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## The Byronic Heroine

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Arguably one of the most famous character types in the history of Western literature, the Byronic hero is, concisely, the dark, brooding, sensitive and passionate lover with the nobly rebellious streak. Identified most lastingly in the poetry of George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824), often as Byron's projected image of himself, such heroes—sometimes the anti-hero, sometimes the antagonist altogether—invariably go on to self-destruct, leaving women and societal expectations devastated in their wake. Typically, we think of the woman who makes the mistake of loving the Byronic hero as being doomed from the start. She will know sorrow and shame; and when her part in the hero's story, as either the unattainable ideal or the cast-off and subsequently fallen woman, is done, she will conveniently disappear.

Or so the critical consensus goes. But a closer reading of the texts in which the Byronic hero and his female counterpart appear reveals a more complicated picture. Are Byron's female characters and those in the tradition of the Byronic hero inevitably only there to serve as a defining structure for men, specifically for that hero? Or might there be present in these texts a Byronic *heroine* as well as a hero?

A Byronic heroine: in short, the complement to and equal of the Byronic hero, and perhaps even the improvement of his nature, embodied in a woman. Often presented as a sister or sister figure, she may serve as the mirror image—or the closest thing to it—of the hero. Most importantly, perhaps, is the fact that the Byronic heroine cannot be assimilated into the traditional image of the fallen woman: she is not ruined by the Byronic hero, nor can she ever be fully attained by him. She has his capacity for rebellion, his same will to power; through the course of their relationship they bring out and nurture this power, positive or destructive (sometimes both), in each other. In a traditional reading, which privileges the hero over his



female counterpart, we might say that without the heroine, the Byronic hero fails to realize his greatest potential as a character and does not come into his full power. But this traditional reading—in short, this focus on the Byronic hero rather than the hero and heroine together—provides an incomplete understanding of the literature and of the character types.

Traditionally, of course, it is the Byronic hero to whom we pay attention, not the heroine, and for obvious reasons. Byron's stamp on this particular male protagonist has proved so indelible that subsequent generations have applied the title of "Byronic hero" even to characters in works that predate Lord Byron. This hero has been the subject of countless studies, and has become confused (albeit with good reason) with the biographical details of Byron's life. Among those scholarly works about the hero that attempt to categorize and describe him as a character type, Peter Thorslev's 1962 book, *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes*, stands as the seminal work. Thorslev examines the eighteenth-century "hero types" and then Romantic heroes as well, describing how each character type fed into the creation of the unique Byronic hero: part villain, part nobleman, part lover, part outlaw. He examines in detail the early Byronic heroes, most notably Goethe's Faust and Milton's Satan, and then moves on to several different Byronic heroes in Byron's work, including Manfred, Childe Harold, Cain, and the heroes of the Oriental tales. But Thorslev has no place for, or even interest in, Byronic heroines. In fact, his one acknowledgement of Byron's female characters is to say that "the [*femme fatales*] in Byron, so far as I can see, are sometimes spaniel-like, but never fatal" (10).

This is, perhaps, Thorslev's own "fatal" mistake. It has become clear in recent scholarship that the heroines of Byron's tales are both more important and more complicated than Thorslev allows, but there has been no examination yet of the Byronic heroine as a recognizable character type. Caroline Franklin's 1992 book *Byron's Heroines*, an in-depth

examination of female character, action, and presence in Byron's texts, comes perhaps the closest of any study to addressing this point. She innovatively observes Byron's female characters in the context of his patriarchal tendencies, and informs us that from the beginning, Byron was the "liberal and libertarian poet. . . yoked to [patriarchal] representations of women" (2). If for different reasons, however, Franklin follows Thorslev in underestimating Byron's female protagonists. She assumes from the beginning that there is no possible vision whatsoever of a single identifiable type of heroine in Byron's texts, no coherent counterpart to the recognizable Byronic hero. "Byron was constantly experimenting with the representation of women," she contends, and thus "[h]is female characters cannot be reduced to one single prototype" (1).

But as I will suggest, there is no reason why we should so readily accept the character type of the Byronic hero and deny even the possibility of the existence of an equally recognizable, equally intriguing, equally powerful Byronic heroine. In this study, I seek to demonstrate that Byronic heroines are not merely ciphers or standards by which the Byronic hero may measure himself; instead, these characters are individuals with a unique power of their own, namely the ability *not* to be subsumed by their male counterparts. It is true that with this power they become a catalyst for the hero and his journey and development, but the hero is a catalyst for *her* journey as well. To be the Byronic heroine, the imperative counterpart and equal of the Byronic hero, the woman must be more than just the Byronic heroine, as it were. He must orbit her as she orbits him. It is in this paradoxical power that she is elevated to heroic status herself.

It is in the interest of expanding on current scholarship that I have conducted this study of the Byronic heroine. Naturally I cannot cover every example of these character types, nor can I

consider them as minutely as they deserve; but perhaps my efforts might serve as the basis for future investigations.

A glance at Byron's life, particularly his relationship with his half-sister, the Honorable Augusta Leigh, is the starting point for this study. While it is popular to discredit biographical studies of Lord Byron's works, I feel it is necessary to examine this angle, particularly since Byron's life and works have so often been confused, as I mentioned previously. As Andrew Elfenbein notes time and again in his 1995 study of Byron's lasting influence, *Byron and the Victorians*, a large part of the appeal of Byron's works was the question of autobiography: how much was true, and how much was fiction? Even if his work is not strictly autobiographical, it seems clear that Byron's poetry frequently provided him a venue for projecting his persona. Elfenbein observes, "The Byronic hero's fascination lay less in his intrinsic qualities than in the fact that he was supposed to represent Byron, the man" (10). While I doubt that the "intrinsic qualities" prove less interesting, it is certainly true that the purported self-representation of Byron himself drew readers to the character of the Byronic hero, and still does today.

Since biography is essential to understanding the character of the Byronic hero and the allure of such a representation, it follows that an examination of Byron's complicated relationship—platonic, fraternal, romantic, sexual—with his half-sister is vital to understand the interaction between the Byronic hero and heroine. The Romantic fascination with incest is a well-documented facet of that movement; but this literally forbidden love did not merely occur in Byron's works, but almost certainly in his own life as well. The public perception of their relationship, from the knowledge of its consummation to what may be gleaned from their letters, will provide the grounds for understanding Byron's incorporation of this same powerful yet tenuous bond in his work.



Moving on to the literature, I will examine the Byronic heroine in two of Lord Byron's most famous works: the metaphysical drama *Manfred* (1816-1817) and the satiric poem *Don Juan* (1821). I have chosen these works because, despite their differences in terms of subject matter and execution, they display most clearly the evolution of the interaction and the balance of power between the Byronic hero and heroine. Although many of Byron's other works, particularly *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812), could also provide fascinating textual examples for this work, *Manfred* and *Don Juan* present his most full elaboration of the Byronic heroine as a recognizable character type. And yet even in these works, such elaborations are invariably compromised, for reasons both personal and artistic. If Byron's works are often at least partially biographical, then Byron is his own model for the Byronic hero. It is a logical step to find that if in the text the hero is unable to control the heroine, the model for that hero would be unable to control his heroines—in life or in literature—as well. Byron's compromised representations of women are, in a way, both his acknowledgment of their power and the only possible way for him to manage it.

In many studies of *Manfred*, Astarte is frequently dismissed as a character altogether; after all, she is already deceased at the drama's beginning. But Astarte's sway over Manfred, even in spirit, as well as Manfred's frequent acknowledgments of her as a better version of himself, given her power in the text. She is a Byronic heroine in that she is everything Manfred is, and more. She has his capacity for rebellion, his overreaching tendencies, his quest for knowledge, his dark and brooding sensibility—but controlled and transformed into beauty and virtue. She is not the same as Manfred—nor is she the idealized version of him posited in a perfectly beautiful female form. Neither are she and Manfred the polarized embodiments of the masculine and the feminine: paradoxically, they are the same, but are drawn to each other in their

mutual inability to possess or subsume each other. The text of the dramatic poem is the exploration of Manfred's inability to master Astarte, or to contain her.

