

13 Lipson Grove North
October 13. 1817.

Sir I send you the 4 first sheets
of my Poem, entitled "Lacoe &
Cynthia, or the Revolution of the
Golden City"

I believe this commencement affords
a sufficient specimen of the work.

I am conscious indeed that some of
the concluding Cantos where "the plot
thickens" & human passion are brought
into more critical situations of developments
are written with more energy & clearness,
& that to see a work of which unity
is one of the qualifications aimed at
by the Author, in a disjointed state, is

in a certain degree unparourable
to the general impression. If,
however, you submit it to Mr.
Moore's judgment, he will make due
allowance for their circumstances.

The whole poem, with the excep-
-tion of the first canto & part of the
last is a nice human story without
the smallest intermixture of super-
-natural interference. The first Canto
is indeed, in some measure a distinct
poem, tho' very necessary to the
wholeness of the work. I say this,
because, if it were all written in the
manner of the first Canto, I could not
expect that it should be interesting
to any great number of people -
I have attempted in the progress of

my work to speak to the common
& elementary emotions of the human
heart, so that, tho' it is the story
of violence & revolution, it is adorned
by milder pictures of friendship
& love & natural affections.

The scene is supposed to be laid
in Constantinople & modern Greece,
but without much attempt at
precise delineation of Mahometan
manners. It is in fact a tale
illustrative of such a revolution as
might be supposed to take place in
an European nation, acted upon by
the opinions of what has been called
(erroneously as I think) the modern
philosophy, & contending with ancient
notions & the supposed advantage
derived from them to those who

support them. It is a Revolution of
this kind, that is, the beau idéal
as it were of the French Revolution,
but produced by the influence of
individual genius, & out of general
knowledge. The authors of it are
supposed to be, my hero & heroine
whose names appear in the title.

My private friends have exalted
it on a very high, & therefore I do
not doubt a very erroneous judgment
of my work. However of this I
can determine neither way. I have
resolved to give it a fair chance, &
my wish therefore is first, to know
~~whether~~ you would purchase
my interest in the copy right,
an arrangement which if true

be any truth in the opinions of
my friends Lord Byron & Mr. Leigh
that of my poems cannot be
an advantage to you, & in the
second place how far you are willing
to be the publisher of it will on my
own account if such an arrangement
which I should infinitely prefer,
cannot be made. —

I rely however on your having
~~the goodness~~ at least to send
the sheets to Mr. Moon & ask
his opinion of them on that point.

Sir Your very obed^t Serv^t

Perceval P. Shelley

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY, A. L. S., 13 October 1817,
to [a publisher].

13 Lisson Grove North
October 13. 1817.

Sir

I send you the 4 first sheets of my Poem, entitled "Laon & Cythna, or the Revolution of the Golden City."

I believe this commencement affords a sufficient specimen of the work. I am conscious indeed that some of the concluding cantos when "the plot thickens" & human passions are brought into more critical situations of development are written with more energy & clearness, & that to see a work of which *unity* is one of the qualifications aimed at by the author, in a disjointed state, is [p. 2] in a certain degree unfavourable to the general impression. If, however, you submit it to Mr. Moore's judgement, he will make due allowance for these circumstances.

The whole poem, with the exception of the first canto & part of the last is a mere human story without the smallest intermixture of supernatural interference. The first Canto is indeed, in some measure a distinct poem, tho' very necessary to the wholeness of the work. I say this, because, if it were all written in the manner of the first Canto, I could not expect that it should be interesting to any great number of people—

I have attempted in the progress of [p. 3] my work to speak to the common & elementary emotions of the human heart, so that, tho it is the story of violence & revolution, it is relieved by milder pictures of friendship & love & natural affections.

The scene of [deleted] is supposed to be laid in Constantinople & modern Greece, but without much attempt at minute delineation of Mahometan manners. It is in fact a tale illustrative of such a Revolution as might be supposed to take place in an European nation, acted upon by the opinions of what has been called (erroneously as I think) the modern philosophy, & contending with antient notions & the sup-

posed advantage derived from them to those who [p. 4] support them. It is a Revolution of this kind, that is, the *beau ideal* as it were of the French Revolution, but produced by the influence of individual genius, & out of general knowledge. The authors of it are supposed to be, my hero & heroine whose names appear in the title.

My private friends have expressed to me a very high, & therefore I do not doubt a very erroneous judgement of my work. However of this I can determine neither way. I have resolved to give it a fair chance, & my wish therefore is first, to know whether you would purchase *my* interest in the copyright, an arrangement which if there [p. 5] be any truth in the opinions of my friends Lord Byron & Mr. Leigh Hunt of my powers cannot be disadvantageous to you, & in the second place how far you are willing to be the publisher of it on my own account, if such an arrangement, which I should infinitely prefer, cannot be made. .—

I rely however on your having the goodness at least to send the sheets to Mr. Moore & ask his opinion of their merits.

I have the honor to be

Sir

Your very obed^t Ser

Percy B Shelley

[flourish]

ALS, 5 pages. Double and single sheet, 18.2 x 11.5 cm.

Wove paper. No watermarks.

Provenance: Maggs, n.d. (lot 916 on p. 30 of sale catalogue)

Listed in De Ricci ("Belonged in 1872 and 1886 to R. E. Egerton-Warburton, of Arley Hall, Northwich, Cheshire"), p. 290 (no. 340), as perhaps written to Longman & Co.

Published in Edward Dowden, *The Life of P. B. Shelley* (2 vols.; London 1886), II, 161–162; Ingpen, II, 558–559; Ingpen and Peck, IX, 250–251; Jones, I, 563–564 (no. 417), with 10 accidental variations from the Lewis MS.

