witness to Holland House's interest in foreign policy and took part in discussions around France's failure to fulfil its early revolutionary promise. Her three-volume political masterpiece, *Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution* (1817), which was conceived and partly drafted while she was in London, sheds light on figures and events of the Revolution, Napoleon in particular (see Parts III, IV, V). This work aptly explores the fundamentals of equality, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness which she identifies with the social order and balance between classes of the political institutions of England.¹¹

Both in the *Holland House Papers*, which include the Dinner Books, as well as in other nineteenth-century works by Marie Liechtenstein and Lloyd Sanders, Staël surprisingly features only marginally.¹² Nonetheless, her interest in the London community is evinced by the number of people she used to entertain at

7 Michael Wiley, *Romantic Migrations. Local, National, and Transnational Dispositions* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), xi.

8 For a more detailed account of Madame de Staël's London sojourn, see Angelica Goodden, *Madame de Staël: The Dangerous Exile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 222–65.

9 Lloyd Charles Sanders, *The Holland House Circle* (London: Methuen, 1908), 331.

10 Thomas Moore, *Life of Lord Byron* (London: John Murray, 1844), 188.

11 Germaine de Staël, *Considerations of the Principal Events of the French Revolution*, ed. Aurelian Craiutu (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2008), 285–628.

12 See, e.g., *Holland House Papers*, British Library [MSS 51318-52254], in particular: Holland House Dinner Books, 1799–1845 [MS 51950-51957]; Liechtenstein 97, 252, 315, 325; Sanders 331–3. On this point, see also Henry Richard Holland, *Foreign Reminiscences*, ed. Henry Edward Holland (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1851), 36.

her residence in Leicester Square, an insular yet equally dynamic alternative to her salon at Coppet, despite Byron's persuasive contention that "Holland's is the first; – every thing *distingué* is welcome there, and certainly the *ton* of his society is the best. Then there is Madame de Staël's [Coppet] – there I never go, though I might, had I courted it" (Moore *Life* 211). Robert Southey's letter to William Taylor of 18 November 1813 from Keswick, in which he writes about Mackintosh's return from India, is also a narration of Southey's own encounter with the Scottish Whig politician and historian at both Holland House and at the London residence of Staël, a woman whom Southey defines as "the most remarkable, & the most interesting of all my new acquaintance."¹³ This also bears witness to Staël's cosmopolitan spirit, which she cultivated and reflected in the conversations and social events she attended both in England and the continent. Thanks to her London experience Staël brings about an intensification of democratic values and an improvement of human rights especially those of women in the nineteenth century. This endows Staël with a predisposition to a sense of community, one that is warm, open and almost cosmopolitan; but perhaps not sufficiently so. She identifies her cosmopolitanism with a clear resistance to her own exile. British localism and insularity started to dissatisfy her as evidenced by the overheated rhetoric of one of her letters to the Swedish-German classicist poet Carl Gustaf von Brinkman: "However beautiful England appears to me, my desires are always for the continent" (cited in Goodden 263). Moreover, equally discontented with England's extremes of absolute monarchy and lawless democracy, when peace was signed in Paris after Napoleon's abdication she returned to France.

Just a couple of years after Staël, the Greek-Italian Ugo Foscolo, in order to escape Austrian persecutions, arrived in London on self-imposed exile in September 1816 to become an affiliate of the Whig salon of Holland House. As I have shown elsewhere, educated European expatriates irritated at the reactionary regimes restored to power by the Congress of Vienna were seeking refuge in England, and Foscolo's welcome at Holland House reflected English sympathies for Italy's unstable political condition.¹⁴ Foscolo's response to the Holland House community also promotes politics of transnational sociability which fosters artistic and literary practices and networks. At first glance, Foscolo – who was among the "very many distinguished foreigners [...] received at Holland House" – appeared entrenched by the cosmopolitanism of a new reality. Lord Holland was very encomiastic towards him and praised his education, – "his learning and vivacity are wonderful, and he seems to have great elevation of mind" – his democratic ideals, his veneration of Napoleon and aversion for the

¹³ Robert Southey, *The Collected Letters of Robert Southey: A Romantic Circles Edition*, gen. ed. Lynda Pratt, Tim Fulford, and Ian Packer; technical ed. Laura Mandell (College Park, MD: University of Maryland, 2009–ongoing). *Part Four: 1810–1815*, ed. Ian Packer and Linda Pratt, https://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/southey_letters/Part_Four (Letter 2334). Date accessed 8 December 2017.

¹⁴ See Carmen Casaliggi, "From Coppet to Milan: Radical Circles at La Scala," *The Wordsworth Circle: A Journal of Romantic Studies* 48, no. 1 (Winter 2017): 59–66 (62).