*Don Juan*, as Franklin has stated, is a tour de force of Byron's female characters. But I would argue that there is a Byronic heroine in *Don Juan*. There are, in fact, several: Donna Julia, Haidée, and Aurora are all different but equally powerful visions of the Byronic heroine.

It may seem implausible to suggest that characters such as Astarte, Julia, Haidée, and Aurora may be read as strong heroines – after all, one woman is dead, and the other three are conveniently removed from the text through coincidental circumstances.. But as I have suggested in proposing that Byron's representations of women are “compromised visions,” these are his methods of coping with both the power of these women and his inability to completely control or fully represent them. After all, even though these women are weakened through Byron's narrative strategies, each one's relationship with the hero still indicates the extent of her power. Alive, Astarte and Manfred fail to come together; dead, they fail to break apart. Neither full consummation nor complete detachment is possible, as much as Manfred wishes for either (or perhaps both). She is always just out of reach, and yet he can never be rid of her – and this defines him. For Don Juan and Julia, Haidée, and Aurora, Don Juan is already presented as being controlled by or powerless under the reign of various women in many countries. The only way Don Juan's episodic adventures can continue is through the end of each episode – often the coincidental death or loss of an articulation of the heroine, who still manages to grow stronger and more complete in each subsequent appearance.

For Byron to portray a Byronic heroine would be impossible, for a number of reasons. It would be a significant weakening of his power as both author and heroic prototype, in a sense, to admit that a woman could possess his same “heroic” qualities. He must defeat or disable the



heroine, somehow – he must compromise her – in order to maintain his superiority and his self-image. In this sense, just as the hero may be defined in relation to the heroine, Byron is defined in relation to his heroines; and they may be identified, at least in one way, by his inability to fully capture them on the page.

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In what is generally considered the most comprehensive biography of Byron, *Byron: Life and Legend* (2002), author Fiona MacCarthy explains the poet's deliberately high-profile promiscuity as his "intent [to live] up to his self-made image of 'the votary of Licentiousness, and Disciple of Infidelity'" (73). This is perhaps the most apt description of Byron's complicated method of creating and promoting his public persona through shocking and gossip-provoking behavior, often sexual in nature. His homosexual tendencies and relationships with schoolmates at Cambridge, although guessed at during his time, are well known today; however, his most infamous and public sexual relationships were with women, and these were more than enough to create the right amount of scandal to increase his reputation. But after a time, the gossip grew to be too much for even him to manage. His relationship with his half-sister Augusta Leigh finally pushed the once tantalized public into total outrage at his behavior.

Generally speaking, what would have disgraced another man was fuel to Byron's dangerous and appealing public image. MacCarthy notes that his rakish behavior started as early as age nine, as a result of sexual abuse from his nursemaid May Gray, which MacCarthy claims coincides with the famous knowledge of his early childhood infatuations, particularly with Mary Duff and Mary Chaworth. However, MacCarthy's subsequent claims that this abuse fueled Byron's considerable preference for homosexual relationships seems tendentious, considering that Byron pursued relationships with women his entire life, much more publicly and for greater lengths of time than any of his homosexual relationships. Although it is possible to argue that this publicizing of his heterosexual relationships was a smoke screen for his homosexual predilections, he never made any mention to his confidantes of homosexual affairs rivaling his heterosexual affections; and to these confidantes, he even confessed incest. Although his

homosexual affairs certainly occurred, it seems unrealistic that they should be considered his exclusive goal or tendency.

In examining Byron's mature affairs in her book *The Byron Women* (1974), Margot Strickland provides a fascinating catalogue of Byron's relationships with some of the most important women in his life. She includes Augusta as well as his prim and vindictive wife Annabella Milbanke; three of his lovers, the volatile Lady Caroline Lamb, the pitiable Claire Clairmont, and the resourceful Countess Teresa Guiccioli; his confidante Lady Elizabeth Melbourne; and his legitimate daughter Ada Lovelace and Augusta's third daughter Medora Leigh. Although this account is somewhat dated, particularly in attributing Medora's parentage to Byron (where this now seems questionable at best), the unforgiving but honest portrayals of these women's strengths and weaknesses provide some eye-opening descriptions of women who have often been marginalized as Byron's "discards."

The scandals caused by Byron's affairs with married women—Caroline Lamb, who attempted revenge but succeeded only in humiliating her family by chronicling the affair in her unsuccessful novel *Glenarvon* (1816); Lady Oxford, who with her husband promoted what were considered dangerous liberal political ideas; and so on—and his questionably close relationship with Lady Melbourne, did not begin to compare to the intrigue and outrage of his affair with Augusta. It is this relationship that, when publicly known, helped finally to destroy Byron's marriage and reputation; it is this relationship that literally fulfilled many latent Romantic tendencies towards the eroticisation of the brother-sister relationship; it is this relationship that Byron revisited again and again in his writing, bringing it under control in his works where he could not in his life.

Incest, as MacCarthy notes, was not uncommon at “every level of [19<sup>th</sup> century] society . . . but the mere suspicion of incest was likely to result in scandal and social ostracism” (205).

The Romantic fascination with incest is similarly well-documented. As Rudolph Binion explains:

A forbidden, illicit love was accordingly the Romantic love par excellence . . . and the forbidden love par excellence was brother-sister incest. . . . Sibling incest (to quote a pioneer study of it in Romantic letters) “can change, in a moment of blinding recognition, from a blessing to a curse, from a socially sanctioned love which unites the lover with his beloved and with the community to a lust which alienates him from all society . . . and makes him an outcast” (Thorslev, “Incest,” p. 41). . . . The tension between social sanction and social outrage, between falling in and out with the world’s ways, is inherent . . . in the situation. (Binion 102-3)

Fascination, of course, is not practice, as Binion notes in his essay “Romanticism and the Revolution of 1789: A Psychohistorical View”: “. . . the Romantics’ *peche mignon* (pet sin) [incest] did stop short of outright practice as far as the records show except in one notorious instance: . . . Lord Byron’s amour with his half sister” (92).

Peter Gunn confirms Byron’s behavioral pattern in his biography of Augusta, *My Dearest Augusta* (1968), which, along with providing an extensive biography of Augusta herself, chronicles the half-siblings’ relationship from early childhood to her death, years after Byron’s own death in Greece. His description of Byron’s actions finds that Byron had

the courage . . . to act out his feelings, to carry them to their logical conclusion in action. . . . His Calvinistic upbringing, however, especially in the notion of predestination, had deeply impressed itself on his mind; and, try as he would, he was not able to eradicate the idea that he was a foredoomed man . . . fatalistically bound to his worst self . . . (Gunn 90)

This is, perhaps, the best and worst of biographical Byron: the fact that he *does* follow his feelings, no matter how socially unacceptable—particularly if they *are* socially unacceptable—to their “logical conclusion in action.” And he never stops examining and re-examining the course of his actions in his own writing. His works and his life thus exist in a dialectical relationship, each as both cause and effect.

Byron creates an example, acts it out in the drama of his own life, and then re-evaluates it in increasingly autobiographical literature—or literature that is *purportedly* autobiographical, and thus becomes yet another tool in his manipulation of his public persona. It is a ceaseless cycle of self-promotion and self-damnation embodied famously and publicly in his works. Augusta, for her part, was the product of Captain John “Mad Jack” Byron’s brief marriage with the former Marchioness of Carmarthen, who left her husband and three children to elope with “Mad Jack.” Augusta’s mother died not long after Augusta was born, and “Mad Jack” remarried—this time to Catherine Gordon, who gave birth to the child who would become the sixth Lord Byron. Although “Mad Jack” died not long after, and Augusta lived away from her stepmother and brother, she and Byron remained affectionate all through their childhood and adolescence, corresponding through many warm letters dating from 1802 onward, linked by the memory of their father (Strickland 13). According to Gunn, although Byron and Augusta did not see each

other for twelve years, she always considered her half-brother as her beloved “Baby Byron” and often took it upon herself to look out for him. (As Gunn writes, “[Byron’s] character [his unpredictable moods and outbursts of passion] needed understanding; and [Augusta’s] affection for him, and the fact that she too was a Byron, gave Augusta just this [understanding]” (43).) She often contacted his solicitors with the hopes of steering Byron back onto a better track, out of debt and disgrace at Cambridge; and although Byron sometimes took offense at this perceived interference, reacting with silence, he always relented and generally acknowledged her good sense.

