

THE HEROISM OF BYRON'S HEROINES

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ABSTRACT

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Byron's women characters have typically been seen as, in Hazlitt's early observation, 'yielding slaves'. My study re-examines that assumption, finding instead, across Byron's career, an abiding concern with the active individuality of women, and, more especially, with the creation of a specifically female form of heroism.

Recent critical attention has discussed women in Byron's poetry in general, notably Nigel Leask (*British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire*, 2004) and Susan Wolfson (*Borderlines: The Shiftings of Gender in British Romanticism*, 2006), but Byronic female heroism has gone unstudied. Caroline Franklin's sociologically couched work (*Byron's Heroines*, 1992) is one of the few to tackle the heroine, but she understands the term merely as 'female protagonist': my interest, by contrast, is in the development of a specific, new kind of gendered heroism.

Byron's representation of women takes shape within a number of discrete but inter-related discourses. The thesis examines the manner in which Byron engaged with previous literary and historical representations of proscribed gender roles. I remain alert to the literary heritage of Byron's representation of female heroism, which extends beyond his own socio-historical context.

The thesis is organised within the three major influences: (i) contemporary writings on gender and women, and a consideration of how Byron has 'resisted' availability for feminist critique, this being a result of an insufficiently nuanced approach to his poetry; (ii) eighteenth-century writings on the Orient and Oceania, which examines the concepts of Orient and Other as central to the destabilization of fixed perimeters of gender spheres in Byron's *Turkish Tales*; (iii) epic, which establishes Byron's relationship with his literary predecessors as one of reformation and resistance before demonstrating how Byron's particular form of heroism and epic was one way that he made room for the heroic female.

The thesis concludes with a brief coda, which extends the parameters of the governing concerns of the thesis, gender and heroism, arguing that *Don Juan* becomes a formal realization of the gendered heroics of Byron's poetic consciousness.

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used for references in the text:

BLJ: Lord Byron. *Byron's Letters and Journals*. Ed. Leslie A. Marchand. 13 vols.

London: John Murray, 1973-1994.

CMP: Andrew Nicholson ed. *Lord Byron: The Complete Miscellaneous Prose*.

Oxford: Clarendon, 1991.

CPW: Lord Byron. *The Complete Poetical Works*. Ed. Jerome J. McGann and Barry

Weller. 7 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1970-1983.

LJM: Andrew Nicholson ed. *The Letters of John Murray to Lord Byron*. Liverpool:

Liverpool UP, 2007.

All quotations of Byron's poetry and plays are taken from *CPW* unless otherwise indicated. References to poetry will give the canto number (where appropriate), followed by the line number. Quotations from the plays will indicate act, scene, and line.

I. THE HERITAGE OF BYRON'S HEROINES

(i) The Critical Heritage

The term 'heroine' is more generally used to denote the female protagonist of a work rather than to indicate nobility of mind, extraordinary capacity for action, or remarkable bravery. Caroline Franklin's *Byron's Heroines*, the most comprehensive study of the subject to date,¹ is insistent in its retention of the insipid neutrality of the noun: 'The word "heroine" is not used in this book to denote a favourable portrayal, but merely in the sense of a female protagonist.'² This thesis provides the first full-length study of Byron's heroines since Franklin's and offers a further stage in the evolving critical heritage of Byron's treatment of gender. In contrast to Franklin, but without wishing to 'exonerate Byron from charges of sexism',³ I shall seek to redefine our understanding of 'heroine' in relation to the earlier etymological sense of female heroic capacity,⁴ and argue that through a reconsideration of accepted critical rhetoric we can achieve a more sophisticated understanding of the critical import of Byron's female protagonists and the varying degrees of heroism they exhibit.

William Hazlitt's dismissal of Byron's female figures in his essay on the poet in

The Spirit of the Age is characteristic of the critical reception of the heroines:

Lord Byron makes man after his own image, woman after his own heart; the one is a capricious tyrant, the other a yielding slave; he gives us the misanthrope and the voluptuary by turns; and with these two characters, burning or melting in their own fires, he makes out everlasting centos of himself.⁵

Hazlitt's assessment has influenced subsequent analysis of Byron's heroines in two major ways. Firstly, he encourages us to read the heroine as the hero's counterpart.⁶

¹ Caroline Franklin, *Byron's Heroines* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).

² Franklin, *Heroines*, 1.

³ Franklin, *Heroines*, 1.

⁴ "heroine, n. (and adj.)". OED Online. September 2011. Oxford UP. 12 October 2011 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/86311?rskey=jcHxaW&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>.

⁵ William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of The Age: Or, Contemporary Portraits, The Complete Works of William Hazlitt in Twenty-One Volumes*, ed. P. P. Howe, vol. 11 of 21 (London: J. M. Dent, 1932) 71.

⁶ Jerome J. McGann, *Fiery Dust: Byron's Poetic Development* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1968) 189.

Franklin alerts us to the shortcomings of this mode of analysis, arguing that it can risk reading the heroine in a purely passive light: a performative prop for the hero who uses the heroine for his own ‘self-aggrandisement’.⁷ Franklin’s concern is warranted; in her review of *Byron’s Heroines*, Jennifer Wallace accuses Franklin of focussing on Byron’s female characters ‘at the expense of the male characters, upon whom the true tension of the work rests’,⁸ seemingly unaware that until the publication of Franklin’s study the heroine was almost exclusively read alongside the hero. Gloria Hull—the first critic to use the label ‘Byronic heroine’—reads the heroines’ importance as primarily ‘for the additional insights which they give into the nature and use of the Byronic hero’;⁹ Joanna Rapf equally regards the heroine as having ‘no important independent existence’¹⁰ being ‘ultimately defined by her relationship to a man’;¹¹ in his analysis of Aurora Raby as Byronic heroine, Charles Clancy similarly argues that ‘Byron consciously created her character to contrast to this male counterpart, to embody the outstanding and valuable characteristics of such a literary type in a dimensioned being.’¹²

Examining the heroine’s role exclusively in relation to the hero has consequently led to critical assumption of the exchange of femininity and masculinity as inversely proportional, for example, Heather Hadlock describes ‘Byron’s “unsexing”

⁷ Caroline Franklin, ‘“At Once Above-Beneath Her Sex”: The Heroine in Regency Verse Romance’, *MLR* 84 (1989): 286: ‘The exaggerated passivity of Byron’s early heroines is seen as ‘natural’ by Jeffrey, and by Byron’s readers, because it justifies and excuses the hero’s self-aggrandisement on her behalf as equally fundamental to human nature.’

⁸ Jennifer Wallace, ‘“Women After His Own Heart”: Byron’s Sexual Politics’, *Cambridge Quarterly* 22.3 (1993): 309.

⁹ Gloria T. Hull, ‘The Byronic Heroine and Byron’s *The Corsair*’, *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 9 (1978): 72.

¹⁰ Joanna E. Rapf, ‘The Byronic Heroine: Incest and the Creative Process’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 21.4 (1981): 639.

¹¹ Rapf, 638.

¹² Charles L. Clancy, ‘Aurora Raby in Don Juan: A Byronic Heroine’, *Keats-Shelley Journal* 28 (1979): 29.

of the heroine and consequent ‘unmanning’ of the hero’;¹³ Anthony Vital similarly regards the masculinity of the hero as compromised by the femininity of the heroine: ‘With the feminine as “pre-text” in so many poems, the male voice, for all its bustling activity, shrinks in importance as in poem after poem it dances attendance on the passively charming feminine.’¹⁴ The interchange of gender specific qualities in Byron’s poetry does in some sense revolve around ineffectual victims and effectual heroes, yet Hadlock’s sense of the causal relationship between the two is unsound; as I shall go on to explore in ‘Radicalized Heroines’ (I.vii) it is the ineffectuality of the male that *requires* the female to adopt an active role rather than the active female ‘unmanning’ the hero; this is undoubtedly the case in the relationship between both Gulnare and Conrad in *The Corsair* (1814), as well as Neuha and Christian in *The Island* (1823). Rapf equally overlooks the significance of this dynamic, suggesting that male victimhood and female heroism are the result of ‘an ironic and perhaps unconscious reversal of traditional roles’.¹⁵ Without challenging Byron’s capacity for irony, there is no question that his experimentation with gender roles is in part the result of conscious authorial intention. Malcolm Kelsall, who finds in *Sardanapalus* a literary partnership that is ‘mutually self-reflexive’, gives the most positive reading of the relationship between hero and heroine.¹⁶ My study similarly observes moments of performative mutual self-reflexivity; however, I depart from the studies listed above in regarding the heroine’s literary significance as something that exists independently from her relationship with the hero.

¹³ Heather Hadlock, ‘The Firmness of a Female Hand’ in ‘The Corsair’ and ‘Il Corsaro’, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 14 (2001): 57.

¹⁴ Anthony Paul Vital, ‘Lord Byron’s Embarrassment: Poesy and the Feminine’, *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities* 86.3 (1983-85): 279.

¹⁵ Rapf, 640.

¹⁶ Malcolm Kelsall, ‘The Slave-Woman in the Harem’, *Studies in Romanticism* 31 (Fall, 1992): 330.

Hazlitt's second critical bequest is the characterisation of Byron's heroines as yielding slaves—a legacy that permeates criticism throughout much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In 1896 critical opinion of Byron's heroines was equally pejorative: 'Byron, with all his intensity and experience, has drawn no heroine of any merit. . . He has no power of delineating human nature.'¹⁷ Peter Thorslev's *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes*, published nearly a century later, is similarly contemptuous of Byron's heroines and refuses to grant them a textual presence, sequestering his assessment of them in a parenthetical aside: '(And the *femmes* in Byron, so far as I can see, are sometimes spaniel-like, but never fatal).'¹⁸ Twentieth-century criticism has gone some way towards remedying Thorslev's short-sighted approach: Anthony Vital, Nigel Leask, and Timothy Flake all comment upon the literary potency of the Byronic heroine¹⁹, and though her focus is on their poetic legacy, Jane Stabler comments upon Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetic realization of 'the potential of Byron's heroines to be other than the "yielding slaves" depicted by Hazlitt'.²⁰ I shall similarly argue that the role of gender in Byron is more complex than stereotypical; by re-examining the Hazlittian assumption of female passivity, I find instead, across Byron's career, an abiding concern with the active individuality of women, and, more especially, with the creation of a specifically female form of heroism.

¹⁷ 'The Heroines of the Poets' in 'Current Literary Thought and Opinion', *Current Literature* 19.5 (May, 1896): 391.

¹⁸ Peter L. Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1962) 10; Lawrence Lipking similarly argues that for all Byron's success in creating a hero figure, 'he had never created a convincing heroine' (*Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988) 37).

¹⁹ See Vital 269-290; Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992) 45-67; Timothy H. Flake, 'Byronic Heroism in the Island' *The Byron Journal* 25 (1997) 44-59.

²⁰ Jane Stabler, 'Romantic and Victorian Conversations: Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning in Dialogue with Byron and Shelley', *Fellow Romantics: Male and Female British Writers, 1790-1835*, ed. Beth Lau (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) 236-237.

My own consideration of Byron's heroines will follow Susan Wolfson's precedent, that 'Byron foregrounds the artifice that sustains much of what we determine to be "masculine" and "feminine"'.²¹ This deliberate blurring of gender roles and identities grants the female protagonist the necessary mobility with which to move into the masculine dominated heroic sphere. Consequently, through his heroines Byron can be seen to contribute to the growing debate surrounding the social situation of women by questioning accepted notions of female autonomy and fortitude. Like Franklin, I will consider Byron's gender ideology 'not as a fixture but as a dialectical process.'²² Doing so is especially important in an assessment of Byron's heroines, who are—like his heroes—capable of growth and change, and so necessarily resist the typological classification offered by Leask and Rapf;²³ rather, as Robert Gleckner convincingly argues, the development of the heroine echoes the development of the hero and that in the representations of Gulnare and Medora 'we have the beginnings of a complexity and conflict similar to that seen in the characters of the Giaour and Selim'.²⁴

²¹ Susan J. Wolfson, "'Their she Condition': Cross-Dressing and the Politics of Gender in *Don Juan*", *ELH* 54.3 (Autumn, 1987): 611. Wolfson works from a Derridarean perspective in her approach to *Don Juan*: 'It is fitting that *Don Juan* . . . should yield related transgressions of gender that may, in Jacques Derrida's words, test "identity and difference between the feminine and masculine"' (593). The concept of identity and difference will be central to my consideration of the heroine's relationship with the hero.

²² Franklin, 'The Heroine in Regency Verse Romance', 274

²³ Leask argues that Byron's heroines function allegorically and divides them into two types, the 'Medoran' and the 'Gulnarean' which stand for the passive and the active ('Byron and the Eastern Mediterranean', *The Cambridge Companion to Byron*, ed. Drummond Bone (Cambridge: CUP, 2004) 107); Rapf identifies 'at least three types' of Byronic heroine: 'the frigid intellectual, the vulgar sensualist, and the ideal combination' (638). Both Leask and Rapf suggest that Byron's poetry conforms to the contemporary poetic tendency to construct 'types' rather than individuals, articulated by Hazard Adams: 'the poets began to write but little of individual men and women, but rather of great types, great symbols of passion and mood' ('Byron, Yeats, and Joyce: Heroism and Technic', *Studies in Romanticism* 24 (1985): 405).

²⁴ Robert F. Gleckner, *Byron and the Ruins of Paradise* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1967) 145.

(ii) Of the Spirit of the Age?

Critical neglect of Byron's heroines is largely a consequence of the perceived resistance of his poetry to feminist readings. In her influential study *Romanticism and Gender*, Anne Mellor groups Byron with Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Edmund Burke as defining 'the hegemonic domestic ideology of the Romantic period'.²⁵ Both Rousseau's and Burke's insistence upon how naturally unsuited women are to acting—or even existing—outside the prescribed feminine sphere of the drawing room justifies at least two-thirds of Mellor's assertion. In both Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) and Rousseau's *Émile, or Education* (1762) we encounter a basic separation of masculine and feminine qualities that has little philosophical grounding, instead being based in gross generalisations of circumstantial social norms. Burke recommends the 'natural' physical weakness of women as a positive aspect: 'The beauty of women is considerably owing to their weakness, or delicacy, and is even enhanced by their timidity, a quality of mind analogous to it.'²⁶ In Mary Wollstonecraft's opinion, Burke's admiration for the female sex, reserved for such figures as Marie Antoinette, who possessed 'neither virtue nor sense',²⁷ is conclusive evidence of the determination of men *not* to recognise the female capacity for greatness. Rousseau's determination to emphasise the naturalness of the 'original dispositions'²⁸ of women to be situated in the domestic sphere supports Wollstonecraft's suspicions. In her confinement within the domestic sphere, the heroine is necessarily excluded from heroic action. For Rousseau the interaction

²⁵ Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism & Gender* (London: Routledge, 1993) 109.

²⁶ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, ed. T. O. McLoughlin and James T. Bolton (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) 275-276.

²⁷ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Hints* in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, vol. 5 of 7 (London: William Pickering, 1989) 18.

²⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, or on Education, The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, trans. and ed. Christopher Kelly and Allan Bloom, vol. 13 of 13 (Hanover: UP of New England, 2010) 163.

between male and female is governed by the balance between power and weakness:

‘One ought to be active and strong, the other passive and weak. One must necessarily will and be able; it suffices that the other put up little resistance.’²⁹

Byron’s poetic interaction with the domestic ideology of the Romantic period is far from clear-cut. An aversion to contemporary domestic ideology is evident in Byron’s circle; Thomas Moore, for example, perceived an inherent incompatibility between domestic happiness and poetry, with poets ‘from Homer down to Lord Byron’ being ‘either strangers, or rebels to domestic ties’.³⁰ Byron extends such incompatibility between the creative and the domestic in the construction of his heroes, whose alienation from domesticity is a necessary component of the Byronic heroism that defines them. Byron’s heroines pose an equal challenge to Burkean and Rousseauvian ideologies of gender by refusing to be confined to their designated domestic sphere. The heroines of the Tales largely resist the domestic parameters that restrict them, either with or without the aid of the hero. In Byron’s treatment of epic, which forms the focus of my second chapter, the (often adulterous) relationship between hero and heroine consistently threatens to destabilize the domestic sphere. It would appear that of Mellor’s tripartite, Byron is the odd one out; rather than define the domestic ideology of the period, Byron’s poetry instead seeks to distort contemporary gender classifications and disrupt the eighteenth-century segregation of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ spheres of action.

Though Byron can be absolved of a Burkean domestic ideology, Rousseau’s influence on Byron is more problematic. Kenneth Neill Cameron has observed that within *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, influences from ‘Rousseau’s *Confessions* are not

²⁹ Rousseau, 532.

³⁰ Thomas Moore ed., *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: With Notices of his Life*, vol. 1 of 2 (London: John Murray, 1830) 591.

far to seek.³¹ Byron's admiration for Rousseau is manifest throughout the poem, most clearly in the third canto (stanzas 76-81) when the poet engages directly with Rousseau's creation of Julie, the heroine of *Émile*: 'This breathed itself to life in J^ulie, *this* / Invested her with all that's wild and sweet' (*CHP* III.743-744). Yet at this point in the poem, Byron makes evident that his admiration for Rousseau is based upon his powers of expression, rather than his ideological commitments. In a note to stanza 79, Byron writes:

This refers to the account in his 'Confessions' of his passion for the Comtesse d'Houdetot (the mistress of St. Lambert) and his long walk every morning for the sake of the single kiss which was the common salutation of French acquaintance.—Rousseau's description of his feelings on this occasion may be considered as the most passionate, yet not impure description and expression of love that ever kindled into words; which after all must be felt, from their very force, to be inadequate to the delineation: a painting can give no sufficient idea of the ocean (*CPW* II.309).

The Comtesse d'Houdetot provided Rousseau with the inspiration for Julie, and echoes of Rousseau's fictional heroine can be observed in Byron's more passive female protagonists. Medora (*The Corsair*), spends much of her time either reclining on a couch (I.371) or pining for her absent lover (I.393); she delights in serving Conrad's every whim ('Light toil! to cull and dress thy frugal fare!' I.422) and is willing 'thrice' to climb the hill to ensure Conrad's Sherbet is chilled to his liking (I.425-28). Even Medora, however, plays a more complex role than Rousseau's prescriptive version of domestic femininity allows: 'Within that meek fair form, were feelings high' (III.95). Medora is crucial for the hero's development and the poem's narrative structure; she provides and exists as a sanctuary for Conrad away from the realm of masculine violence. His love for her, 'unchangeable—unchanged' (I.287), is presented as his one remaining humane virtue, 'Which only proved, all other virtues gone, / Not guilt itself

³¹ Kenneth Neill Cameron ed., *Shelley and His Circle, 1773-1822*, vol. 3 of 10 (London: OUP, 1970) 293. A 1796 edition of *Confessions* is listed in the 1816 Sale Catalogue (item 273); a first edition is listed alongside *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Heloise* (1792) in the 1827 Sale Catalogue (item 167). All Sale Catalogue entries taken from 'Appendix: Sale Catalogues (1816 and 1827)', *CMP* 231-254; future references will be cited parenthetically using the shorthand 'SC' followed by the identifying date (in parentheses) and item number.

could quench this loveliest one!’ (I.307-8). Medora’s beauty becomes Conrad’s motivating force, reaching him from afar (I.511-12); their love also becomes a focal point of romantic tension with the appearance of Gulnare who asserts her own agency in contrast to what she perceives as Medora’s impotence: ‘I rush through peril which she would not dare’ (III.299). My next chapter shall explore in more detail Byron’s pattern of establishing heroines in conventional roles before proceeding to undermine their conventionality.

Byron’s resistance towards the domestic ideology of the Romantic period is, however, in opposition to a more usual literary collaboration with prevailing gender stereotypes. Literature of the long eighteenth century, especially novels by female authors, tended to respond to the cult of domesticity by reinforcing rather than challenging it. Alice Browne argues that the social emphasis on women needing to cultivate physical weakness had a literary impact: ‘Novel heroines became more fragile as the century went on’.³² If we adopt Browne’s perspective that ‘heroine-centered fantasies are just as important a part of the culture’s view of women as more consciously held beliefs’,³³ then the gender roles prescribed by the prevailing domestic ideology of the period can be regarded as both symptom and cause of the literary re-imagining of the feminine. Browne, however, goes on to argue that ‘new kinds of writing by, for and about women helped to make feminist discourse possible, even though their immediate effect was often to limit women to narrowly ‘feminine’ views of themselves and their lives’.³⁴ Certainly, in Romantic literature the heroine tended to cut a diminished figure in the wake of the splendour of the masculine hero. Meena Alexander indicates that the Romantic vision of the feminine ‘might be gentle, nurturing and silent, or fiercely sexual and violent; but nowhere was it granted a genius

³² Alice Browne, *The Eighteenth-Century Feminist Mind* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987) 31.

³³ Browne, 13.

³⁴ Browne, 14.

commensurate with that of men',³⁵ and whilst Barbara Caine notes that 'A new and more serious ideal of womanhood was emerging' she stresses that 'at the same time, manhood was being exalted in new ways and in ways which served to emphasize the extent to which men embodied all human excellence.'³⁶ As such, the interaction between contemporary visions of hero and heroine is in almost complete accordance with Burkean and Rousseauvian stricture: whilst he quested, she remained static.

Romantic heroines, as Wollstonecraft indicates, were informed by the self-effacing attitude of their real-life counterparts who are 'only anxious to inspire love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition'.³⁷ The tendency of female authors to reinforce the passive domestic ideal of womanhood is explained by Mary Poovey as motivated by self-interest: 'Because their contributions to society were rewarded both by men's grateful approval and by a sense of their own worth, women had a clear investment in accepting the naturalisation of the feminine ideal.'³⁸ Even when women departed from such 'naturalisation', this 'nobler ambition' remains couched in the masculine-heroic sphere – even for the champion of the female sex, female excellence is unintelligible without masculine influence: 'I have been led to imagine that the few extraordinary women who have rushed in eccentric directions out of the orbit prescribed to their sex, were [*male* spirits, confined by mistake in female frames].'³⁹ The refusal to award the female with her own separate identity accords with Thomas Laqueur's 'one-sex model': '*man* is the measure of all things, and woman does not exist as an ontologically distinct category.'⁴⁰ Forced to define the feminine according to

³⁵ Meena Alexander, *Women in Romanticism: Mary Wollstonecraft, Dorothy Wordsworth and Mary Shelley* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989) 6.

³⁶ Barbara Caine, *English Feminism 1780-1980* (Oxford: OUP, 1997) 23.

³⁷ Wollstonecraft, 73.

³⁸ Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984) 15.

³⁹ Wollstonecraft, 103.

⁴⁰ Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard UP, 1990) 62.

socially stereotyped notions, Wollstonecraft's characterisation of women in the long eighteenth-century accords with social expectation: 'Gentleness, docility, and a spaniel-like affection are, on this ground, consistently recommended as the cardinal virtues of the sex'.⁴¹ As such, the female heroic necessarily had to be judged according to the standards of the *male* heroic, and those women who transcended social expectations were inevitably de-feminized: 'In fact, if we revert to history, we shall find that the women who have distinguished themselves have neither been the most beautiful nor the most gentle of their sex.'⁴² Yet during the Romantic era, heroism began to move away from more conventional heroic qualities, such as physical strength, and adopt more 'feminine' virtues.⁴³ Wollstonecraft laments such a shift: 'Bodily strength from being the distinction of heroes is now sunk into such unmerited contempt that men, as well as women, seem to think it unnecessary';⁴⁴ however, whilst Wollstonecraft critiqued the tendency to favour '*finesse* and effeminacy' over 'fortitude',⁴⁵ it was this blurring of gender roles and identities that granted the female protagonist the necessary mobility with which to move into the hitherto masculine dominated heroic sphere.

⁴¹ Wollstonecraft, 102.

⁴² Wollstonecraft, 98.

⁴³ Northrop Frye observes this shift in Romance novels: 'With the rise of the romantic ethos, heroism comes increasingly to be thought of in terms of suffering, endurance, and patience, which can coexist with such weakness, whatever other kinds of strength it may require. . . Such a change in the conception of heroism largely accounts for the prominence of female figures in romance' (*The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard UP, 1976) 88).

⁴⁴ Wollstonecraft, 107.

⁴⁵ Wollstonecraft, 216.

(iii) ‘loveliest Oligarchs of our Gynocracy’⁴⁶

The contents of both Sale Catalogues of Byron’s library indicate an ongoing interest in literary and historical accounts of gender and femininity.⁴⁷ Though the presence of the English translations of Cristoph Meiner’s *History of the Female Sex* (1808)⁴⁸ [SC (1816) 226] and Joseph Alexandre Ségur’s *Women: Their Condition and Influence in Society* (1803)⁴⁹ [SC (1816) 300] does not conclusively confirm Byron’s interest in the historical and contemporary fortunes of the female sex, their librarious cohabiters give a strong indication of Byron’s fascination for works that consider remarkable historical female figures, fictional works that use such figures as a basis for fabricated heroines, and, perhaps most significantly, poems and novels by women concerning issues of gender. Given her later role in *Don Juan*, Jean Henri Castéra’s *Histoire de Catherine II* (1800) [SC (1827) 43] is an expected item. The appeal of aristocratic European matriarchs is further evidenced by the memoirs of Wilhelmine of Prussia—sister of Frederick the Great—who was married to the Margrave of Brandenburg-Bayreuth. The memoirs appear twice—once in their original language of publication [SC (1816) 13], and again in the English translation [SC (1816) 230], suggesting Byron’s interest in Wilhelmine was sufficient for him to want to attend to her story in his own language; such avid interest is comprehensible given Wilhelmine’s

⁴⁶ *DJ* XII.524.

⁴⁷ The content of both contrasts starkly with Byron’s juvenile ‘Reading List (1807)’ (*CMP* 1-7); despite claiming to have read ‘above four thousand novels’ (6), no women appear in Byron’s 1807 reading list—other than the ones he has been ‘making love to’ instead of reading (6)—with the exception of Sappho (2).

⁴⁸ Where the first date of publication and the date of publication of Byron’s own copy deviates, both are given. For further bibliographic details see ‘Works Cited’ which lists the edition owned by Byron where known.

⁴⁹ Ségur’s text was published in translation from the French by Longman the same year as its release in Paris; Longman had previously published material of a strikingly similar kind, notably Mary Robinson’s *Letter to the Women of England, on the Injustice of Mental Subordination* (1799), which was released in a second edition the same year, retitled *Thoughts on the condition of women, and on the injustice of mental subordination* (1799). For a detailed examination of both Meiner’s and Ségur’s texts see Franklin, *Heroines*, 104-121.

role in establishing Bayreuth as one of the leading intellectual nuclei of the Homan Roman Empire, attended by major literary figures including Voltaire. Byron's possession of the *Memoir of the Queen of Etruria* (1814) [SC (1816) 15] is similarly revealing of an interest in leading female European political figures; following the early death of her husband, Maria Louisa acted as Regent for her son until Napoleon forced her to flee Florence (the capital of the region then known as Etruria); she remained in exile until Napoleon's defeat when she became Duchess of Lucca until her death; her memoirs were intended to raise support for her campaign to regain governance of the Kingdom of Etruria for her son. Jean-Louis Soulavie's *Anecdotes de la Cour de France pendant la faveur de la Marquise de Pompadour* (1802) [SC (1827) 6] is equally revealing; Madame de Pompadour, mistress of Louis XV, friend of Voltaire, and *femme savante* of the French court, has been the subject of continuing biographical and historical study, from Nancy Mitford's 1954 biography⁵⁰ to more recent scholarly debate concerning her 'feminine power'.⁵¹ Louise d'Epainay, whose *Memoires et Correspondance* (1818) [SC (1827) 54] also feature among Byron's books, is another example of a woman famed for her influential relationships with men of intellectual and political renown; she is perhaps best remembered for her patronage of Rousseau, and was one of the most prominent *femmes savantes* of Enlightenment France, cultivating friendships with Voltaire, Denis Diderot, and Baron von Grimm. Her *Memoires* began life as a pseudo-fictional account, *L'Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant*, and exist as a significant contribution to debates concerning the political status of women in

⁵⁰ Nancy Mitford, *Madame de Pompadour* (London: Hamilton, 1954).