Austrians, as well as his intervention in the army.¹⁵ While in London, Foscolo—in a rather conscious attempt to introduce nineteenth-century English readers to the history and culture of Italy—published many articles on Italian literature, including his “Articles on Dante” (1818) for the *Edinburgh Review*, *Essay on the Present Literature of Italy* for John Murray (1818), *Narrative and Romantic Poems of the Italians* (1819) for the *Quarterly Review*, as well as the “Italian Poets” series (1822) for the *New Monthly Magazine*. This was also his attempt to indicate to an English audience the prospect of a foreign world thus fostering the multicultural and transnational values of Romantic migrations.¹⁶ Gradually, however, Foscolo, like Staël, grew disenchanted with the Holland House community and, because of the ongoing ideological and personal differences between himself and the hostess Lady Holland, left England for Greece in the Summer of 1817. In his letter written from Brussels on 9 July 1817, Lord Holland admiringly, yet vainly, attempts to persuade Foscolo to remain in London with the following words: “all your acquaintance in England will lament the loss of your society” (Vincent *Ugo Foscolo* 45). On the whole, however, Foscolo’s views are characterised more by an incessant, almost promethean thirst for distant experiences rather than by the stability of more confined surroundings.

Despite Staël’s and Foscolo’s ultimate sense of discontent with the Holland House community, their avowed desire to foster higher levels of multiculturalism and transnational values while in London contributed to the belief that, as Wiley has put it, “emigration would fundamentally transform individuals and societies” (Wiley xi), thus implying the social, literary, and cultural benefits of transnational networks and interactions. For many Romantic radical writers, Holland House begins to co-exist with the concrete idea of a house as a home: its sense of safety, inclusion, and belonging most fully demonstrates the important social effect of being welcome; Holland House became a site to debate both global and personal reforms, and in which to establish new selves. Moreover, the literati gathering in the wealthy surroundings of Holland House exist not merely as distinct or solitary voices but rather as a self-consciously defined group with affinities to the liberal literary salons gathering at La Scala in Milan, which, in the Autumn of 1816 hosted the nationalists in exile Byron, John Hobhouse, and John Polidori, when Foscolo had just arrived in London (Casaliggi 59–65). In Milan, the radical culture and national politics rotating around Ludovico di Breme’s liberal *Società Romantica* had a wider European and cosmopolitan appeal because of its associations with Foscolo at Holland House and Staël at Coppet, thus proposing the usefulness of a mode of international Romantic sociability.¹⁷

¹⁵ See Eric Reginald Vincent, *Ugo Foscolo: An Italian in Regency England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 26, 33.

¹⁶ On this point, see also Jane Stabler, *The Artistry of Exile: Romantic and Victorian Writers in Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 17–20.

¹⁷ For an account of Lord and Lady Holland’s visit to Milan and to La Scala theatre in 1814 while in the company of Samuel Rogers, see Martin Blocksidge, *The Banker Poet: The Rise and Fall of Samuel Rogers* (Brighton, Chicago, and Toronto: Sussex Academic Press, 2013), 182–8.

As Holland House increasingly acquired importance while epitomising the association between European and British culture, it also increasingly featured in one form or the other in British Romantic texts as in the case of Lord Byron's work. *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* is a satirical poem in heroic couplets which wittily responds to Henry Brougham's contemptuous criticism of Byron's own *Hours of Idleness* (1806) in *The Edinburgh Review*. It is useful to place Byron's poetry born of the conflict with *The Edinburgh Review* in relationship to the British salon culture of Holland House and to read it alongside Byron's own political (un)successes – from his disastrous early career in the British House of Lords, to his involvement in the Peninsular War in Spain and the revolutionary context abroad, especially that of Italy and Greece. Scholars such as Malcolm Kelsall (1980) and, more recently, Carla Pomaré (2013), Michael O'Neill (2014), and Christine Kenyon Jones (2017), have shown us the extent to which Byron's early political career was fundamental for an understanding of his work.¹⁸ Kelsall, for example, has successfully demonstrated how Byron "turned his talent as a poet to the service of politics" (Kelsall 4), where poetry became for him a cultural site for expressing his disillusion for the contemporary political situation, especially at a time when life for the Whigs was really unpromising. Kenyon Jones, on the other hand, illustrates how Byron's poetry "grew out of his oratorical skills rather than vice versa" (Kenyon Jones 176), since poetry for him is always connected to the question of public engagement with the political milieu of his time. Therefore, although his famous line "the poetry of politics" (*BLJ* VIII. 47) refers to the Italian revolutionary climate, it nonetheless epitomises Byron's own poetical focus on the national and international politics of his time and the way in which, for him, poetry and politics were twin passions.¹⁹