Augusta married Colonel George Leigh in 1807 at the not early age of 21. Col. Leigh was a notorious gambler, and the marriage was constantly plagued by financial difficulties. Byron and Augusta saw very little of each other after his tour of Europe in 1809, and after “her ‘abominable’ (his word for it) marriage in 1807” (Gunn 82); but in the spring and summer of 1813, with Colonel Leigh away, they finally had the chance to spend time together again in person. It is at this time that their relationship moved from a sibling bond to a romantic and sexual one.

When Byron and Augusta finally met again, “[b]oth were inordinately shy, highly sensitive,” and aware of “how much they were alike”. “The discovery of each other, therefore, was in the nature of a self-discovery, which reinforced the awareness that they were individual persons who were at one and the same time harmoniously complementary to an extraordinary degree” (Gunn 43). Having a sexual affair seemed a natural course of action to Byron and Augusta for a number of reasons. Strickland suggests that:

When siblings fall in love with one another it is usually the result of an emotionally deprived childhood. . . . Their reunion after



several years without meeting was a joining of two people completely in tune with one another. . . . Captain Byron's deep affection for his full sister with whom he lived in France until his death [also set a romantic precedent for Byron and Augusta]. Augusta was extremely interested in her forebears. (16, 19)

MacCarthy concurs:

[Byron and Augusta] were linked too by their tendency to incest, which clusters within families, as is now well known. . . . [T]he shared love of the profligate father was a factor in their intimacy. . . . The sense of destiny and dynasty was strong in both of them. (5-6)

The most intense and uninterrupted period of their affair seems to have taken place at this time. By August of 1813 Byron was planning to take Augusta abroad with him on an extended tour of Europe, probably as much to avoid marrying himself as to avoid a scandal. At Christmas he returned to Augusta's home at Six Mile Bottom; after the New Year, she journeyed to his home at Newstead Abbey to see him, where they were "conveniently snowed up" for three weeks (MacCarthy 213). However, Byron returned her to Six Mile Bottom and her husband not long afterwards. She was expecting her third child, her daughter Elizabeth Medora Leigh, whose parentage still remains in question.

The possibility of Byron being the father of the child was "covered, at least outwardly, by the fact that [Augusta] had slept with her husband about the assumed time of its conception" (Gunn 96), although at that time Byron and Augusta had also met in London. Born on April 15,

1814, the child was named Elizabeth but called by her middle name, Medora; the choice of that name is still the source of much debate. As MacCarthy summarizes:

[No] . . . definite conclusion [can] be drawn from the fact that Medora is the name given to Byron's heroine in *The Corsair*, the poem he was composing during Augusta's pregnancy. One of the Duke of Rutland's racehorses was also called Medora. The Duchess of Rutland was also one of the other sponsors of the child.

(214)

MacCarthy names a number of other reasons it is unlikely that Byron fathered Medora, including the fact that he “was inordinately if fitfully possessive of his offspring . . . [b]ut he showed no signs of paternal pride in Elizabeth Medora as he evinced for [his other children Ada and Allegra]” (215). Byron's infamous “ape” letter to Lady Melbourne, so called because in it he discusses Medora's birth and claims she is “not an ‘Ape’ and if it is—that must be my fault,” could be read as a joke referring to medieval superstitions rather than a confession of paternity (MacCarthy 214). Although Annabella Milbanke, Byron's wife, seems to have believed that Medora was Byron's daughter, her feelings could be attributed to bitterness during and after her divorce from Byron; and Medora's claims that he was her father were likely part of a plea for money and assistance during periods of destitution.

Whatever the case, her children were one of the reasons Augusta did not go abroad with Byron. Her devotion to her marriage and her husband, despite her adoration of Byron, constituted another reason; a third was the rumor of the plague abroad in Europe, particularly Italy. And while Byron and Augusta could not “escape” to live abroad in Europe, and could not stop their affair, rumors about their relationship began to circulate amongst the upper circles of

British society and began to cause problems for both of them—rumors largely founded by Byron’s purportedly confessional literature, and by his letters to friends, which often detailed his actions, or at least strongly hinted at them.

Where Augusta kept their relationship a secret, Byron seems to have been unable to stop talking about or referencing it. He wrote frequently to his confidante Lady Melbourne, and occasionally to his friends Thomas Moore and John Cam Hobhouse, both of whom strongly advised him against the affair; MacCarthy describes his letters as “sometimes jauntily defiant, sometimes cagey and tormented” (204). On August 11, 1813, Byron wrote famously to Lady Melbourne, “I should have been glad of your advice how to untie two or three ‘*Gordian knots*’ tied round me—I shall cut them without consulting anyone—though some are rather closely twisted round my *heart* . . .” (Marchand 3: 87-88). To Moore he wrote on August 22 of the same year, “. . . the fact is, I am, at this moment, in a far more serious, and entirely new, scrape than any of the last twelvemonths,—and that is saying a great deal” (3: 96). He often referred to Augusta with an “A” or with dashes to avoid using her name, but his messages were clear—and typically always laid the responsibility for their affair and its initiation solely on himself (Gunn 89). He acknowledged his friends’ good advice, particularly Lady Melbourne’s, but persisted in the affair anyway—typical of his rebellious behavior and his desire both to flaunt social conventions and to place himself in some kind of (preferably moral) danger. But the publication of the dramatic poem *The Bride of Abydos* in December 1813, featuring a woman in love with her cousin, brought the scandal fully to the public’s attention.

It is worth noting in this dangerous period of their relationship the different reactions of Byron and Augusta. As MacCarthy explains,

It is interesting that Augusta, so conventionally religious, shows little of Byron's own sense of having sinned. She may have rationalised the situation: she was only his half-sister. There is a certain element in Byron's own responses of Calvinist breast-beating, of manufactured doom. (206-7)

This telling difference in their personalities characterized their relationship and their actions towards each other from that point onward. Although Byron loved Augusta, perhaps more than any other woman, he "betrayed her"—that is, betrayed the secret of their affair—to Lady Melbourne, to Annabella Milbanke when she was his wife, and possibly to Lady Caroline Lamb. Therefore "Augusta was, in one sense at least, a victim of elements in Byron's character . . . but she was nevertheless a willing victim" (Gunn 89). Although there is no question of Augusta's compliance in the affair even if Byron was, as he claimed, the instigator, there may have been a point where he threatened her with revealing their relationship to the public in full—although at the time, this may have been more of a threat to his wife than to Augusta herself. Byron, in a sense, needed to see his actions as betraying Augusta, in order to couch himself in his desired role.

Byron's marriage was largely spurred on by Augusta, who wisely realized the best way to protect Byron's reputation—and her own—was to marry him to a respectable woman. Gunn notes that "Augusta had persuaded him to marry, 'because it was the only chance of redemption for *two* persons'" (110). Always taking the entire situation in stock, Augusta's cool-headed cleverness allowed her to provide for her brother's well-being as well as to protect the reputations of herself, her family, and Byron himself. After a moody and occasionally reluctant courtship, Byron married Annabella Milbanke, niece of his confidante Lady Melbourne, on

January 1, 1815. Milbanke had rejected him once before but this time succumbed. The marriage was notoriously tumultuous, even violent at times. Byron had terrible fits of rage and bouts of drinking, and often verbally abused Annabella. Byron found Annabella, or the “Princess of Parallelograms” (Strickland 71), as he called her, prim, boring, and worst of all, not Augusta. He often tormented her with insinuations of his sexual relationship with Augusta, unfavorably comparing Annabella to her—perhaps because he really did prefer his half-sister, perhaps because Annabella seemed to embody all the forces directing him towards a “normal,” respectable life, rather than the tragic, poetic image he had carved out for himself.

