IN MEMORIAM

TRUMAN GUY STEFFAN

Truman Guy Steffan was a Byron scholar of great distinction, whose monumental Variorum Edition of *Don Juan* (1957) brought The University of Texas a reputation as an excellent place to study the British Romantics. The reviews of the Variorum, and of his accompanying volume on the composition of *Don Juan*—by such scholars as Christopher Ricks, Leslie Marchand, and Carl Woodring—were highly complimentary. His later research promoted *Cain* to stature in the Byron canon; this book won an award from the Modern Language Association. He also edited Byron’s correspondence and issued the standard student edition of *Don Juan*. He was a founding member of The American Committee of the Byron Society. He was admired as a scholar from the time he entered college until his retirement from U.T. due to poor health in 1977. He died September 24, 1996.

He was born to Truman Josiah Steffan and Nellie (Teal) Steffan February 10, 1910, in Bellwood in Blair County, Pennsylvania. He was raised an Episcopalian in the Pennsylvania Dutch country and in his later years sometimes spoke of his delight in the folkways of his childhood. By 1931, at which time he graduated Phi Beta Kappa and Valedictorian of his class from Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, he had won five other awards for outstanding scholarship. He went on to the University of Wisconsin where he earned the M. A. degree in 1933 and the Ph. D. degree in 1937, submitting a dissertation on Jeremy Taylor. At Wisconsin he was the protégé of three great scholars, Madeleine Doran, Ruth Wallerstein, and Helen C. White. And he was spoken of in 1938 by Harry H. Clark, the English Department Chairman, as “the most promising member of our junior staff of some fifty teachers.” He also taught in the Division of Extension of the University of Wisconsin and at a community college in Madison. He came to The University of
Texas as an Instructor in 1938 and rose through the ranks to Professor in due course, with three years’ leave for civilian service to the Navy (1942-1944) as Instructor of Navigation in the Naval Flight Preparatory School and as Chairman of the Navigation Department there. From the beginning at The University of Texas, Professor Steffan played a responsible role, often as Chair of Curriculum and other departmental committees, and he was called upon to be Acting Chair of the Department during one summer session in 1965 and another in 1967. He received a University Research Institute Faculty Research Award in 1965 to work on Byron’s eight verse dramas. He was a member of the Editorial Board of Studies in Romanticism from 1962 until his retirement. Professor Steffan was known to his colleagues, friends, and neighbors in Austin as an honorable and warm-hearted man. He was appreciative of good students and of good scholarship. The serious students in his classes thought him rigorous (and he was) but were devoted to him, sometimes visiting him long years after graduation, and in one case addressing the Dean about the value of Professor Steffan’s class, taken a dozen years before, in this ex-student’s development as an intellectual.

His natural inclinations were to gentle wit in table talk and to music, which all his life was a joy to him; his collection of records, like his high fidelity equipment, was locally famous. After 1948, when he and his wife Esther moved to 31st Street up the hill east of Lamar Boulevard, other faculty members and their families (notably Gordon and Vody Mills, Powell and Mary Stewart, Homer and Jeannie Craig [of the Mathematics Department], and Leo and Mildred Hughes and their children who lived next door) would gather in his house to listen to those recordings. His favorite composer was Beethoven, but he had a large and diverse collection of other composers in performance. He collected opera especially, and he leavened the classical mix with ragtime. And he was a connoisseur, having been trained in serious music from an early age; his instrument in boyhood was the violin.
Professor Steffan was very much aware that his work was an opportunity to enhance the reputation of the University beyond the region. Largely his scholarly work did this, as it has lasted beyond his active life and is cited worldwide by Byron scholars. He owned a substantial collection of photocopies of Byron manuscripts which he had obtained during the work on the various Byron editions he published. Late in his life he donated those photocopies to the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center where with the Byron MSS. already in the HRHRC they form a nucleus of primary scholarship for Byronists in America. He was an activist in his early years; the front page of a *Daily Texan* from the mid-1950s shows Professor Steffan, Professor Leo Hughes, and Professor Block Smith looking over a list of “liberal-loyalist” delegates they have just been instrumental in selecting at a precinct caucus.

Professor Steffan’s wife, Esther (nee Sigman), self-effacing but a strong and self-educated woman, worked with him on the Variorum Edition of *Don Juan* and the Penguin edition that appeared years later. He was very proud of her contribution to the latter edition. She had made her living before marriage by typing dissertations in Madison. She was self-reliant; deciding that she could best help Guy finish his dissertation by suspending their courtship, she went off to Alaska on her own to work until he had the Jeremy Taylor project finished. Only then did she come back to Madison to complete the courtship; they were married in Dubuque, Iowa, in August of 1938, less than a month before Guy was to start teaching at The University of Texas. They were a very close couple. Esther devoted herself to the research on Byron as noted, but also devoted time and energy in later years to caring for her husband’s aged and infirm mother. They had no children. Their house was furnished with artifacts from summer travels in Mexico. They also summered repeatedly in the mountains of western Colorado, where they “collected” minerals, cool air, and scenery. In his last years, after Esther’s death, Professor Steffan was cared for by his housekeeper, Mary Eaton.
Truman Guy Steffan’s professional achievements appear in *Who’s Who in America* and other books of biographical reference. But such books do not convey the whole man, not even the whole professional man. In 1977, it was said of him that Leslie Marchand and Guy Steffan were the two established scholars who had done most to encourage and assist the work of younger scholars in the Romantic field. Quiet and unobtrusive, Professor Steffan made his mark not just in publications but in acts of professional kindness.*

[Signature]

Larry R. Faulkner, President
The University of Texas at Austin

[Signature]

John R. Durbin, Secretary
The General Faculty

This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of John W. Velz, Professor Emeritus of English (Chair), Gerald Langford, Professor Emeritus of English, and Max Westbrook, Professor Emeritus of English.

*The Committee would like to thank consultants Barbara Hughes Buttrey and Mary Eaton.
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