Byron's early political career suggests therefore that poetry is both empirical data and a form of narrative, and Holland House, in this context, serves as a platform which facilitated intellectual discourse and collective moral agency. Yet much of the scholarship on Byron's involvement with Holland House in *English Bards* is concerned with his caustic comments to Lord Holland and his entourage. The despondent tone

¹⁸ Malcolm Kelsall, *Byron's Politics* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987); Jane Stabler, *Byron, Poetics, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Carla Pomaré, *Byron and the Discourses of History* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013); Michael O'Neill, "Byron and the Aesthetics of History and Culture," in *Rethinking British Romantic History, 1770–1845*, ed. Porscha Fermanis and John Regan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 205–22; Christine Kenyon Jones, "'I am not made for what you call a Politician': Byron's Silent Parliamentary Experiences," in *Byron: The Poetry of Politics and the Politics of Poetry*, ed. Roderick Beaton and Christine Kenyon Jones (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 173–86.

¹⁹ On this point, see in particular *Byron: The Poetry of Politics and the Politics of Poetry*, ed. Roderick Beaton and Christine Kenyon Jones (London and New York: Routledge, 2017). Quotations from Byron's letters and journals are taken from *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 13 vols. (London: John Murray, 1973–94) and are cited parenthetically as *BLJ* followed by volume and page number. Quotations from Byron's poetry are cited parenthetically in the main text by canto and/or line number and are taken from *The Complete Poetical Works*, 7 vols. ed. Jerome J. McGann (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980–93).

of the poem rarely offers anything worth admiration. Even when Byron addresses the "Illustrious HOLLAND!" (l. 540) it is just to suggest that:

Thy HOLLAND's banquets shall each toil repay;
While grateful Britain yields the praise she owes,
To HOLLAND's hirelings, and to Learning's foes. (ll. 519–21)

To underline the point, this series of sarcastic comments in the form of a whole for part metonymy where Britain (a whole) stands for the guests at Holland House (its part) reveal a pressure to reflect on those visitors who are there, like sycophants, not for the spirit of learning but for a cynical or mercenary use of culture, and while they are in effect its enemy: "Where Scotchmen feed, and Critics may carouse!" (l. 545). This appears glaringly antithetical to what was going to become the respectful tone of his future friendship with Lord Holland. When, early in 1812, he was clearly preoccupied with losing credibility around the political circle led by the Hollands, Byron withdrew the planned fifth edition of the poem and managed to delete the lines that could have further entangled his reputation. Significantly, while examining Byron's poetic form in relation to historical debates of the time, Jane Stabler has significantly reflected on the poet's choice of the heroic couplet in *English Bards*, which "had [...] been bound up from the start with poetical and political allegiances," and in particular, Stabler contends, with Byron's intent to "keeping in with Holland House."²⁰ Although Byron refrained from making explicit moral judgement throughout, he uses the heroic couplet as the poetic form most apt to express the inexpressible and to exchange criticisms freely and reasonably in the international environment in the orbit of Holland House and governed by the rules of politeness. I shall return to the significance of form and genre later in this essay.

As a counterpoint to traditional readings of the poem which tend to focus on Byron's negative views on the Holland House Circle, I suggest that the poet's attention to this London coterie in a poem entitled *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* relates to emerging nationalistic discourses that not only see England and Scotland (together with Ireland and Wales) playing distinct but overlapping roles in the creation of a modern Britain, but also, by implication, in relation to the age of nascent European nationhood.²¹ Peter W. Graham pays attention to the significance of "the pairing in the title" which unmistakably associates "the weaknesses of his [Byron's] fellow poets" with "the tyranny of the Edinburgh's critics."²² Graham, however, appears to overlook the links between Englishness, Scottishness, and the related disentangling of national feeling from state identity inherent in the title. Nor does he examine in

²⁰ Jane Stabler, *Byron, Poetics, and History*, 173–4.

²¹ Carmen Casaliggi and Porscha Fermanis, *Romanticism: A Literary and Cultural History* (New York and London: Routledge, 2016), 92–3.

²² Peter W. Graham, "Byron and the Business of Publishing," in *The Cambridge Companion to Byron*, ed. Drummond Bone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 27–43 (29).

any detail the reason why Byron intended to name the poem *British Bards*, a title with which Byron was probably invoking the ideal of national self-determination, since Britishness for him was always connected to the question of self-identification and lost freedom. Despite the suppression of “British” from the title and therefore the assumption that Ireland and Wales are to be spared from Byron’s critique, these two geographical places also prominently feature in the poem alongside many others making it clear that ideas of locality are thus fundamental to a better understanding of the poem. With its allusions to the landscapes of Wales, Scotland, and England invoked alongside those of Belgium, Portugal, Spain, Germany, Italy, Morocco, and France, *English Bards* takes us primarily on a journey to continental Europe (Lord Holland is in fact not mentioned until line five hundred). This is also Byron’s arduous and time-consuming journey towards self-discovery, which finally enables him to face his own undefined set of identities, as in his numerous allusions to Scotland. As Stephen Cheeke has insightfully reminded us, “Scotland is never quite Scotland in Byron’s early work but a place to be defined in relation to other places, or tinged with the hues of places known about through books.”²³ What is at stake here, therefore, is that *English Bards* represents a reorientation of history with Europe at its object (as much as conversations about Europe were at the heart of discussions at Holland House), towards a more global reconfiguration of the narrative of revolutionary failure and decline that a unified post-Napoleonic Europe, would provoke and away from the lost confidence in British nationalism.