Augusta was with the Byrons often during their brief marriage, particularly at the beginning, and from April to June of 1815 she actually lived with them. It was during this time that Annabella was pregnant with Byron’s “little legitimacy,” their daughter Ada; and it was during this time that Byron was the most volatile and abusive towards Annabella. Gunn reports that Augusta could calm Byron’s sudden rages, and would do so to protect Annabella: “Annabella and Augusta,” he writes, “had formed an immediate and instinctive liking for each other, and now they formed a sympathetic conspiracy of defence against Byron’s outrages” (129). Strickland suspects Augusta of being jealous of Annabella, even of provoking Byron’s rages against his pregnant wife, but it is worth noting the women’s friendly correspondence during that period and long after, as well as their grateful reports of each other in letters to outside parties.

No matter how much she protected Annabella, however, Augusta’s presence caused tensions in the household, particularly when Byron would intimate to Annabella that he preferred his half-sister’s company—in bed and elsewhere—to hers. MacCarthy notes that Annabella eventually asked Augusta to leave their house and return to her family at Six Mile Bottom.



Although Annabella was concerned that Augusta would harbor hard feelings towards her, MacCarthy explains:

What were Augusta's own feelings on dismissal? Her attitude is always difficult to gauge, so adept was she at smoothing over difficulties, showing the devoted mother's determination to keep the household afloat. . . . Augusta's practised diplomacy excelled itself. (253)

Again, Augusta's level-headed approach to her brother's mishaps—even his faults—salvaged a bad situation, or at least did not worsen it. As Gunn says, “[it is in this] . . . that we see the full measure of the woman, and understand something of the reason why she won Byron's unfailing love” (149).

Byron and Annabella's marriage could not survive Byron's violence, his verbal abuse, and especially the rumors of his homosexual and incestuous affairs, and Annabella sued for a divorce that was completed on April 7, 1816. Byron fled the disgrace resulting from Annabella's public accusations and fled to Europe, leaving his affairs in Augusta's capable hands, including relaying messages to Annabella and looking after the sale of his estate, Newstead Abbey. Yet he was still, in a sense, pursuing Augusta, or at least pursuing the idea of their affair—he was still petitioning her to come to Europe with him, and writing (but not publishing, for fear of hurting her reputation) the “Stanzas to Augusta,” which he showed to a few friends only. For her part, Augusta remained loyal to both Byron and Annabella. Although Annabella turned on her later in life, accusing her of engendering Byron's hatred towards her and preventing their reconciliation, as well as interrogating her about the nature of the siblings' relationship (Augusta never revealed



whether they had been lovers or not), Augusta remained friendly and loving towards Annabella to her death (Strickland 38-9).

The most confusing, and perhaps saddest, aspect of this relationship are Byron's letters to Augusta after he left for Europe—for while they wrote often, they never saw each other again after 1816, though Byron's letters were always full of love and longing for her. Even as he was writing letters detailing escapades with mistresses and even the birth of an illegitimate child, he was also always revisiting their affair—that idyllic period of the summer of 1813. On September 17, 1816, he wrote, “What a fool I was to marry—and *you* not very wise—my dear ... I shall never find anyone like you—nor you (vain as it may seem) like me. We are just formed to pass our lives together . . .” (5: 96), and on October 15 of the same year Byron sent, “*A thousand loves to you from me*—which is very generous for I ask only *one* in return” (Marchand, 5: 115). On May 17, 1819—three years after his exile from England—he was still writing:

But I have never ceased nor can cease to feel for a moment that perfect & boundless attachment which bound & binds me to you—which renders me utterly incapable of *real* love for any other human being—what could they be to me after *you*? My own XXXX [Augusta] we may have been very wrong—but I repent of nothing except that cursed marriage—& your refusing to continue to love me as you had loved me—I can neither forget nor *quite forgive* you for that precious piece of reformation. –but I can never be other than I have been—and whenever I love anything it is because it reminds me in some way of you or yourself. . . . (6: 29)

In late 1816, Byron had published *Manfred*, his most explicit literary reference to his affair with Augusta, both immortalizing their love and scandalizing their reputations further. He never returned to England, never saw Augusta again, and died in Greece on April 19, 1824.

Through all of these trials during Byron's life and after, Augusta was polite, resourceful, and devoted to her family—her husband, her children, and her brother. In several accounts she is described as only appearing to age or grow tired *after* Byron's death. For all their similarities, when compared side by side Byron appears frivolous, a little absurd in his sense of being self-doomed, and incapable of keeping a secret—he seems to deliberately destroy his relationships and reputation, and to have enabled own humiliation. Augusta was older, wiser, and more practical—able to surmount every obstacle that caused Byron to despair.

Taking all this information into consideration, and adding to it the knowledge of Byron's cagey tendency towards autobiographical literature, it seems plausible Byron in these works is both presenting and *preventing* his relationship with Augusta, over and over again. Creating tragic, foredoomed heroes to represent himself, and wiser, kinder, sweeter women to stand for Augusta, he presents his incestuous love affair in a safer medium than that of the British social sphere: he presents it in poetry, where it is no longer a scandal, but a tragedy. But rather than allowing the female character to outmaneuver or outshine his hero, he employs elaborate narrative techniques to both distance the hero from her and cripple her agency within the text. In this his works become not just the cycle of self-promotion and self-damnation, designed to manage his image in the eyes of the public—they become the instrument with which he manages his image *in his own eyes*. This is especially evident in *Manfred*, but may be seen in other works as well; *Don Juan* provides an excellent and challenging example of this concept. Over and over

he creates and plays out the relationship that was never fulfilled in his actual life, but he plays it according to his own rules and to the conclusion he desires.

Unsurprisingly, it is difficult to pinpoint any explicit portrayal on Byron's part of the Byronic heroine as she is defined in this study: the mirror image of the Byronic hero, simultaneously superior and inferior, possessing each of the qualities that mark the male protagonist. As I have suspected, this difficulty can be traced to Byron himself. As examined in the previous section, the author's public persona as well as his relationship with his half-sister Augusta both serve as precedents for what we now recognize in literature as Byronic characterization and relationships. As the hero, in his role as author, it seems fitting that he is still unable to master or control his counterpart heroine (or even the concept of her), even within the controlled realm of his own literature. Byron presents us instead with inchoate visions of the heroine – hints, as it were, toward a character central to his literary inspiration, and yet always just beyond outright presentation. *Manfred* provides readers with actualized memories of the dead Astarte; *Don Juan* features a wide variety of evolving articulations of the heroine. By compromising or “crippling” the presentation of heroines, Byron asserts the importance and (supposed) superiority of his hero; but in doing so, he manages to *reassert*, if only implicitly, the heroines' inexorable power.

It would seem, then, that the female characters in question do in fact play roles inferior to those of the heroes. They are presented in the context of their relationships to the men; they are less directly tied to the action of the plot. Astarte is dead, after all, and the women of *Don Juan* come and go in “episodes.” Even the titles seem indicative of the priority of the male characters—both *Manfred* and *Don Juan* are titled after their male protagonists. Yet the plots of both *Manfred* and *Don Juan* fail without the female characters of each text—and these women are neither fully erasable nor interchangeable. Their compromised portrayal represents, I

maintain, an attempt to assert the hero's importance by Byron himself, and his attempt to privilege the hero over her—and the acknowledgement of the *need* to do so. For if a female character is threatening enough to jeopardize the hero's superiority in the text, she is powerful indeed.

How exactly do we know that these women are heroines if their presentations are so compromised? The answer, I think, is that we recognize them precisely *by* their inchoate representations in the texts. Neither the heroes of the stories nor the author can master them. Just as Manfred cannot summon or keep Astarte, and just as Juan's maturation takes much longer than the more marked and interesting evolutions of the women, so too Byron struggles in his engagement with the Byronic heroine. To allow them to take over the story outright would be to diminish the hero, and subsequently to diminish himself; to erase them completely would leave both the hero and the story utterly bereft and incomplete. The hero exists only within his relationship to the heroine, and yet this power makes her dangerous to him—both the male protagonist and the male author. Byron both accepts her influence and, as one would expect of the model for the Byronic hero, refuses to give way. He needs her, but he recognizes her as dangerous in her attractive otherness; her treatment at his hands within the text may be seen as compensation for this recognition. And yet, were the situation reversed, the fact of their “co-dependent” existence would still remain true. It is not just the hero that exists in the context of the heroine; they each exist in their relation to the other.