⁵¹ See in particular Danielle Gallet, *Madame de Pompadour ou le pouvoir feminine* (Paris: Fayard, 1985); Julian Swann, 'Parlement, Politics and the *Parti Janséniste*: The *Grand Conseil* Affair, 1755-56', *French History* 6 (December, 1992): 435-461; Thomas E. Kaiser, 'Madame de Pompadour and the Theatres of Power', *French Historical Studies* 19.4 (Autumn, 1996): 1025-1044; Margaret Crosland, *Madame de Pompadour: Sex, Culture, and Power* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2000); Tess Lewis, 'Madame de Pompadour: Eminence without Honour', *The Hudson Review* 56.2 (Summer, 2003): 303-314.

eighteenth-century France, specifically in her challenge to Rousseauvian formulations of gender identities.⁵²

Byron was equally intrigued by women of the English Court; one of Princess Caroline's Women of the Bedchamber, Mary Lepel, Lady Hervey, an edition of whose letters are recorded [SC (1827) 95], was admired by both Alexander Pope and Voltaire, who wrote the verses 'To Lady Hervey'; *The British Critic*, however, saw little in her letters to justify such a response: 'It is difficult to believe that the Lady Hervey of the letters is the Mary Lepel, whose "merit, beauty, and vivacity," exhorted homage even from the virulence of Pope's resentment; and who had the extraordinary distinction of being celebrated in English verse by Voltaire.'⁵³

Mary Berry's *Life of Lady Rachel Russell* (1819) [SC (1827) 206] is an equally fascinating acquisition by Byron; Lady Russell was an able authoress and enjoyed significant political prestige, being dubbed the 'grande dame' of the Whigs by the end of the seventeenth century.⁵⁴ A figure whose impact on Romantic Orientalism I shall return to in my next chapter is 'the charming Mary Montague' (*DJ* V.24), whose *Oeuvres* (1804) are listed in the later Sale Catalogue [SC (1827) 143].

Byron's accumulation of factual and pseudo-factual biographies of significant historical female personages is complemented by his collection of literature that features either women as the central theme, such as Charles Robert Maturin's *Women; or, Pour et Contre* (1818) [SC (1827) 193], (more controversially) Rousseau's *Julie, ou*

⁵² See Alice Parker, 'Louise d'Epinay's Account of Female Epistemology and Sexual Politics', *The French Review* 55.1 (Oct., 1981): 43-51; Roland G. Bonnel and Catherine Rubinger eds., *Femmes Savantes et Femme D'Esprit* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994); Mary Trouille, 'Sexual/Textual Politics in the Enlightenment: Diderot and D'Epinay Respond to Thomas' Essay on Women', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 19 (1996): 1-15, and 'La Femme Mal Mariée: Mme d'Epinay's Challenge to *Julie* and *Emile*', *Eighteenth-Century Life* 20.1 (1996): 42-66; Gary Kates, *Monsieur d'Eon is a Woman: A Tale of Political Intrigue and Sexual Masquerade* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001) 196-200.

⁵³ *The British Critic* 17 (1822): 43.

⁵⁴ Lois G. Schworer, 'Russell, Rachel, Lady Russell (*bap.* 1637, *d.* 1723)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (OUP, 2004) online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, Jan. 2008, 23 Oct. 2011 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24335>>.

la Nouvelle Heloise (1761; 1792) [SC (1827) 167], and Thomas Brown's *The Paradise of Coquettes* (1814) [SC (1816) 267]; or features historical and mythological women as the central protagonist, such as Francis Hodgson's *Lady Jane Grey* (1809) [SC (1816) 135], William Herbert's *Helga A Poem in Seven Cantos* (1815) [SC (1816) 136], W. S. Irving's *Fair Helen: A Tale of the Border* (1814) [SC (1816) 11],⁵⁵ and Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué's fairytale *Undine* (trans. Soane) (1818) [SC (1827) 68].

Complementary to Byron's collection of biographies and letters, but perhaps less expected, is his extensive assortment of major fictional works by women that focus on issues of gender and femininity, such as Mary Tighe's Spenserian poem *Psyche* (1811) [SC (1816) 137], an epic romance that provides a daring representation of female sexuality.⁵⁶ Byron's appreciation of the novel genre more generally is articulated by his possession of Anna Barbauld's fifty-volume collection, *British Novelists* (1810) [SC (1816) 36], which emerged as the first effort to define a novelistic canon;⁵⁷ his interest in women novelists in particular has been partly accounted for by Franklin, who remarks upon the frequency with which female novelists appear in both Sale Catalogues.⁵⁸ The presence of women writers in Byron's libraries is in itself remarkable, but what is perhaps more significant is the subject-matter they cover.

Amelia Opie, whose *Adeline Mowbray* is loosely based on the marriage of

⁵⁵ The epigraph to Irving's *Tale* is taken from Byron's *Giaour*:

A mightier monument command,
The mountains of thy native land!
There points thy Muse to stranger's eye
The graves of those that cannot die! (132-135)

⁵⁶ See Greg Kucich, 'Gender Crossings: Keats and Tighe', *Keats-Shelley Journal* 44 (1995): 29-39; Harriet Kramer Linkin, 'Skirting around the Sex in Mary Tighe's "Psyche"', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 42.4 (Autumn, 2002): 731-752; for the poem's critical reception and literary reputation see Linkin, 'Mary Tighe and Literary History: The Making of a Critical Reputation', *Literature Compass* 7 (2010): 564-576.

⁵⁷ See Claudia L. Johnson, "'Let me make the novels of a country": Barbauld's *The British Novelists* (1810/1820)', *Novel* 34.2 (2001): 163-179.

⁵⁸ See Caroline Franklin, 'Byron and Women Novelists', *The 2001 University of Nottingham Foundation Lecture* (U of Nottingham P, 2002; Rpb 2010).

Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, is well-represented in the 1816 Sale Catalogue;⁵⁹ her *Father and Daughter* (1801) [SC (1816) 205], which considers the fate of fallen women through the misfortunes of its protagonist Agnes, has been read by Eleanor Ty as a radical re-appropriation of the conventional treatment of the sexually transgressive heroine.⁶⁰ The heroine of Sydney Morgan's *Florence Macarthy* (1818) [SC (1827) 134] is herself a novelist, and articulates a proto-feminist radical reaction against the misogyny of contemporary literary circles. The second of Mary Brunton's two full-length novels, *Discipline* (1814) [SC (1816) 82], as the title suggests, takes female fortitude as its central concern; though the subject matter conforms to Brunton's purportedly primarily religious motivations for writing, the independence and strength of mind her heroine comes to possess has made Brunton an attractive subject for studies of eighteenth-century proto-feminist ideology.⁶¹

A similar kind of Christian feminism is apparent in Hannah More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1808) [SC (1816) 229], which critiques the limitations of contemporary femininities, and advocates a new kind of female gender-identity rooted in education.⁶² Frances Burney's *Camilla* (1802) [SC (1816) 72] satirizes the contemporary opinions regarding female education through the governess Miss Margland and the scholar Dr. Orkborne.⁶³ In terms of female education, the significant number of Maria Edgeworth's writings is of especial importance;⁶⁴ her

⁵⁹ *Simple Tales* (1806) and *Tales of Real Life* (1813) are both listed [SC (1816) 247].

⁶⁰ Eleanor Rose Ty, 'Re-scripting the Tale of the Fallen Woman: Opie's *The Father and Daughter*', *Empowering the Feminine: the Narratives of Mary Robinson, Jane West, and Amelia Opie, 1796-1812*, ed. Eleanor Rose Ty (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1998) 133-144.

⁶¹ See in particular Eve Tavor Bannet, *The Domestic Revolution: Enlightenment Feminisms and the Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000).

⁶² See Ann Stott, 'A Singular Injustice Towards Women': Hannah More, Evangelicalism and Female Education', *Women, Religion, and Feminism in Britain, 1750-1900*, ed. Sue Morgan (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002) 23-38.

⁶³ See Audrey Bilger, *Laughing Feminism: Subversive Comedy in Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2002) 130-131.

⁶⁴ *The Modern Griselda* (1805) [SC (1816) 9]; *Tales of Fashionable Life* (1809) [SC (1816) 95]; *Patronage* (1814) [SC (1816) 96]; and *Harrington and Ormond* (1817) [SC (1827) 64].

interest in educational reform is evident from her first publication, *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795), which was soon followed by *Essays on Practical Education* (1798), on which she worked closely with her progressive-thinking father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth.⁶⁵ Perhaps a more radical figure in the Sale Catalogues is Mary Robinson, who published her proto-feminist treatise *Thoughts on the Condition of Women, and on the Injustices of Mental Subordination* (1799) soon after her novel *Walsingham* (1797; 1805) [SC (1816) 319], a radical narrative of a cross-dressed heiress. The now near-forgotten Sophie Cottin is the next best-represented female author in Byron's library after Edgeworth.⁶⁶ Although not as clearly related to the proto-feminist cause as Edgeworth, Cottin's novels can be considered radical in their challenge of the purely reproductive function of female sexuality, such as in her erotically explicit *Claire d'Albe* (1799).⁶⁷

Byron's familiarity with literary women was not limited to the bibliographic. One of his most significant literary acquaintances was Madame de Staël, to whom he was introduced at a party in London in 1813.⁶⁸ The poet's initial impressions of de Staël were less than favourable; in a letter to Annabella Milbanke he remarks:

it is lucky that Me. de Staël has published her Anti-suicide⁶⁹ at so killing a time—*November* too! I have not read it—for fear that the love of contradiction might lead me to a practical confutation.—Do you know her? I don't ask if you have *heard* her? Her tongue is “the perpetual motion” (*BLJ* III.160).⁷⁰

To de Staël herself, however, Byron was more than usually courteous, suggesting that if not her perpetual conversation, then her writings at least had made no small impression on him. He writes in his 1813 journal: ‘I have read her books—like most of them, and

⁶⁵ Edgeworth's *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth* (1820) is also listed [SC (1827) 63].

⁶⁶ *Claire d'Albe* (1799); *Malvina* (1801); *Amélie Mansfield* (1802); and *Mathilde* (1805) are all listed [SC (1827) 36].

⁶⁷ See Michael J. Call, *Infertility and the Novels of Sophie Cottin* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2002).

⁶⁸ See Catherine Fanshawe's and James Smith's accounts in Ernest J. Lovell, *His Very Self and Voice: Collected Conversations of Lord Byron* (New York: Macmillan, 1954) 68-69.

⁶⁹ *Réflexions sur le Suicide* (1813)

⁷⁰ Byron refines the joke he'd earlier tried on Moore: ‘Rogers is out of town with Madame de Staël, who hath published an Essay against Suicide, which, I presume, will make somebody shoot himself’ (*BLJ* III.73).

delight in the last' (III.207). After reading the poet's citation of her

De l'Allemagne (1810)⁷¹ in a note to the *Bride of Abydos* (1813),⁷² de Staël sent a note in French to thank Byron; Byron's effusive reply is dated the same day:

In referring to your recent work in the note with which you are obliging enough to be pleased—I was but too happy to avail myself of your authority for a real or fancied confirmation of my own opinion on a particular subject.—My praise was only the feeble echo of more powerful voices—to yourself any attempt at eulogy must be merely repetition (*BLJ* III.184-85).

By the time Byron encountered de Staël in Copet during his summer with the Shelleys in Switzerland his attitude toward her had softened; Moore reports that, drawing Byron aside, she counselled him on his recent matrimonial misdemeanours:

He must endeavour, she told him, to bring about a reconciliation with his wife, and must submit to contend no longer with the opinion of the world. In vain did he quote her own motto to *Delphine*, "Un homme peut braver, une femme doit se succomber aux opinions du monde"; her reply was, that all this might be very well to say, but that in real life, the duty and necessity of yielding belonged also to the man.⁷³

Moore's (albeit apocryphal) report, conveys the importance of Byron's Genevan milieu for his work; his growing intimacy with de Staël and increased familiarity with the Shelley-Godwin circle suggests beyond question his exposure to the proto-feminist cause. There is no direct evidence, however, that Byron was fluent in his knowledge of the works of Wollstonecraft. Neither Sale Catalogue contains an edition of her work, and his only mention of her in his correspondence is in relation to Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley; his most extensive reference to Wollstonecraft is in response to Robert Southey's charges that Byron and Shelley "had formed a League of Incest"; 'I had nothing to do with the offspring of Mary Wollstonecraft—a former Love of Southey's—which might have taught him to respect the fame of her daughter' (*BLJ* VI.76). Though, as Ross asserts, Byron did not identify himself 'with the

⁷¹ [SC (1816) 83]: the first translation of de Staël's *D'Allemagne* was published by Murray in 1813; her *Corinna, or Italy* (1807) is also listed [SC (1816) 73].

⁷² *CPW* III.436-437.

⁷³ Lovell, 189.

Wollstonecraft feminist program',⁷⁴ his reference to Mary as *Wollstonecraft's* daughter⁷⁵ (rather than Godwin's), combined with his treatment of gender in his poetry, indicates at the very least an intimacy with the Wollstonecraft feminist programme.

Byron's familiarity with Godwin came prior to his introduction to the Shelleys. Following Samuel Rogers' and Sir James Macintosh's suggestion, Byron proposed forwarding £600 of the £1500 advance Murray gave him for *The Siege of Corinth* to assist 'a man of talent in distress' (*BLJ* V.16-17).⁷⁶ Godwin's *Political Justice* (1793), with its emphasis on equality and attack on marriage,⁷⁷ when considered alongside his evident sympathy for the Wollstonecraft feminist programme makes him an especially important intellectual influence on Byron. Such Godwinian intellectual inheritance is of especial significance when addressing Byron's relationship with Shelley, which further consolidated Byron's understanding of Godwinian principles: "To do my part to free the human mind from slavery", that in his own words was the main object of Godwin's life.⁷⁸ The influence of the writings and philosophies of Godwin and Wollstonecraft on the Shelleys cannot be underestimated;⁷⁹ as Richard Holmes suggests, Godwin's work had a direct impact on Shelley's hopes for reform and the possibilities of a utopian society.⁸⁰ Both Mary and Shelley avidly read and re-read the distinguished couple's publications, their reading being particularly voracious during

⁷⁴ Marlon B. Ross, *The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women's Poetry* (Oxford: OUP, 1989) 155.

⁷⁵ Byron also refers to Mary as Wollstonecraft's daughter explicitly in *BLJ* VI.82, and implicitly in *BLJ* IX.97.

⁷⁶ Murray's regarded the request 'as a species of cruelty', and wrote to Byron to state that 'it is actually heartbreaking to throw away my earnings on others.' (*LJM* 155-6); by 1822, however, he is part of a committee dedicated to raising funds in aid of Godwin's latest financial predicament, and solicits Byron for £25 (*LJM* 449-50), to which Byron agrees (*BLJ* X.18).

⁷⁷ William Godwin, *Political Justice, The Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, vol. 3 of 7, ed. Pamela Clemit, Martin Fitzpatrick, and Mark Philp (William Pickering, 1993. Rpt. 1999) 453-454.

⁷⁸ H. N. Brailsford, *Shelley, Godwin and their Circle* (1913. London: OUP, 1951) 179.

⁷⁹ Betty T. Bennett ed., *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: Volume One, "A part of the Elect"* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980) xiii-xiv.

⁸⁰ Richard Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1974) 97.

1814, the year of their elopement, and 1816 when they first met Byron.⁸¹ The probable influence of the Shelleys' Wollstonecraft-inspired feminism on Byron's presentation of gender is discernable in the progressive strengthening of his heroines. Byron had already 'wished to try [his] hand at a female character' (*BLJ* III.199) prior to the Summer of 1816, however, his subsequent poetic compositions are highly suggestive of an intensified interest in the proto-feminist programme; with the exception of the Maid of Saragossa (*Childe Harold I*, 1812), Gulnare, and Medora (both *The Corsair*, 1814), all of Byron's heroic heroines considered within the thesis appear post-1816: Astarte (*Manfred*, 1817); Donna Julia and Haidee (*Don Juan I & II*, 1819); Myrrha (*Sardanapalus*, 1821); Neuha (*The Island*, 1823); Adeline and Aurora Raby (*Don Juan XIV-XVII*, 1824).⁸²

⁸¹ See 'Reading List', *The Journals of Mary Shelley: 1814-1844*, vol. 1 of 2, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) 85-103.

⁸² The most overtly heroic heroines of Byron's Venetian plays and Metaphysical dramas, left unconsidered by this thesis, also emerge post-1816: Marina (*The Two Foscari*, 1821) and Aholibamah (*Heaven and Earth*, 1821).

(iv) Shaping the Thesis

The critical tenor of studies of Byron published during the past five years has been predominantly biographical and cultural rather than poetical.⁸³ Though this is perhaps more indicative of a general trend in Romanticist criticism⁸⁴ the dominant trend of Byron studies in particular is anti-poetical; two of the few recent full-length studies of Byron are on Byron's celebrity status,⁸⁵ and the last full-length study that considers Byron's poetics in any detail was published nearly a decade ago.⁸⁶ The tendency to relegate Byron's poetry to a subsidiary position to his person—to read his life through his poetry or his poetry through his life—preoccupies a considerable portion of the critical heritage. Matthew Arnold's *fin de siècle* judgement that 'when Goethe said that Byron was "in the main greater" than all the rest of the English poets, he was not so much thinking of the strict rank, as poetry, of Byron's production; he was thinking of that wonderful personality of Byron which so enters into his poetry'⁸⁷ carries throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Even G. Wilson Knight who believed Byron to be 'our greatest poet in the widest sense of the term since Shakespeare' argues that 'great though the literature be, it is outdistanced by Byron's importance as a man'.⁸⁸ Richard Cronin attributes Byron's popularity to the 'egotism' of his compositional style: 'It had given his poetry a salacious interest that brought it

⁸³ See *The Year's Work in English Studies*: (2007) 86 (1): 641-642, 647-648; (2008) 87 (1): 709-713; (2009) 88 (1): 713-716; (2010) 89 (1): 644-650; (2011) 90 (1): 639-640, 644-646, 662-666. Three notable exceptions are: Susan Wolfson, *Borderlines: The Shiftings of Gender in British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2006); Gavin Hopps and Jane Stabler eds., *Romanticism and Religion from William Cowper to Wallace Stevens* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); Alan Rawes ed. *Romanticism and Form* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007).

⁸⁴ The 2008 *Year's Work in English Studies* remarks that 'Discussion of Romantic poetry continued to be dominated, however, by an interest in history and context' (691).

⁸⁵ See Tom Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity: Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007) and Ghislaine McDayter's *Byromania and the Birth of Celebrity Culture* (New York: SUNY, 2009).

⁸⁶ Jane Stabler, *Byron, Poetics and History* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002); previous to this, Alan Rawes published *Byron's Poetic Experimentation: Childe Harold, The Tales, and the Quest for Comedy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

⁸⁷ Matthew Arnold, 'Preface', *Poetry of Byron* (London: Macmillan, 1881) xix.

⁸⁸ G. Wilson Knight, *Lord Byron: Christian Virtues* (London: OUP, 1953) 3.

close to gossip, but it was an aesthetic flaw . . . The reader of Byron's poetry, by contrast, is gripped not by the poem but by the person of the poet.⁸⁹ This thesis does not seek to extinguish the poet's personality, indeed, I frequently seek to illuminate our understanding of the verse through the poet's own prose; one of the central aims of the thesis is, however, to grant the poetry an aesthetic independence and poetic significance beyond the confines of socio-cultural or biographical readings.⁹⁰ In exploring Byron's engagement with contemporary gender debates, and in examining the impact this had upon his treatment of women in his poetry, the thesis necessarily draws upon work by Franklin and Wolfson, both of whom have made Byron available for feminist readings. My own approach to the poetry, however, exposes Byron's poetry neither to an exclusively Franklinian new historicism nor a Wolfsonian 'neo-formalism'.⁹¹ Rather, I remain alert to the socio-historical context of the production of Byron's work whilst prioritising attention to the poetry itself. Similarly to Jane Stabler, I seek to redirect attention to formal features of Byron's poetry; however, the concern of this thesis is primarily with what Stabler terms 'the historical matrices of literary composition', rather than simultaneously addressing, as she does, the impact of readerly participation in these compositional processes.⁹² I do, however, consider Byron's own readerly processes of paramount importance for our understanding of the literary significance of the heroines. Byron's heroines emerge as manifestations of the poet's engagement in a complex reading process that synthesizes textual material which extends beyond the cultural and historical parameters of his own social context. The relationship between Byron's reading and the heroines is necessarily regarded it as a reflexive one:

⁸⁹ Richard Cronin, *Paper Pellets: British Literary Culture after Waterloo* (Oxford: OUP, 2010) 52-53.

⁹⁰ For a similar approach, see Jonathan Shears, 'I Have a Means of Freedom Still': Aesthetic Dialectic in Sardanapalus', *Liberty and Poetic License: New Essays on Byron*, ed. Bernard Beatty, Tony Howe and Charles Robinson (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2008) 117-131.

⁹¹ Susan Wolfson, 'Formal Intelligence: Formalism, Romanticism, and Formalist Criticism', *Formal Charges: the Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997) 1-30.

⁹² Stabler, *Poetics*, 10.

examining the poet's reading informs our understanding of his construction of these figures, and close examination of the heroines themselves elucidates our comprehension of the complexity of his reading processes. Each chapter seeks to establish the extent of the heroines' literary significance by initially determining the idiosyncratic manner of Byron's creative engagement with Oriental and Epical texts, before moving on to a close examination of the poetic language surrounding the heroines themselves.

The thesis provides a chronological record of my changing methodological sympathies over the course of the project. The first half of the study has an evident new historical dimension in its consideration of the cultural aspects of Byron's treatment of Orientalism within a recognisably Romantic and late eighteenth-century discourse. The chapter examines the concepts of Orient and Other as central to the destabilization of fixed perimeters of gender spheres in Byron's Tales.⁹³ I begin with an exploration of the treatment of the opposition of East and West⁹⁴ as comparable with the division between masculinity and femininity before considering how Byron's poetry, even as it seems to conform, defies such binary divisions. As Franklin argues in her consideration of Byron's treatment of the East, 'Byron's contribution to the dialectic was typically a contradictory one.'⁹⁵ His presentation of women certainly corroborates this view. I shall initially explore how Byron's Turkish Tales uphold expectations of Eastern despotism, before demonstrating their radical potential. In my examination of Byron's Tales I shall not argue that Byron signals a *clear* departure from the stereotype of the East as latently

⁹³ Byron's Turkish Tales are conventionally thought of as: *The Giaour* (1813); *The Bride of Abydos* (1813); *The Corsair* (1814); *Lara* (1814); *The Siege of Corinth* (1816) and *Parisina* (1816). Though discussion in this chapter shall focus on the Turkish Tales, I on occasion expand my discussion to the Tales more generally, and am following the categorization used by nineteenth-century editions (specifically William Michael Rossetti's c.1870), which gives a better indication of Byron's enduring interest in the genre throughout his career by also listing: *The Prisoner of Chillon* (1816), *Beppo* (1818), *Mazeppa* (1819), and *The Island* (1821).

⁹⁴ In this chapter (and where it appears elsewhere in the thesis) I shall use 'East' to refer to the eastern part of the world (specifically the near East, especially the Ottoman Empire) and be used interchangeably with the Orient, as opposed to the West (for my purposes Western Europe) or Occident.

⁹⁵ Franklin, *Heroines*, 76.

misogynist: indeed, it is important that he upholds this concept in his deliberate construction of the East as a dystopia. Instead, I shall examine the effect his negotiation of contemporary stereotypes of culturally relativistic misogyny has on gender mobility within the tragic Tales, in contrast to the utopian vision of the late poem, *The Island*. The chapter will conclude with a reading of *The Island* as a poem that unknots the tangled presentation of femininity seen in the earlier Tales. The second half of the thesis has more of a formalist and philological dimension than the first. This portion of the thesis argues that *Don Juan* exhibits Byron's most clear articulation of his interest in the heroic potential of female characters, and that the poem is demonstrative of how Byron's particular form of heroism and epic was one way that he made room for the heroic female. I shall focus at some length upon *Don Juan*, and address the ways in which Byron's rethinking of literary epic enabled him to display the mobility of gender-specific qualities.

The thesis is not intended to provide an exhaustive study of notable heroines in Byron's poetry, indeed, both the Venetian plays and the late Metaphysical dramas are left unconsidered; rather, through a consideration of two of the most significant genres with which Byron can be seen to engage I reveal the scope of a gendered appreciation of Byron's verse. My intention throughout the project has been to offer a more nuanced and poetically sympathetic account of Byron's treatment of gender than has previously been pursued. The final coda bears out the scope of my approach to explore related poetical issues; in this instance the subject is Byron's own compositional heroics in the cunning poetics we encounter throughout *Don Juan*. I do not intend for the final section to be read as a conclusive end-point, but rather as an opening out to the critical possibilities which remain available to us in the continuing study of Byron's poetry.

II. BYRON'S ORIENTALISM AND HEROIC 'OTHERNESS'

(i) 'Supreme Romanticism'

The centrality of Orientalism within Romanticism is beyond question. In the third and final volume of his literary journal, the *Athenaeum*, Friedrich Schlegel decrees “‘We must seek the supreme Romanticism in the Orient’”;¹ Raymond Schwab bases an entire thesis on the concurrent emergence of Orientalism and Romanticism, defining Romanticism as ‘an oriental irruption of the intellect’;² both Marilyn Butler and Nigel Leask indicate the ‘major’ significance of Orientalism for Romanticism;³ Saree Makdisi argues for the centrality of Orientalism in Romantic thought, Romanticism being ‘a discourse of otherness which comprehends Orientalism along with other forms of exoticism’;⁴ and Edward Said states that ‘The coincidence of the advent of Romanticism and Orientalism in the West, as Schwab so carefully portrays it, gave the former its complex dimensions and led it to the reformulation of human limits’.⁵

In discussing the Orient, one unavoidably has to approach Said’s *Orientalism*.⁶ Said’s thesis remains a controversial one. The shortcomings of using Said’s thesis as an analytic tool for Romantic Literature is the monolithic nature of the study.⁷ Whilst the

¹ Friedrich Schlegel, ‘Gespräch über die Poesie’, *Athenaeum: Eine Zeitschrift*, ed. A.W. Schlegel and Friedrich Schlegel, vol. 3 of 3 (Berlin: Friedrich Vieweg dem Älteren, 1800): ‘Im Orient müssen wir das höchste Romantische suchen’ [trans. ‘We must seek the supreme Romanticism in the Orient’] (103).

² Schwab 482. Both Edward Said and Saree Makdisi comment upon the surprising lack of response from Romantic scholars to Schwab’s work. See Said’s ‘Foreword’ to Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe’s Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880* (New York: Columbia UP, 1984) vii; and Makdisi’s *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2003) 212.

³ Marilyn Butler states that ‘Orientalism is a major theme of English Romanticism’ in ‘The Orientalism of Byron’s *Giaour*’, *Byron and the Limits of Fiction*, ed. Bernard Beatty and Vincent Newey (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1988): 78; Nigel Leask neatly echoes her in describing Orientalism as ‘a major component of European Romanticism’ (17).

⁴ Makdisi, 212.

⁵ Schwab, xix.

⁶ Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1978. London: Penguin, 1995).

⁷ See especially Leask, who argues that: representations of ‘the oriental Other ... in British Romantic literature ... are more various than Said’s thesis will allow’ (2); Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003); for a more historically orientated critique, see John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995).

difficulty of Said's thesis is its inflexibility, at a basic level, Said's 'discourse of differentiation' lies at the heart of Romantic Orientalism.⁸ Perhaps in recognition of this, Said devotes the lengthy second essay of *Orientalism* to representations of the Orient during the Romantic era. Matthew Scott has argued that we should not overlook this fact, and that 'it is the long second essay that should most interest the literary historian: it remains a highly impressive analysis of transformations in the representation of the Orient during the Romantic period.'⁹ Herein lies the problem. As a contribution to literary history, Said's thesis is not under question. It is at the point that the critic seeks to employ Said's thesis beyond the reductive level of it being a 'discourse of differentiation'—to use it to inform an analytic methodology with which to approach poetry—that *Orientalism* falls short.

Butler has pointed out that in actual fact, 'Said has little to say about English Romantic poetry' and that 'the examples he gives are poems long considered of lesser importance, such as Southey's religious epics or Byron's *Turkish Tales*, which Said feels no need to analyze.'¹⁰ Without concurring that the *Turkish Tales* are of lesser importance, the point remains that Said does not attempt to progress from literary history to poetic analysis and it is when reading Byron more closely that the inconsistencies destabilize any attempt to 'fit' the poetry into Said's framework; as Franklin has argued, 'as Byron also consistently denounced imperialism throughout his verse, he has proved a trickier writer to fit into the binary model of Said's thesis than government polemicists like Byron's *bête noire*, Robert Southey.'¹¹ Byron delights in

⁸ Makdisi, 212.

⁹ Scott, 71.

¹⁰ Marilyn Butler, 'Orientalism', *The Romantic Period, Penguin History of Literature*, vol. 5 of 10 (London: Penguin, 1994) 397.