In particular, Byron’s references to the diplomat and future negotiator of post-Napoleonic Europe Hibernian Strangford, also British Ambassador to Sweden, Turkey, and Russia, with whom Byron had contact in Athens, suggest a continuous preoccupation with Europe’s instability while also intentionally evoking Strangford’s Irishness as a means to explore the development of a distinctly national literary agenda in Byron’s work. By invoking Strangford to “[b]e warm, but pure, be amorous, but be chaste” (l. 297), Byron not only refers to the diplomat’s illicit appropriation of an original Portuguese song but in his exhortation to “Cease to Deceive” (l. 298) he has Europe in mind. European stability is under threat if people like Strangford exist. Byron, who in his experience of self-exile turns himself to Europe as a means to achieve that stability that he could not attain in his own country, is now disillusioned and, in the face of his active interest in a reformed stage, appears to revert back to English nationalism. He thus rejects “[t]he mummery of German schools” (l. 564), the “distortion of a Naldi’s face” and the humour of “Italy’s buffoons, / And [...] Catalani’s pantaloons” (ll. 595–7).²⁴ The various localities in the poem and the metaphors they each reveal are here partially deconstructed. Also, disillusioned by the repressive intellectual and social environment of both England and counter-revolutionary Europe, Byron, like fellow

²³ Stephen Cheeke, *Byron and Place: History, Translation, Nostalgia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 35.

²⁴ On this point, see also Alex Watson, “Byron’s Marginalia to *English Bards* and *Scotch Reviewers*,” *The Byron Journal* 37, no. 2 (2009): 131–9 (135).

attendee of Holland House Foscolo, whom he knew through Hobhouse and whose work he respected, turns his attention to “[t]he glorious Spirit of the Grecian Muse” (l. 870), and the unmatched rigour of Greek classical scholarship.²⁵

A significant aspect of Holland House’s discussions about Europe which particularly interested Byron and Foscolo related to the Ionian Question when the transition of the seven Ionian Islands in Western Greece from Venetian rule (until 1797), to French power (when Napoleon conquered Venice), and subsequent British control in 1815 initiated a number of social and political debates in Britain. Foscolo, because of his cultural background, was also particularly receptive towards ideas of transnationalism and foreign occupation. The fact that the islands remained under Western influence was reassuring for the efforts that were made in maintaining “the grace, harmony, and wisdom of the classical ideal” to which both Byron and Foscolo had always aspired.²⁶ It is no coincidence, then, that together with a focus on contemporary modes of reforms and ameliorations, Holland House’s attention to the Ionian Question entails the salon’s interest in the idealisation of Greece and its classical learning, as well as in the noble cause of the Greek uprisings. Furthermore, as the mother of all arts and civilisation, Greece attracted the attention of British and European travellers, especially those interested in antiquarianism, a practice that for Cheeke is not only “overtly linked with class-interest and customs, with the leisure activities of the aristocracy, and so with a grand-tourism” but can also be seen as “an insidious form of imperial conquest” (Cheeke 25) on the part of the British abroad, an issue that surfaces through the lines of *English Bards* in the form of conflicting notions of nationalism. It seems very likely then that, disillusioned with the home politics but still with Lord Holland in mind, Byron recurs to exotic and foreign landscapes as a way of condemning both Britain’s and Europe’s increasing imperialism and turns himself to the East as a projection of his own political anxieties and aspirations.²⁷

I will now turn my attention towards a poem that, significantly, is dedicated to Lord Holland, and which Philip W. Martin reads as an example of “the unstable chemistry of Occident and Orient”: Byron’s *The Bride of Abydos: A Turkish Tale*.²⁸ Written soon after Byron’s first visit to Southern Europe in 1809 when tensions with the Ottoman Empire were already in the air, it is a key text in understanding how the European Romantic circles at Holland House were especially preoccupied with the condition of Greece, the Islands, and the future destiny of the Levant. In this love story between Selim and Zuleika, the dedication “To the Right Honourable Lord Holland,” not only

²⁵ For a recent study on the relationship between Byron and Foscolo, see Rosa Mucignat, “History, Prophecy, Revolution: Italian Politics in Byron and Foscolo,” in *Byron: The Poetry of Politics and the Politics of Poetry*, ed. Roderick Beaton and Christine Kenyon Jones, 200–12.