The relationship is defined primarily as a struggle for control. Byron's heroes desire not only to manipulate but to *possess* their female counterparts: to subsume them, in a sense, as Manfred manipulates the memory of Astarte by idealizing her, by cataloguing her qualities and claiming or discarding them as he chooses; as Don Juan moves from woman to woman, from

country to country, always seemingly able to disregard completely the past in favor of fully embracing the prospects of the future. But the desire to encompass the heroine is both enabling and self-defeating. The male figure cannot take the heroine and command her qualities or her body to the extent he wishes; even if he could, the heroine would become an extension of him, and would not remain herself once subsumed. But neither can he banish her from his thoughts or desires. She exists beyond the realm of his control, constantly desired because those desires can never be fulfilled.

Traditional readings of *Manfred* (1816-1817) present the implied incestuous relationship of the siblings Count Manfred and Astarte as biographical, and it certainly appears so. They share the same bloodline; in their youth, they had “one heart,/And loved each other as [they] should not love” (2.1.23-27). Going by these and numerous other insinuations, it is safe to say that although the crime of incest is never explicitly mentioned, it is heavily implied. But other than her place as one half of the incestuous relationship of the dramatic poem, Astarte is dismissed by most critics from the discussion of the rest of the work. She is regarded only in her role as the object of Manfred’s despair and desire. In his chapter on Byron’s “metaphysical dramas,” Peter Thorslev finds Astarte utterly uninteresting, serving mainly as an accessory to Manfred’s Faustian journey. In fact, in his 1965 article “Incest as Romantic Symbol,” published three years after his book *The Byronic Hero*, Thorslev suggests that the use of romantic sibling love was representative of the relationship between the hero and his psyche (41-58)—thus reducing Astarte to a psychological extension of Manfred.

This is the most obvious facet of what is in fact a widely shared reading strategy, one which traditionally deters readers and critics alike from extracting any so-called “feminist” (or even “feminine”) potential from the work. *Manfred* is often read as promoting a very specific



polarization of masculine and feminine qualities; thus in *Byron's Heroines*, Caroline Franklin reads Manfred's Faustian journey as a quest to overcome gender dualism, to be reunited with "the lost female half of his soul" (223)—namely, Astarte. She argues that Manfred represents masculinity and its traditional associations, particularly ambition, logic, and intellectual aspirations, which leaves Astarte exclusively to represent femininity and its morally superior but less powerful and less noble associations, such as nature. "[Astarte's] feminine virtues, whilst revered, must be rejected by the [hero]," writes Franklin; "[t]his way, the feminine is validated yet also subsumed by heroic masculinity" (227). But Franklin does not explore the implications of this charge: namely, that if Manfred in fact *lacks* Astarte's positive humanitarian qualities and innate goodness, he is in a sense less than her. More importantly, Franklin never addresses the possibility that Astarte, acting on her own goodness, has first rejected Manfred, precisely because he lacks her qualities.

On this point, it is helpful to keep Augusta in mind. Franklin's assertion that Astarte is not autobiographical, but representative of femininity, actually diminishes Astarte's importance to the action of the play. She writes:

Gender and the differentiation of sexual role is symptomatic, for Byron, of this fall into [the Western dichotomy of masculine reason and feminine sentiment]. In *Manfred* . . . the hero becomes distanced from those qualities now associated with femininity—closeness to nature, the social virtues, instinctive humanitarianism. As a man, he must intellectualize his situation, assertively challenge the ruling orthodoxy, even become destructive in his will

to power. Astarte . . . [is] therefore aligned with community values which have to be rejected by the defiant male individualist. (221)

Instead of searching for the individualized and unique counterpart to himself, Manfred is apparently “seek[ing] in vain to overcome the dualism of gender and be [united] with the feminine principle” (223). If this is so, Astarte loses her individuality, and may be replaced by any woman who may serve as cipher for the “feminine principle”; thus Franklin, like Thorslev, reduces Astarte to an extension of Manfred’s being. But from Manfred’s assertion that she is the only person—not the only woman, or only relative, but *the only human being*—with whom he can identify (2.2.50-59, 2.2.100-104), followed by the famous “She was like me in lineaments. . .” (2.2.105-117) speech detailing their similarities, it seems clear that it is not a “feminine principle” he seeks or mourns, but a female individual—an irreplaceable woman.

Manfred’s admiration and rejection of feminine and humanitarian virtues – in short, his love for Astarte, and yet his request that she go to Heaven, while he is punished for both of their sins – leave him isolated and tragic, the ideal Romantic hero, aggressively “exemplify[ing] Romantic defiance alone” (Franklin 231). It appears that he rejects all the ways he could be reconciled with nature or humanitarian virtues—feminine traits—and thus chooses his own fate. Perhaps this is because to be “reconciled” with the feminine virtues, as Franklin suggests he desires, would actually fulfill and subsequently thwart his actual desire: to subsume or to encompass Astarte. To claim her traits for his own would be to erase their similarities and dissimilarities and make her that extension of himself—would rob her of the identity to which he has devoted so much energy and thought since her death. That identity is the memory of Astarte—his only claim to her now that she is gone from the earth. Alternately, he runs the risk of falling *into* Astarte. To claim her traits would also be to erase himself, in taking on her

qualities and losing his own, thereby rendering him something other than the sole unique counterpart to her. If he were to fully possess her, or allow her to possess him, both of their identities would be erased, and they would cease to exist as opposing forces magnetically drawn to each other.

In this complicated play of the desire, it is clear that Manfred and Astarte cannot simply be reduced to the polarized masculine and feminine opposites of each other. Byron in fact stresses the equality of the relationship in Manfred's "like me in lineaments" exchange:

MANFRED                    I have not named to thee

Father or mother, mistress, friend, or being,

With whom I wore the chain of human ties;

If I had such, they seem'd not such to me—

Yet there was one—

WITCH                    Spare not thyself—proceed.

MANFRED   She was like me in lineaments—her eyes,

Her hair, her features, all, to the very tone

Even of her voice, they said were like to mine;

But soften'd all, and temper'd into beauty;

She had the same lone thoughts and wanderings,

The quest of hidden knowledge, and a mind

To comprehend the universe; nor these

Alone, but with them gentler powers than mine,

Pity, and smiles, and tears—which I had not;

And tenderness—but that I had for her;

Humility—and that I never had.

Her faults were mine—her virtues were her own—

I loved her, and destroy'd her! (II.ii.100-116)

As Manfred makes clear, he is not representative of *mankind*, or even able to sympathize with other human beings. It follows, I would suggest, that Astarte is not representative of *womankind*. Thorslev finds Astarte to be not a person, but an extension of Manfred, yet important to the text in that role; Franklin insists that Astarte is her own person but is utterly uninteresting. Each is the negative image of the other. But Astarte's actual role and importance to the text lies somewhere in between these two readings. She is indeed her own person, and even though she is dead—precisely because she must be portrayed as dead, rather than alive and active—she is important. Relegating Astarte to her position as cipher for feminine virtues, or as an extension of Manfred's greatness (or foil for his journey), leads to a diminishing not only of the full implications of her character, but of Manfred's character and journey as well. Manfred is not seeking reconciliation with nature or humanity—he is proud of his difference from them, of his aloofness, and he has never sought their company. He seeks the *aid* of nature, or the spirits of such, in order to fulfill his real journey: his hopeless quest to regain Astarte, or, better put, to *gain* her in the first place, as he never had her at all. The speech depicting her virtues is not a description of her as a feminine ideal, but as a personal ideal for Manfred: he acknowledges that she is greater than he, and that he cannot now, nor ever, possess her. He searches the earth for her and cannot summon her; when she does finally appear again, he cannot command her. His pleas in the famous "Speak to me!" speech – "Speak to me! / For I have call'd on thee in the still night / . . . [and] many things answered me— / Spirits and men – but thou wert silent all" (2.4.135-41) and "One word for mercy! Say, thou lovest me," (2.4.155) – remain unanswered,

unfulfilled. (It is interesting, also, to compare Manfred's speeches to Byron's later letters to Augusta: "I have never ceased nor can cease to feel for a moment that perfect & boundless attachment which bound & binds me to you. . . ." (6: 29).)