¹¹ Franklin, "'Some samples of the finest Orientalism': Byronic Philhellenism and proto-Zionism at the time of the Congress of Vienna', *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780–1830*, ed. Tim Fulford and Peter Kitson (Cambridge: CUP, 1998) 221; she continues: 'Said's Foucauldian model is

uncertainties and as such his poetry can be seen to resist binaries, as with his imaginative engagement with the Oriental Other.¹²

Said defines the Orient and Orientalist thus:

The Oriental is given as fixed, stable, in need of investigation, and in need even of knowledge about himself. There is no dialectic either desired or allowed. There is a source of information (the Oriental) and a source of knowledge (the Orientalist): in short, a writer and a subject matter otherwise inert.¹³

At this point, Said defines the inhabitant of the Orient as possessing distinct boundaries, but it would be unfair to suggest that Said consistently adopts such a stringent position on the fixity of Oriental identity; as Scott notes, ‘It is Said’s powerful sense of a formative confusion lying at the heart of Romanticism that remains so remarkably sharp.’¹⁴ In contrast to the claim of ‘Shattered Myths’ Byron’s Oriental inhabitants are in a state of flux; rather than such instability being indicative of a formative confusion, it instead enables Byron to engage in a dialectic (which Said refutes) that exposes the potency of the East as an arena in which to expose the hypocrisy of Western stereotypes. The Eastern subject matter that will be the focus of this chapter is far from inert, Byron’s Eastern heroines being of great importance in considering his construction of female heroism. To extend Jerome McGann’s argument that Byron and Shelley ‘are most deeply *engaged* (in a socialist-activist sense) when they have moved further along their paths of displacement and escape’,¹⁵ I contend that an Eastern arena provided Byron with the necessary distance to articulate an emancipatory vision of

too monolithic’ (222); ‘(Said tends to underestimate the self-reflexive aspect of Orientalism)’ (226).

¹² Unless otherwise stated, I shall be working from the OED definition of Other (see ‘Other’ *n.* II.9a): ‘That which is the counterpart or converse of something specified or implied; (*spec.* in structuralist and post-structuralist critical and psychoanalytic thought) that which is not the self or subject; that which lies outside or is excluded from the group with which one identifies oneself; (in Lacanian thought) the unconscious, the symbolic order. Now usually opposed to *self*:’ (“other, adj., pron., and n., and adv.1”). OED Online. September 2011. Oxford University Press. 3 November 2011
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/133219?rskey=arSuQM&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>).

¹³ Edward Said, ‘Shattered Myths’, *Orientalism: A Reader*, ed. A. L. Macfie (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000) 93.

¹⁴ Matthew Scott, ‘Edward Said’s Orientalism’, *Essays in Criticism* 58.1 (2008): 73.

¹⁵ Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1983) 124.

women, beyond the gendered repressions of his own country.

(ii) ‘an Oriental twist in my imagination’¹⁶

Of all the Romantic poets Byron in particular held an unwaning enthusiasm for the Orient, both factual and fictional, as his reading list of 1807 indicates:

I have read Knolles, Sir Paul Rycaut, and Prince Cantemir, besides a more modern History, anonymous, of the Ottoman History I know every event, from Tangralopix, and afterwards Othman Ist to the peace of Passarowitz, in 1718—the Battle of Crotzka in 1739 & the treaty between Russia & Turkey in 1790.¹⁷

Such precocious intellectual posturing is perhaps to be expected from a nineteen-year old Byron, fresh from Trinity College Cambridge, but Byron boasted of his enthusiasm for the East and Eastern Tales on more than one occasion; Isaac D’Israeli records him as referring to the same titles and authors in a similarly bombastic tone:

Knolles—Cantemir—De Tott—Lady M. W. Montagu—Hawkin’s translation from Mignot’s History of the Turks—the Arabian Nights—All travels or histories or books upon the East I could meet with, I had read, as well as Rycaut, before I was *ten years of old*. I think the Arabian Nights first.¹⁸

This fascination with the East perpetuated throughout his life. From the Sale Catalogues of Byron’s Library we can observe Byron’s continued interest in the East from his purchase (and presumed perusal) of George Macartney’s *Embassy to China* (1798) [SC (1816) 186]; John Taylor’s *Travels to India* (1799) and John Galt’s *Letters from the Levant* (1813) [both SC (1816) 305]; Henry Weber’s *Tales of the East* (1812) [SC (1816) 308]; the second and third volumes of Edward Daniel Clarke’s *Travels in Various Countries of Europe, Asia and Africa* (1810; 1812-16) [SC (1816) 148]; John M. Kinneir’s *A Geographical Memoir of the Persian Empire* (1813) [SC (1816) 179]; Andrew M. Ramsay’s *Travels of Cyrus* (1727; 1814) [SC (1827)

¹⁶ *BLJ* III.199. From a letter to Edward Daniel Clarke, the renowned antiquary and mineralogist; Clarke’s travelogue is listed in the 1816 Sale Catalogue as item 148.

¹⁷ ‘Reading List’ (1807), *CMP* 4. For further information on Byron’s Eastern reading see especially H. S. C. Wiener, ‘Byron and the East: literary sources of the “Turkish Tales”’, *Nineteenth-Century Studies*, ed. Herbert Davies et al (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1940; rpt. 1968) 89-129.

¹⁸ Cited in Isaac D’Israeli, *The Literary Character*, vol. 1 of 2 (3rd ed. London: John Murray, 1822) 102n. Wiener explains: ‘The additional books here mentioned by Byron are: *Memoirs of the Baron de Tott, on the Turks and the Tartars*, translated from the French, 2 vols (London, 1785); Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Works*, 5 vols (1803); Vincent Mignot, *The History of the Turkish, or Ottoman Empire*, trans A. Hawkins, 4 vols (London 1787)’ (91, n.5).

169]; John Malcolm's *History of Persia* (1815) [SC (1816) 327]; John McLeod's *Voyage to Lewchew* (1817; 1818) [SC (1827) 136]; William Macmichael's *Journey from Moscow to Constantinople* (1819) [SC (1827) 218]; George A. F. Fitzclarence's *Journal of a Route Across India* (1819) [SC (1827) 212]; Robert Walpole's *Travels in Various Countries of the East* (1820) [SC (1827) 230]; William Leake's *Topography of Athens* [SC (1827) 118]; and John L. Burckhardt's *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land* (1822) [SC (1827) 201].¹⁹ In his contemplation of the various possible literary influences for Byron's *Turkish Tales*, Harold Wiener argues that Byron's interest in the East was 'by no means accidental', explaining that the long eighteenth century saw a 'vast increase in the resources of Oriental scholarship, stimulated by the efforts of Sir William Jones, but also an ever growing number of travelers to the Near East, many of whom returned to England to record in detail the experiences they had encountered on their journeys.'²⁰ Wiener is reluctant, however, to give Byron any credit for originality in his fascination with the East and argues that 'Byron was merely following the dictates of fashion in reading Turkish histories and travel books during his boyhood, and his decision to tour the Near East after he had come of age was the natural outgrowth of his reading'.²¹ That his travels to the East were a literal realisation of his early imaginative meanderings was a fact that Byron was supposedly entirely conscious of: 'The Turkish history was one of the first books that gave me pleasure when a child; and I believe it had much influence on my subsequent wishes to visit the Levant, and

¹⁹ This is not intended as an exhaustive list of Byron's travelogues in the East or elsewhere, but rather as a representative illustration of his continued interest in the subject. I have not included works that receive attention elsewhere in the thesis; neither have I included works concerning travels to Egypt, the African continent in general, the Americas, or the Polar regions.

²⁰ Wiener, 89.

²¹ Wiener, 90.

gave, perhaps, the oriental coloring which is observed in my poetry.’²²

The criticism that Wiener levels at Byron is more profound than simply contesting the originality of his literary tastes. Initially challenging Byron’s claim to have read Eastern poetry (‘When we find him saying that he had perused some of the Asiatic works “either in the original or translations,” we feel free to substitute “none in the original and few in translation”’),²³ Wiener goes on to doubt the extent of Byron’s Eastern reading, pointing to the composition of the *Turkish Tales* as utilizing ‘the broader, less specific type of borrowing’.²⁴ He expands by stating that ‘Byron was sufficiently well informed on all of these subjects to have written as he did without ever having seen Scott’s essay; nor is there reason for supposing that he consulted Knolles and Rycout, Cantemir, the Baron de Tott, or Lady Mary Wortley Montagu while composing the *Turkish Tales*.’²⁵ It would appear prudent, then, to adhere to Wiener’s label of a broader, less specific type of borrowing. That the poet’s interest in the East was informed by his boyhood reading and by his Grand Tour is not under question; the significance of the East for Byron is, however, not rooted in the empiricism of documented evidence, but rather the more fanciful possibilities of an imagined Orient.

Byron was not afraid to admit that his personal and poetic interest in the East was highly fashionable. In a well-known letter to Thomas Moore, Byron advises his friend:

Stick to the East;—the oracle, Staël, told me it was the only poetical policy. The North, South, and West, have all been exhausted;²⁶ . . . The little I have done in that way is merely a “voice in the wilderness”²⁷ for

²² Wiener, 91; cited from Count Gamba’s *A Narrative of Lord Byron’s Last Journey to Greece* (London: John Murray, 1825) 148-149.

²³ Wiener, 109.

²⁴ Wiener, 119.

²⁵ Wiener, 119.

²⁶ We are reminded of Goethe’s ‘Hegire’ that opens his *West-östlicher Divan* (1819): ‘Nord und West Sud zersplittern, / Throne bersten, Reiche zittern, / Fluchte du, in reinen Osten / Patriarchenluft zu kosten!’ Trans.: ‘North, West, and South disintegrate, / Thrones burst, empires tremble. / Fly away, and in the pure East / Taste the Patriarchs’ air.’ Cited in Said, *Orientalism*, 167.

²⁷ Byron here appropriates the words of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23), who in turn cites Isaiah 40:3: ‘The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’ It is likely that Byron here alludes to the

you; and, if it has had any success, that also will prove that the public are orientalizing, and pave the path for you (*BLJ* III.101).

For Byron, the East held limitless imaginative possibilities and provided an arena for new fictions.²⁸ Whilst, with characteristic generality, Byron emphasises the staleness of the other areas of the globe, like mines that have given up the best of their goods; by comparison, the East was an Aladdin's cave of immeasurable creative wealth.²⁹ Byron's wonder at the limitless possibilities of the East again anticipates Said: 'In the Orient one suddenly confronted unimaginable antiquity, inhuman beauty, boundless distance.'³⁰

Having ascertained that Byron's treatment of Eastern literary influences is perhaps not as original as the poet himself may have liked to project, it remains that in his poetic treatment of the East, Byron was in at least one way entirely unique. To return to Wiener's scepticism regarding Byron's familiarity with genuinely Eastern literature, Andrew Rudd has questioned, 'But to what extent were British readers in the Romantic period ever truly exposed to Eastern literature? Without the relevant languages, they were reliant on translations, pseudo-translations, adaptations and imitations to gain any idea of what Oriental culture was like.'³¹ Unless, of course, you were fortunate enough to experience that culture first hand. As Mohammed Sharafuddin has indicated, Byron's 'direct experience with the Orient' sets him apart from his contemporaries.³² It is this direct experience that, when combined with the oriental twist in his imagination (the latter clearly being informed by extensive reading on the subject of the East) that leads Butler to pair Byron with Shelley as 'The most

original Isaiah quotation, which would make Moore God—the kind of hyperbolic praise we could expect from Byron to Moore (see fn122).

²⁸ Until 1815 that is, when Byron claimed to have 'apparently exhausted' the East's resources (*BLJ* V.45).

²⁹ See also Butler, 'Orientalism', 446.

³⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 167.

³¹ Andrew Rudd, "'Oriental' and 'Orientalist' Poetry: The Debate in Literary Criticism in the Romantic Period', *Romanticism* 13.1 (2007): 61.

³² Mohammed Sharafuddin, *Islam and Romantic Orientalism: Literary Encounters with the Orient* (London: Tauris, 1994) 214.

distinguished and consistent of British poets writing on the East'.³³

In differentiating between Byron's and Shelley's poetic treatment of the East,

Mario Praz's distinction between the exoticist and mystic is pertinent:

The latter projects himself outside the visible world into a transcendental atmosphere where he unites himself with the Divinity; the former transports himself in imagination outside the actualities of time and space, and thinks that he sees in whatever is past and remote from him the ideal atmosphere for the contentment of his own senses.³⁴

The metaphysical dimensions of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* clearly contrast with Byron's concern in constructing an Eastern 'reality' outside of the constraints of time and space in the Tales, which reveal a more general prioritisation of fact over fiction.³⁵

In writing to his publisher, John Murray in November 1813, concerning an additional 'note for the ignorant' to *The Bride of Abydos*, Byron declared: 'I don't care one lump of Sugar for my *poetry*—but for my *costume*—and my *correctness* on those points (...) I will combat lustily' (*BLJ* III.165).³⁶ Byron frequently reiterates his belief in the value

³³ Butler, 'Orientalism' 426. It should be noted that Butler states that 'Robert Southey was the most prolific and influential English poet writing on the East through the wartime years, 1793-1815' (413). Leask, rather misguidedly, touts a Byronic line in his treatment of Southey's 'unsaleable fictions (...), at once too spicy and indigestible for fastidious British appetites' (14). This is not quite true: whilst they did not prove as popular as Byron's *Turkish Tales*, and received lukewarm reviews, the poems did sell. *The Curse of Kehama* (1810), for example, was a moderately successful poem in Southey's lifetime with four further editions being published in 1811, 1812, 1818, and 1838 (see Robert Southey, *The Curse of Kehama*, *Robert Southey: Poetical Works 1793-1810*, vol. 4 of 5, ed. Daniel Sanjiv Roberts (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2004) xviii). Moreover, Southey's poetic influence should not be underestimated; Butler goes on to note that 'Shelley gives credit to Southey and to *Thalaba*, once his favourite poem, for its intimations of 'The thrilling secrets of the birth of time' (128) and for its almost tender fellow-feeling for small creatures—'bright bird, insect, or gentle beast' (13)' (Butler, 'Orientalism', 437).

³⁴ Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (London: OUP, 1970) 210.

³⁵ Byron's high opinion of the factual is documented several times over 'I could not write upon anything, without some personal experience and foundation' (*BLJ* V.14); 'I hate things *all fiction* & therefore the *Merchant & Othello*—have no great associations to me—but *Pierre* has—there should always be some foundation of fact for the most airy fabric—and pure invention is but the talent of a liar' (*BLJ* V.203).

³⁶ Byron's anxiety over the accuracy of his notes to the Tales, according to Leask, is justifiable; footnoting: 'at once guaranteed the authenticity of the allusion, whilst at the same time reassuring the metropolitan reader that it was both culturally legible and translatable' (Leask, 'Wandering through Eblis', 175-176). Leask also emphasises the footnote's importance in cultural differentiation. Whereas traditionally the Other has been relegated to the notes to avoid encroachment on the Western autonomy of the main body of the text, Leask explains that 'In the case of Orientalist fiction and poetry, one finds a similar phenomenon but with the terms reversed. Here the fictional *narrative* transcribes otherness whilst the *notes* translate it into the ethnological or historiographical discourse of the same' (181). For further information regarding the banishment of the Other to the notes see Lionel Gossman, 'History as Decipherment: Romantic Historiography and the Discovery of the Other', *New Literary History* 18.1 (1986): 23-57.

of personal recollection for poetic composition, writing in his journal on 14 November 1813: ‘but what romance could equal the events—“quaeque ipse...vidi, / Et quorum pars magna fui”’ (*BLJ* III.205).³⁷ John Galt wrote to Byron soon after the publication of *The Bride of Abydos* to query a possible source for the tale, which Byron denied, stating ‘The coincidence I assure you is a most unintentional & unconscious one’ (*BLJ* III.195); Byron’s real-life involvement in the events that form the plot of the early Tales have never been fully evidenced, however, as I shall come on to argue more fully, such contradictions have undoubtedly fuelled speculation.

For Said, the ‘orientalization’ of the public of which Byron speaks is the result of a creative plundering of the East as fantasy:

Thus all of Orientalism stands forth and away from the Orient: that Orientalism makes sense at all depends more on the West than on the Orient, and this sense is directly indebted to various Western techniques of representation that make the Orient visible, clear, “there” in discourse about it. And these representations rely upon institutions, traditions, conventions, agreed-upon codes of understanding for their effects, not upon a distant and amorphous Orient. . . . Similarly William Beckford, Byron, Goethe, and Hugo restructured the Orient by their art and made its colours, lights, and people visible through their images, rhythms and motifs. At most, the “real” Orient provoked a writer to his vision; it very rarely guided it.³⁸

Said’s account of the East provoking a writer to his vision undeniably fits Byron, however, in overlooking Byron’s deliberate construction of the “real” Orient, Said can be accused of failing to do the poet justice. Makdisi states that ‘Byron’s Orient claims to be the Orient’s Orient—the real Orient “out there,” and not only some vaguely-realistic figurative landscape produced by a Western imagination.’³⁹ Yet Makdisi’s assertion can only hold true for Byron’s more mature works; the poet’s early imaginative engagement with the East relied upon Western literary touchstones; he writes to his Mother of his first view of Tepaleen: ‘it brought to my recollection (with some changes of *dress* however) Scott’s description of Branksome Castle in his lay’

³⁷ Marchand’s trans. (*BLJ* III.205): ‘Virgil, *Aeneid*, II,5: “I myself saw these things in all their horror, and I bore great part in them.”’

³⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 22.

³⁹ Makdisi, 214.

(*BLJI*.227). Byron's early engagement with the foreign more closely resembles a Saidian system of interaction with the East: 'In the system of knowledge about the Orient, the Orient is less a place than a *topos*, a set of references, a congeries of characteristics, that seems to have its origin in a quotation, or a fragment of a text, or a citation from someone's work on the Orient, or some bit of previous imagining, or an amalgam of all these.'⁴⁰

Alan Richardson has argued that Byron's adventuring to the Orient, both in his own life and his poetry, resulted in the poet losing his grip on what constituted the 'real'. Richardson argues, somewhat disparagingly, that Byron 'left his "social reality" behind, it seems, at some point west of Albania.'⁴¹ To a certain degree, this loosening of a grip on "social reality" was necessary—and even desirable—for Byron's imaginative vision of the East. Byron's Tales were consciously constructed to bring the most vivid *impression* of the Orient to the reading public. The poet said of one of his early Tales, *The Bride of Abydos* (1813):

Whether it succeeds or not is no fault of the public, against whom I can have no complaint. But I am much more indebted to the tale than I can ever be to the most partial reader; as it wrung my thoughts from reality to imagination—from selfish regrets to vivid recollections—and recalled me to a country replete with the *brightest* and *darkest*, but always most *lively* colours of my memory (*BLJ* III.230-231).

We again come across the concept of an 'oriental colouring' in his poetry and might also recall the lines from the third canto of *Don Juan*, that poets 'take all colours—like the hands of dyers' (*DJ* III.792). For Byron, it is the imaginative stimulus that actual experience of the *real* East provides which becomes central to its significance as a geographical space. Byron's imagination seemed to be at its most potent when abroad, and we find this very Romantic concept of the visionary interiority of the poetic imagination repeated a few years later in 1817 when he describes his response to Rome

⁴⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 177.

⁴¹ Alan Richardson, 'Introduction', *Romanticism, Race, and Imperial Culture, 1780–1834*, ed. Alan Richardson and Sonia Hofkosh (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996) 3.

in a letter to Murray:

But I can't describe because my first impressions are always strong and confused—& my Memory *selects* & reduces them to order—like distance in the landscape—& blends them better—although they may be less distinct—there must be a sense or two more than we have as mortals—which I suppose the Devil has—(or t'other) for where there is much to be grasped we are always at a loss— and yet feel that we ought to have a higher and more extended comprehension (*BLJ* V.221-222).

When Thibaudet stated that 'The Orient gave nothing to Romantic thought, although it haunted everyone's imagination' we might presume that he had lines like Byron's in mind.⁴²

⁴² Cited in Schwab, 16.

(iii) ‘that dreary binary of Same and Other’⁴³

The Other has conventionally been used to reinforce the identity of the Same: Said’s basic thesis states ‘that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self’.⁴⁴ Similarly, Byron’s fascination with the East was driven by his interest in the concept of cultural difference; as Butler argues:

Byron’s concept of other nations’ independence was that of an Enlightenment intellectual, who respected the autonomy of other cultures, but was inclined to admire them precisely for their *otherness* [my emphasis], their unreformed feudal ‘romantic’ features.⁴⁵

And, I would add, the imaginative possibilities these implied. Byron’s inclination to admire ‘otherness’ is evident throughout his poetry, especially in the construction of his heroines. Such treatment of the Eastern Other can be extended to a consideration of the feminine Other; as Simone de Beauvoir succinctly states: ‘No group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over and against itself.’⁴⁶ For Byron there is certainly a potent identity exchange to be made when positioning the East against the West; yet what he does with the Oriental Other does not work to *strengthen* Western (or gendered) identity but to *fracture* it in order to question conventional assumptions surrounding race and gender. Byron’s treatment of the Other stimulates a crisis in cultural identity, thereby exemplifying Said’s contention that: ‘Crisis, in short, is converted into criticism of the status quo’.⁴⁷ It is Schwab’s thesis, rather than Said’s, that is most applicable to what Byron’s Orientalism achieves: ‘The effect of oriental studies was to undermine the wall raised between the two cultures; such studies fulfilled

⁴³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990. London: Routledge, 2006) 140: ‘... that dreary binary of Same and Other that has plagued not only the legacy of dialectics, but the dialectic of sex as well.’

⁴⁴ Said, 3.

⁴⁵ Butler, ‘Byron’s *Giaour*’, 85.

⁴⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H.M. Parshley, *Everyman’s Library* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993) xlv.

⁴⁷ Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (London: Faber, 1984) 232.

their real purpose by transforming the exile into a companion.⁴⁸

Leask has identified the radical potential of Shelley's treatment of the Other, arguing 'that Shelley (unlike Byron, Southey or De Quincey) translated British imperialism into a displaced form of revolutionary politics which, in the name of universal enlightenment, alchemized the Other into the Same'.⁴⁹ I would agree that Byron's use of the Other is not to alchemize it into the Same, but to maintain a sense of differentiation in order to gain a new perspective on the interaction between the two categories. This distance is not, however, achieved by oppositional alienation of Same and Other. In speaking of the unconventional domestic arrangement of Neuha and Torquil in *The Island*, Byron implores the reader 'let not this seem strange' (II.370). We are made aware of Byron's endeavours—to return to Schwab—to 'undermine the wall raised between the two cultures'. Byron's effort to make the Other seem Same (or at least sane) and the Same seem Other shares Shelley's radical treatment of cultural identity. In his essay 'On Love', Shelley in part defines the subject as the soul's thirsting after its 'antitype';⁵⁰ Leask has suggested that 'In Shelley, as in Byron, the Other is often figured as an (often oriental) female who turns out to be an 'epipsychidion' or wishful projection of the ego of the male protagonist.'⁵¹ Yet while Byron's construction of his Eastern heroines was in part motivated by a thirst for a Western 'antitype', the result was no mere psychic conjuring on the part of the male protagonist (as in *Alastor*), but a carefully considered portrayal of the inconsistencies and dangers of Western ideals of femininity.

⁴⁸ Schwab, 1. Schwab does qualify this according to special interests, polemics etc., but his argument remains an alternative to Said's.

⁴⁹ Leask, 6.

⁵⁰ Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'On Love', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Freistat (London: Norton, 2002) 504. All citations of Shelley's poetry and prose taken from this edition; line numbers are indicated parenthetically.

⁵¹ Leask, 6.

Through the construction of his heroines, Byron critiques his own culture's models of womanhood. Alain de Botton provides a curiously apt thought on the topic: 'If it is true that love is a pursuit in others of what qualities we lack in ourselves, then in our love of someone from another country, one ambition may be to weld ourselves more closely to values missing from our own culture.'⁵² For Byron, as for Flaubert, the attraction of the East was intensified by *ennui* with his own culture. Part of the poetic ambition of the Tales was Byron's desire to weld his imagination more closely to values he felt to be absent from Western culture. Such an approach, according to Schwab, is characteristic of Romantic literature, the 'underlying theme' of which being 'the European experience of the Orient, which is in turn based on the human need for absorbing the "foreign" and "different."'⁵³

Whether the East or Woman, what defined attraction or revulsion towards the Other for Romantic writers was excess. The Romantic fascination with the East is, in part, explained by Andrew Rudd's observation that 'Eighteenth-century commentators tended to regard the East as a land of imagination, a view stemming from the widely-held belief that Oriental peoples were excessively subject to their passions.'⁵⁴ The presence of such excessive passion no doubt contributed to Byron's own criticism of the Tales; he wrote to Murray of their 'false stilted trashy style' (*BLJ* VII.182) and to Shelley that they were 'exaggerated nonsense' (*BLJ* IX.161).⁵⁵ Poor opinion of the Tales, however, has not been confined to the author alone; as Robert McColl rightly indicates: 'It is the excess the critics have reviled. They are, to use Gleckner's word,

⁵² Alain de Botton, *The Art of Travel* (London: Penguin, 2003) 90.

⁵³ Schwab, viii.

⁵⁴ Rudd, 54.

⁵⁵ Criticism of the 'excessive' tendency of Eastern literature was posed by Coleridge in 'Lecture 11' of his series, 'Lectures on the Principles of Judgement, Culture, and European Literature' delivered to the London Philosophical Society in 1818, see *Lectures 1808-1819: On Literature*, ed. R.A. Foakes, vol. 2 of 2 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987) 191.

“overwritten”.⁵⁶ Gleckner in turn cites Rutherford’s disparaging comments regarding the ‘ludicrous exaggeration’⁵⁷ of the Tales, however, Gleckner believes Rutherford ‘misses the whole point of the scene. In the first place, it is overwritten to the point of nightmare...the purity of Eden, the “natural order being re-established after an unnatural rebellion” that Rutherford says is missing from all the Tales [CS 44], *is* being re-established with the end of fallen, bestial man.’⁵⁸ Though the plot trajectories of the Tales, as Gleckner argues, redeem their overblown style and suggest there is something more serious being said.⁵⁹ Byron evidently regretted his decision to encourage his oriental poetry to be read as fashionable ‘exaggerated nonsense’; writing to Moore in 1817 regarding the chosen title for *Lalla Rookh*, Byron laments: ‘I wish you had not called it a “*Persian Tale*”. I am very sorry that I called some of my own things “Tales,” because I think they are something better’ (*BLJ* V.186).⁶⁰ The critical refusal to take the Tales seriously is arguably symptomatic of the Oriental genre. In his consideration of the sexuality that informs the diversity of representations of the Oriental (in this case Arab), Said contends that ‘the absolutely inviolable taboo in Orientalist discourse is that that very sexuality must never be taken seriously.’⁶¹ Yet it is this very sexuality which, when explored by the Romantics, *is* intended to be taken seriously. Malcolm Kelsall explains: ‘one may suggest that for a reader of Jones, Shelley and Byron the mores of sexuality are intrinsic in defining culture, and that the historical divisions of a sexually

⁵⁶ Robert McColl, “‘Best success were sacrilege’: Investigating Antithesis in *The Siege of Corinth*”, *Byron and Orientalism*, ed. Peter Cochran (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006) 237.

⁵⁷ Andrew Rutherford, *Byron: A Critical Study* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1961) 177n.

⁵⁸ Gleckner, 271.

⁵⁹ For further discussion of the Tales as popular literature see: Rutherford 35-47; Philip W. Martin, *Byron: A Poet Before his Public* (Cambridge: CUP, 1982) 30-63; Jerome Christensen, *Lord Byron’s Strength: Romantic Writing and Commercial Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1993) 88-141.

⁶⁰ Marchand notes that ‘Byron was misinformed. Moore’s subtitle was “an Oriental Romance”’ (186, n.3).

⁶¹ Said, ‘Shattered Myths’, 95.

defined original culture underlie the imperial conflicts of East and West.’⁶² Such centrality of sexuality in a definition of culture informs Byron’s Tales, and though I will not attempt to argue that the Tales—or any of Byron’s oeuvre—are to be taken entirely seriously, there is a serious element to Byron’s presentation of gender relations. The various conditions surrounding the Tales’ conception, not least the evident vacillation of Byron’s own opinion of what they were and how they should be taken, prevent a sterile reading of them as being serious socio-political critiques.⁶³ Yet, as Butler has argued, ‘In either case, not to attend to the variety of motive and of social philosophy in this generation of writers is to impose an untenable uniformity on the English Romantic poetry addressing the East, or, simply, not to hear what is being said.’⁶⁴

Said’s belief that an author ‘comes up against the Orient as a European or American first, as an individual second’, sits uneasily alongside the concept of the Romantic individual.⁶⁵ Makdisi has indicated the specific socio-historical conditions that brought about Romantic Orientalism by the contemporaneous concepts of the solitary Self and Romantic imperialism.⁶⁶ If we acknowledge the validity of Makdisi’s argument, then the significance of the individual for Romantic—particularly Byronic—Orientalism, cannot be overlooked. Byron frequently alludes to his imaginative relationship with the East as the basis of his individuality as a writer. The centrality of the Self, or at least of the self-consciousness of Byron’s Orientalism, brings us back to Said. Franklin asserts:

⁶² Malcolm Kelsall, “‘Once she did hold the gorgeous East in fee...’: Byron’s Venice and Oriental Empire”, *Romanticism and Colonialism*, ed. Fulford and Kitson (Cambridge: CUP, 2000) 255. Also see Sharafuddin: ‘He wrote his ‘Turkish Tales’ for many reasons; but prominent among them must be the refusal of the kind of perception of foreign nations that represents them only as deviants from one’s own’ (43).