²⁶ See Eric Reginald Vincent, *Byron, Hobhouse and Foscolo: New Documents in the History of a Collaboration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1949), 119.

²⁷ On this point, see Andrew Warren, *The Orient and the Young Romantics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

²⁸ Philip W. Martin, “Heroism and History: *Childe Harold* I and II and *The Tales*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Byron*, ed. Drummond Bone, 94.

addresses the poem's political focus on Whig policy, thus establishing a context for the poem which requires political interpretation,²⁹ but it also entails new worlds in which European social and economic concerns indicate the poet's interest in questions of location and how these relate to issues of class, gender, national identity and race. To start with, the epigraph to the poem, which Byron takes from Robert Burns's *Ae Fond Kiss* (1791), draws on Byron's attachment to Scottishness and the exotic "otherness" of Celtic cultures, a theme that – as we have seen above – he had already successfully explored in *English Bards*. In his diary entry for 5 December 1813, Byron recalls how *The Bride of Abydos* evokes "a country replete with the darkest and brightest, but always the most lively colours of my memory" (*BLJ* II. 361), a quotation which shows how thinking about local and national identity in *The Bride* was also increasingly framed in more global ways. At the very start of the poem, Byron calls up the image of the old and proud Giaffir whom he condemns for having usurped the throne from his brother, Selim's father (I. 20–31). Byron suggests that Holland, like Giaffir, in representing himself as a patron, is also projecting himself as a cultured ruler in his own right who quietly intuits the reasons why the institutional function of Holland House is people-centred and tied to more broad-scale initiatives that seek to address revolutionary transformations and political concerns.

Byron's engagement with Europeanness in his Turkish tale is interestingly addressed in the opening of the poem. Lines 1 and 2 in Canto I – "Know ye the land where the cypress and myrtle / Are emblems of deeds that are done in their clime" – echo the first line of the Songs of Mignon from Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1796) – "Know'st thou the land where the lemon tree blows – / Where deep in the bower the gold orange grows?," a line which Byron must have learnt from Staël's novel *Corinne, or Italy* (1807), whose literary intent was to compare the relationship between the climate, geography, political institutions and arts of Italy, England, and France.³⁰ As Joanna Wilkes has suggested, both Byron and Staël, although "born for opposition" (*Don Juan* XV. 176), openly acknowledge their debt to Goethe and their work suggests important affinities between the German *Sturm und Drang* and European Romanticism.³¹ A little later in the poem Byron explores the

²⁹ On this point, see Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 38–45.

³⁰ The Songs of Mignon were also set to music several times from the end of the eighteenth century onward. For a detailed account of the relationship between music and the literary text, see Terence Cave, *Mignon's Afterlives: Crossing Cultures from Goethe to the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship: A Novel*, trans. R. Dillon Boylan (London: George Bell & Sons, 1875), 180. Although Byron's knowledge of German literature was considerable, it was largely attained through the medium of French, English, and Italian translations. For Staël's tribute to the work of Goethe – "Know ye the land where orange-trees are blossoming?" – see Germaine de Staël, *Corinne; or, Italy*, trans. Isabel Hill (New York: Mason, Baker and Pratt, 1874), 33. On this point see also, *The Works of Lord Byron* ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge, 7 vols (London and New York: John Murray, 1904), III, 157.

³¹ On this point, see Joanne Wilkes, *Lord Byron and Madame de Staël: Born for Opposition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 7–8.

analogy between painting and music – “The mind – the Music breathing from her face!” (I. 179) by drawing on Staël’s *De L’Allemagne* (1813), a monumental work which attributes to German culture that depth and sincerity of feeling that are proposed as a model for a new European consciousness.³² Andrew Warren is right when he claims that “[t]aken as a whole Byron’s Orient is as interpenetrated with the indelible traces of European history as is his Occident” (Warren 108). But it is not only “European history” as Warren states, alluding to the fears associated with post-revolutionary turmoil, but it is also European literature that profoundly influences the poet. Despite Byron’s initial aversion to Staël, the fact that he borrows lines and imagery from her work is a testimony of the way in which his association with European liberal intellectual circles – Coppet in particular – exercised a somewhat exclusive influence on the development of his literary and critical thinking. These frequent interactions between British and European writers further endorse the idea that Holland House was indeed a “cosmopolitan meeting place where fashion, learning and the arts could mingle, new talents be encouraged, and ideas expanded in the give and take of conversation” (Kelly 27–8). In other words, and as Jon Mee has so eloquently reminded us, this is one of the “Conversable Worlds” of salons, clubs, coffee-houses and country-houses so many Romantics wrote about: worlds in which the rich relationship between continental European thought and British intellectual and political life in the period were actively reworked by European Romantic writers.³³