In dying, Astarte becomes the only thing in existence beyond his control; and without her, Manfred is not only incomplete—his existence is crippled. Her death damns Manfred to a half-life: he cannot live as he did when she was alive, so he does not wish to live at all, but he cannot die. He must search the world for Astarte, his lost but never possessed half; and in a sense, he must realize that he is less than she because he lacks the virtues she possessed, and that he can never contain her. This is why Manfred longs to die: he could not become one being with Astarte, and he cannot now live without her.

Byron's divorce from Annabella Milbanke, fueled partially by rumors of his incestuous affair with Augusta, was completed in April 1816, and by the end of that year he had published *Manfred*. Despite living as an exile in Europe, presumably to escape the society that condemned him and to save what reputation Augusta had left, he still published the dramatic poem, undoubtedly awaiting the public outcry against his work. It was largely viewed as an autobiographical (or at least partially autobiographical) work, a confession of his transgressions; and yet through the medium of a dramatic poem, located in a fantastic setting, Byron recast his affair with Augusta as something tragic and unfulfilled, rather than lustful or corrupt. It was his defiance of the society that had condemned him, as well as his recreation of the affair that consumed his imagination. Creating the older, more practical and level-headed Augusta as an immobilized, literally silenced phantom, while creating himself as the tragic, foredoomed, and almost supremely powerful count—one who speaks enough for himself and Astarte—may well represent Byron's true purpose in publishing *Manfred*. It is both an advertisement of Byron's



superiority and an acknowledgement of Byron's *need* to create a version of himself superior to someone who poses a threat to him. The assertion of his own superiority—of his hero's superiority—necessitates the acknowledgement of the heroine's (and of Augusta's) inherent potential power over him.

Finding traces of the Byronic heroine in the satirical poem *Don Juan* (1821) is a challenge, albeit one different from the one posed by *Manfred*. Instead of having no living, present heroine, here there are multiple contenders for what has been considered a single role. It seems contradictory to think that there can be multiple Byronic heroines for a single hero; and indeed, by definition there cannot be, if the Byronic hero and heroine are, in fact, counterparts. But *Don Juan* deviates from this in two significant ways: first, Don Juan is not the Byronic hero of the poem; and second, there are three potential articulations of a Byronic heroine, three distinct women who all fill this role in unique and challenging ways.

It has often been wondered whether Don Juan is a Byronic hero at all. Thorslev, among many others, declares that he is not: he asserts that the term "Byronic hero" should not be applied to the character of Don Juan, that the character displays none of the Romantic or Byronic traits (12-13). Neither does Franklin consider Don Juan a Byronic hero. She finds that the text illustrates "[a] relativist view of sexual morality, in which the status of woman indicates the nature of a nation's government" (102), and that Byron left Don Juan the character undeveloped as a "passive cipher" so he could instead focus on the "gallery of female characters" (101).

It is true that Juan himself displays no typically Byronic traits, but neither Thorslev nor Franklin expand on the idea that the narrator is the Byronic hero—another overt example of Byron not only promoting his own image but almost blatantly inserting himself into his texts. Satirically distancing himself from the characters by his jaded, experienced tone and his



ironically superior attitude, the narrator also exerts a considerable amount of control over the characters and the course of the narrative as well; much of the poem consists of his lengthy detours that dwell on his humorous personal experiences. This creates the perfect “space” for a situation like Juan’s, in which a male character is consistently engaged with superior (superior in action, in speech, in taste, in morals, in feeling) female characters. After all, a mere mortal man, one who is *not* a Byronic hero, can be overwhelmed by these multiple strong, beautiful, supremely Romantic (supremely *Byronic*) women. The actual hero, the narrator, has safely distanced himself beforehand and can view the proceedings with amusement and pity. In this light, I am arguing that because the hero has removed himself from the text and appears only to direct and comment on the action, it is possible for several potential iterations of the Byronic heroine to exist, each one unique and distinct, each one an incomplete fragment of an elusive whole.

There are three women with whom Juan has serious, romantic, monogamous relationships (or at least with whom he seems to be headed towards such a relationship) in the text: Donna Julia, Haidée, and Aurora Raby. Donna Julia is the first of these women, and she appears as the most unrefined, “wildest” woman, perhaps predictably considering her “Moorish origin” (2.56). Juan and Julia’s love is particularly awkward and is the most illicit (as Julia is married to an older man); it also lasts the shortest amount of time before it is violently disrupted and Juan is sent on his way. Although Julia is contracted as a tutor to Juan, she clearly has other pursuits on her mind: she “[c]aress’d him often, such a thing might be/Quite innocently done, and harmless styled” (1.546-47). When they blush upon seeing each other, the narrator remarks that “Donna Julia knew the reason why,/But as for Juan, he had no . . . notion” (1.558-59). Julia makes much of privately insisting that her love for Juan is platonic, merely friendly, and then

deliberately places herself in a series of positions in which he could very easily “persuade” her to engage in sex. After all, while Juan is ignorant of seduction and only vaguely aware of his desires, Julia understands all of these feelings very well, and still continues to encourage and even guide his advances.

The discovery of the affair and Julia’s subsequent self-punishment turns her from the heroine of forbidden love into the heroine of repentant virtue. In both roles she is held above Juan’s unformed, youthful feelings; and both roles are told in a tongue-in-cheek manner, suggesting to Franklin that “[t]he comedy at the expense of Julia is double-edged and defensive, for it prepares the way for [Byron’s] own ideal Romantic heroine in Canto II” (125).

The next heroine is Haidée, “Nature’s bride” and “Passion’s child” (2.1609-1610). Although the affair between Juan and Haidée is idyllic, it is only possible because the island setting is “uncivilized”—that is, the lovers are so far removed from society as Juan (and Byron) knew it, that a kind of “return to Paradise” is possible. Early in the introduction to Haidée, her “youthful disregard for the future” is revealed as a flaw (albeit an endearing one), and it is made clear that her “remoteness from Europe” (Franklin, 144) will lead to instability in her temperament and her society. Haidée, closer to Juan’s age, does not marry him—a good thing, as marriage is a farce, according to the rakish narrator—and so while their affair is still unorthodox, it is less illicit than Julia’s, as Haidée was not previously married. The romance lasts long enough for Haidée and Juan to take over the kingdom in the absence and reported death of Haidée’s father, and for her to become pregnant with Juan’s child.

In contrast to Julia, who allows Juan to “seduce” her through an elaborate pretense of innocence (and many justifications from the narrator), Haidée and Juan seem at first on equal terms. They are, in fact, frequently compared to “our first parents” Adam and Eve, particularly in

the fact that they “run the risk of being damn’d for ever” (2.1539-1540). “Each [is] the other’s mirror” (4.101), and “they [are] children still” (4.113). But Haidée is revealed in several scenes to be more powerful than Juan. Just as Julia displayed more overtly Byronic tendencies than Juan in conducting an elaborate seduction, in the quality of her illicit love for him, and in her self-imposed and downright pitiable repentance, so Haidée makes stronger actions and experiences stronger emotions than Juan. Her course of action, described at length by the narrator, is both more interesting and more tragic than Juan, who often appears by way of contrast as Franklin described him: as a “passive cipher.” It is she who rescues Juan and nurses him back to health after the shipwreck; it is she who has the rightful claim to the throne they share; it is she who has the dream prophesying their discovery and eventual separation; it is she who defends Juan from her father when he returns to the island and discovers their reign of luxury and debauchery, and, importantly, she who speaks during that confrontation. Although Juan takes action and fights her father and his men, Haidée is the one who defies her father most eloquently.