⁶³ Leask criticizes Watkins reading of the Turkish Tales: ‘Watkins over-seriously reads them as didactic fables of an alternative system of social relations, and more problematically, underplays their sexual politics and orientalism’ (15).

⁶⁴ Butler, ‘Orientalism’, 447.

⁶⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 11.

⁶⁶ Makdisi, 213.

Of course, Byron's self-conscious deconstruction of his own Romantic Orientalism prefigured modern scepticism like Edward Said's famous definition of Orientalism as 'the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient' operating as a Western style for 'dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.'⁶⁷

Scott argues similarly that 'Said's work matters because, most unusually in modern criticism, it takes the Romantic challenge of skepticism seriously and sees the failure of sympathy and the experience of bafflement in the face of the other as a principal legacy of Romanticism.'⁶⁸ If we are to accept, as Franklin and (to an extent) Scott suggest, that in his self-conscious treatment of his own particular brand of Orientalism Byron in some sense prefigured Said then the complexity of reading Byron alongside Said becomes increasingly evident: it becomes a relationship of identity-and-opposition.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Caroline Franklin, 'Some samples of the finest Orientalism': Byronic Philhellenism and proto-Zionism at the time of the Congress of Vienna', *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780-1830*, ed. Tim Fulford and Peter Kitson (Cambridge: CUP, 1998) 221.

⁶⁸ Scott, 76.

⁶⁹ Bloomian concepts of anxiety haunt discourse surrounding Romantic Orientalism. Leask's *Anxieties of Empire* uses Harold Bloom's thesis as a springboard from which to launch an attack on Said; whilst in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Said draws attention to the discrepancy between Schwab's presentation of Orientalism and Romanticism and work by Harold Bloom and Walter Jackson Bate (250) arguing for 'one major theoretical and scholarly contribution of Schwab's work: influence in Romantic literature as enrichment and useful persistence rather than as diminishment and worrying presence' (251).

(iv) 'haunted by a fear of the seraglio'⁷⁰

John MacKenzie indicates that in Oriental or pseudo-Oriental literature 'Feminist ideas provide an important sub-plot since so many aspects of western attitudes to the East were bound up with notions of gender, the role of women in western society and perceptions of women in that of the East.'⁷¹ Moreover, the treatment of the Eastern Other by the West parallels the traditionally binary constructs of gender. Both Woman and the East are conventionally contrasted with their masculine, Western counterparts by a sense of deficiency. Beauvoir writes:

"The female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities," said Aristotle; "we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness." And St Thomas for his part pronounced woman to be an "imperfect man", an "incidental" being... Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being... She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other.⁷²

Similarly, the East can be seen to have been constructed by the West as incidental, as the subject, as the Other. Said portrays almost Freudian construction of the Eastern Other as an embodiment of the Western 'id';⁷³ the East becomes the primitive part of the Western psyche, characterised by its dark sexual desires and the indulgence of baser instincts, and lacking the polish of the Western super-ego. Related to the figuration of Eastern 'idishness' is a long-standing cultural legacy that associates both the East and femininity with sexual deviance and emotional excess.

As McGann suggests, such sexual deviance is informed by revolutionary

⁷⁰ Makdisi, 215.

⁷¹ MacKenzie, xvii-xviii.

⁷² Beauvoir, xlv-xlv.

⁷³ Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey and Anna Freud, vol. 22 of 24 (London: Vintage, 2001) 73. Freud defines the id as 'the dark, inaccessible part of our personality ... we call it a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations... It is filled with energy reaching it from the instincts, but it has no organisation, produces no collective will, but only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle. The logical laws of thought do not apply in the id, and this is true above all of the law of contradiction.' For id, read East. In casting the id as other, there is an irony in the fact that id is also shorthand for 'idem' i.e. Latin, 'the same'.

significance: ‘Eroticism, Shelley argues, is the imagination’s last line of human resistance against what he elsewhere called “Anarchy”: political despotism and moral righteousness on the one hand, and on the other selfishness, calculation, and social indifference.’⁷⁴ Byron can yet again be seen to preempt Said, as Leask indicates: ‘For Byron, the allure of the East was in the nature of a fatal attraction, a deadly cure for aristocratic spleen.’⁷⁵ Leask suggests that the curious quotation from *Childe Harold* concerning ‘The nympholepsy of some fond despair’ (IV.1031) is indicative of Byron’s fascination with erotic visions of Eastern femininity. According to Praz, the association of the East with the figure of the *femme fatale* begins with the Romantics. He takes Cleopatra—a figure who Byron saw as ‘the epitome of her sex’ (*BLJ* III.207)—as an example: ‘Cleopatra combined a fabulous Oriental background with a taste for algolagnia, which... seemed to be in the very air of the Romantic period.’⁷⁶ To summarise, Romantic visions of the East are bound up with concepts of exoticism, which seemingly had an almost equal propensity to inspire attraction or revulsion. Nowhere is the latter reaction more clearly stated than in Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

Makdisi’s thorough investigation into the centrality of Wollstonecraft in Orientalism posits that ‘It is in Wollstonecraft that we find the clearest and most carefully and thoroughly articulated exposition of the relationship between 1790s radicalism and Orientalism.’⁷⁷ Makdisi is swift to contrast 1790s radicalism with that which Byron and Shelley contribute to circa 1815. In spite of this, the close temporal

⁷⁴ McGann, *Romantic Ideology*, 118.

⁷⁵ Leask, *Anxieties of Empire*, 10.

⁷⁶ Praz, 215. Praz emphasizes the two facets of algolagnia, Sadism and Masochism, as belonging to two distinct halves of the century. Praz associates the first half of the long eighteenth century with the former, ‘active algolagnia’, embodied in the Fatal Man or Byronic Hero; the second half of the century belongs to the ‘passive algolagnia’ of the Fatal Woman (216).

⁷⁷ Makdisi, 215.

proximity of the publication of the *Vindication* with Byron's own presentation of Oriental femininity invites comparison. In Thomas Thornton's study, *The Present State of Turkey* (1807), the author asserts that the attitude towards women denotes the progress of any civilisation: 'Where women are degraded from their rank in society, the European sinks into the Turk.'⁷⁸ Chivalry becomes a marker of European social progress in contrast to the East.

Wollstonecraft holds a rhetorical mirror to Thornton's argument, arguing that Western attitudes towards women are 'in the true style of Mahometanism'.⁷⁹ Makdisi points to Wollstonecraft's depiction of Oriental femininity in the *Vindication* as a highly original phenomenon:

Here, virtually for the first time, the despotic and an altogether new conception of femininity (which might otherwise seem at odds with despotism) are merged in a discourse of seductiveness whose primary locus would of course be the seraglio—a space in which the despotism and the soft languid femininity of the East became inseparable.⁸⁰

Despotism produces the languid sensuality that Wollstonecraft so voraciously attacks: 'In a seraglio, I grant, that all these arts are necessary; the epicure must have his palate tickled, or he will sink into apathy'.⁸¹ The *Vindication* is emphatic that such reprehensible sensuality finds its origins in tyranny and subjugation—that sensuality is symptomatic of despotism. Makdisi argues that until Wollstonecraft invited the comparison, 'Eastern despotism, and the East in general, had not previously been thought of in particularly feminine terms', and that the association of the seraglio with seductiveness was not readily made.⁸² Harems were far more likely to be associated with isolation and violence than bewitching arts of love. Nearly all of Byron's Turkish

⁷⁸ Thomas Thornton, *The Present State of Turkey* (London: Joseph Mawman, 1807) 311. Byron was familiar with Thornton's work, accusing him, alongside De Pauw as having 'debased the Greeks beyond their demerits' ('Notes', *CPW* II.201).

⁷⁹ Wollstonecraft, 73.

⁸⁰ Makdisi, 218.

⁸¹ Wollstonecraft, 98.

⁸² Makdisi, 219.

Tales exemplify a Wollstonecraftian vision of gender relations in the Orient, finding their narrative impulse in the antagonistic relationship between oriental despotism and soft languid femininity under the encompassing roof of the seraglio.⁸³

Beauvoir inherits Wollstonecraft's hostility towards Eastern models of gender, though she can be seen to take such criticisms one step further. Rather than the extension of 'the dualisms of feminine and masculine' to that of East and West that Makdisi observes in Wollstonecraft,⁸⁴ Beauvoir denies the East any participation in her thesis. Despite Beauvoir's study recognising the importance of the relationship between the foreign and the Other, she makes no attempt to look at the Orient as she can observe no 'evolution' in the patriarchal attitude towards women, and therefore discerns no alteration in the status of women: 'We shall study that evolution in the West. The history of woman in the East, in India, in China, has been in effect that of a long and unchanging slavery.'⁸⁵ The question of the treatment of race alongside gender has been given further consideration in recent feminist studies, as in Butler's *Gender Trouble*:

The language of appropriation, instrumentality, and distanciation germane to the epistemological mode also belong to a strategy of domination that pits the "I" against an "Other" and, once that separation is effected, creates an artificial set of questions about the knowability and recoverability of that Other.⁸⁶

While Beauvoir effects 'that separation', Wollstonecraft can be seen to create exactly the artificial set of questions that Butler is talking about. Makdisi argues that 'Wollstonecraft seeks to rescue (Western) women from the charge of irrationality, potential enthusiasm, excess, and so on by projecting all these negative qualities on a newly invented Oriental space to which "our" others must belong.'⁸⁷ In restricting her discourse to a consideration of Western femininity, Beauvoir is liable for the same

⁸³ *Lara* and *The Siege of Corinth* are exceptions; such polarization can be extended to the harem cantos of *Childe Harold*, though not to *Don Juan*—it is in the latter that Byron inverts anticipated gender roles.

⁸⁴ Makdisi, 219.

⁸⁵ Beauvoir, 86, n.1.

⁸⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 197.

⁸⁷ Makdisi, 219.

charge. Beauvoir's caution, in approaching the East, however, distances her from the kind of universal feminist discourse that we find in Wollstonecraft, and which Butler critiques:

The political assumption that there must be a universal basis for feminism, one which must be found in an identity assumed to exist cross-culturally, often accompanies the notion that the oppression of women has some singular form discernible in the universal or hegemonic structures of patriarchy or masculine domination. The notion of a universal patriarchy has been widely criticized in recent years for its failure to account for the workings of gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts in which it exists. . . . That form of feminist theorizing has come under criticism for its efforts to colonize and appropriate non-Western cultures to support highly Western notions of oppression, but because they tend as well to construct a "Third World" or even an "Orient" in which gender oppression is subtly explained as symptomatic of an essential, non-Western barbarism.⁸⁸

Wollstonecraft plays upon Western fears of Eastern tyranny to effect a change in the treatment of Western women; such oppression is therefore figured as universal.

Whether Butler's criticisms can be applied to proto-feminist writers such as Wollstonecraft is, however, questionable—her objections clearly refer to more recent writings on gender; yet such pronouncements remain relevant in an application to Romantic Orientalism, not least because the long eighteenth century similarly contested the hegemony of universalism. As Scott suggests, 'The failure of Orientalist writing ever adequately to speak about 'the other' in terms that escape its own subjectivity might be seen as part of Romanticism's rejection of eighteenth century universalism.'⁸⁹

Like Wollstonecraft, Byron was clearly aware that detailing the oppression of women in the East would necessitate reflection on such oppression in the West; Franklin observes: 'In the midst of Oriental melodrama we are given this detailed and sensitive insight into a young bride's view of a marriage of convenience, as apposite in Regency England as in Turkey.'⁹⁰ That is not to argue that Byron saw a 'singular' form of the oppression of women (though he certainly saw the concept of freedom as universal), indeed, his poems recognise the cultural relativism of the position of

⁸⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 5.

⁸⁹ Scott, 74. For further discussion of the problems of universalism (versus pluralism) see Muthu 261.

⁹⁰ Franklin, *Heroines*, 81.

women; he is, however, guilty of Butler's latter charge in his construction of 'a "Third World" or even an "Orient" in which gender oppression is subtly explained as symptomatic of an essential, non-Western barbarism.

(v) ‘All women in the Orient are odalisques.’⁹¹

It is the presentation of gender in the Tales that is most often cited as precluding them from being considered truly radical, and it was most likely the Turkish Tales that prompted Hazlitt in his criticism that Byron’s heroines were yielding slaves written after his own heart.⁹² Hazlitt’s pejorative remark closely echoes Francis Jeffrey’s review of *The Corsair* and *The Bride of Abydos* for *The Edinburgh Review*: ‘We still wish he would present us with personages with whom we could more entirely sympathise. At present, he will let us admire nothing but adventurous courage in men, and devoted gentleness in women.’⁹³ Byron’s identification with the East has been suggested as being symptomatic of his sympathy with Oriental patriarchal despots. Said has commented that ‘an eighteenth-century mind could breach the doctrinal walls erected between the West and Islam and see hidden elements of kinship between himself and the Orient. Napoleon is a famous instance of this (usually selective) identification by sympathy.’⁹⁴ The alleged misogyny of the two men appears to court especial attention. Eric Meyer cites the following tragic anecdote concerning

⁹¹ Gustave Flaubert, ‘Odalisques’, *Dictionary of Accepted Ideas*, trans. Jacques Barzun (London: M. Reinhardt, 1954) 63. Flaubert’s dictionary is a satiric commentary on the kind of contemporary prejudices Byron’s Tales engage with and depart from. In a letter to Louise Colet, Flaubert remarks: ‘the oriental woman is no more than a machine: she makes no distinction between one man and another man’ (cited in Botton, 187). Byron’s portrayal of his own women and their often aggressive monogamy is clearly at odds with Flaubert’s flippant characterization.

⁹² See fn5 of my introduction.

⁹³ Francis Jeffrey, ‘On *The Corsair* and *The Bride of Abydos*’, *The Edinburgh Review* (April 1814): 228 [Reiman, 863]. All contemporary reviews cited from Donald H. Reiman ed. *The Romantics Reviewed: Contemporary Reviews of British Romantic Writers*, “Part B: Byron and Regency Society Poets”, 5 vols (New York: Garland, 1972). Hereafter Reiman page citations shall be given in square brackets.

⁹⁴ Said, *Orientalism* 118. Byron’s admiration of the French Emperor has recently received extensive critical attention, notably in Fiona MacCarthy’s and Edna O’Brien’s biographies and in Bernard Beatty, Tony Howe, and Charles E. Robinson’s collection of critical essays, *Liberty and Poetic Licence: New Essays on Byron* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2008); see especially essays by John Clubbe (181-192) and Jonathan Gross (193-205). Marilyn Butler briefly discusses the extent to which the Byronic hero is indebted to a French cult of Napoleon in *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (Oxford: OUP, 1981) 118; a more extended discussion is provided by Christina M. Root in ‘History as Character: Byron and the Myth of Napoleon’, *History & Myth: Essays on English Romantic Literature*, ed. Stephen C. Behrendt (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1990) 149-165.

Napoleon's Egyptian mistress: 'For her collaboration with the infidel [Napoleon], she was killed by having her throat cut by the impassive authorities.'⁹⁵ Meyer goes on to state that this 'invites comparison with any number of similar episodes in the *Oriental Tales of Byron*'.⁹⁶ It is not exactly clear to which episodes Meyer is referring to. Other than Leila, none of the *Oriental* heroines are executed. Parisina comes closest: she is tried alongside her lover for adultery by her husband the sultan, but her eventual punishment is living after her lover has been executed.

Leila's death is cited as further evidence of racial identification by Leask, who states of the *Giaour*: 'He admits that he too would have destroyed Leila for her infidelity had he been Hassan, thus destroying any possible claims for the moral superiority of Europeans. The power relations of gender transcend cultural difference.'⁹⁷ Yet it is the power relations of gender that are a defining factor in cultural difference. Identification with Eastern attitudes towards women betrays more about the cultural isolation of the hero figure than it does about an assumed European moral superiority. Sexual relations do—in some sense—transcend cultural identification, but the manner in which these are conducted become markers of cultural affiliation. Butler argues:

By his overuse of this emblematic case of Eastern despotism and effeminacy [the harem], Byron allegedly betrays far from liberal attitudes: a contempt for female weakness and passivity, an association of the East with this degraded view of women, and a voyeuristic, semi-pornographic curiosity towards what amounts to sexual abuse.⁹⁸

Butler identifies misogyny (from a Western perspective) as being a defining characteristic of Byron's image of Eastern culture. The recurrent presentation of degraded femininity within Byron's *Tales* consequently aligns the poet with a culturally

⁹⁵ Eric Meyer, "'I Know Thee Not, I Loathe Thy Race": Romantic Orientalism in the Eye of the Other', *ELH* 58 (Fall, 1991): 659.

⁹⁶ Meyer, 659.

⁹⁷ Leask, *Anxieties of Empire*, 29.

⁹⁸ Butler, 'Orientalism', 430.

specific form of sexism, and the treatment of women in the Tales problematizes the poet's own attitudes towards sexual politics. Daniel Watkins follows Butler's lead in stating that 'Specifically, the Tales describe the pervasive cultural attitudes, practices, and beliefs which, under certain circumstances, not only limit human independence, but in fact support reactionary and morally destitute social systems.'⁹⁹ The charge levelled at Byron is that the Tales betray the poet's own reactionary and morally questionable attitudes towards women. Reminiscent of Butler's comments regarding Western figuration of Eastern literature as displaying a 'semi-pornographic curiosity towards what amounts to sexual abuse', Joseph Lew has argued that the formal qualities of *The Giaour* invite a style of reading that enacts such abuse: 'Implicitly, the fragment poem 'wishes' to be violated by the reader.'¹⁰⁰ The criticism of the perceived passivity and ill treatment of the heroines by contemporary British reviewers indicates that Byron's Tales departed markedly from acceptable Western codes of sexual conduct. Franklin states that 'Sexual politics had always been of primary interest in the genre of the Oriental tale. . . In travel books on the East, too, so well-represented in Byron's library, the treatment of women was a fascination.'¹⁰¹

The conformist heroines of the Tales give an indication of the extent to which Byron was engaging with existing literary models of Eastern femininity. Byron's engagement with Western stereotypes of other cultures in the construction of his Eastern heroines seemingly follows Flaubert's dictum that 'All women in the Orient are odalisques'. Indeed, the Tales have largely been read as Byron anthologizing heroines who can themselves be subject to Said's critique of Flaubert's presentation of Oriental

⁹⁹ Daniel P. Watkins, *Social Relations in Byron's Eastern Tales* (London: Associated UP, 1987) 16.

¹⁰⁰ Joseph Lew, 'The Necessary Orientalist? *The Giaour* and Nineteenth-Century Imperialist Misogyny', *Romanticism, Race, and Imperial Culture*, ed. Richardson and Hofkosh (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996) 179. Lew's analysis echoes Said's insistent overuse of sexual verbs to describe the West's violation of the East; Cochran provides an exhaustive list of such instances (*Byron and Orientalism*, 192fn).

¹⁰¹ Franklin, *Heroines*, 34.

women, being ‘Less than a woman than a display of impressive but verbally inexpressive femininity’;¹⁰² by contrast Byron’s harem heroines, in all their impressive femininity, are far from inexpressive. These figures demonstrate Byron’s anticipation of the kind of stereotype latterly presented by Flaubert, before displaying a clear departure from such clichéd Eastern femininity. I will not attempt to deny that women are ill treated in these Tales: they suffer at the hands of an unyielding patriarchy and usually die tragic deaths;¹⁰³ rather than read the heroines fates as indicative of Byron’s sympathy for contemporary stereotypes of Eastern misogyny, I instead regard their tragic demise as fulfilling Western generic expectations.

Romantic Orientalism’s reliance on stereotypes of the East was reinforced by Western productions of purportedly Eastern literature. As I explored earlier in this chapter, the popular contemporary fascination with the Orient was in no way matched by a widespread knowledge of genuinely Oriental literature; rather, the Orientalist vogue was informed by a determination to overlook the realities of that culture. The East that fascinated the Western reader was a mirage, an Arabian Night or Eastern Tale that coincided with an intensified interest in the workings of the imagination. Said explains that popular Orientalism:

easily identifiable in William Beckford, Byron, Thomas Moore, and Goethe, cannot be simply detached from the interest taken in Gothic Tales, pseudomedieval idylls, visions of barbaric splendour and cruelty....Sensuality, promise, terror, sublimity, idyllic pleasure, intense energy: the Orient as a figure in the pre-Romantic, pretechnical Orientalist imagination of late-eighteenth-century Europe was really a chameleonlike quality called (adjectivally) “Oriental”.¹⁰⁴

Byron’s early reading exposed him to a wide variety of ‘visions of barbaric splendour and cruelty’. An exploration of Richard Knolles, the Korân (defined by Flaubert as a

¹⁰² Said, *Orientalism*, 187.

¹⁰³ As Franklin observes, ‘All the heroines of the Oriental Tales die except Gulnare and Kaled’ (35); without wanting to challenge Franklin’s general argument, the final couplet of *Lara* would indicate that Gulnare is, in fact, the sole survivor of the Tales. We are told of Kaled’s grief stricken madness that: ‘This could not last — she lies by him she lov’d; / Her tale untold — her truth too dearly prov’d’ (II.626-627).

¹⁰⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, 118-119.

‘Book entirely about women, by Mohammed’),¹⁰⁵ and the *Arabian Nights*—texts that Byron possessed in his library and was evidently familiar with—illuminate the general claim that the treatment of women in Byron’s Eastern reading was either barbaric or demeaning.

Byron refers repeatedly to his familiarity with Knolles’ *Generall Historie of the Turkes* (1603). Knolles’ text features several notable female figures, and these can be divided into two groups: the tyrannous and the tyrannized.¹⁰⁶ Manto, a Greek woman taken captive by the Turks and then married to *Ionuses Bassa*, exemplifies the latter group:

But long lasteth not the sommer fruit of wanton loue, blasted most times in the blossome, and rotten before it be well gathered: For in short time the Bassa more amorous of her person than secured in her vertues, and after the manner of sensuall men still fearing least that which so much pleased himself, gaue no less contentment to others also; began to haue her in distrust, although he saw no great cause why, more than his owne conceit, not grounded vpon any her euill demeanor, but vpon the excesse of his owne liking. . . Who therewith enraged, and calling her vnto him, forthwith in his furie, with a dagger stabd her to the heart and slew her: so together with the death of his loue, hauing cured his tormenting jealousie.¹⁰⁷

The threat of vengeful masculine violence hangs heavy over Byron’s Turkish Tales.

The beautiful slave and the tyrannous Turkish husband is a motif that Byron explores in his two most commented upon narrative poems, *The Giaour* and *The Corsair*, reemerging in the rest of the Tales in slightly differing formats. Knolles’ presentation of tyrannous femininity—a version of womanhood which makes profuse appearance in the *Nights* and in mock-Eastern Tales like William Beckford’s *Vathek* [SC (1816) 312]—finds its supreme representative in Roxolana, Solyman’s wife. The moral of Roxolana’s

¹⁰⁵ Flaubert, 53.

¹⁰⁶ Seyed Mohammed Marandi suggests such polarization is not limited to treatment of Eastern women in the Tales: ‘Oriental men are divided into two categories: despots and their ‘brave’ and ‘gallant’ slaves who mindlessly await their ‘Lord’s behest’ (I,22)’ (‘The Concubine of Abydos’, *The Byron Journal* 33.2 (2005): 100).

¹⁰⁷ Richard Knolles, *The Generall Historie of the Turkes* (London: A. Islip, 1603) 557. Manto’s epigraph reads:

If feature braue thou doest respect, thou canst none fairer see,
 Nor in whose chast and constant brest could greater graces lie.
 But whilst mismatcht she liu’d to mourne, enthrald to jealous braine,
 Vnhappy she, with cruell hand was by her husband slaine. (559)

story is clear:

To fairest lookes trust not too farre, nor yet to beautie braue:
 For hatefull thoughts so finely maskt, their deadly poisons haue.
 Loues charmed cups, the subtle dame doth to her husband fill:
 And causeth him with cruell hand, his childrens bloud to spill.¹⁰⁸

Roxolana and Manto exemplify Wollstonecraft's assessment of the unchanging binary stereotyping of femininity: 'she [woman] has always been a slave, or a despot'.¹⁰⁹

Knolles' models of tyrannous and tyrannized femininity unsurprisingly, given his own cultural persuasion, conform to the clichéd Western portrayal of Eastern femininity. As considered earlier in the chapter, there is little evidence to suggest that Byron came much closer to genuine Eastern literature than Knolles' *History*. The most significant, purportedly Eastern texts, that Byron had exposure to were all in translation and heavily annotated by Western Orientalists: George Sale's *Koran* and Scott's *Arabian Nights*.

Byron's familiarity with texts such as Knolles' *History*, Sale's *Koran*, and Scott's *Arabian Nights* suggest that rather than engaging directly with Eastern literature, Byron was actively and intentionally engaging with Orientalism as filtered through a Western literary heritage. Byron's peculiar brand of Orientalism shows clear development from its 1790s radical Orientalist heritage. Whilst Byron was concerned with the construction of a 'real' Orient, his choice of reading material smacks of what Makdisi has termed 'a specifically 1790s form of Orientalism' which 'had literally nothing to do with the experience of the East, whether personal or collective, let alone with the actual cultures and civilizations of that part of the earth whose fate it was to be gathered under the rubric of "the Orient"',¹¹⁰ or, as Rana Kabbani has rather more pithily phrased it, 'It made use of a fictionalized East to fictionalize it further.'¹¹¹ Wiener has suggested that

¹⁰⁸ Knolles, 759.

¹⁰⁹ Wollstonecraft, 123.

¹¹⁰ Makdisi, 214.

¹¹¹ Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986) 31.

although Byron's various journal entries appear 'to indicate that Byron knew much about Arabian and Persian literature, it is more than likely that he encountered it chiefly through secondary sources by reading Henley's notes to Beckford's *Vathek* and the complete works of Sir William Jones.'¹¹² The following extract from a letter to Murray not only confirms Wiener's suspicion, but indicates Byron's firm belief in the authenticity of these secondary sources: 'if you want authority—look at Jones—D'Herbelot—*Vathek*—or the Notes to the Arabian N[ight]s—& if you think it necessary model this into a *note*' (*BLJ* III.164). As a model of the Eastern tale, Byron held *Vathek* in particularly high esteem:

I do not know from what source the author of that singular volume may have drawn his materials; some of his incidents are to be found in the "Bibliothèque Orientale"; but for correctness of costume, beauty of description, and power of imagination, it far surpasses all European imitations; and bears such marks of originality, that those who have visited the East will find some difficulty in believing it to be more than a translation. As an Eastern tale, even *Rasselas* must bow before it (*CPW* III.423).

Three significant points can be drawn from the above passage; firstly, Byron's acknowledgement of the importance of research for the Oriental writer and his fascination with how a writer engages with sources; secondly, to return to Said's argument, Byron's admiration of 'correctness of costume, beauty of description, and power of imagination' confirms the difficulty in separating Romantic Orientalism from western sentimentalism; and thirdly, Byron's reassertion of his authority as one who has 'visited the East'. Said follows Schwab's lead in acknowledging the historical, intellectual, and imaginative conditions of the Romantic era as being peculiarly suited to an Oriental Renaissance. Both Schwab and Said emphasise the centrality of the intense energy of the imagination in Eastern and Romantic literature, and, more specifically, the power to create alternative realities: 'For the West the term "to think" presupposes the faculty to create a reality, and thus speech stands for a sort of

¹¹² Wiener, 92n.

unfettered magic.’¹¹³

As I argued at the start of the chapter, the Romantic and the Oriental are each typically characterized by excess, each seeking to move beyond the familiar, and the safe; however, the success of the Eastern tale in Europe, as Byron recognized, lies in the promise of a not too genuine experience of Eastern culture—the extravagance of the East, tempered by the rationalism of the West. Most contemporary reviewers, while refusing to believe that *Vathek* was a genuine Arabian tale, had no difficulty in relating it to the *Arabian Nights*, first translated into English in the early eighteenth century.

Roger Lonsdale comments:

Here was the precedent for wild, extravagant, and sometimes savage, incidents, supernatural agencies, and exotic settings. The eighteenth-century reader to some extent rationalized his delight in the *Arabian Nights* by telling himself that it was also instructive as a genuine depiction of Eastern manners and Eastern genius. . . . The author’s apparently detailed knowledge of Eastern manners and customs, his careful attention to local colour and to what Byron was to praise as the ‘costume’ of the tale, had no precedent in English.¹¹⁴

The most faithfully Orientalist precursor to *Vathek*, as indicated above, were the *Arabian Nights*, which were loose translations of genuine Eastern Tales.¹¹⁵ Beckford’s tale understandably became the benchmark for the Romantic Orientalists who followed his example. Both Byron and Moore observed the creative possibilities of a style whose origins were betwixt and between West and East, and both were conscious of performing something original (originality itself being considering a defining quality of ‘oriental’). Byron declares to Moore in the dedication to *The Corsair*:

Your imagination will create a warmer sun, and less clouded sky; but wilderness, tenderness, and originality are part of your national claim of oriental descent, to which you have already thus far proved your title more clearly than the most zealous of your country’s antiquarians (*CPW* III.148-149).