Holland House thus becomes a place purposefully created to make individuals better citizens in a global world. In 2017 Kevin Gilmartin claims not only that Romantic “sociability was shaped by place,” but also “that sociability in turn shaped place”.³⁴ In this sense, forms of international networks around Holland House were shaped by the way in which space is perceived and interpreted: just as Holland House shapes how people live and think – a sort of neo-Montesquieuism – so do their attitudes shape and reshape Holland House. As the political and cultural space of Holland House appeared stable and well decipherable, I suggest that it also shaped specific literary genres – or what I here call ‘sociable genres’: the mock-heroic poem (*English Bards*) and the oriental tale (*The Bride of Abydos*). The first, allows for a satire of the people and events depicted with more freedom to criticise; the latter,

³² *De L’Allemagne* was completed in 1810 but did not appear in France because the police, acting under Napoleon’s orders who considered it as too un-French, confiscated the volume’s proofs. It was finally published in London in 1813 and almost simultaneously in English translation. For Staël’s description of the analogy between painting and music in *De L’Allemagne*, see Germaine de Staël, *Germany* trans. from the French; three volumes in two, vol. 2 (New York: Eastburn, Kirk and Co., 1814), 106. On this point, see also *The Works of Lord Byron*, III, 164–5.

³³ Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). On this topic, see also *The Concept and Practice of Conversation in the Long Eighteenth Century 1688–1848*, ed. Katie Halsey and Jane Slinn (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008).

³⁴ Kevin Gilmartin, ed., *Sociable Places: Locating Culture in Romantic-Period Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 2. For a specific account of British Romantic writers’ engagement with the European context see, in particular, “Part IV Traveling Sociability,” 183–246.

which was traditionally meant to be read aloud, is fundamentally within everybody's reach. Therefore, one of the most pervasive and durable effects of conversations around Holland House is that they work through principles of associationism in the sense developed in both David Hartley's and David Hume's theories: place shapes sociability, sociability shapes place, place and sociability shape literary genres, and genres shape Holland House as much as the people and their conversations do.

There are other passages in Byron's *Bride* which advocate the atmosphere of sociability breathable at Holland House. The beginning of the poem – "But here young Selim silence brake, [...] And downcast look'd, and gently spake" (I. 47–9) – can be associated with Byron himself the first time he enters Holland House: sceptical and sarcastic in the beginning, yet, while time passes, more at ease with this group of intellectuals. Overall, *The Bride's* narrative is dominated by Selim's long Hamletic speech in the grotto in Canto II (St. XIII–XX), which focuses on rhetoric rather than action and that can therefore be aligned with the natural flow of conversation taking place at Holland House, and – I suggest – with Byron's own speeches in the House of Lords, where his excellent ideas for social and political change never reached fruition, presumably due to the fact that the atmosphere of the British Parliament appeared "more that of a club for aristocrats and country gentlemen than of an institution of government."³⁵ Therefore, the chiasmus – another form of speech this time, albeit a figurative one – of "Holland House" and "The House of Lords" is not simply crossing domesticity and public life simultaneously. There is some kind of synergy at work in merging the politics of the time with the literary so that the successfulness of Byron's speeches at Holland House contrasts with his political un-successes at the House of Lords. Moreover, the chiasmic association between Lord Holland and the House of Lords is another tribute to the English patron, and discussions revolving around the bourgeois "public sphere" of Holland House become indicative of communal concerns to a pan-European intellectual society whose diversity interacts in innovative and heteroglossic centres of sociability.³⁶ In this respect, Selim's speech links perfectly well with ideas of Europeanness breathable at Holland House. For example, while talking to Zuleika about his own father, Selim recalls how Abdallah's good deeds were recognised and "[r]emembered yet in Bosniac song" (II. 219) up until his cruel and most degrading death (II. 222–3). A little later in the poem Selim invokes "Widin's walls" (II. 228) and "Sophia's plain" (II. 233) to then geographically move towards

³⁵ E. A. Smith, *The House of Lords in British Politics and Society, 1815–1911* (London and New York: 1992), 10. Byron took his seat at the House of Lords in 1811 shortly after his return from the Levant. He delivered three speeches in 1812–3. The first one, on 27 February 1812, was on the Frame-Work Bill. The second, delivered on 21 April 1812, and the longest of all, was on the Catholic Question. The last one delivered on 1 June 1813, the shortest of all, was for an enlarged suffrage based on tax payers and annual parliaments. For further details on Byron's three speeches, see Thomas Moore, *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, with notices of his Life*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1830), I. 402–3.