Haidée’s death in madness is not a dishonor to her character, nor does it compromise her heroic status: rather, it is essentially a *deus ex machina* that allows the protagonist (and thus the hero, his narrator) to escape from a female character powerful enough to take over the action of the text. ““Deal with me as thou wilt, but spare this boy”” (4.304), she implores her father, both elevating herself to a tragic Romantic position in her depth and extremity of feeling and her willingness to die for love, and asserting Juan’s inferiority by pointing out that he is still immature, still a “boy,” in comparison to her. But even though Byron must remove her from the story, he does not do her a disservice in her death, but rather an honor: as Franklin notes, “only 16 stanzas out of the 288 are devoted to her demise. The emphasis of the episode as a whole is on her vitality” (138). Thus Haidée’s death, although convenient, is almost inadvertently

portrayed as a heroic Romantic death, and it propels forward the momentum of the plot. For Haidée's death both thwarts and enacts the Byronic romance, asserting again that Byronic characters—even if it is a relationship of one Byronic character and one “mere mortal”—may never remain together happily. Self-destruction is inevitable.

The final incarnation of the Byronic heroine in *Don Juan*, after several episodes in between, is found in the most civilized society and the most civilized woman: in England, Juan actually contemplates entering into a marriage contract with Aurora Raby. She is the ultimate incarnation of the Byronic heroine: the modern, self-contained woman. As an independently wealthy, intelligent, unmarried orphan, she is entirely in charge of her own conduct and lifestyle. She can, in fact, resist Juan, and is not overwhelmed by his charm or by his beauty. Franklin finds that Aurora has “a sense of self-worth based not on a man's romantic love for her, but on her intrinsic value as an individual. . . . [She] is Byron's portrait of the modern woman” (158).

Although the Lady Adeline Amundeville cuts a striking figure against the English backdrop of the final cantos, she is not the object of Juan's affection, nor of the narrator's deepest admiration. She is beautiful, witty, entertaining, wealthy, and respected or envied by the other characters—and ultimately, compared to Aurora, too shallow and superficial to ever provide the kind of superior, self-contained woman Byron places in the role of Byronic heroine within the satire. Adeline is introduced as “[t]he fair most fatal Juan ever met, / Although she was not evil, nor meant ill” (13.91-92); she is the perfect socialite and wife, hosting perfect parties in the perfect setting; yet in the end, she cannot begin to compare to Aurora, whose introduction paints her as a far more challenging character. She is “a young star who shone / O'er life, too sweet an image for such glass. . . . A Rose with all its sweetest leaves yet folded” (15.341-44); she has “something of sublime / In eyes which sadly shone . . . with an aspect

beyond time; / Radiant and grave, as pitying man's decline" (15.354-57); she is aloof without ulterior motives, "gaz[ing] upon a world she scarcely knew / As seeking not to know it. . . . Her spirit seem'd as seated on a throne / Apart from the surrounding world" (15. 369-76). The very language of her descriptions places her above not just Juan, but all men; not just men, but above the world as a whole.

Adeline rails against the possibility of Juan marrying Aurora, not because of envy or jealousy; indeed, the narrator cannot name what makes Adeline dislike Aurora (15.377-432).

Perhaps it is simply that nameless quality of superiority that places these articulations of the heroine not just above Juan, but above all the other women he encounters—the difference between the visions of the Byronic heroine and the rest of Byron's "gallery of female characters." Whatever the case, Adeline is eventually revealed to be considerably less *genuine* than Aurora; in the penultimate canto, when Adeline is reciting a poem for the guests, Aurora and Juan are withdrawn from the action simply by looking at each other. It is at this moment that Juan "began to feel / Some doubt how much of Adeline was *real*" (16.815-16). Without words or overt actions—with not much more than a quiet smile, echoing the power of Astarte's brief words in *Manfred*—Aurora accomplishes what was only hinted at with the previous visions of the heroine:

And certainly Aurora had renewed

In him [Juan] some feelings he had lately lost

Or hardened; feelings which, perhaps ideal,

Are so divine, that I must deem them real:—

The love of higher things and better days;



The unbounded hope, and heavenly ignorance  
 Of what is called the world, and the world's ways;  
 The moments when we gather from a glance  
 More joy than from all future pride or praise  
 Which kindle manhood, but can ne'er entrance  
 The heart in an existence of its own  
 Of which another's bosom is the zone. (16.901-12)

In short, Aurora returns him to childlike innocence, to the utmost perfection of the instant, without the weight of the past or present. Aurora, like a child herself, does not erase Juan's past – but she neutralizes it, and makes the adventures of the previous cantos not worthless or forgotten, but the more *worthwhile*. She is his equal and better; she is rebellious, by virtue of the fact that she is both a Bluestocking and a Catholic; she is challenging, naturally placed above the superficial society represented by Adeline and comfortable in her aloofness. An end is in sight for Juan—and although Byron does not (or cannot) answer the question of whether Juan marries Aurora, or falls into another exploit, here is the woman who could prove the answer to all of his (mis)adventures.

*Don Juan* is Byron's most explicit engagement with the scenario implied in *Manfred*: that of a Byronic hero in danger of being equaled or even overwhelmed by a Byronic heroine. Here, these women are superior in action and in feeling to Juan, and while this would have been too much for Byron to explicitly portray in *Astarte*, it is allowable in this setting because the heroines are superior to an average man—a man who is not the Byronic hero. The hero—the narrator—is, in fact, superior to *them* still, in that he controls the action of the text and how much exposure each heroine receives. Byron, in his egoistic act of self-insertion, creates again a hero



who can control the heroine in a limited sense – but one who still cannot possess or subsume her, because he never comes into direct contact with her. Indeed, the narrator must end the story before answering the question of whether Juan and Aurora will marry, because the narrator, Juan, and Byron himself all come dangerously close to merging in the English episodes of *Don Juan*. The gap between the narrator and the events of the story narrows, and it is more difficult for the narrator to maintain protective and necessary satirical distance. Here he cannot dictate what Aurora does to his text—there is no natural way for him to regulate her or the change she created in Juan—and therefore the story must suddenly, incompletely end. It is the ultimate expression of narrative control and, at the same time, of a loss of control.

## Conclusion

Emily Brontë's only published novel, *Wuthering Heights* (1847), is often noted as being heavily influenced by George Gordon, Lord Byron's dramatic poem *Manfred* (1816-1817). But it should not be assumed that *Wuthering Heights* is mere mimicry. Rather, *Wuthering Heights* is an inventive and socially aware revisioning of an historical text. It is also, it strikes me, the logical extension of a sensibility that, although masked in chauvinistic tendencies, was already governing Byron's works. The situations present in *Manfred* and *Don Juan*—the first being that of a hero and heroine who interact only when the heroine's agency within the text has been permanently restricted, the latter of heroines whose agency is intact but whose interaction with the hero has been halted—provide the foundation for Brontë's examinations of the Byronic hero and heroine, and their relationship. Much as Byron had done in *Don Juan*, Brontë presents readers with a powerful articulation of the Byronic heroine, a woman who threatens to overwhelm the hero with her beauty, her passion, or her intelligence, if not all three. Incorporating *Manfred* into her novel, Brontë probes Byron's text, and in her work provides answers, as it were, to the questions of the origins of Manfred and Astarte's relationship, of their incestuous love, and of the reasons for Astarte's death and subsequent power over Manfred. This is all accomplished through the heroine of *Wuthering Heights*, the powerful Catherine Earnshaw.

Although Heathcliff displays typically Byronic traits, he is notably absent from the text for an extended amount of time, and frequently hindered in action: his status as an orphan, then as a household servant, prevent him from holding the same authority as Catherine. In short, like *Don Juan*, there are moments where he is not supremely the Byronic hero; and in these moments, Catherine's likeness to the heroines of *Don Juan* is evident. Her positive qualities (her beauty, passion, intelligence, social status) threaten to overwhelm Heathcliff as much as her negative

qualities (her temper, violence, cruelty). But in her cruelty, in her rare acts of violence, she separates herself from the Byronic heroines of *Don Juan*, who are presented as unfailingly kind or noble. Catherine is not afraid to take on the typically male qualities of Byronic heroes such as Manfred.

Brontë boldly subverts *Manfred* in elevating Astarte, his deceased “repository of human virtues,” to Catherine, who is as equally compelling and interesting a protagonist as Heathcliff; and as she does so she achieves very specific ends. In a sense, she *is* retelling *Manfred*, fleshing out the story where Byron would or could not, a point particularly exemplified in Catherine Earnshaw's difficult position of both being a part of Heathcliff and being Mrs. Edward Linton. Rather than her destruction—perhaps her *self*-destruction—being the appropriate punishment for an errant girl, Brontë recognizes it as the inescapable reality of the Byronic relationship.