The warmth of Byron’s regard for Moore’s efforts in a genre he himself was writing within did not go unnoticed by hostile reviewers, with *The Antijacobin Review*

¹¹³ Schwab, 483.

¹¹⁴ Roger H. Lonsdale, ‘Introduction’ to William Beckford, *Vathek* (London: OUP, 1970) xxiii.

¹¹⁵ For a contemporary discussion of the controversy concerning the authenticity of the *Nights*, see Weber’s introduction to *Tales of the East*, vol. 1 of 3 (Edinburgh: John Ballantyne & Co., 1812) i-xxxvi.

remarking that ‘In his dedication to the “Corsair,” the adulation of Mr. Moore is fulsome even to disgust’¹¹⁶—a criticism which reviewers no doubt felt equally applicable to the poets’ Eastern productions. The genre’s very deliberate quality of being outside Western literary convention has led to the Eastern Tales being generally considered of little literary merit, and Leask refers to the swift departure of ‘the “costume poetry” of Byron and Moore... from the literary canon of “high Romanticism”’.¹¹⁷ Perversely, the very act of stepping outside of Western conventionality leaves the Eastern Tales open to charges of conformism to a rather more anachronistic culture—that the sexual politics they present are more easily aligned with the feudal East than the contemporary West.

Such a deliberate attempt at an expected conformity has led critics and contemporary reviewers to assume that the Tales exhibit a kind of uniformism which accounts for the continued questioning regarding the extent of their radical potential. Byron’s casting of the East as ‘the only poetical policy’ was not entirely shared by reviewers, who became swiftly bored by the Oriental locale and *costume* of the Tales. *The Critical Review* felt the Eastern decoration of Byron’s verse not merely superfluous, but detrimental:

When time shall have tempered the vivacity of these impressions, we think Lord Byron will be a greater poet than he is now. We know of no one, to whom scenery, dress, and decoration, are less necessary, and who is therefore likely to lose more, by being locally attached.¹¹⁸

In a review of the same poem, published the same month, *The British Review* was rather more cutting:

¹¹⁶ ‘Lord Byron’s *Bride of Abydos and the Corsair*’ from *The Antijacobin Review* (March 1814): 41.

¹¹⁷ Leask, “Wandering through Eblis”; Absorption and Containment in Romantic Exoticism’, *Romanticism and Colonialism*, ed. Fulford and Kitson (Cambridge: CUP, 2000) 178.

¹¹⁸ *The Critical Review* on *The Corsair* (February 1814): 155 [636].

We can scarcely criticise as fast as Lord Byron can write; but in the present case we are relieved from the necessity of any repetition of our critical labour, by the convenient uniformity of his lordship's productions.¹¹⁹

Writing on *The Siege of Corinth* three months later, *The British Review* declares that 'Lord Byron has... made us rather sick of Turks and Tartars'.¹²⁰ *The Siege of Corinth* fared little better at the hands of *The Augustan Review* which wearily observes that 'The scenery is as usual Grecian, and the hero as usual a villain.'¹²¹ Even *La Belle Assemblée*, who more usually adheres rigidly to a tone of insipid fan-worship notes (without irony) the conformity of the style of the Tales: 'This poem, undoubtedly the work of our noble and justly admired bard, is much in the style of his Lordship's former Tales.'¹²²

The frustration of the reviewers at the swift succession of the similarly themed Turkish Tales led to equivalent critical responses. *The Eclectic Review* is outspoken in its ennui: 'If Lord Byron can produce nothing better than Tales of this description, we care not how many of these we get from him'.¹²³ The *Antijacobin Review* is equally dismissive: 'Lord Byron has declared his intention of not obtruding any more of his effusions on the public "for some years to come." The intention is so good, that we sincerely hope he may carry it into full execution.'¹²⁴ The vast sales figures of the Turkish Tales, however, were testimony to the fact that the reading public did not share in the contempt of many reviewers.¹²⁵ Magazines were conscious of the fashionable nature of the poet, as *The Augustan Review* writes:

¹¹⁹ *The British Review* on *The Corsair* (February 1814): 506 [421]

¹²⁰ *The British Review* on *The Siege of Corinth* (May 1816): 458 [431]

¹²¹ *The Augustan Review* on *The Siege of Corinth* and *Parisina* (April 1816): 382 [62]

¹²² *La Belle Assemblée* on *Lara* (September 1814): 131 [97]

¹²³ *The Eclectic Review* on *The Siege of Corinth* and *Parisina* (March 1816): 269 [733]

¹²⁴ *The Antijacobin Review* on 'Lord Byron's *Bride of Abydos* and the *Corsair*' (March 1814): 236 [49]

¹²⁵ For print runs of five of the Tales (*Parisina* is not listed), see William St Clair, 'Appendix 9', *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007) 586-587. At 25,000 copies, *The Corsair* was the most popular of the Tales, and famously sold out its entire print run of 10,000 copies on its first day of publication.

But cost what trouble it may, the research must be made; for what stylish lady or gentleman will incur being set down for a barbarian, from not being able to repeat on critical occasions, a part of the fine stanzas of so fashionable an author?¹²⁶

The British Review who was suspicious of the poet's motives of production anticipated Byron's later statements, which suggest that the quality of the Tales did not merit their popularity:

To enter into a detailed criticism upon such a work would, we feel, be mightily ridiculous; especially as we are by no means sure that the poet is not trying a ludicrous experiment upon the tolerance of fashionable favouritism¹²⁷

The public had conformed to Byron's expectations of them and proved that the East was a shrewd poetical policy to have adopted. Unlike Southey whose Eastern epics *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) and *Curse of Kehama* (1810) experimented with both form *and* content, Byron struck the right balance between Western narrative form and decorative Oriental costume; his later comic Tale, *Beppo*, self-ironizes the earlier 'easy' success of the tragic *Tales*:

Oh that I had the art of easy writing
 What should be easy reading! could I scale
 Parnassus, where the Muses sit inditing
 Those pretty poems never known to fail,
 How quickly would I print (the world delighting)
 A Grecian, Syrian, or Assyrian tale;
 And sell you, mix'd with western sentimentalism,
 Some samples of the finest Orientalism! (401-408)

Whilst Byron here hints at his own disregard for the 'pretty poems' that the world had delighted in,¹²⁸ his 'art of easy writing' is—like the stanza itself—an affectation.

Matthew Scott has noted that these lines could equally suggest that there is more to the Turkish Tales than 'easy reading':

¹²⁶ *The Augustan Review on The Siege of Corinth and Parisina* (April 1816): 380 [61].

¹²⁷ *The British Review on The Siege of Corinth* (May 1816): 454 [429].

¹²⁸ Byron later complained to Shelley that 'You see what it is to throw pearls to Swine — as long as I wrote the exaggerated nonsense [the Tales] which has corrupted the public taste — they applauded to the very echo — and now that I have really composed within these three or four years some things which should "not willingly be let die" [the plays] — the whole herd snort and grumble and return to wallow in their mire' (*BLJ IX.161*).

One implication of this is that, when Byron rhymed ‘Orientalism’ with ‘western sentimentalism’ in Beppo, he rightly drew attention to something fundamental that was already manifest in his own earlier poetry. *The Giaour*, for example, for all its gathered notes about Islam, is in the end a poem about the inability of a Muslim and a Christian each to recognise the existence in the other of the emotions that they have in common.¹²⁹

Scott’s argument that the Tales are fundamentally commenting on issues of racial difference and identification challenges critical (and authorial) determination to dismiss them as inoffensively fashionable ‘pretty poems’. If race relations form the ideological fulcrum of the poems then one begins to question whether their popularity was in spite of, or owing to their more serious considerations. If the latter, then their popularity becomes even more intriguing; rather than purely exotic diversions, the poems have a more serious educational element to them.

Basing a narrative on the complexities of Same/Other relations is not radical in itself: indeed, there is potential to read the poems as betraying a fundamental social conservatism; Leask argues: ‘Byron reduces the imperialist Self to a level with its oriental Other; but in so doing he in effect perpetuates the prejudice of the East/West binary opposition whilst attacking the ideology of empire which it empowers.’¹³⁰ The Tales adhere to the Romantic Orientalist trope of relying upon Western preconceptions of the Orient, rather than a familiarity with genuine Eastern culture. Yet as I considered earlier in the chapter, Wollstonecraft’s indisputably radical *Vindication* similarly adheres to Eastern gender stereotypes, whilst attacking the ideology of patriarchy that itself perpetuates its existence through upholding such gender stereotypes. Leask’s argument that the underlying message of the Tales is founded on an extension of the very ideology of difference that they supposedly attack does not preclude the poems from radicalism of other kinds.

¹²⁹ Scott, 74.

¹³⁰ Leask, *Anxieties of Empire*, 4.

(vi) Byron's Arabesque¹³¹

Byron's 1807 list of his childhood reading evidences the poet's familiarity with the Korân, and indicates his perception of its centrality in Arabic culture, being a defining factor of Arab identity: 'Arabia, Mahomet, whose Koran contains most sublime poetical passages far surpassing European Poetry' (*CMP* 1).¹³² Byron's opinion was not, however, characteristic of the text's nineteenth-century literary reception. Thomas Carlyle wrote that 'Nothing but a sense of duty could carry any European through the Koran'.¹³³ Southey comments in a similar vein: 'It had been easy to have made Zeinab [an early heroine in *Thalaba*] speak from the Koran, if the tame language of the Koran could be remembered by the few who have toiled through its dull tautology.'¹³⁴ Byron's knowledge of the Korân is not demonstrably thorough. The poet is more inclined to use the text as a stage prop, rather than a textual source in his Eastern Tales ('A Koran of illumin'd dyes' (*Bride of Abydos* II.73) is observed near Zuleika's 'silken Ottoman' (II.64)), and it would appear that Byron's fascination with the Korân was owing to its cultural resonance, rather than its 'sublime passages'.¹³⁵ Byron's depiction of Eastern women from *The Giaour* onwards suggests, however, a familiarity with the presentation of women in the Korân:

¹³¹ For an article-length discussion of this section of the thesis see Anna Camilleri, 'Byron's Arabesque', *Charles Lamb Bulletin* 155 (Spring, 2012): 73-83.

¹³² For further discussion of Byron's relationship with Islam, see Bernard Blackstone, 'Byron and Islam: the Triple Eros', *Journal of European Studies* 4 (1974): 325-63.

¹³³ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History* (Berkeley: California UP, 1993) 56.

¹³⁴ Southey, *Thalaba the Destroyer*, ed. Tim Fulford, *Robert Southey: Poetical Works 1793-1810*, ed. Lynda Pratt (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2004) 193.

¹³⁵ Wiener comments that 'It is unwise to assume that he [Byron] is speaking with first-hand acquaintance of the book' (110); he is open to the possibility that Byron may have read Sale's 'Preliminary Discourse' (111), but contends that the poet's knowledge of the Korân is predominantly derived from Henley's notes to *Vathek*—a text whose Orientalism Wiener dismisses as 'spurious' (115).

Though on Al-Sirat's arch I stood,
 Which totters o'er the fiery flood,
 With Paradise within my view,
 And all his Houris beckoning through.
 Oh! who young Leila's glance could read
 And keep that portion of his creed
 Which saith, that woman is but dust,
 A soulless toy for tyrant's lust? (483-490)

Certainly, an ability to reference Al-Sirat and the Houris does not categorically prove

Byron read the Korân.¹³⁶ But the footnote to these lines poses a confident challenge to the common assumption that Islam denied women souls:

A vulgar error; the Koran allots at least a third of Paradise to well-behaved women; but by far the greater number of Mussulmans interpret the text their own way, and exclude their moieties from heaven. Being enemies to Platonics, they cannot discern 'any fitness of things' in the souls of the other sex, conceiving them to be superseded by the Houris (*CPW* III.419).

Byron's dismissal of the status of women in Islamic cultures might be deemed rather hasty, or resulting from a poor grasp of the Korân, whose fourth chapter ("Women; Revealed at Medina") opens with the declaration: '*respect women who have born you, for God is watching over you*' (60).¹³⁷ Though the portions are inaccurate, Byron rightly indicates that 'the Koran allots at least a third of Paradise to well-behaved women': chapters Four and Nine indicate that women and men are equally welcome into *al Jannat*:

Whoso doth evil, shall be rewarded for it; and shall not find any patron or helper, beside GOD; but whoso doth good works, whether he be male or female, and is a true believer; they shall be admitted into paradise, and shall not in the least be unjustly dealt with (76).

And:

GOD promiseth unto the true believers, both men and women, gardens through which rivers flow, wherein they shall remain for ever; and delicious dwellings in gardens of perpetual abode (158).

¹³⁶ Cochran has similarly commented on Byron's *costume* that 'displaying your knowledge of what djereeds and ataghans are, and claiming thereby an intimacy with Islamic culture, is like having your photo taken on the Rialto and saying how well you know Venice' (*Orientalism*, 12).

¹³⁷ All citations taken from George Sale, *The Koran, commonly called the Alcoran of Mohammed* (London: C. Ackers, 1734). Wiener logically concludes that 'since he [Byron] did not read Arabic and since there were no better translations, if he consulted any edition of the *Koran*, it was probably Sale's' (111); as Cochran has indicated, however, the text does not appear in either the Sale Catalogues or Byron's letters and journals (*Orientalism*, 9-10).

The footnote is, however, typically Byronic, in that it purports to draw our attention to an error, yet manages to overturn its own objections. The footnote's title, 'A Vulgar Error', should not be overlooked. It is generally assumed that Byron means to say that uneducated Westerners commonly misinterpret Islamic attitudes toward women, and that this particular error is 'In common or general use'¹³⁸ in the West. Sharafuddin confirms this, somewhat naively commenting that:

the aspect for us to note is that Byron's commitment to Islamic accuracy, or his hostility to English inaccuracy, is so strong that even when his poetry scores a legitimate dramatic effect, he feels the need to point out that this effect is based on a mistaken notion.¹³⁹

Byron does not, in the end, use the footnote to point out an error. The first sentence of the footnote contains a notable qualification: 'the Koran allots at least a third of Paradise to well-behaved women; *but* by far the greater number of Mussulmans interpret the text their own way, and exclude their moieties from heaven' [my emphasis]. The 'vulgar error' may equally be considered that of the East's: the notion of women being considered inferior beings being a widely assumed 'by far the greater number of Mussulmans'. Byron's choice of adjective encourages ambiguity, vulgar being defined as: 'Commonly or customarily used by the people of a country; ordinary, vernacular', and so suggests that the notion of women's inferiority is commonly or customarily used by the people of the East. Byron's footnote is based on a heavily ironic footing: the Korân allots 'true believers, both men and women' space in Paradise, but the rewards of the faithful revolve around male sexual fantasy. Sale's commentary in the 'Preliminary Discourse' depicts a gendered sexual bliss as the primary reward for good behaviour:

¹³⁸ "vulgar, adj.". OED Online. September 2011. Oxford University Press. 4 November 2011 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/224849?rskey=vRLM9G&result=2&isAdvanced=false>>.

It cannot be coincidental that Byron's choice of adjective is highly charged with religious connotations, being evocative of the Vulgate translation of the Bible.

¹³⁹ Sharafuddin, 221.

But all these glories will be eclipsed by the resplendent and ravishing girls of paradise, called, from their large black eyes, *Hûr al oyûn*, the enjoyment of whose company will be a principal felicity of the faithful. These, they say, are created, not of clay, as mortal women are, but of pure musk; being, as their prophet often affirms in his *Korân*, free from all natural impurities, defects, and inconveniences incident to the sex, of the strictest modesty (96-97).

Any reader of the *Korân* will observe the remarkable emphasis the text places on these *Hûr al oyûn* or Houris, who are promised on multiple occasions throughout the text.¹⁴⁰

It would be understandable, perhaps, for Byron to assume that Houris supersede women; though the *Korân* commands its readers to *respect* women, they (as in the Bible)¹⁴¹ are explicitly cast as inferior:

Men shall have the pre-eminence above women, because of those *advantages* wherein God hath caused the one of them to excel the other, and for that which they expend of their substance *in maintaining their wives*. The honest women *are* obedient, careful in the absence *of their husbands*, for that God preserveth them, *by committing them to the care and protection of the men* (65).

Byron's commentary on the 'vulgar error' deliberately engages with, and to an extent perpetuates the cultural stereotypes of the East. The objectification and domination of women in the East is seen by Byron to be only loosely in dialogue with the *Korân*.

Writing to Lord Holland in November 1813, Byron said of the *Bride* that 'The very *wild* Stanzas are more like Southey or King David—"By the waters of Babylon" &c. than anything English—but that is thoroughly Eastern—& partly from the *Koran*' (*BLJ* III.168-169). Writing to Lady Melbourne in the same month, Byron qualifies his comments concerning the implied Western authorship of the *Bride*: 'When I speak of

¹⁴⁰ See Chapter 37: 'And near them *shall lie the virgins of paradise*, refraining their looks *from beholding any besides their spouses*, having large black eyes, *and* resembling the eggs *of an ostrich* covered with *feathers from the dust*.' (367); Chapter 44: 'and we will espouse them to fair damsels, having large black eyes.' (403); Chapter 52 'and we will espouse them unto virgins having large black eyes.' (424); Chapter 55: 'Therein *shall receive them beauteous damsels*, refraining their eyes *from beholding any besides their spouses*: whom no man shall have deflowered before them, neither any genius' (433); twice in Chapter 56: 'And *there shall accompany them* fair damsels having large black eyes; resembling pearls hidden *in their shells*: as a reward for that which they shall have wrought.' (434) and 'Verily we have created *the damsels of paradise* by a *peculiar* creation: and we have made them virgins, beloved by their husbands, of equal age *with them*; for *the delight* of the companions of the right hand.' (435); and Chapter 78: 'for the pious *is prepared* a place of bliss: gardens planted with trees, and vineyards, and *damsels* with swelling breasts, of equal age *with themselves*, and a full cup.' (479).

¹⁴¹ See, for example, I Corinthians 11:3/8-9 and 14:34-36, I Timothy 2:8-15, I Peter 3:1-7, Ephesians 5:22-24, and Colossians 3:18-19.

this *tale* & the *author*—I merely mean *feelings*—the characters & the costume & the tale itself (at least are very like it I heard) are Mussulman’ (*BLJ* III.175). Sharafuddin argues that part of Byron’s motivation in writing the Turkish Tales was that ‘He wished the full reality of Islam to become perceptible—not because he was seeking an alternative authority to the West, but because, as a generous liberal who hated tyranny and believed in national independence, he took delight in racial, social, cultural and religious *variety* and *otherness*.’¹⁴² Byron’s generous liberalism and hatred of tyranny led him to expose the ‘full reality’ of his own (western) concept of Islamic culture in his Tales—the flaws of the West found themselves being accentuated in Byron’s stereotypes of the East. Byron was fascinated by the relationship between scriptural religion, and cultural practice. James Kennedy reminisced that following Byron’s own belief that we must ‘make a distinction between Christianity, as it is found in the Scriptures, and the errors, abuses, and imperfections of Christians themselves’, the poet remarked that “‘he had always taken care to make this distinction, as he knew enough of Christianity to feel that it was both necessary and just.’”¹⁴³ For Christianity, read religion. Byron’s figuration of Islam is similarly careful to distinguish between what is written in the Korân, and what Byron saw as the errors, abuses and imperfections of Muslims themselves.

Arguably the most characteristic Eastern text that Byron would have encountered was the *Arabian Nights*, translated into English for the first time earlier in 1706. Wiener argues that: ‘The Tales are quite unlike those of Byron, and we are forced to conclude that although the *Arabian Nights* awakened in Byron the desire to read and learn more about the East, they played no greater part in his literary career.’¹⁴⁴ It is in

¹⁴² Sharafuddin, 243.

¹⁴³ James Kennedy, *Conversations on Religion with Lord Byron* (London: John Murray, 1830) 31.

¹⁴⁴ Wiener, 114.

the Tales that we have the most overt demonstration of the influence of the *Nights* on Byron as an adult poet. The formative impact of the *Nights* on the young Byron was profound. As one of the first books Byron encountered with a genuinely Eastern heritage, the *Nights* have clear significance in awakening the poet's fascination for the East.

Leask argues that 'The great stimulus for the new taste in oriental literary commodities was undoubtedly the *Arabian Nights Entertainment*, translated into English from Galland's 'translation' in the period 1704-12.'¹⁴⁵ As Leask indicates, Galland's 'translation' was far from unproblematic, however, nineteenth-century commentators suggest that despite such a controversial reputation the text retained significant literary value and Oriental appeal for nearly two centuries. In 1879

John Payne wrote:

Numerous as are the mistakes and inaccuracies, willful and involuntary, that deface it, there lives in it, if not the letter, emphatically the true spirit of Oriental romance, as seen by European observers through the intervening media of distance and difference; and his charming style, the fine flower of the literary manner of the eighteenth century¹⁴⁶

Or, as Borges evocatively phrased it in the following century: 'We, their mere anachronistic readers of the twentieth century, perceive only the cloying flavor of the eighteenth century in them and not the evaporated aroma of the Orient which two hundred years ago was their novelty and their glory.'¹⁴⁷ Certainly, Galland's *Nights* and responses to it tell us more about British Romanticism than the Orient. The 'intervening media of distance and difference' was seen by Southey as the essential ingredient in the

¹⁴⁵ Leask, *Anxieties of Empire*, 19. The first English translation was not available until 1706 (see Eva Sallis, *Sheherazade through the looking glass: the metamorphosis of the Thousand and one nights* (Richmond: Curzon, 1999) 3), and the final two volumes of Galland's 12 vol. set in French did not appear until 1717, two years after his death (see Duncan B. Macdonald, 'A Bibliographic and Literary Study of the First Appearance of the *Arabian Nights* in Europe', *The Library Quarterly* 2.4 (1932): 387).

¹⁴⁶ John Payne, 'The Thousand and One Nights, 1-11', *The New Quarterly Magazine* (January 1879): 154.

¹⁴⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, *The Total Library: Non-Fiction 1922-1986*, ed. Eliot Weinberger, trans. Esther Allen et al (London: Allen Lane, 2000) 93.

Nights' palatability, who remarked that they 'certainly abound with genius' but only because 'they have lost their metaphorical rubbish in passing through the filter of a French translation'.¹⁴⁸ Though I acknowledge the significance of Galland's text, my study shall limit discussion to the probable influence on the Tales from Byron's reading of Jonathan Scott's six-volume translation, which is remarkably similar to Galland's. Wiener reasonably concludes that though Byron may have read Galland in the original French, or in translation, 'It is most probable that during the preparation of the Turkish Tales he used the edition of Jonathan Scott' owing to the presence of that edition in Byron's library [SC (1816) 23].¹⁴⁹ Though Payne makes no mention of Scott among the 'versions with which I am acquainted, that are worthy of serious notice',¹⁵⁰ Scott's edition was, according to Muhsin Jassim Ali, among the most authoritative editions available at the start of the nineteenth century: Scott published to answer 'the call for an accurate translation that would satisfy the emerging scientific spirit'.¹⁵¹

Without assuming an unchanging *Nights* or unchanging Orient,¹⁵² I shall read Scott's edition of the *Nights* as one text, and argue that the manner in which the individual Tales are organized deliberately intensifies the didactic intention of the whole.¹⁵³ Whilst I would agree with Peter Heath's qualification that the didacticism of the *Nights* 'might not immediately appear self-evident',¹⁵⁴ recent scholarship on the

¹⁴⁸ Southey, *Thalaba*, 194.

¹⁴⁹ Wiener 91n. I shall be referring to the set currently housed in the Bodleian, shelfmark 931 f.46 (v.1) to 931 f.51 (v.6). Byron was also familiar with Edward Forster's five-volume translation (first published 1802), which he gifted to John Claridge. The set has since been donated to Harrow where Byron and Claridge met (see P. D. Hunter, 'The Byron Collection at Harrow School', *The Byron Journal* 35.1 (June 2007): 61-72).

¹⁵⁰ Payne, 396.

¹⁵¹ Muhsin Jassim Ali, *Scheherazade in England: A Study of Nineteenth-Century English Criticism of the Arabian Nights* (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1981) 74.

¹⁵² Muhsin Mahdi, *The Thousand and One Nights* (Leiden: Brill, 1995) 2.

¹⁵³ See also Peter Heath's argument that the individual Tales 'may also be viewed as integral parts of larger, complex literary structures' in 'Romance as Genre in *The Thousand and One Nights*', *The Arabian Nights Reader* ed. Ulrich Marzolph (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2006) 171.

¹⁵⁴ Heath, 203.

Nights has turned away from nineteenth-century criticism, notably that of G. K. Chesterton and E. M. Forster, who argue that the primary focus of Scheherazade's narrative is to ignite in the sultan (and reader) the 'wish for an everlasting story',¹⁵⁵ and that she only survives 'because she managed to keep the king wondering what would happen next.'¹⁵⁶ Heath argues that Scheherazade's 'main purpose with this strategy is not procrastination... On the contrary, Schahrazād is narrating Tales primarily to instruct the King.'¹⁵⁷ Though Scheherazade's suspenseful *modus operandi* does not, as Heath appears to suggest, necessarily sit contrariwise to the assertion of didactic intent (as Chesterton and Forster outline, how she tells that tale is equally as important as the tale she tells). Rather, that her major task is the reorientation of the Sultan's perspective is beyond doubt. In the same collection of essays, Fedwa Malti-Douglas similarly contends that Scheherazade's arduous task is that of educating the sultan 'in the ways of a nonproblematic heterosexual relationship.'¹⁵⁸ Makdisi and Nussbaum follow twentieth-century feminist interest in the *Nights*, which suggests that Scheherazade's story primarily gives voice to culturally significant themes rather than narrative stylistics: 'Arab and Persian women figure centrally in the *Nights*, and one might argue that part of its modern legacy is that it gave voice to European women writers and feminist themes on a worldwide scale.'¹⁵⁹ In a consideration of the feminist legacy of the *Nights* in Byron's Oriental poetry, the productive partnership between the study of feminist themes and narratological trajectory becomes manifest.

¹⁵⁵ G. K. Chesterton, 'The Everlasting Nights', *The Spice of Life and Other Essays* (Beaconsfield: D. Finlayson, 1964) 58.

¹⁵⁶ E. M. Forster, 'The Story', *Aspects of the Novel* (1927. London: Penguin, 2005) 41.

¹⁵⁷ Heath, 204.

¹⁵⁸ Fedwa Malti-Douglas, 'Shahrazād Feminist', *The Arabian Nights Reader*, 359.

¹⁵⁹ Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum, 'Introduction', *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context: Between East and West* (Oxford: OUP, 2008) 19.

The development of the presentation of women in Scott's edition of the *Nights*, culminating in the success of the heroine of the frame narrative, is comparable with a sense of female heroic development in Byron's *Turkish Tales*. Significantly, the presentation of women in the first three volumes of Scott's edition of the *Nights* conforms to the limited notions of womanhood we have observed in Knolles and the Korân. The opening scenes of the frame narrative focus on female adultery and violent retribution. In brief, the story concerns Shaw-zummaun, the younger brother of the King, who returns home unexpectedly to see his beloved wife 'whom he ardently loved' with another man: 'she, not expecting his return, had taken one of the meanest officers of her household to her bed.' (I.3) He executes the guilty parties and leaves to visit his brother, Shier-ear, only to witness the sultana and ten of her ladies engage in 'amorous company' with an equal number of black men: 'Modesty will not allow, nor is it necessary, to relate what passed between the blacks and the ladies. It is sufficient to say, that Shaw-zummaun saw enough to convince him, that his brother was as much to be pitied as himself' (I.8).

The experience convinces Shaw-zummaun of the uniformity of women's uncontrollable passions and deceptive natures: 'I believed all women to be naturally lewd; and that they could not resist their inclination. Being of this opinion, it seemed to me to be in men an unaccountable weakness to place any confidence in their fidelity' (I.12). On revealing the sultana's adulterous actions to Shier-ear, the brothers agree 'that there is no wickedness equal to that of women' (I.18). The sultana and her ladies are duly executed. The infamous conclusion that Shier-ear reaches is that, 'being persuaded that no woman was chaste, he resolved, in order to prevent the disloyalty of such as he should afterwards marry, to wed one every night, and have her strangled next morning' (I.19). The stories which form the major body of the *Nights* are told by

Scheherazade, the vizier's daughter, who bravely volunteers to marry the sultan herself to prevent him strangling every marriageable maid in the land; she proceeds to deter the sultan from carrying out her own execution by telling him such engaging stories that he postpones her fate for 1001 nights.