³⁶ On the social shaping of the public-private sphere, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into the Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

"Roumelie" (II. 293) and "Danube's tide" (II. 295) and finish in the company of the Greek patriot Lambro Canziani (II. 380) (who was very dear to Byron) with the intent to "prate / of equal rights" (II. 385–6), and to ultimately conclude with a general desire for universal "freedom" (II. 381, 387).

In his assessment of Byron's Eastern tales, Warren has recently suggested that they portray a "vexed and porous border between East and West" with "a Western character encountering the East" (Warren 108) as in the case of Selim. Indeed, the poem explicitly locates its literary narrative across both Western and Eastern Europe and the Levant. Germany, Bulgaria, Turkey, Russia, and Israel are the object of attention but it is within both modern and ancient Greece that Byron predominantly places his literary journey. Despite Nigel Leask's eagerness to dismiss "the Christian elements" in the poem and his ensuing suggestion that the poem's setting is "entirely oriental" (Leask 38), I instead position *The Bride* as a poem prepared to assert Greek rather than Turkish standards of taste, as the explicit reference to Selim's mother's Greekness (and Christianity) in Canto I, line 90 suggests. Furthermore, the poem also illuminates the global reach of Byron's poetry as part of an innovative network of correspondences, links and connections between nations. In a poem where all the characters are portrayed as of strong and stable Muslim faith, Selim and his mother – because of their westernised religious and cultural backgrounds – are seen as outcasts. This is visible in the strong reiteration of the line "son of a slave" (I. 81, 109, 111), and in subsequent hints at considerations about the slave trade, an issue which was a main concern in British culture during the Romantic period as well as a theme of discussion at Holland House. By engaging with characters who are predominantly exiles and outsiders, Byron is here also reflecting on his own condition as a castaway and he appears, like Selim, displaced on the home front. By focusing on Selim's signs of rebellion – "[h]e saw rebellion there begun" (I. 118) – and by using the language of oppression and vengeance while describing Turkish cruelty over the Greeks – "[t]hat field with blood bedew'd in vain" (II. 23) – Byron redefines the contours of his poetry within a wider socio-historical schema.³⁷ Susan Oliver convincingly reads *The Bride* as a poem in which "conflict and rivalry within the Islamic world" are accentuated "in the form of Hellenophobic and Arabophobic attitudes".³⁸ This is highlighted by the death of Selim – "if aught his lips essayed to groan / The rushing billows choked the tone! (II. 581–2) – which Martin describes as a special moment in which Selim "reveals his true nature, and his enduring love and dies in a manner that testifies to both: glancing around at Zuleika in battle, he is fatally wounded" (Martin

³⁷ A greater reader of English literature, the French artist Eugène Delacroix found inspiration for his work in the poetry of Byron, who was highly celebrated by the French Romantics. Delacroix also professed sympathy for the Greeks in their wars with the Turks as in his painting *The Massacre at Chios* (1824). For a reading of Delacroix's *Massacre*, see Barthélémy Jobert, *Delacroix* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 70–8. For a reading of Delacroix's painting *The Bride of Abydos*, see Jobert 276.

³⁸ Susan Oliver, *Scott, Byron and the Poetics of Cultural Encounter* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 164.

95). Warren goes further in arguing that Selim's (and Zuleika's) death represents a "de-Orientalizing" moment that suppresses the division between East and West to then privileging "the return of the Orientalized description" (Warren 118, 119). Nonetheless, although Selim's death might be read as an oppression of Christianity, Greekness, and ultimately Europeanness, the fact that he is redeemed through his heroic defiance by saving Zuleika appears as a definitive message of his final salvation, and both Byron and Selim appear as martyrs in the cause of Greek freedom.

If the Ionian Question was attentively considered by the Holland House community, discourses around Spain and the Peninsular War interested the Holland House set even more, especially in consideration of Britain's support of Portugal and Spain against Napoleon, albeit with temporary ups and downs. Diego Saglia and Ian Haywood have recently pointed out that these different ideological and political reactions "did not interrupt cultural exchanges between Spain and Britain, nor did [they] hamper the process of penetration of Spain into British culture."³⁹ Indeed, as a devoted Hispanist, Lord Holland collected and preserved materials documenting the events of the Spanish risings, as well as chief literary and artistic treasures for his library related not only to Spain but also to the Americas (it was Southey in particular who had the pleasure to conduct research there in preparation for his *History of Brazil* [1810–19] and *History of the Peninsular War* [1823]). Saglia also draws attention to the fact that for the Hollands the Iberian nation not only represented a hope for more progressive tendencies, especially before 1814 when the fate of Europe was an open question, but it also became the site "to publiciz[e] the cultural and political agendas of their circle."⁴⁰ It can therefore be argued that, similarly to the First Canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812) which deals with the Spanish conflicts, *The Bride* was partly written with the Iberian politics of Lord Holland in mind. The work examined so far is taking me to a point discussed by Saree Makdisi in *Romantic Imperialism*, that I would like to pursue further: "when all is said and done, romanticism will turn out to be not only worldly but also global, and to have been so all along."⁴¹ With this in mind, I would like to suggest that thinking about Holland House in relation with major global concerns and with the transnational, comparative and worldly implications of the Spanish Question can radically change the ways in which we deal with its institutional identity. In particular, discourses around the slave trade and the abolition of slavery in the American colonies as identified above in *The Bride* were at the heart of Holland House's discussions, discussions that were albeit complicated by the fact that Lord Holland himself, despite being an important ally of the leading figures in the abolitionist movement including Thomas Clarkson, Zachary Macaulay