To understand the importance of Brontë's revisioning, and her grounds for doing so, we must first return to the lost or subdued feminine potential of *Manfred*, discussed at length in section three, and then explore the critical knowledge of Byron's influence on Brontë. The plot of *Manfred* clearly has much to do with that of *Wuthering Heights*, although the characters seem to have only a limited resemblance to each other: the dramatic poem focuses on the male protagonist and the novel largely on the female protagonist, and Catherine Earnshaw appears to have considerably more agency in her text than Astarte does in her own. But Astarte, who appears at first to be the ultimate “passive” female character—a woman who is dead when the story begins—in fact holds more power in her text, as we have seen, than was previously acknowledged. She is thus the initial vision, in a sense, of Catherine Earnshaw, who is so vivacious and so present in her text that even her ghost cannot be subdued—again like Astarte.

In this light, it is easier to see the ways in which *Manfred* provided the basis for *Wuthering Heights*. Certainly the Brontë siblings' fascination with Byron, as well as their familiarity with his life and works, is well documented. Many critics, particularly F. B. Pinion in his 1995 article "Byron and *Wuthering Heights*," have examined what the Brontës likely gleaned from Thomas Moore's 1830 biography of Byron, and how it makes its appearance in their literary works. It is *Wuthering Heights* that has the most potential biographical references to Byron, such as when Heathcliff runs off into the night after hearing Catherine say it would "degrade" her to marry him (86-87). Pinion finds this mirrors a famous incident in which Byron, at 16, ran similarly into the night after hearing a young woman, Mary Chaworth, scoffed, "Do you think I could care any thing for that lame boy?" (Pinion, 195-196).

The influence of Byron's literary works on *Wuthering Heights* is similarly evident, and has been much examined. Ann Lapraik Livermore, in her essay "Byron and Emily Brontë," finds that it is "possible to perceive that . . . *Wuthering Heights* was planned [by Brontë] as an intertwining of [Byron's poem] *The Dream* with the facts as then known of Byron's ambiguous love for his half-sister, his marriage to Anne Isabella, and her flight from him" (338). Her analysis of *Wuthering Heights* and *The Dream* finds that the two works have loosely connected visual imagery. Similarly, Meg Harris Williams's 1987 book *A Strange Way of Killing: The Poetic Structure of Wuthering Heights* devotes a brief chapter to Byron's influence on Emily Brontë. Williams finds that Brontë was particularly influenced by Byron's comedic side, specifically *Don Juan*, and his "preoccupations with how an 'idea' can remain alive, within a culture or personality" (214).

While *Don Juan* and *Manfred* both display Byron's tendencies towards using the narrative to distance himself and his hero from the female protagonist—tendencies which Brontë

subverts by making the female protagonist quite literally the heroine of her story—Brontë’s use of this revisionary technique is seen most clearly in the retelling of *Manfred*. Some influence from *Don Juan* is certainly possible; but it is through bringing to light *Manfred*’s “buried” heroine that Brontë accomplishes her goals.

The fact that *Manfred*’s literal textual presence in *Wuthering Heights* is distinct and easily recognizable also makes a strong argument for the dramatic poem being the most direct Byronic influence on the novel. The similarities of plot are obvious. *Manfred* begins after the death of its heroine, presenting the hero’s textual journey as a quest to reclaim her or die, although he is able to do neither on his own terms. *Wuthering Heights* tells this same story, but gives the “prologue” of it as well, dedicating the first half of its story to the background between the hero and heroine, and the context of the heroine’s death, which is left a mystery in *Manfred*. Beyond this, the most famous speeches of each work parallel each other. Manfred’s declaration of his literal identification with Astarte, the “She was like me in lineaments” speech of Act II, Scene 2 is mirrored by Catherine’s lengthy descriptions of her love for Heathcliff despite her decision to marry Edgar Linton in Chapter 9. These include her dream of leaving Heaven to return to Wuthering Heights and her claims that Heathcliff is “more [herself] than [she] is” and that “whatever souls are made of, [theirs] are the same” (86); and similarly, after Catherine’s death, Heathcliff’s lament: “I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul!” (155). As Manfred begs an array of spirits to bring him Astarte, so that he might live or die rather than continue in his half-life, so Heathcliff begs Catherine to haunt him: “Be with me always – take any form – drive me mad! only *do* not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you!” (155). And, as Pinion finds, Manfred’s desperate “Speak to me!” monologue of Act II, Scene 4 finds verbal similarities in Heathcliff’s early plea to Catherine’s ghost in Chapter 3: “Come in!



Come in!’ [Heathcliff] sobbed. ‘Cathy, do come. Oh do – *once* more! Oh! my heart’s darling! hear me *this* time – Catherine, at last!’” (45). In short, the most memorable speeches of *Manfred*, particularly the exchanges between or descriptions of the bond between the hero and heroine, become the equally memorable speeches of *Wuthering Heights*.

This cleverly constructed revisioning of Byron’s inherent concepts is not, as Andrew Elfenbein suggests in his 1995 book *Byron and the Victorians*, a corrective measure or a demystification of Byronic romance; nor is it so much an attack on Byron’s text, in the sense that Brontë found it lacking. Rather, *Wuthering Heights* might be best seen as a recuperative reading of *Manfred*, where Brontë takes what Byron offers—a heroine restrained by a variety of distancing narrative techniques, a story that conveniently begins *in medias res*, an apparent division of the masculine and feminine—and builds upon it in her own text.

Brontë’s text is important because it takes Byron’s works and presents what he either accepts as fact or portrays deliberately in order to criticize her society and show its cruelties and shortcomings. She takes Byron’s text and draws out its heroine, placing her at the front of the novel, giving her tremendous power and agency as well as a fully articulated personality – and she presents it in an uncompromised vision as well, where Byron was unable or unwilling to do so. Catherine and Heathcliff destroy themselves and the world around them in their quest to be reunited; and although they fail – although their successors Cathy and Hareton seem to embody everything about polite society with its clearly defined gender roles, poised to restore order to both *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange* – at least Catherine and Heathcliff operate on their own terms.

In this light, the Byronic hero and heroine are here more united, more linked, than ever before. Like previous incarnations, this pair wants to merge, to subsume each other, but they



cannot – but that desire exists *because* they cannot do so. Catherine threatens to overwhelm Heathcliff, just as he threatens to overwhelm her, but circumstance and self-damnation alike prevent that from happening. The plot is not an imbalance between one's success and the other's downfall, or a case of one character being lifted while the other is down; rather, Catherine and Heathcliff rise and fall together. They are both lifted in their innocence when they are children; they both fall in their adulthood, when Catherine marries and dies, and Heathcliff loses all sense of his humanity.

This is the trajectory the Byronic hero and heroine have been following since their inception in Byron's works: it is their drive to encompass each other, a drive that results in a terrible downward spiral to an equality – an equality of being where both are ruined by their own self-destruction and by each other in equal measure. Even Brontë, presenting a hero and heroine with dynamic agency at the inception of her text, cannot create a way to bring the Byronic hero and heroine together – because their relationship can never be satisfactorily completed. And yet this inability to complete or fully experience their relationship is what gives the Byronic hero and heroine purpose, creating, in essence, a relationship that is both redemptive and damning.

*Wuthering Heights* ends with a focus on Catherine Heathcliff and Hareton Earnshaw, the children modeled after Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff, and their impending marriage; and yet Catherine Heathcliff and Hareton Earnshaw have rejected all Byronic tendencies in their personalities and actions, and thus their relationship can provide a satisfying conclusion to the novel. Within *Wuthering Heights*, she expands on the Byronic hero, provides us with a complete articulation of the Byronic heroine, examines the relationship between them, and recognizes that relationship's considerable limitations. In a sense, Brontë finds that to complete her novel, she must move *past* the Byronic relationship—a relationship unable to be completed, sterile in that

inability—and return to more traditional, less destructive characters. The logical conclusion of the Byronic relationship, presented by Brontë, is an ultimately destructive relationship that can only be fulfilling by never being fulfilled.

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