Small wonder then that the early stories repeatedly return to motifs of female imprisonment, adultery, and extreme violence against women. In the first story, 'The Ass, the Ox, and the Labourer', the 'hero', a wealthy merchant, beats his wife to 'bring her to her senses' (this from the advice of a cock) (I.31); the wife gives into the husband and 'Upon this, perceiving that she repented of her impertinent curiosity, he desisted; and opening the door, her friends came in, were glad to find her cured of her obstinacy, and complimented her husband upon this happy expedient to bring his wife to reason' (I.31-32). In 'The Story of the Three Calenders, Sons of Sultans; and the Five Ladies of Bagdad', one of the five ladies, Amene, gets her cheek bitten by a silk merchant and, as a punishment for lying as to the cause of the wound, her husband flays her breast and side 'to make her remember her offence' (I.334). The story of the second Calender involves a beautiful princess, kept prisoner by a genie in an underground palace in the middle of a wood. Other stories, such as 'The Story of Codadad and his Brothers', also portray women being kept prisoner by hideous giants, and in this instance the woman in question speaks for by far the greater number of the heroines of the *Nights*: 'His design was either to take my life or oblige me to marry him' (IV.145). When the genie realises another man has discovered her whereabouts, he beats her to the point of death, then cuts off one of her hands. She dies from loss of blood. At the start of 'The Story of Sinbad', the hero is interred in a tomb with a basket containing 'the corpse of a young lady, whiter than snow, all cut in pieces.' (II.100). We later discover, in 'The Story of the Three Apples', that she has been murdered by her husband after he mistakenly

believes her to have cuckolded him with a black slave (II.109).

The heroines of Scott's *Nights*, particularly in the first volume, tend to conform to the tyrannized/tyrannous dichotomy that can be observed in Knolles, and examples of brutal or manipulative women equal examples of victimized damsels. In 'The Story of the Vizier that was Punished', a Ghole (savage demon) appears in the shape of a beautiful woman weeping, and tricks a Prince with the intention of feeding him to her children. 'The History of the Young King of the Black Isles' demonstrates that even the most tyrannous of heroines are subject to extreme violence. The Queen drugs the King each night so she can carouse with her lover ("Sleep on, and may you never wake again!" I.122); once the King has discovered the truth (and after a not insignificant amount of gratuitous cruelty from both parties) the tale concludes with the brutal execution of the Queen: 'He then rose up, and seizing her by the arm so suddenly, that she had not time to discover him, he with a blow of his cimeter cut her in two, so that one half fell one way and the other another' (I.142). Even when women do not take direct action to influence the behaviour of men, the love of women cause men to ruin themselves financially and turn to crime, as in 'The Story of the Christian Merchant'.

The women of Scott's opening volumes that do not conform to the stereotypes found in Knolles, are instead presented as Houris rather than women, confirming Butler's suggestion cited earlier that the East was associated with 'a degraded view of women, and a voyeuristic, semi-pornographic curiosity towards what amounts to sexual abuse'; for example, in the story of the third Calender, where forty obliging hostesses (I.280) offer their services to the hero: 'We assure you, that the good fortune of her whom you choose shall cause no feeling of the kind [jealousy]; for we are agreed among ourselves, that every one of us shall in her turn have the same honour; and when forty days are past, to begin again' (I.283).

Evidence of Western approximation of the polarized femininity encountered in the *Nights* is manifest in pseudo-Oriental fiction of the long eighteenth century.

Beckford's adherence to the binary of tyrannous and tyrannized femininity in *Vathek* provides one such example. Vathek's mother, Carathis, is described as being 'as wicked, as woman could be; which is not saying a little; for the sex pique themselves on their superiority, in every competition' (29). Vathek's lover, Nouronihar, is a model of beauty:

her course was as difficult to follow, as the flight of one of those beautiful blue butterflies of Cachemire, which are, at once, so volatile and rare (63).

and devotion:

Dear sovereign of my soul! I will follow thee, it be thy will, beyond the Kaf, in the land of the afrits. I will not hesitate to climb, for thee, the nest of the Simurgh... the most awful of created beings (94).

Byron's Eastern heroines are described in remarkably similar terms. Leila, alike in her beauty, is compared to 'The insect-queen of eastern spring' (*Giaour* 389), which the footnote specifies is 'The blue-winged butterfly of Kashmeer, the most rare and beautiful of the species' (*CPW* III.418); Zuleika, alike in her devotion, follows her hero without hesitation:

More free her timid bosom beat,
The maid pursued her silent guide;
And though her terror urged retreat,
How could she quit her Selim's side? (*Bride* II.95-98)

Zuleika's fear is tangible. Rather than equality of action, here the heroine is clearly positioned as following her hero. Her very femininity informs her inability to take control of the action. The feminine virtue of selfless devotion prevents her quitting her Selim's side, and the softness of her temperament prevents her from articulating her fears and there is no sense in which Zuleika's flight from the palace is informed by strength or independence: she is instead presented as a stereotyped version of Eastern

femininity.¹⁶⁰

The heroines of imitation Eastern Tales are demonstrably as conformist as those of the Eastern Tales themselves. At a basic level the frame narrative of Moore's *Lalla Rookh* closely resembles the *Nights*.¹⁶¹ It tells the story of a burgeoning romance between Feramoz, a poet, and Lalla Rookh, a princess who are observed by Fadladeen, the Great Nazir or Chamberlain of the Haram; Moore's poem neatly inverts the gender dynamic of the *Nights* where the story-teller is Scheherazade, the listener the Sultan, and the third party Scheherazade's sister. The heroine of the first story, 'The Veiled Prophet of Khorassan', is named Zelica (remarkably close to Zuleika), and combines the more pathetic elements of Byron's Eastern heroines: she turns mad owing to separation from her lover (as with Parisina and Kaled) and then dies tragically (as with all but Gulnare), appearing to her lover in a vision at the close of the poem (like Leila and Francesca). In the third story, 'The Fire-Worshippers', we observe the virgin in the tower motif (as with Medora), the heroine, Hinda, having been imprisoned there by her father (like Zuleika). Hinda is described in remarkably Medora-esque terms: 'Her soul all flame, her brow all sadness' (147). Parallels between Hinda and Byronic femininity are all too easy to observe. Compare 'She Walks in Beauty': 'And on that cheek, and o'er that brow, / So soft, so calm, yet eloquent' (13-14) with 'There was but *one* such voice for her, / So kind, so soft, so eloquent' (*Lalla Rookh*, 165). In addition, her lover is remarkably Byronic, being described as pale of cheek and sunken of brow (128), 'Some erring spirit cast from heav'n' (128), comparing neatly with Lara: 'He stood a

¹⁶⁰ Marandi has critiqued critical tendency to cast Zuleika as a *type*: 'Most critics who have commented on Zuleika's personality, agree that she represents a typically Oriental female, who lives in absolute subservience' ('The Bride of the East', *Byron and Orientalism*, 222). It is important to note that Zuleika is stereotyped according to Western perspectives of the eighteenth century, and that Byron's engagement with such perspectives is indicative of his reading of Oriental culture through a Western filter.

¹⁶¹ Parenthetical citations from Thomas Moore, *Lalla Rookh. Poetical Works of Thomas Moore*, ed. A. D. Godley (London: OUP, 1910). Allan Gregory has commented that *Lalla Rookh* 'was translated into several languages, including Persian, and was famously referred to as a miniature *Arabian Nights*' ('Thomas Moore's Orientalism', *Byron and Orientalism*, 181).

stranger in this breathing world, / An erring spirit from another hurled' (*Lara* I.315-317).

Such parallels continue in the final story, 'The Light of the Haram' (the opening stanzas and subsequent sections of which are written in anapestic tetrameter, like Byron's 'Destruction of the Sennacherib') where we get the following description of the eye of Nourmahal (note the similarity to Beckford's Nouronihar): 'From the depth of whose shadow, like holy revealings / From innermost shrines, came the light of her feelings' (204). Compare with the beauty of Zuleika:

Such was Zuleika—such around her shone
The nameless charms unmarked by her alone—
The light of love—the purity of grace—
The mind—the Music breathing from her face!
The heart whose softness harmonized the whole—
And, oh! that eye was in itself a Soul! (*Bride* I.176-181)

The close relationship between the descriptions of the heroines of Byron's poems and the works of Beckford and Moore is symptomatic of a uniformity in the treatment of women, conforming to the Western stereotype of Eastern gender models. Generally within the Tales, Byron presents us with a conventional approach to the Orient.

Perhaps his most orthodox poem is his first, *The Giaour*, the advertisement deliberately encouraging the reader to assume that the tale is a translation of fragments of an original:

The tale which these disjointed fragments present, is founded upon circumstances now less common in the East than formerly; either because the ladies are more circumspect than in the 'olden time'; or because the Christians have better fortune or less enterprise. The story, when entire, contained the adventures of a female slave, who was thrown, in the Mussulman manner, into the sea for infidelity, and avenged by a young Venetian, her lover (*CPW* III.39).¹⁶²

The disjointed fragmentary nature of the narrative means that the 'circumstances' surrounding the fate of Leila, the heroine, do not become clear until over three hundred

¹⁶² Byron comments on Leila's murder that 'The circumstance to which the above story relates was not very uncommon in Turkey' (*CPW* III.422). McGann has speculated upon Byron's own involvement in the controversy, though admits there is 'unfortunately little data to substantiate' such speculation (see *CPW* III.415). For Byron's unpublished note on the drowning of Leila see *CPW* III.423.

lines into the text. The cultural relativism of Leila's death is made clear; being drowned in a sack as punishment for infidelity is figured as an Eastern custom.

The Giaour's advertisement seems to uphold Lew's premise that 'in Byron a female character's fate is determine by geography; Western heroines tend to survive, while orientalized women die or disappear.'¹⁶³ Lew argues that: 'beginning with *The Giaour*, Byron helped to create an expectation based not on genre but on geography: that Oriental women in literature would die—most often by violent means. Moreover, this generic expectation was not merely unusual, it was new.'¹⁶⁴ That the heroines of the Tales, explicitly tragedies, die tragic deaths should hardly come as a surprise. And whilst Leila is, chronologically, the first of these, she is the only one to die by violent means: Zuleika dies of a broken heart at her lover's death; Medora dies of a broken heart caused by Conrad's adultery; Gulnare seemingly evaporates, quite potentially to return as Kaled who dies of a broken heart at her lover's death, as does Parisina; and Francesca, whose major presence in *The Siege of Corinth* is as a ghost, has seemingly pined for an absent lover and, it transpires, has died from an unfulfilled broken heart. Byron is clearly helping to create an expectation based on genre. In confirmation of Byron's engagement with generic expectations, Laura, the heroine of the comic *Beppo*, survives to live happily ever after with her husband, and the ending of the late romance drama *The Island* sees Torquil and his native princess Neuha thwart their foes and establish an idyllic domestic refuge amidst paradisaal surroundings.

Lew contributes to a critical determination to see the deaths of the heroines as far more violent than the texts themselves would substantiate. Byron's heroines die either directly at the hands of men or by the absences or deaths of their heroes, as with

¹⁶³ Lew, 177.

¹⁶⁴ Lew, 175.

Zuleika:

He was thy hope—thy joy—thy love—thine all—
 And that last thought on him thou could'st not save
 Sufficed to kill—

(*Bride* II.636-638)

Zuleika's all-consuming passion for her hero is echoed by all of her Oriental sisters. Yet Byron here explicitly conforms to the tragic trope of the ill-fated lovers. Lew argues for a clear-cut case of Byron's 'deeply-ingrained misogynistic feelings'¹⁶⁵—why else would he kill off his heroines? It is perhaps rather an oversight that most of the heroes of the tragic Tales die too, often before the heroines, and more violently: Selim dies in battle ('Fast from his breast the blood is bubbling' *Bride* II.579); as does Alp: after hearing that Francesca is dead he is shot by an arrow to the brain ('And then eternal darkness sunk / Through all the palpitating trunk' *Siege of Corinth* 836-837); Conrad does not die (nor does Gulnare, though Medora does) but potentially lives again as Lara, who dies in battle ('bleeding fast from life away.' *Lara* II.417); and Hugo is beheaded by his father ('Rolled the head—and, gushing, sunk / Back the stained and heaving trunk' *Parisina* 456-457). With the exception of the Giaour who dies at the end of the poem after avenging Leila's murder ('He pass'd—nor of his name and race / Hath left a token or a trace' *The Giaour* 1329-1330), the heroes unquestionably suffer more grisly fates than the heroines; however, as Rutherford argues, the heroes' deaths are far from didactic: 'Indeed the deaths of these heroes are not in any way a judgment on their lives—there is no sense of a natural order being re-established after an unnatural rebellion.'¹⁶⁶

A more legitimate objection to level against the manner of the heroines' deaths is that they are desperately passive. Lew remarks that, 'What is striking about all of these

¹⁶⁵ Lew, 183.

¹⁶⁶ Rutherford, 44.

women is the dreary monotony of their fates.’¹⁶⁷ Dying of a broken heart hardly measures up to the masculine equivalent of suffering a gruesome death in battle. But the passivity of the heroines is uniformly constructed as being the result of masculine tyranny. The ‘ideals’ of womanhood we encounter within the Turkish Tales serve to illustrate and emphasise the dominant patriarchal structures of the East. Similarly to the later Medora, Zuleika, ‘child of Gentleness!’, embodies stereotypical womanhood.

Zuleika’s father initially controls her fate:

‘Hence, lead my daughter from her tower—
Her fate is fixed this very hour;
Yet not to her repeat my thought—
By me alone be duty taught!’ (I.40-43)

The heroic rhyme scheme underpins the firmness of Giaffir’s judgment, shackling the incarcerated Zuleika to her fate through the rhyming of ‘tower’ and ‘hour’—the rigidity of the temporal limits of her fate are reinforced by her physical confinement in the tower. In this passage we can also observe the megalomania that informs all of Byron’s Pacha-figures. The Chief of the Harem guard is not to relay Giaffir’s decision regarding Zuleika’s fate (‘Yet not to her repeat my thought’), apparently because he refuses to devolve his power over his daughter: ‘By *me* alone be duty taught’ (my emphasis); he appears to fear his power being diluted through the repetition of his orders. Or perhaps he fears Zuleika looking to another male figure for authority—a fear that would prove legitimate given Zuleika’s transference of allegiance from her father to her purported brother.

An examination of the conformist elements of *The Bride of Abydos*, though revealing of Byron’s Eastern reading, does not delineate the radical elements that inform the early Tales. As Butler suggests, ‘We can best judge the pornographic and political impact of a single work by reading *against* its genre, noticing where it gives

¹⁶⁷ Lew, 174.

more than what is generic or challenges genre-fed expectations.’¹⁶⁸ The 1813 Tales are less overtly radical than their later counterparts, yet in his presentation of the less savoury elements of Western figurations of Eastern culture Byron deliberately engages in the diction of contemporary social commentary. The most striking parallel to draw is with Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication*. Though Byron’s critique is leveled at tyranny in general, rather than oppression of women in particular, such oppression is clearly presented as being gendered. Giaffir gloats over his son, taunting him for effeminacy owing to his lack of martial skill: ‘Go—let thy less than woman’s hand / Assume the distaff—not the brand’ (I.99-100). Selim illustrates Makdisi’s remark that ‘the rights of the manly citizen are shown to be incompatible with the seraglio, and with the East in general, for the same reason that they are incompatible with an aristocratic economy also supposedly characterized by “unnatural” despotism, idleness, and luxury.’¹⁶⁹

The seraglio is the fulcrum of despotism, idleness, and luxury, symbolic of an Eastern aristocratic economy, which, whilst governed by patriarchy, necessarily causes the emasculation of its male inhabitants. This occurs either literally, with the castration of those who are required to govern the harem, or figuratively, as with Selim. In a remarkably pre-Freudian moment, Selim declaims on the paternal pressures of Palace life:

¹⁶⁸ Butler, ‘Orientalism’, 430.

¹⁶⁹ Makdisi, 215.

‘What could I be?—Proscribed at home,
 And taunted to a wish to roam;
 And listless left—for Giaffir’s fear
 Denied the courser and the spear;
 Though oft—Oh, Mohamet! how oft!
 In full Divan the despot scoffed,
 As if *my* weak unwilling hand
 Refused the bridle or the brand:
 He ever went to war alone,
 And pent me here untried—unknown—
 To Haroun’s care with women left,
 By hope unblest—of fame bereft.’ (II.321-332)

Selim’s description of the harem as wholly incompatible with the nurturing of masculine heroism echoes Rousseau’s judgement on slavery: ‘in becoming sociable and a slave, he becomes weak, fearful, and obsequious; his soft, effeminate way of life ends up draining him of both strength and courage.’¹⁷⁰ Selim suffers the same enforced enclosure as the harem women and is taunted by his despotic father for sharing in their languid lifestyles. Denied the trappings of masculine military identity (‘the courser and the spear’) he is denied masculinity itself. Selim’s untried and untested nature stimulated a crisis of identity and he is ‘unknown’ in more than one sense: unacknowledged by his father; unrecognisable to his subjects and unsure of himself, he is quite understandably ‘bereft’. In his opening rhetorical statement of ‘What could I be?’, Selim points to a series of factors that simultaneously explain his current powerlessness and his eventual rebellion (that requires a harem woman as an accomplice). Equally, Selim’s initial question, which points to his enforced enclosure as the vindication for his weakness, implies that we should also be questioning the status of harem women. Nurture is granted dominion over nature, and to be in the harem pent will facilitate listlessness and passivity; as Wollstonecraft states: ‘Liberty is the mother of virtue, and if women [be], by their very constitution, slaves, and not allowed to breathe the sharp invigorating air of freedom, they must ever languish like exotics, and

¹⁷⁰ Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, trans. Franklin Philip (Oxford: OUP, 2009) 31.

be reckoned beautiful flaws in nature'.¹⁷¹

Leila, Zuleika, and Francesca (and, to an extent, Medora) conform to Wollstonecraft's description of harem slaves. Yet it is not their condition, but the cause of their condition, which is the significant marker of Byron's shift away from conformity. Watkins gives a persuasive reading of the importance of Byron's conformist heroines (this on Zuleika):

Made entirely passive, she fulfils the social role of women, becoming a repository of feeling and nebulous value, without real human dimension, who can be moulded repeatedly to fit the aims and expectations of the ruling elite....To understand her role in this way is not to demean her, personally, as spineless, to suggest that she is consciously party to tyranny, or to view her as something less than what she should be (under existing circumstances, which deny women any power and rights whatsoever, it would be difficult to imagine her as anything but submissive), but to emphasize that she does not so much transcend events as develop from them, and that she serves a very specific social function.¹⁷²

Byron's presentation of conformist models of femininity is not, then, necessarily indicative of an approval or perpetuation of Eastern misogyny as Meyer and Lew have suggested. Franklin argues that at a basic level, Byron's figuration of the Turks as sexually tyrannous 'drew attention to the existence of power relations between the sexes.'¹⁷³ Where gender dynamics in the East are concerned, especially when commented upon by a Western author, reflections on the nature of power relations between the sexes in the West are necessarily implied. Byron's Turkish Tales rely on their readers drawing inevitable comparisons between the status of women at home and abroad. Watkins goes on to argue (this on Francesca):

Even while her characterization *expresses* social assumptions about women—that they are on one hand transcendently pure and on the other the very voice of authority and oppression—at the same time it *reveals* the social tyranny over women by underscoring the values of a comprehensive and essentially patriarchal network of social relations.¹⁷⁴

The most passive heroines of Byron's Turkish Tales, rather than merely being yielding slaves, or displays of impressive but verbally inexpressive femininity, offer valuable

¹⁷¹ Wollstonecraft, 105.

¹⁷² Watkins, 63.

¹⁷³ Franklin, *Heroines*, 34.

¹⁷⁴ Watkins, 113.

commentary on the effects of essentially patriarchal networks of social relations. Sharafuddin similarly argues that ‘The “Turkish Tales” demonstrate that it is in their attitudes towards women that Muslim tyrants show their limitations.’¹⁷⁵ Though set in Italy, *Parisina* follows the conformist model of a heroine whose forbidden love for her husband’s son results in the son’s execution and her evaporation: ‘No more in palace, hall, or bower, / Was Parisina heard or seen: /...Parisina’s fate lies hid / Like dust beneath the coffin lid’ (503-504; 513-514). Not only does Parisina’s fate offer valuable commentary on the effects of essentially patriarchal relations, but, like Zuleika, she is the focus of the narrative and the central figure in the Tale. It is her transgression that causes the ensuing violent action in the poem, with such transgression finding its origins in her initial powerlessness to choose her husband. In Parisina we can observe a reworking of qualities Byron initially tried his hand at in Zuleika.

Whilst I would resist any analysis of the heroines which suggested a clear sense of development, and whilst I share in Watkins’ reservations concerning the usefulness of ‘hollow’ types,¹⁷⁶ a taxonomy of the Byronic Orientalist woman nevertheless reveals the patterns of Byron’s shift away from conformity: fully conforming, as in Zuleika and Leila (1813); partially conforming, as in Medora (1814), Parisina and Francesca (both 1816) (all three of whose deaths undermine their vow to protect their heroes, though to a degree Francesca manages this from beyond the grave); and fully departing, as with Kaled (1814) and Gulnare (1814). This taxonomy also reveals that Byron’s heroines certainly did not develop into radical models of femininity in accordance with a clear chronological trajectory and revises Franklin’s assessment that ‘as the series of Tales

¹⁷⁵ Sharafuddin, 251. Perhaps inadvertently, Sharafuddin echoes Thornton’s *Present State of Turkey*, with misogyny becoming a marker of cultural limitations (see n. 83).

¹⁷⁶ Watkins, 62.

unfolds, the role of the heroine develops'.¹⁷⁷ Though Parisina and Francesca appear to modify the extent to which Byron radicalized the Oriental heroine in the 1814 Tales, such modification does not then extend into his comic Tale, *Beppo* (1818), or his adventure Tales, *Mazeppa* (1819) and *The Island* (1823). *Beppo* is essentially concerned with the politics of infidelity, reinventing *The Odyssey's* Penelope as a faithless, yet loving wife; in *Mazeppa* the Cossack maid most closely resembles Shelley's dream maiden of *Alastor*, and further echoes can be observed in independent domestic goddesses like Haidée,¹⁷⁸ and Neuha of *The Island*—Byron's most complete heroine of all the Tales. Payne writes of the repeated narrative elements of the *Nights*:

. . . the constant recurrence of the same elements of description does not produce monotony. Even as in music the multiform progressions of various keys inform the unity of the unchanging gamut with limitless variations of combination and effect, so the play of sentiment and circumstance in the Arabian Tales perpetually induces in the rigid scale of their ornaments fresh permutations of shifting colour and new harmonies of fantasy and impression.¹⁷⁹

For Arabian Tales, read heroines. The 1813 Tales are somewhat limited in how they envisage femininity, and narrowly avoid monotony in the performative relationship between hero and heroine. Yet even within the most conformist of his Tales, Byron experiments with limitless variations of combination and effect, produced by modifications of sentiment and circumstance. Readers would have to wait until the following year for more overtly radical permutations of the Eastern heroine.

¹⁷⁷ Franklin, *Heroines*, 37.

¹⁷⁸ Byron began working on *Don Juan II* on December 13th 1818, a little under three months after finishing *Mazeppa*, which might explain the similarity of the two heroines.

¹⁷⁹ Payne, 382.

(vii) Radicalized Heroines

The Turkish Tales are significant in their demonstration of Byron's vision of the Orient as an arena for progressive experimentation with female heroic performance. Such progressive experimentation is partly owing to the distancing of East from West—spatially, culturally, and, if we are to agree with Louis Massignon, temporally.¹⁸⁰

Through his use of Eastern women, Byron could break free of Western socially accepted behavioural gender norms. He manipulates Western expectations of Eastern women (or harem slaves) by presenting them as passionate and autonomous lovers who are willing to subvert the patriarchy that oppresses them. By using harem women Byron is able to emphasise a shift from passivity to action. Butler queries critical determination to label the Turkish Tales as examples of a reactionary sexual politics:

Even the subtle Jerome Christensen too sweepingly pronounces the Turkish Tales 'misogynist'; that is a view qualified by Susan Wolfson and Caroline Franklin in their more discriminating examinations of the complex sexual politics of Byron's orientalism.¹⁸¹

As this chapter has already explored, even when seemingly at his most conformist in his *Turkish Tales*, Byron touches upon issues fundamental to a comprehension of contemporary sexual politics that are deeply problematic. His more overtly radical heroines, Gulnare and Kaled, exemplify how by situating his poetry abroad Byron provided himself with the necessary distance to articulate an emancipatory vision of women beyond the gendered repressions of his own country. Audre Lorde has argued that historically the West possesses no pattern for relating across human differences

¹⁸⁰ Lew has assigned such a view to Said: 'As Edward Said has taught us, traveling to the Orient involves not just spatial but also temporal displacement. To travel to the East was to enter a past realm' (195). Though Said emphasizes the antiquity of Eastern culture (see *Orientalism*, 167), in his paraphrasing of Massignon's 'vision' which 'assigned the Islamic Orient to an essentially ancient time and the West to modernity' Said critiques the French scholar's framework as reductive, and his failure to see the East on equal footing with the *contemporary* realities of Europe meant that his grasp of cultural conflict in the contemporary Arab world 'never really got past the quarrel between Isaac and Ishmael' (*Orientalism*, 270).

¹⁸¹ Butler, 'Orientalism', 430.

with the East (or non-West) as equals.¹⁸² Byron's Turkish Tales would challenge this assumption, his Western characters repeatedly engaging with their Eastern counterparts as equals. Such cultural mirroring is central to the Tales radical potential: in demonstrating the intense inequality of gender relations in the East, Byron demonstrated an awareness of the unsatisfactory state of sexual politics in the West. To return to Lorde, the Tales demonstrate how Byron used 'human difference as a springboard for creative change'.¹⁸³

Until the introduction of Lady Adeline in the fourteenth canto of *Don Juan*,¹⁸⁴ all of Byron's most notable heroines are from foreign lands, and we encounter them abroad. The 'othering' of these characters who are triply distanced by their gender, their nationality, and their geographic location, is fundamental to their characterization as active heroines. The following lines are taken from a poem enclosed in a fan letter to Byron in 1815; the anonymous author—somewhat indignantly—questions:

And is there no spell in thy own native earth,
Does no Talisman rest on the spot of thy birth,
Are the daughters of Britain less worthy thy care,
Less soft than Zuleika, less bright than Gulnare?¹⁸⁵

Byron had, of course, already given the answer to this in the first canto of *Childe Harold*: 'Who round the North for paler dames would seek? / How poor their forms appear! how languid, wan, and weak!' (I.601-602). Foreignness informs the heroic potential of the active Eastern heroines. It is in the presentation of an alternative *female* hero in *The Corsair* and *Lara* that Byron's Tales find their transgressive

¹⁸² Audre Lorde, 'Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference', *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1997) 374.

¹⁸³ Lorde, 375.

¹⁸⁴ *DJ* XIV.46.362-363: 'Fired with an abstract love of virtue, she, / My Dian of the Ephesians, Lady Adeline'.

¹⁸⁵ I am grateful to Corin Throsby for drawing my attention to these lines, which are taken from the version of the poem in the Murray Archive (MS 43512). The published version reads: 'Are the daughters of Albion less worthy thy care, Less soft than "Yuliskeen," less bright than "Gulnare?"' (*St James's Chronicle*, 16 September 1815). It is unclear where 'Yuliskeen' is drawn from—certainly not Byron. The name does emphasize, however, that Eastern exoticism was perceived to be characteristic of the heroines.

pathway; Leask explains:

For all the ‘official’ heroism of the *Tales* (of a kind which, after all, sealed Byron’s fame as well as his eventual fate), they finally chose a transgressive path which represented a peculiarly contorted escape from their ideological impasse.¹⁸⁶

Leask emphasizes the importance of the heroines, rather than the heroes of the two

1814 *Tales*, ‘for it is the women who suddenly spring to life.’¹⁸⁷ Kelsall has argued that

‘Byron’s early Oriental romances used the fantasies of female pulp fiction to explore

the liberations of cross-cultural sexuality’.¹⁸⁸ Whilst Kelsall’s judgment may be

applicable to the 1813 *Tales*, the 1814 poems articulate more serious concerns than

their pop-fiction status may encourage us to anticipate. Leask is rather more astute in

regarding the liberations of cross-cultural sexuality to be politically charged:

I wish to argue in discussing *The Corsair* that Byron displaced the political dimensions of a “radicalized hero” into the terms of gender, thereby finding a way of surreptitiously overcoming the limits imposed upon him by the norms of representation and his own political ideology.¹⁸⁹

It is precisely the political dimensions of such displacement that have informed the

chapter thus far, though in the 1814 *Tales* the radicalization of the heroine is far more

explicit than in any of the other *Tales*. Franklin also observes Byron’s surreptitious

subversion of norms of representation within the *Tales*. Pointing to *The Giaour*, *The*

Corsair, and *The Siege of Corinth* she states that ‘these ironic narrative poems

experiment with point of view to confound readerly expectations.’¹⁹⁰ Franklin is here

speaking about national and racial identity rather than about gender, but as Kelsall

indicates, the cross-cultural element informs the liberation—or radicalization—of

gender roles in the Turkish *Tales*. The displacing of the political dimensions of a

‘radicalized hero’ onto the female protagonist that Leask identifies in *The Corsair* can

also be observed in *Lara*, and it is the latter poem which shall provide the focus of this

¹⁸⁶ Leask, *Anxieties of Empire*, 16.