³⁹ Diego Saglia and Ian Haywood, "Introduction," in *Spain in British Romanticism, 1800–1840*, ed. Diego Saglia and Ian Haywood (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 1–18 (5).

⁴⁰ On this point, see also Diego Saglia, *Poetic Castles in Spain: British Romanticism and Figurations of Iberia* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 26–32 (26).

⁴¹ Saree Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), xii.

and William Wilberforce, was the owner of large plantations in Jamaica and therefore dependent on the exploitation of slave labour.

Deirdre Coleman, in particular, has demonstrated that anti-slavery activism was sometimes closely allied to colonial and imperial discourses of rights and liberties.⁴² This dovetailing of abolitionist and imperial thinking led to a number of contradictory positionings in Romantic era writing, some of which are encapsulated in Byron's *The Bride of Abydos*. The poem, with its global preoccupations, deftly weaves together echoes of *English Bards* precisely at the moment where Byron invokes the imperial dimension of Captain Cook's explorations (l. 350), or the worldly reach of Southey's epic poems *Thalaba*, *The Destroyer* (1801) and *Madoc* (1805) (ll. 220–30). As in Southey's *Thalaba* – who stays true to Allah and is guided by the prophet Mohammad in destroying the sorcerers – Byron's insistence on the dichotomy between the Christian and Arab world in *The Bride* calls attention to the relationship between the local and the global in understanding different variants of cultural and social change that can no longer be explained solely by a homogeneous pan-European narrative. Byron, by becoming an interpreter of a distant culture, reflects within his work the transnational community of Holland House characterised by plural diversity and cultural distinction.

Holland House offers a way of thinking about the direction of transnational networks as in the émigré experiences of Staël and Foscolo, or the way in which a spirit of changes and reforms is at work in the European dimension of Byron's poetry. Whether it was the prospect of engaging with the great "Spirit of the Age," or, on a grander scale, ideas about improving conditions in Greece, Spain, and the colonies, Holland House first needs to be understood in relation to the European context that gravitates around it. As the poems of *English Bards* and *The Bride* each sustain a Europe-oriented momentum, moving towards the global, that keeps Holland House in the near foreground, so Byron's writing of both poems always keeps Lord Holland in sight. In a letter from Cephalonia written to Lord Holland on 10 November 1823, just a few months before his death, Byron recommends the Greek deputies to Holland and his wife and is preoccupied with a possible political union between the two countries that he will never witness in person (*BLJ* XI. 59). It is not therefore surprising, then, that towards the end of his life discussions over the 1840 Eastern crisis which had arisen when Egypt declared independence from the Ottoman Empire and occupied Syria at a time when Palmerston became Foreign Secretary would also preoccupy Holland (Sanders 347). Egypt, Syria, and Lord Palmerston were among the last intelligible words which he spoke.⁴³ By giving voice to these major concerns, the Holland House community, gifted, productive, and influential, both captured and expressed what Thomas Babington Macaulay called "the favourite resort of wits

⁴² Deirdre Coleman, "Conspicuous Consumption: White Abolitionism and English Women's Protest Writing in the 1790s," *English Literary History* 61, no. 2 (1994): 341–62 (342).

⁴³ On this point, see also *The Holland House Diaries 1831–1840*, ed. Abraham D. Kriegel (London, Henley and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 419.

and beauties, of painters and poets, of scholars, philosophers, and statesmen."⁴⁴ These intellectuals become like texts and talk about themselves like texts: the religious, cultural, and social implications of their political discussions reflect the length, tone, and content of the literature in question. Holland House as a circle is real and available up until Lord Holland's death on 22 October 1840, that "wretched day" which "closes all the happiness, refinement and hospitality within the walls of Holland House"⁴⁵ and "eclipse[s] the gayety of nations" (Greville 236).

⁴⁴ Eric Reginald Vincent, *Ugo Foscolo: An Italian in Regency England*, 29.

⁴⁵ Leslie George Mitchell, *Holland House* (London: Duckworth, 1980), 306.