Notes: 1. De Ricci's surmise about the recipient has substance, for Longman had in 1817 published Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh*. But the letter may have been sent to Charles and James Ollier. For a review of *Laon and Cythna's* career see White, I, 547–552.

2. Here published by permission of Frederick L. Jones and the Clarendon Press, Oxford.

13 Lisson Grove North

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The whole poem, with the exception of the first canto & part of the last is a mere human story without the smallest intermixture of supernatural interference. The first canto is indeed in some measure a distinct poem, tho' very necessary to the wholeness of the work. I say this, because, if it were all written in the manner of the first canto, I could not expect that it should be interesting to any great number of people.

I have attempted in the progress of my work to speak to the common & elementary emotions of the human heart, so that tho' it is the story of violence & revolution, it is relieved by milder pictures of friendship & love & natural affections.

The scene is supposed to be laid in Constantinople & modern Greece, but without much attempt at minute delineation of Mahometan

manners. It is in fact a tale illustrative of such a Revolution as might be supposed to take place in an European nation, acted upon by the opinions of what has been called (erroneously, as I think), the modern philosophy, and contending with antient notions & the supposed advantage derived from them to those who support them. It is a Revolution of this kind, that is, the beau ideal, as it were of the French Revolution, but produced by the influence of individual genius, & out of general knowledge. The authors of it are supposed to be my hero & heroine whose names appear in the title.

My private friends have expressed to me a very high, & therefore I do not doubt, a very erroneous judgment of my work. However, of this I can determine neither way. I have resolved to give it a fair chance, & my wish therefore, is first, to know whether you would purchase any interest in the copyright, an arrangement which, if there be any truth in the opinions of my friends Lord Byron & Mr. Leigh Hunt of my powers cannot be disadvantageous to you & in the second place, how far are you willing to be the publisher of it on my own account, if such an arrangement, which I should infinitely prefer, cannot be made.

I rely however on your having the goodness at least to send this sheet to Mr. Moore & ask his opinion of their merits.

I have the honor to be

Sir Your very obed. Ser.

PERCY B. SHELLEY

A MAGNIFICENT LETTER OF FIVE PAGES TO HIS PUBLISHER DESCRIBING IN FULL HIS LONGEST WORK, "LAON AND CYTHNA."

[916] SHELLEY (PERCY BYSSHE, 1792-1822). Poet. A.L.S. to a Publisher. 5 pp., 8vo. 13, Lisson Grove North, 13 October, 1817. £375

One of the finest and most interesting letters written by Shelley in which he offers for publication his longest work "*Laon and Cythna*," of which he gives a long account. As Ollier accepted the publication of the book, this letter was evidently written to him.

"I send you the 4 first sheets of my Poem, entitled 'Laon & Cythna, or the Revolution of the Golden City.'

"I believe this commencement affords a sufficient specimen of the work. I am conscious indeed that some of the concluding cantos, when 'the plot thickens' & human passions are brought into more critical situations of development, are written with more energy & clearness; and that to see a work of which unity is one of the qualifications aimed at by the author, in a disjointed state, is in a certain degree, unfavourable to the general impression. If, however, you submit it to Mr. Moore's judgment, he will make due allowance for these circumstances.

"The whole poem, with the exception of the first canto & part of the last, is a mere human story without the smallest intermixture of supernatural interference. The first canto is indeed in some measure a distinct poem, tho' very necessary to the wholeness of the work. I say this, because, if it were all written in the manner of the first canto, I would not expect that it should be interesting to any great number of people.

"I have attempted in the progress of my work to speak to the common & elementary emotions of the human heart, so that tho' it is the story of violence & revolution, it is relieved by milder pictures of friendship & love & natural affections.

"The scene is supposed to be laid in Constantinople & modern Greece, but without much attempt at minute delineation of Mahometan manners. It is in fact, a tale illustrative of such a Revolution as might be supposed to take place in a European nation, acted upon by the opinions of what has been called (erroneously, as I think) the modern philosophy, and contending with ancient notions & the supposed advantage derived from them to those who support them. It is a Revolution of this kind, that is, the *beau ideal*, as it were, of the French Revolution, but produced by the influence of individual genius, & out of general knowledge. The authors of it are supposed to be my hero & heroine whose names appear in the title.

"My private friends have expressed to me a very high, and therefore I do not doubt, a very erroneous judgment of my work. However, of this I can determine neither way. I have resolved to give it a fair chance, & my wish, therefore is first, to know whether you would purchase any interest in the copyright, an arrangement which, if there be any truth in the opinions of my friends Lord Byron & Mr. Leigh Hunt of my powers, cannot be disadvantageous to you; in the second place, how far are you willing to be the publisher of it on my own account, if such an arrangement, which I should infinitely prefer, cannot be made." Etc.

Peacock gives an interesting account of the publication of Shelley's long poem.

"This work, when completed, was printed under the title of *Laon & Cythna*. In this poem he had carried the expression of his opinions, moral, political & theological, beyond the bounds of discretion. The terror which, in those days of persecution of the press, the perusal of the book inspired in Mr. Ollier, the publisher, inducing him to solicit the alteration of many passages which he had marked. Shelley was for some time inflexible; but Mr. Ollier's refusal to publish the poem as it was, backed by the advice of all his friends, induced him to submit to the required changes. Many leaves were cancelled, and it was finally published as *The Revolt of Islam*. Of *Laon & Cythna*, only three copies had gone forth.