¹⁸⁷ Leask, *Anxieties of Empire*, 45.

¹⁸⁸ Kelsall, ‘Byron’s Venice’, 253.

¹⁸⁹ Leask, *Anxieties of Empire*, 45.

¹⁹⁰ Franklin, ‘Byronic Philhellenism’, 223.

section. In this way, I shall extend my comparative reading of the Tales with *The Arabian Nights* to illustrate the similarities in the progression from conformism to radicalism.

Franklin's assessment of the Tales as narratives that confound readerly expectations can be extended to an assessment of *The Arabian Nights*. The *Nights* finds its premise in Scheherazade's intention to confound her audience, the sultan. The *Nights*' narrative mode elides the identity of the text's external audience (the reader) with its internal audience (the sultan). In reading Scheherazade's narration of the stories the reader in some senses *becomes* the sultan. In the previous section of this chapter, I compared Byron's Tales with examples of misogynist violence to be found in the early volumes of the *Nights*—a text whose infamous premise is the threatened existence of the narrator: the heroine Scheherazade. Scheherazade is an early example of the kind of heroine we encounter in Byron's Turkish Tales, possessing 'courage, wit, and penetration, infinitely above her sex. She had read much, and had so admirable a memory, that she never forgot any thing she had read.... Besides this, she was a perfect beauty, and all her accomplishments were crowned by solid virtue' (I.20).

Notably, other than Scheherazade herself, the first three volumes of Scott's *Arabian Nights* contain few examples of radical femininity. A shift, however, occurs in the third volume. Despite opening with the expression of similar sentiments to those of the Sultan in the frame story in the 'Story of Kummir al Zummaun and the Princess of China' ('I know not whether I could prevail on myself to marry, on account of the trouble incident to a married life, and the many treacheries of women, which I have read of' (III.105)), the volume swiftly progresses to the 'Story of Noor Ad Deen and the Fair Persian', whose hero provides an (albeit unconscious) echo of the rhetorical stratagem of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*, stating 'there is but little difference between

brutes and those men who keep a slave only to look at, and to gratify a passion that we have in common with them' (III.284). The buying and selling of female slaves informs much of the narrative of the stories in the third volume; along with the Fair Persian, there is 'The Story of Prince Beder and the Princess Jehaun-Ara', which contains the following condemnation of slavery by the heroine, Gulnare of the Sea:

The body indeed may be enslaved, and under the subjection of a master, who has the power and authority in his hands; the will can never be conquered, but remains free and unconfined, depending on itself alone...it is a wonder that I have not followed the example of many unfortunate wretches, whom the loss of liberty has reduced to the melancholy resolution of procuring their own deaths in a thousand ways, by a liberty which cannot be taken from them (III.382).

The sentiments and language are remarkably similar those expressed by Byron's

Gulnare:

I felt—I feel—love dwells with—with the free. (*The Corsair* II.502)

And:

I never loved—he bought me—somewhat high—
Since with me came a heart he could not buy. (III.329-330)

Equally striking is 'The Story of Ali Baba and the 40 Robbers Destroyed by a Slave' (more commonly known as 'The Story of Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves'), where Morgiana, the slave of the title, manages to end the lives of 37 of the robbers; she begins by stabbing the leader of the gang of thieves with a poniard, saving Ali Baba's life a second time in a manner remarkably akin to that of Byron's Gulnare. In return, Ali Baba grants her freedom and marries her to his son (V.179). The final story of Scott's collection, 'The Story of the Sisters Who Envied Their Younger Sister', is one of female heroism. The latter half of the story follows the adventures of the daughter of the younger sister of the title, Princess Perie-zadeh, who goes on a quest to rescue her brother. Though she is cautioned of the danger ahead, she asserts confidence in her abilities: 'as in all enterprises and dangers every one may use strategem' (V.379). The 'Heroic princess' obtains the object of her quest – a talking bird – 'so courageously' that the bird swears 'inviolable fidelity' (V.381). She leads the way home, her male

companions declaring: ‘Madam, were we ignorant of the respect due to your sex, yet after what you have / done for us there is no deference we would not willingly pay you, notwithstanding your modesty; we entreat you no longer to deprive us of the happiness of following you’ (V.386-387). Again, we are reminded of *The Corsair*, where we are told of Conrad’s men: ‘had they known / A woman’s hand secured that deed her own, / She were their queen—less scrupulous are they / Than haughty Conrad how they win their way’ (III.508-511).

The sixth volume of Scott’s *Nights*, which collects extra stories selected from the Montagu manuscript copy and translated by Scott, contains two further narratives of female resourcefulness and courage. The first, ‘The Story of the Lovers of Syria; or, The Heroine’ follows the heroine of the title who is taken hostage by the master of a ship:

Finding herself thus ensnared, as she was a woman of strong mind, instead of indulging in unavailing complaint, she assumed a satisfied air; and as the only way to preserve her honour, received the addresses of the treacherous master with pretended complacency, and consented to receive him as a husband at the first port at which the ship might touch. . . . At length the vessel anchored near a city, to which the captain went to make preparations for his marriage; but the lady, while he was on shore, addressed the ship’s crew, setting forth with such force his treacherous conduct to herself, and offering such rewards if they would convey her to her lover at the port they had left, that the honest sailors were moved in her favour, agreed to obey her as their mistress, and hoisting sail, left the master to shift for himself (VI.217).

En route, the heroine collects 39 ladies and 40 robbers, taking the robbers’ booty and clothing the women as men in the process (VI.250-251). On arriving in a foreign land, and still disguised as a man, ‘the enterprising heroine of this history’ (VI.255) takes up the position of sultan and, subversively, is married to the vizier’s daughter: ‘From this time they lived in perfect happiness together, one exercising the authority of sultan to the satisfaction of the subject, and the other acting the part of a satisfied and obedient wife’ (VI.253-254). This ‘artful yet virtuous’ (VI.255) heroine continues to reign as sultan until the arrival of her father, and her lover. She and her wife are married to the lover and live happily ever after. The storyline of ‘The Heroine’ invites comparison

with *Twelfth Night*, and indeed, becomes almost an Arabic pantomime of its Shakespearean relative. Such early examples of cross-dressed heroines appropriating traditionally masculine spheres of action offer clear comparison with Byron's own Tales, *Lara* in particular. These additional stories also alert us to the narrative power Scheherazade wields. The subliminal influence intended by the progression of the stories should not be overlooked: as the nights pass, Scheherazade becomes more daring in her presentation of women, until they eventually become a gloss on her own position.

In 'The Story of the Avaricious Cauzee and his Wife' we encounter a tale strikingly similar to the frame narrative of the *Nights*. The cauzee marries women, fails to feed them properly, and when they complain to their fathers he cuts off their hair and divorces them (keeping their dowries), pretending that they have behaved improperly. The Scheherazade character of the story is named Moussul, and is similarly 'a girl of great beauty, wit, and discretion' (VI.115); she hears 'of the cauzee's avarice, and the ill usage of his wives' (VI.115), 'resolved to play a trick upon him for his abuse of her sex, and set off for Tripolis' (VI.115). Her statement of purpose is clear:

I must expose to ridicule this miserly cauzee, who has injured so many unfortunate women, by first almost starving them to death, then cutting off their hair and divorcing them, under pretence of immodesty, without returning their portion or dower (VI.118).

We can easily compare it to Scheherazade's own:

I wish to stop that barbarity which the sultan exercises upon the families of this city. I would dispel those painful apprehensions which so many mothers feel of losing their daughters in such a fatal manner (I.21).

Both heroines act in the interests of their own sex, though in the original frame narrative there is clearly more at stake than losing a length of hair and a dowry.

Scheherazade's eventual aim is to alter the Sultan's perspective on women, saving her own life and halting the cycle of uxoricide. We can observe a marked shift in narrative tone, as well as content as we progress through the stories. Scheherazade's

voice becomes more didactic at the close of ‘The Wonderful Lamp’, the opening story of the fifth volume, and we begin to observe a change in dynamics between the sultan and the story-teller when he begins to wake her himself: ‘His only thought now was to see if he could exhaust her store’ (V.46). Whilst we can observe the treatment of women as resources, or vassals, such straightforward chauvinism is complicated by the sultan casting Scheherazade’s stories as educational: ‘Indeed they were all diverting, and for the most part seasoned with a good moral’ (V.46). In the concluding lines of the collection, we are informed that Scheherazade’s efforts have been a success:

A thousand and one nights had passed away in these innocent amusements, which contributed so much towards removing the sultan’s unhappy prejudice against the fidelity of women. His temper was softened. He was convinced of the merit and great wisdom of the sultanness Scheherazade. He remembered with what courage she had offered to be his wife, without fearing the death to which she knew she exposed herself, as so many sultannesses had suffered within her knowledge.

These considerations, and the many other good qualities he knew her to possess, induced him at last to forgive her. I see, lovely Scheherazade, said he, that you can never be at a loss for these little stories, which have so long diverted me. You have appeased my anger. I freely renounce the law I had imposed on myself. I restore your sex to my favourable opinion, and will have you to be regarded as the deliverer of the many damsels I had resolved to sacrifice to my unjust resentment (V.411-412).

Not only has she saved her own life, but by her own actions, and her subtle introduction of the merits of women and the capacity of female characters for bravery and honour (which by the final volume is matched by the frequency of male cowardice and betrayal), she convinces the sultan to suspend his ‘unhappy prejudice against the fidelity of women’, and to cease his pursuit of enacting his vengeful and ‘unjust resentment’ on less fortunate sultanas.

Though I have argued that Byron’s heroines become more active in the later Tales, it is important to emphasize that they are not empowered via didacticism. In stark contrast to Scheherazade’s appeased sultan, Gulnare’s Pacha receives her rhetorical defence of Conrad with incredulity:

Release my foe!—at whose remonstrance?—thine!...
 I have a counsel for thy gentler ear:
 I do mistrust thee, woman! and each word
 Of thine stamps truth on all Suspicion heard. (III.171;177-179)

Gulnare's voice is not entirely devoid of power throughout the entire poem. On offering Conrad's relief, she assures him that 'A single word of mine removes that chain' (III.314). Gulnare's failed attempt at coercing Seyd through verbal means necessitates her recourse to violence.

The development of the presentation of women in the *Nights*, which culminate in the success of the heroine of the frame narrative, is comparable with a sense of female heroic development in Byron's *Turkish Tales*. Franklin agrees with Gleckner's analysis of the progressively radicalized incarnations of the Eastern heroines: 'Originally a fragile slave murdered by an Oriental patriarch (Leila), she later loses her passivity to become the strong warrior/mistress (Gulnare, Kaled).'¹⁹¹ Sharafuddin, who compares the characterization of Leila as a victim to the starkly different Gulnare—'also an inmate of a harem' but importantly 'no victim'—resists the idea of such a development by stressing what he sees as a shared connection between the Eastern heroines:

But this act retains, in all its aggressiveness, the oriental mixture of sexual passions and fanatical fidelity. ...Henceforth, Gulnare's devotion to Conrad, prolonged to the point of disguise and death in *Lara*, remains absolute, like a religious faith. To that extent, she remains related to the archetype as defined by Zuleika. She makes no extravagant demands of reciprocity, as, for example, her Christian, or at least 'Frankish', rival, Medora, does; nor does she have Medora's intense inner life, nourished by sorrow, and even by guilt. She has a unity of self which seems beyond the reach of western woman, with her moral ambition and her mistrust of the senses.¹⁹²

For Sharafuddin, the heroines of the *Tales* are all of a particular Eastern stamp. His insistence that Gulnare's homicidal impulses find their origin in her oriental heritage (combined with a fanatical extremism) is contrasted with Medora's passivity and tolerance, which is firmly related by Sharafuddin to her Christian, or Westernised roots. Contrary to Sharafuddin's reiteration of Byron's dismissal of Western women, such 'unity of self' is not permanently 'beyond the reach of western woman', emerging (albeit rather belatedly) in the form of Aurora Raby in the fifteenth canto of *Don Juan*

¹⁹¹ Franklin, *Heroines*, 97.

¹⁹² Sharafuddin, 247-248.

(1824). Sharafuddin's observation that devotion is the common denominator of the heroines of the Tales is entirely correct, but only in that they remain 'related'. The motivation for such devotion is unchanging: love. Yet the manner in which love manifests itself, and the actions taken by each heroine are too diverse to relegate them to an 'archetype'. To return to my earlier citation of *The Bride of Abydos*, compare Zuleika's flight with Selim:

More free her timid bosom beat,
The maid pursued her silent guide;
And though her terror urged retreat,
How could she quit her Selim's side? (II.95-98)

to Kaled's steadfastness:

He turned his eye on Kaled, ever near,
And still too faithful to betray one fear; (Lara II.348-349)
. . . This Lara mark'd, and laid his hand on his:
It trembled not in such an hour as this; (II.354-355)

The contrast between the characterization of the two heroines is clear. As far as one can speak convincingly of a sense of development within poems written and published within eight months of each other,¹⁹³ it is clear that Byron's wish to try his hand on a female character in *Zuleika* (*BLJ* III.199) encouraged him to repeat the endeavour.

Byron's increasing fascination with the heroines of the Eastern Tales can be related to developments within Romantic Orientalism itself. Makdisi has argued that we can observe 'a specifically 1790s form of Orientalism' which is 'characterized...by a simultaneously ontological, epistemological, phenomenological, and philosophico-political obsession with the self, the citizen, the subject';¹⁹⁴ he contrasts this with the subsequent Romantic Orientalism of around 1815, which 'significantly altered' its predecessor by contrasting 'the culture of (Western) modernity' with 'the sublime

¹⁹³ *The Bride* and *Lara* were published swiftly after composition, on 2 December 1813 and 6 August 1814 respectively.

¹⁹⁴ Makdisi, 214.

panoramas of Oriental splendour and/or decay'.¹⁹⁵ Makdisi suggests such contrast reaches 'a kind of crisis' in second-wave radical Orientalists such as Byron and Thomas de Quincey.¹⁹⁶ I would like to suggest that this 'kind of crisis' in Byron is manifest in the shifting nature of the heroine. In the Eastern Tales the antithesis Makdisi presents collapses, as the cultures of Western modernity (the Byronic hero) and Oriental splendour and decay (the Pacha) come into contact through the medium of the heroine. We are consistently made aware of the heroine's attempts to negotiate the conflict of the subject caught between Western modernity in her love for the hero, and situated within the locus of Oriental splendour and decay: the harem.

The arena most affected by developments in Romantic Orientalism was the harem. Makdisi's assertion that Wollstonecraft's construction of the harem as a site where languid feminine sensuality sat uneasily alongside, or rather, became symptomatic of a tyrannous masculinity is of especial significance for Byron, whose harems are formed along remarkably Wollstonecraftian lines in their coupling of sensuality and violence. The radicalization of the harem enabled Byron to utilize it as a theatre of unexpected female action, or rather, heroism. Franklin has argued that Byron's harems are more significant indicators of his radical politics than has been previously assumed, and that 'the harem functions in Byron's poetry not merely as a conventional image of Eastern Imperialism, but as an example of the libido-driven psychology of all empire-building.'¹⁹⁷ Byron's harems are not merely critiques of the phallogocentrism of imperial exploration and conquest, but also function as spaces exempt from the usual rules that govern gender relations—particularly in contrast to the West. Butler has suggested that the Tales are deliberately encouraging of, rather than

¹⁹⁵ Makdisi, 213.

¹⁹⁶ Makdisi, 214.

¹⁹⁷ Franklin, 'Byronic Philhellenism', 229.

hostile to a favourable female readership:

So many modern critics, male and female, seem agreed that Byron's harem scenes are male fantasies that it would be rash to call the view wrong. Yet it must be obvious from the long-running romance career of the Sheikh that readers of women's romances also warm to the Eastern palace's opulence, coercion and female apartness... Moreover, the subordination of this masculine power, in Byron's plots, to the hero's need, not for women in general but for one particular absent woman, seems to invite women, specifically, to appropriate the story.¹⁹⁸

Female appropriation, or 'ownership' of the harem underpins its entrance into Western literary culture. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's accounts of her experience of the harem were among the first to reach a Western readership. The very femininity that denied her so many rights in her own culture, enabled her to access an Eastern experience forbidden to Western men. As Wiener comments, 'Lady Mary's descriptions of her visits to the harems must have attracted Byron's attention, for these were privileges denied him.'¹⁹⁹ Indeed, Lady Mary's descriptions undoubtedly came to Byron's notice:

The twelve isles, and the more than I could dream,
Far less describe, present the very view
Which charm'd the charming Mary Montagu. (DJ V.22-24)²⁰⁰

The harem was part of the more than Byron could dream, far less describe. Any familiarity with the *real* harem was veiled from the male gaze. Ruth Yeazell has convincingly argued that such mystery only heightened the allure of the harem for the (particularly male) Western reader:

For men especially, both the lure of the unknown and the provocation of taboo no doubt remained fundamental; and the fact that the harem stayed hidden by definition, even as other bits of the East came tantalizing into view, could only have intensified its appeal.²⁰¹

That the harem remained hidden from men travelling in the East did not prevent their writing descriptions of it. Unsurprisingly, these were rarely accurate, and, as

¹⁹⁸ Butler, 'Orientalism', 433.

¹⁹⁹ Wiener, 127.

²⁰⁰ McGann's note reads 'See Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's letter to the Countess of Bristol, 10 April 1718 ... But Byron's reference is more general, to her *Turkish Letters* (1763), originally written in 1716 when she lived in Constantinople as the wife of the English ambassador' (CPW V.706).

²⁰¹ Ruth Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind: Passages of Western Art and Literature* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2000) 5.

Ros Ballaster argues, Lady Mary deliberately engaged in a corrective literary endeavour:

The 'letters' prove to be a cover for a travel treatise which challenges and rewrites those that have gone before, especially Paul Rycaut's *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1668), Jean Dumont's *A New Voyage to the Levant* (1696), and Aaron Hill's *A Full and Just Account of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1709).²⁰²

Lady Mary's triumphant exposure of the fallacy of the harem accounts found in these texts is much like Byron's own attempts to correct the efforts of those who wrote second-hand accounts of foreign lands, which his own firsthand experience enabled him to discredit as inaccurate. Yeazell, however, accuses Byron of being guilty of imagined voyeurism in his own poetry, though she excuses him on the grounds that he was following, rather than setting, a precedent of poetic licence:

Though the author of *Childe Harold* often turned his own restless tourism to the uses of poetry, no evidence exists that he ever managed to include the sultan's harem on his itinerary. . . . But if the poet had never directly seen the interior of a harem, he had encountered many representations of one, and he was hardly the first to pretend to a familiarity in excess of his experience.²⁰³

Of the many representations of the harem Byron would have encountered, whilst there is little evidence of Byron's knowledge of Jean Dumont, he was familiar with both Aaron Hill and Paul Rycaut.²⁰⁴ Wiener has drawn our attention to Rycaut's account regarding the Ladies of the Seraglio,²⁰⁵ which is reproduced in the second volume of Knolles' *History*:

And since I have brought my Reader into the quarters of these Eunuchs, which are the Black guard of the sequestered Ladies of the *Seraglio*, he may chance to take it unkindly, should I leave him at the door, and not introduce him into those apartments, where the Grand Signiors Mistresses are lodged: And though I ingenuously confess my acquaintance there (as all my other conversation with Women in *Turky*) is but strange and unfamiliar; yet not to be guilty of this discourtesie, I shall to the best of my information write a short account of these Captivated Ladies, how they are treated, immured, educated and prepared for the

²⁰² Ros Ballaster, *Fables of the East: Selected Tales 1662-1785* (Oxford: OUP, 2005) 192.

²⁰³ Yeazell, 13.

²⁰⁴ 'What would Richardson, the vainest and luckiest of *living* authors (i.e. while alive)—he who, with Aaron Hill, used to prophesy and chuckle over the presumed fall of Fielding' (*BLJ* VIII.11). As Marchand notes, Byron would have undoubtedly been aware of Hill's satirization of Pope in his 'Progress of Wit' (1730).

²⁰⁵ Wiener, 120.

greatest achievements of the Sultan's affection.²⁰⁶

Rycaut's confession of a lack of direct knowledge of the Seraglio is endemic among male writers of the period, as is his attempt to utilize what little knowledge he does have into an authoritative account. The likelihood is, as Wiener has already suggested, that Byron's major authority for his own descriptions of the harem in the Turkish Tales, *Childe Harold II*, and *Don Juan* cantos five and six was Lady Mary herself.²⁰⁷ Wiener draws parallels between Byron's presentations of the harem's interior with specific examples from Lady Mary's letters, focusing on examples from *The Bride of Abydos*, specifically the silken Ottoman in Zuleika's chamber (II.64) and the rose over her grave (II.672).²⁰⁸ A probable further source would have been Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* (1721; first translated into English in 1722). Whilst Montesquieu does not provide the most accurate depictions of the harem, the text is of especial importance in being the first to invest the harem and its inhabitants with a political significance in concordance with a sexualized atmosphere. Ballaster comments that 'The longest [of the *Persian Letters*] returns to the representation of the harem woman and makes even more explicit than Galland the analogical richness of this representation as a means of debating the nature and exercise of political authority.'²⁰⁹ It is Byron's mediation between Wollstonecraft's 'feminist orientalism',²¹⁰ Lady Mary's commitment to accuracy of cultural representation, and Montesquieu's satirical exercise that informs his own particular harem vision of a space that challenges cultural norms at home and abroad.

²⁰⁶ Knolles 5; Sir Paul Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London: John Starkey and Henry Brome, 1668) 38.

²⁰⁷ Peter Cochran has also suggested that both E. D. Clarke's *Travels in Various Countries of Europe, Asia and Africa*, 3 vols. (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1812-16) and Miss Tully's *Narrative of a Ten Years' Residence in Tripoli* (London: Henry Colburn, 1816) were also probable sources. Byron read the latter after composing the Turkish Tales but before starting work on *Don Juan* (see Cochran, *Orientalism*, 19 and 102-107). For further discussion of the significance of Tully for Byron see Cochran 'Byron and "Tully's Tripoli"', *The Byron Journal* 20 (1992): 77-88.

²⁰⁸ Wiener, 127.

²⁰⁹ Ballaster, 11.

²¹⁰ Yeazell, 78.

The harem belongs to the realm of female inactivity, enforced by an unyielding patriarchy. In Byron's *Turkish Tales*, however, the realm of masculine action is not always confined beyond the boundaries of the harem walls; in addition, entitlement to such action rarely falls neatly into gender categories, not always being granted to men, and not always denied to women. The episode of 'Gulnare, the homicide!' (*The Corsair* III.463) exemplifies the disruption of prescribed gender roles in the *Tales*. In murdering Seyd, Gulnare appropriates the hero's shoes, not only by becoming his rescuer, but also by becoming her own. Byron conveys a shared sense of oppression, both Gulnare and Conrad being captives of the same tyrant: 'She was a slave—from such may captives claim / A fellow-feeling, differing but in name' (III.202-203). The mutual bondage each experiences is continually emphasised throughout the poem, indeed, Gulnare's love for Conrad is made possible by this sense of communion: 'She pressed his fettered fingers to her heart' (II.535). Whilst she is free from physical fetters, her heart is as captive as is his body. Yet it is the hero who is resigned to his fate, unwilling to challenge propriety to win his freedom: Conrad's refusal to resort to 'the secret knife' (III.364) requires Gulnare to occupy the masculine sphere of heroic action. The overtly feminine nature of the murder is emphasised by Gulnare: 'But since the dagger suits thee less than brand, / I'll try the firmness of a female hand' (III.380-81).

Contemporary representations of the dagger-wielding woman were less than favourable and explicitly connected to threats of revolutionary disorder. The frontispiece to the first volume of *The Anti-Jacobin Review* (1798), entitled 'A peep into the Cave of Jacobinism' shows a serpentine, gorgon-esque figure, a dagger held by a belt, which proclaims 'Egalite'. Nicola Trott discusses the late eighteenth-century interest in 'the dagger-sporting monster',²¹¹ however, in his portrayal of Gulnare, Byron

²¹¹ Nicola Trott, 'Sexing the Critic: Mary Wollstonecraft at the Turn of the Century', *1798: The Year of*

challenges received opinion that female capacity for revolution is inversely proportional to beauty. Gulnare is no monster:

That form, with eye so dark, and cheek so fair,
And auburn waves of gemmed and braided hair;
With shape of fairy lightness—naked foot,
That shines like snow, and falls on earth as mute— (II.402-405)

Her ethereal ‘shape of fairy lightness’ and soft tread resembles one of Shelley’s dream maidens. A sense of the metaphysical is subtly interwoven with the suggestion of sensuality; the ‘eye so dark’ hints at hidden depths, whilst the ‘cheek so fair’ emphasizes girlish innocence, and her ‘naked foot, / That shines like snow’ is at once seductive and virginal. Gulnare’s physical appearance leads Conrad to assume she is incapable of murder: “Thanks to that softening heart—she could not kill!” (III.407). Byron takes advantage of such conventional expectations to heighten the dramatic tension of Conrad’s realization that Gulnare has murdered Seyd:

They meet—upon her brow—unknown—forgot—
Her hurrying hand had left—’twas but a spot—
Its hue was all he saw, and scarce withstood—
Oh! Slight but certain pledge of crime—’tis blood! (III.414-417)

The caesura effectively fractures Conrad’s idea of Gulnare, whilst the imperfect rhyme of ‘withstood’ and ‘blood’ exposes the jarring contrast between Gulnare’s appearance and her recent action. The spot of blood echoes Lady Macbeth’s exclamation of ‘Out, damned spot!’ (*Macbeth* V.i.33) as a ‘Slight but certain pledge of crime’. Trott labels Lady Macbeth as the first unsex’d female: ‘Shakespeare’s great and terrible study of femininity freed from the constraints of gender’.²¹² Byron, like Shakespeare, is interested in the exploring the capability of the female liberated from the bonds of convention. Gulnare both metaphorically and literally escapes the chains placed on her by patriarchal tyranny and like Lady Macbeth becomes a force that threatens masculine

the Lyrical Ballads, ed. Richard Cronin (Macmillan, 1998) 52.

²¹² Trott, 36.

authority.

Trott has commented that the negative reception of Wollstonecraft and the concept of the liberated female was rooted in fears over the dissolution of gender boundaries: ‘everything indicates that the perceived threat was... of an elision of sexual difference brought about by the masculinizing of the female’.²¹³ Conrad’s reaction to Gulnare following the murder of Seyd exemplifies just such concerns, making it apparent that, for Conrad, Gulnare’s hands will ‘ne’er be clean’ (*Macbeth*, V.i.41-42):

That spot of blood, that light but guilty streak,
Had banished all the beauty from her cheek!
Blood he had viewed—could view unmoved—but then
It flowed in combat, or was shed by men! (III.426-429)

It is made explicit in this passage that Conrad does not object to the murder itself, but to the fact that it was committed by a woman. The emphatic connection Conrad establishes between violence and masculinity is equally evident in the two MS. variants of line 429: ‘It reddened on the scarfs and swords of men’ and ‘It flowed a token of the deeds of men’ (*CPW* III.204). The blood he has viewed has been within the boundaries of manly combat, not shed by the secret knife of the female murderess. Byron’s choice of diction is loaded with connotations of shame and exile: Gulnare’s beauty is ‘banished’ from her ‘guilty’ face. Whilst Conrad believes Gulnare’s femininity to be threatened by her violent impetus, it is also clear that his masculinity has been challenged: she performs where he is impotent. In leaving Conrad to play the passive ‘damsel in distress’ Gulnare displays the assertive valour more usually allocated to make heroes.

Hazlitt’s essay ‘On Effeminacy of Character’ criticises the indecision and inaction as feminine faults, stating ‘There is nothing more to be esteemed than a manly firmness and decision of character. I like a person who knows his own mind and sticks to it; who

²¹³ Trott, 51-52.

sees at once what is to be done in given circumstances and does it.’²¹⁴ Gulnare attempts to justify her actions through male principles of honour by arguing that she is indebted to Conrad for freeing her mind from passive acceptance of her situation: “Why should I seek? because—Oh! did’st thou not / Redeem my life from worse than slavery’s lot?” (III.288-289). The *real* motivation, however, is love: ‘I saw thee—loved thee—owe thee all—would save, / If but to shew how grateful is a slave’ (III.343-344). The heroine is conventionally required to be passionately in love with the hero, yet this *feminine* passion, unlike its masculine equivalent, is not intended to inspire autonomous action. In Byron’s poetry, however, female action is *always* motivated by love for the hero (whether reciprocated or not); the perpetration of such action necessitates the end of the heroines status as harem slave, either by escape or death, or occasionally both, as in *The Giaour*.

Byron’s resistance to the space of the harem as a suitable setting for lasting romantic partnerships follows Western precedents; Yeazell explains that ‘As the West liked to tell it, a harem love story almost always meant the end of the harem or flight of the lovers.’²¹⁵ The most notable of these flights is Gulnare’s, not least because her eventual fate is unclear—a fact not overlooked by contemporary reviewers.

Commenting in its review of *Bride of Abydos and the Corsair*, *The Antijacobin Review* writes of *The Corsair*: ‘The denouement of this poem is by no means satisfactory; the bard has cut the knot which he could not untie, in his easy mode of disposing the hero. Of Gulnare, and of her fate, though an object of interest in the tale, not a word is said.

This is a defect in the poem.’²¹⁶ In their review of *The Corsair* one month earlier,

The Monthly Review had expressed a similar sense of dissatisfaction: ‘We also felt

²¹⁴ William Hazlitt, “On Effeminacy of Character”, *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt: Volume Six: Table Talk*, ed. Duncan Wu (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998) 226-227.

²¹⁵ Yeazell, 137.

²¹⁶ *Antijacobin Review* on ‘Lord Byron’s *Bride of Abydos and the Corsair*’ (March 1814): 234-48.

disappointed at not hearing what finally became of this person after she had quitted the Harem with Conrad.²¹⁷ *The Monthly Review* speculates that the opaque nature of Gulnare's fate is owing to the difficulty Byron faced in constructing his most complex heroine to date:

The predominance of revenge in the mind of a woman has been often displayed: but the poet has seldom, if ever, ventured to carry his portraiture of it beyond the point at which the passion attains its gratification. Lord Byron, however, has now attempted to describe, in the character of Gulnare, the return to that natural softness which must ever form a prevailing feature in the female character: though we suspect that his Lordship felt the difficulty of the task, since he has abandoned it almost as soon as it was undertaken.²¹⁸

If *The Monthly Review* is correct, then Byron only abandoned the project to resume it less than six months later in *Lara*, where we again encounter the motif of the vengeful female lover.

The mysterious murder of Ezzelin in *Lara* draws upon elements from two preceding Tales: *The Giaour* and *The Corsair*. The enigmatic nature of the murder of Leila is recalled by the circumstances surrounding Ezzelin's death. As for the drowning of Leila, the events are narrated by an impartial observer, rather than a fisherman, this time 'a peasant's is the tale' (*Lara* II.550). Owing to formal differences (*Lara* is not a fragment, but a continuous story), the disposal of Ezzelin's body is not censored like Leila's, however, his murder occurs 'off-stage'. The passage is worth citing at length:

²¹⁷ 'The Corsair', *The Monthly Review* (February 1814): 199 [1753].

²¹⁸ 'The Corsair', *The Monthly Review* (February 1814): 189-190 [1748].

He heard a tramp—a horse and horseman broke
 From out the wood—before him was a cloak
 Wrapt round some burthen at his saddle-bow,
 Bent was his head, and hidden was his brow.
 Rous'd by the sudden sight at such a time,
 And some foreboding that it might be crime,
 Himself unheeded watch'd the stranger's course,
 Who reach'd the river, bounded from his horse,
 And lifting thence the burthen which he bore,
 Heav'd up the bank, and dash'd it from the shore,
 Then paused, and look'd, and turn'd, and seem'd to watch,
 And still another hurried glance would snatch,
 And follow with his step the stream that flow'd,
 As if even yet too much its surface show'd: [. . .] (II.558-571)
 He caught a glimpse, as of a floating breast,
 And something glittered starlike on the vest,
 But ere he well could mark the buoyant trunk,
 A massy fragment smote it, and it sunk:
 It rose again but indistinct to view,
 And left the waters of a purple hue,
 Then deeply disappear'd: the horseman gaz'd
 Till ebb'd the latest eddy it had rais'd;
 Then turning, vaulted on his pawing steed,
 And instant spurr'd him into panting speed.
 His face was mask'd—the features of the dead,
 If dead it were, escaped the observer's dread; [. . .] (II.578-589)
 If thus he perish'd, Heaven receive his soul!
 His undiscover'd limbs to ocean roll;
 And charity upon the hope would dwell
 It was not Lara's hand by which he fell. (II.594-597)

Though the peasant witnesses the entire episode, the identity of the murderer remains hidden: 'Bent was his head, and hidden was his brow'; 'His face was mask'd'. As with the episode of Leila's death, the body is wrapt in cloth and not immediately perceived to be concealing a mortal burden; as in *The Giaour*, the waters swiftly conceal the true nature of the crime ('But ere he well could mark the buoyant trunk, / A massy fragment smote it, and it sunk') and 'some foreboding that it might be crime' prevents the onlooker from drawing concrete conclusions: 'the features of the dead, / *If dead it were*, escaped the observer's dread' (my emphasis).

Critical attention on the twenty-fourth stanza has focussed on the final heroic couplet, 'And charity upon the hope would dwell / It was not Lara's hand by which he fell.' Both Leonard Goldberg and Cheryl Giuliano have commented on the likelihood

that Kaled rather than Lara commits the mysterious murder of Ezzelin.²¹⁹ Giuliano in particular argues the likely development of Kaled from Gulnare would suggest Kaled's guilt a logical deduction. If the 1814 Tales are concerned with Byron trying his hand at portrayals of 'the firmness of a female hand' (*Corsair* III.381) then Kaled's vengeful murder of her lover's killer would be entirely plausible. In Kaled, Byron, contrary to the assertions of the *Monthly Review*, displayed 'the predominance of revenge in the mind of a woman' as seen in Gulnare, and *crucially* 'ventured to carry his portraiture of it beyond the point at which the passion attains its gratification.' That Byron chooses not to make this explicit is not necessarily indicative of his shying away from his earlier bold characterisation of Gulnare, but is rather consistent with the characterisation of the enigmatic Kaled throughout the poem.

Further suggestive of this consistency is the recurrence of certain verbs in the twenty-fourth stanza to evoke Kaled's grief. Compare the actions of the disposal of Ezzelin's body: 'Heav'd up the bank, and *dash'd* it from the shore, / Then paused, and look'd, and turn'd, and seem'd to watch, / And still another hurried glance would *snatch*' (my italics), with the inaction of Kaled's sorrow: 'He did not *dash* himself thereby, nor tear / The glossy tendrils of his raven hair' (II.508-509; my italics). Though she does not initially tear at her hair, by the poem's conclusion: 'she had shorn, but sav'd her raven hair, / And oft would *snatch* it from her bosom there' (II.616-617; my italics). The most pertinent comparison is in the repetition of 'gaze'. In the twenty-fourth stanza, 'the horseman gaz'd / Till ebb'd the latest eddy it had raised'. The death-scene of Lara in the twenty-first stanza conflates the gazes of the lovers:

²¹⁹ See Leonard S. Goldberg, 'Center and Circumference in Byron's *Lara*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 26.4 (Autumn, 1986): 671; Cheryl Fallon Giuliano, 'Gulnare/Kaled's "Untold" Feminization of Byron's Oriental Tales', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 33.4 (Autumn, 1993): 804.

He gaz'd, as if not yet had pass'd away
 The haughty spirit of that humble clay;
 And those around have rous'd him from his trance,
 But cannot tear from thence his fixed glance;
 . . . [He] strove to stand and gaze, but reel'd and fell (II.500-503; 510)

The first 'He', gazing 'as if not yet pass'd away' is Lara; the remaining gazing is done by Kaled. The fierce loyalty to her lover is translated at first to a literal watchfulness over his dying form, before metamorphosing into the vengeful gaze that observes Ezzelin's sinking body. If we are to conclude that Kaled is guilty of Ezzelin's murder, then the inversion of the action of *The Giaour* has been inverted: it is the heroine, not the hero, who avenges the death of her lover by closely replicating a crime committed against an earlier incarnation of herself.

Watkins attributes *Lara* with opening 'the field of inquiry by implying that masculine and feminine roles are not necessarily biologically determined in every case'. Whilst Watkins' chronology is inaccurate,²²⁰ his central argument pins down the central significance of such gender bending: 'Again, the point here is not simply that women are really men, but rather that gender differences are often socially ascribed and defined, usually working to the detriment of women, as the earlier *Tales* powerfully attest.'²²¹ Contemporary reviewers unanimously saw *Lara* as the sequel to the *Corsair*.²²² Of particular interest to the reviewers was the character of Gulnare-Kaled, with *The Eclectic Review* even going so far as to elide any of the heroines distinguishing features by naming them as one: 'In like manner, the interest of *Lara* is, we think, almost entirely derived from the romantic passion of his page—of

²²⁰ The Maid of Saragoza from the first canto of *Childe Harold*, published two years prior to the *The Corsair* and *Lara*, is Byron's first experimentation with the motif of cross-dressed heroism.

²²¹ Watkins, 106.

²²² See particularly *The Quarterly Review* who reviewed the poems together in July 1814; the *Scots Magazine* of August 1814; the *New Monthly Magazine* and the *Monthly Review* of September 1814; and the *Eclectic Review* of October 1814.

Gulnare.²²³ For *The Eclectic Review*, Kaled provides a more accurate, and less offensive, painting of the female sex than Gulnare:

With equal delicacy the unfeminine and yet most womanly attachment of Kaled to her master, — unfeminine only in its origin and in the degree of the passion,—most womanly in its disinterestedness, secrecy, and truth,—is represented, so as not to appear to offend against the dignity of her sex.²²⁴

For the reviewers, Kaled's story was to be treated as an extension of Gulnare's. More recently, Peter Cochran has argued that 'The heroine's hair changes colour: that's the only factual inconsistency which makes us pause before treating these two Tales as one, and even then no-one's certain.'²²⁵

Regardless of whether *Lara* can be considered a *true* sequel to *The Corsair*, Byron clearly develops in *Lara* the blurring of gendered spheres of action that (although not the debut performance) is memorably staged in *The Corsair*. Kaled departs most markedly from the stereotype of the harem heroine. Through her convincing cross-dressing and bravery on the battlefield, Kaled comes closest of all the heroines of the Eastern Tales to equality with her hero. To return to Kaled's peculiar brand of devotion:

He turned his eye on Kaled, ever near,
And still too faithful to betray one fear; [. . .]
This Lara mark'd, and laid his hand on his:
It trembled not in such an hour as this (II.348-349; 354-355)

The masking of Kaled's true identity by her fearless exterior is reinforced by the rhyme of 'his' with 'this'; the ease with which the couplet works is indicative of the exclusion of the feminine from this scene of martial fraternity—'hers' fails to fit the heroic schema. The insistence that Kaled's hand belongs to a he, not a she (which is doubly reinforced by the rhyme) suggests that Lara takes Kaled's identity at face value.

Gleckner rather acidly remarks:

²²³ 'On *Lara* [and *Jacqueline*]', *Eclectic Review* (October 1814): 394 [727].

²²⁴ 'On *Lara* [and *Jacqueline*]', *Eclectic Review* (October 1814): 397 [729].

²²⁵ Cochran, *Orientalism*, 52.

It has been tacitly assumed by all the commentators I have read that Lara knows that Kaled is Gulnare in disguise. But if he knows, why should he keep Kaled-Gulnare in a position of servitude? Why perversely insist on her being unsexed? Why lead her foolishly into battle and almost certain death? But if the assumption *is* correct, which I doubt, we have an even more powerful image of Lara's perversion of life, love, and humanity than we would otherwise. Still, I prefer to see the perversion, as Byron certainly did, as something accomplished by Kaled-Gulnare herself, through an effort of will comparable to the mental "manhood" which steels Lara's heart against himself and all men.²²⁶

If we are to presume *Lara* to be a continuation of *The Corsair* then Conrad/Lara would necessarily be aware of Gulnare's/Kaled's true gender. To assume that Lara *is* aware of Kaled's true identity does not necessitate that we view her in possession of a diminished autonomy. The 'perversion', as Gleckner phrases it, can still be something achieved by Kaled-Gulnare herself, as it is in *The Corsair*.

Nowhere does the poem explicitly indicate that Lara is ignorant of Kaled's true identity, though there are several moments where there is clearly more to their relationship than meets the eye:

Silent as him he served, his faith appears
Above his station, and beyond his years.
Though not unknown the tongue of Lara's land,
In such from him he rarely heard command;
But fleet his step, and clear his tones would come,
When Lara's lip breath'd forth the words of home (I.516-521)

Kaled and Lara share a bond that evades the understanding of onlookers. This is clearly not a standard master-page relationship: Kaled is at Lara's beck and call, yet rarely receives commands, presumably because of Kaled's unusual responsiveness to Lara's needs. These lines express an acknowledgement of an incongruence between Kaled's appearance, poise, and station. Such moments are not simply clues, carefully planted to prepare the reader for the revelation of Kaled's true identity toward the end of the poem, but deliberately construct the possibility that Lara is fully aware of Kaled's femininity—that the hero and heroine are a continuation of Conrad and Gulnare and that their opposing gender informs the tenor of their relationship. There is a significant

²²⁶ Gleckner, 163.

illustration of the intimacy between the two when Kaled soothes the nightmare-ridden Lara with a mutually exclusive language: ‘in that tongue which seem’d his own’ (I.242).²²⁷ In this way, the relationship between hero and heroine is an early model for the later private language we observe between Juan and Haidée:²²⁸ ‘All in all to each other: though their speech / Was broken words, they *thought* a language there’ (II.1507-1508).²²⁹ Franklin’s assertion that ‘Lara does not even know Kaled is a woman, otherwise there would be no reason for her disguise’²³⁰ demonstrates a willful naivety that overlooks the obvious: that Kaled would cross-dress to be granted the freedom of movement that would otherwise be denied to her.²³¹

Kaled’s disguise also serves to articulate Byron’s construction of a gendered heroism. When the reader is convinced of Kaled’s *masculinity*, the sense of ‘him’ being ‘too faithful to betray one fear’ is construed as being expressive of a deep fraternal bond that would be expected from men fighting shoulder to shoulder. The exposure of Kaled’s *femininity*, however, causes us to regard such faithfulness differently. Franklin regards this moment as one of heroic deflation, arguing that ‘The strength and independence of female passion are no longer to be feared when put to the service of the ‘feminine’ virtue of selfless devotion.’²³² Byron’s presentation of heroines such as Gulnare would encourage readers not to underestimate the power of

²²⁷ Leask has also emphasized the significance that ‘only Kaled (...) understands the language he speaks’ in *Anxieties of Empire* (56).

²²⁸ Byron began *Don Juan* II toward the end of 1818, nearly four and a half years after the publication of *Lara*.

²²⁹ The significance of language for lovers is explored in other poems, notably, as I shall come onto discuss, in *The Island*.

²³⁰ Franklin, *Heroines*, 86.

²³¹ The precedent for women being required to cross-dress for independent survival had been set most famously by Shakespeare in *Twelfth Night*. Though Leask has argued that there are ‘suggestive biographical parallels between Kaled and Byron’s boy lover Niccolo Giraud’ (*Anxieties of Empire*, 57), the obvious point of comparison, as Giuliano suggests (787), is surely Caroline Lamb. See also Leslie A. Marchand, *Byron: A Biography*, vol. 1 of 3 (New York: Knopf, 1957) 331: ‘She had a passion for pages, and used to dress in their scarlet-and-sepia liveries.’

²³² Franklin, *Heroines*, 86.

such a ‘feminine’ virtue of selfless devotion. Indeed, Franklin is entirely correct in her observation of a gendered notion of loyalty, however, from Gulnare to Myrrha, this very strength and independence are in no way rendered less fearful by virtue of their femininity. When Kaled’s true identity is revealed, Byron is explicit that Kaled’s femininity informs the strength of her devotion:

He did not dash himself thereby, nor tear
 The glossy tendrils of his raven hair,
 But strove to stand and gaze, but reel’d and fell,
 Scarce breathing more than that he lov’d so well.
 Than that *he* lov’d! Oh! never yet beneath
 The breast of man such trusty love may breathe!
 That trying moment hath at once reveal’d
 The secret long and yet but half-conceal’d; (II.508-515)

Significantly, Kaled’s ‘secret’ is one that has only been ‘but half-conceal’d’, suggesting further that Lara is perhaps aware of her true identity. The news of Lara’s death causes Kaled to lose the poise that she attempts to maintain, marking a shift from impassive masculinity, to overwrought femininity. Notably, Kaled’s supposed masculinity is emphasised by inaction: ‘He did *not* dash himself thereby, *nor* tear’ (my emphasis). Neither is her femininity established through explicit use of feminine pronouns, rather, she is revealed as feminine by virtue of *not* being masculine. Kaled *must* be feminine as ‘never yet beneath / The breast of man such trusty love may breathe!’ Kaled’s femininity is further suggested by her physical strength failing under the weight of her emotional response; in ‘that trying moment’ she ‘strove to stand and gaze, but reeled and fell’. Yet Kaled does not descend into feminine hysteria:

Grief had so tam’d a spirit once too proud,
 Her tears were few, her wailing never loud;
 But furious would you tear her from the spot
 Where yet she scarce believ’d that he was not,
 Her eye shot forth with all the living fire
 That haunts the tigress in her whelpless ire; [. . .]
 This could not last—she lies by him she lov’d;
 Her tale untold—her truth too deeply prov’d. (II.602-607; 626-627)

This instance clearly contradicts Franklin’s assertion that such strength and independence of female passion are no longer to be feared when put to the service of

the 'feminine' virtue of selfless devotion. Kaled's grief has, to an extent, tamed her spirit but her femininity is informed by a ferocious dedication to 'him she loved'. The emotion she experiences is explicitly feminine and domestic: she is compared to 'the tigress in her whelpless ire'. But crucially, this does not render her more pliable, or less intimidating. Rather than an accuracy of 'costume', or encouragement of a popular fad, Byron's most striking contribution to Western Orientalism is in his representation of gender types in particular.

(viii) Dystopian Visions, Utopian Dreams²³³

Byron's Turkish Tales are not characterized by a homogeneous conformism. Though the earlier Tales do not depart overtly from eighteenth-century expectations of the Orient, *The Corsair* and *Lara* undermine a stereotypical version of Eastern femininity through a radical vision of alternative gender dynamics. In the conceptualization of the Orient as a dangerous arena for the conduct of human relations, Byron can be seen to comment negatively upon the extremes of masculine tyranny and feminine oppression.²³⁴ Leask argues that throughout the Turkish Tales Byron's contemplation of eastern vistas forces him to reflect critically upon the primacy of the West.²³⁵ The Tales can therefore be considered as an extension of the poet's educational Grand Tour.

Byron explicitly commented upon the edifying cross-cultural experience of his travels in a letter to his Mother:

I am so convinced of the advantages of looking at mankind instead of reading about them, and of the bitter effects of staying at home with all the narrow prejudices of an Islander, that I think there should be a law amongst us to set our young men abroad for a term among the few allies our wars have left us.—Here I see and have conversed with French, Italians, Germans, Danes, Greeks, Turks, Armenians, &c. &c. and without losing sight of my own, I can judge of the countries and manners of others.—Where I see the superiority of England (which by the bye we are a good deal mistaken about in many things) I am pleased, and where I find her inferior I am at least enlightened (*BLJ* II.34-35).

Byron's figuration of competing cultural values of West and East evolves organically.

As Butler has indicated, rather than the pragmatic materialism of Byron's *bête noire*,

Southey, 'Byron's Oriental tale out-Southey Southey by being 'naturalistically' anti-

²³³ Although the first recorded usage of 'dystopia' was not until 1868, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) is heavily informed by dystopian visions that challenge a dissatisfactory state of political affairs at home. Byron was evidently familiar with the text and mentions it in a letter to John Murray on 10th December 1819 on the critical reception of *Don Juan*: 'I like & admire Wilson—and *he* should not have indulged himself in such outrageous license—it is overdone and defeats itself—what would he say to the grossness without passion—and the misanthropy without feeling of Gulliver's travels?' (*BLJ* VI.257); the phrase 'Utopian dreams' is taken from Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 105: 'if they [be] really capable of acting like rational creatures, let them not be treated like slaves; or, like the brutes who are dependent on the reason of man, when they associate with him; but cultivate their minds ... These may be termed Utopian dreams. —'

²³⁴ Byron had already drawn upon Western prejudices against the East in his House of Lords speech in 1812 where Turkey is used as a byword for tyranny: 'I have been in some of the most oppressed provinces of Turkey, but never under the most despotic of infidel governments, did I behold such squalid wretchedness as I have seen since my return in the very heart of a Christian country' (*CMP* 26).

²³⁵ Leask, *Anxieties of Empire*, 23.

Western.²³⁶ Butler argues that the major political significance of Byron's Oriental Tales, particularly *The Giaour*, is to be found partly *outside* of literature, though reflected within the poem's central thematic concerns. Though I would agree with Butler's analysis of Byron's opposition to the fundamental ideologies of the moralizing West, the East is no safe haven of ideal values. Byron's 'naturalistic' anti-Western vision in part stems from a similarly naturalistic critique of the East.

E. S. Shaffer suggests that Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' is the first poem to articulate 'new views of myth' i.e. the refinement of the idyll as defined by Schiller:

Let him [the modern poet] make it his task to create an idyll which carries out that pastoral innocence also in subjects of culture and in all conditions of the most active, passionate life, the most strenuous thought, the most subtle art, the highest social refinement, which, in short, leads man, who cannot any longer return to arcadia, forwards to Elysium.²³⁷

'Kubla Khan' is not, however, a poem that embodies the Schillerian concept of the idyll straightforwardly. The soundtrack of the poem is haunted by latent threats of violence, those infamous 'Ancestral voices prophesying war' ('Kubla Khan' 30).²³⁸ Byron's Oriental Tales continue to follow the problematized path of Kubla's troubled Oriental paradise. All of the Tales present a dystopian society whose patriarchal structure is threatened by insurgence and betrayal. Byron consciously constructs a landscape characterized by Eastern barbarism and violence. In *The Giaour*, the first of his Oriental romances, the Orient is explicitly constructed as being a darker place than it first seems:

²³⁶ Marilyn Butler, 'Byron's *Giaour*', 86-87.

²³⁷ Cited in E. S. Shaffer, 'The Oriental Idyll', *'Kubla Khan' and the Fall of Jerusalem: The Mythological School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature, 1770-1880* (Cambridge: CUP, 1975) 96.

²³⁸ All Coleridge citations from *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E. H. Coleridge (1912. Oxford: Clarendon, 1975).

Strange—that where Nature lov'd to trace,
 As if for Gods, a dwelling-place,
 And every charm and grace hath mixed
 Within the paradise she fixed—
 There man, enamour'd of distress,
 Should mar it into wilderness,
 And trample, brute-like, o'er each flower...
 Strange—that where all is peace beside
 There passion riots in her pride,
 And lust and rapine wildly reign,
 To darken o'er the fair domain. (46-52; 58-61)

Byron is aware he is constructing an Orient for Western consumption; 'Strange' is used both to comment upon the geographical otherness of the Eastern setting,²³⁹ and to the surprising paradox of the East as a paradisaal dwelling place fit for the Gods, marring it into wilderness by man's brutality. The solid rhyme of 'mixed/fixed'—'mixed' implying movement, 'fixed' stability—emphasizes the incongruity between the permanence that seemed to be afforded by an initially perfect balance of charm and grace, and the reality of the Orient. Modest Nature has been usurped by prideful passion: man has ravaged the fragility of Nature's work with his base desires. Echoes can again be traced from Beckford's *Vathek*, which, as Lonsdale observes, demonstrates 'the characteristic alternation in Beckford of moods of longing for secluded, prelapsarian innocence and the indulgence of sexual and sadistic fantasy.'²⁴⁰ The competing desires for prelapsarian innocence and sexual indulgence necessarily taint the paradisaal possibilities of the Orient. The Romantic Orient articulates the tragedy of the human condition. As Moore's Peri comments:

"Poor race of men!" said the pitying Spirit,
 "Dearly you pay for your primal Fall –
 Some flow'rets of Eden ye still inherit,

²³⁹ "strange, adj.". OED Online. September 2011. Oxford University Press. 4 November 2011 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/191244?rskey=GOwrST&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>. I.2: 'Belonging to some other place or neighbourhood; unknown to the particular locality specified or implied. Of a place or locality: Other than one's own'; I.10.a: 'Unfamiliar, abnormal, or exceptional to a degree that excites wonder or astonishment; difficult to take in or account for; queer, surprising, unaccountable.'

²⁴⁰ Beckford, ix.

But the trail of the Serpent is over them all" ('Paradise and the Peri' 109)
 The turbulence of man's relationship with nature in *The Giaour* calls to mind the simile
 of the ravaged garden in Shelley's *Epipsychidion*:

. . . to whom this world of life
 Is as a garden ravaged, and whose strife
 Tills for the promise of a later birth
 The wilderness of this Elysian earth. (186-189)

Both Byron's 'Gods' and Shelley's 'Elysian earth' invoke a pre-Christian mythology yet Biblical undertones necessarily inform the image of the ravaged garden. Shelley sets up a contrast between the earthly and the heavenly through the experience of the sages who endure life in patience for the promise of death and the afterlife. The idea of death as a form of rebirth occurs on several occasions in Shelley's poetry, notably *Adonais*, and here the fertile hope of Elysium is underscored by the rhyming of 'birth' with 'earth', which is in direct contrast to the previous rhyming couplet that shackles 'life' to the inevitable 'strife' that it brings. There is an ambiguity in Shelley's use of 'this', which initially suggests a quantification of the quality of earthly existence—our experience of this world of life is a necessarily limited one in contrast to the eternity of the afterlife—is repeated to also suggest an inextricable link between 'this Elysian earth' and a more metaphysical one.

Donald Reiman and Neil Fraistat have paralleled images of ruined gardens in *Epipsychidion* and the third part of *The Sensitive Plant*, a poem that starkly lays the blame at man's feet: "'Tis we, 'tis ours, are changed – not they' (20). There is an unexpected parallel between Byron's illustrations of man's violence against nature and against women (and men) in Shelley's poem:

The garden once fair became cold and foul
 Like the corpse of her who had been its soul
 Which at first was lovely as if in sleep.
 Then slowly changed, till it grew a heap
 To make men tremble who never weep. (The Sensitive Plant, III.17-21)

Shelley's 'garden once fair' closely compares with Byron's Oriental idyll 'where

Nature lov'd to trace, / As if for Gods, a dwelling-place'. Both poems make a clear connection between violence against nature and violence against women. In Shelley's poem, the tragic fate of femininity is a very physical simile ('Like the corpse of her'), whereas in *The Giaour* the same is more figurative, the symbolic femininity of the flowers being trampled on 'brute-like', by man.

The Orient of *The Giaour* is a postlapsarian wilderness that stages (and critiques) the barbarity of the traditions of Eastern patriarchy; it is, as Sharafuddin states, 'in the neighbourhood of paradise',²⁴¹ which only emphasizes its distance from it. Watkins has argued that historical considerations of *The Giaour* 'allow us to see that such episodes as the murder of Leila and the brutal assassination of Hassan are not necessarily isolated, arbitrary, and purely private acts, but rather are predictable incidents in a world pervaded by extreme violence.'²⁴² Without contesting the conclusion, I would suggest that Byron is deliberately constructing a world of extreme brutality where murder is a predictable eventuality. As previously mentioned, Byron's characterisation of the East as violent draws upon an extensive literary heritage. Historical considerations, though complementary, are not entirely necessary in allowing us to see the murders of Leila and Hassan as inevitable acts of violence in a cultural landscape that was known to Western readers by its supposed barbarity.

McGann suggests that Byron tended to associate the East, Greece in particular, with utopianism: 'In all instances, however, Greece is a poetic resort, an Ideal against which the insufficiencies of the political and cultural present can be measured and judged.'²⁴³ Byron does not, however, wholeheartedly endorse Greece as an ideal vision of society. Grecian women, such as Leila and Myrrha are enslaved before suffering

²⁴¹ Sharafuddin, 231.

²⁴² Watkins, 36.

²⁴³ McGann, *Romantic Ideology*, 126.

brutal deaths and even without wholly accepting the political allegorization of these heroines as the state of Greece herself,²⁴⁴ it is clear that Byron's vision of Greece was hardly straightforward, and hardly utopian; Sharafuddin's contention that Byron's 'notion of paradise is pitched not in the ideal realm, but in the actual region of the Mediterranean'²⁴⁵ overlooks the problematic gender relations of the Eastern Mediterranean which inform Byron's Turkish Tales; Sharafuddin's later contrast is, however, far more revealing: 'There is nothing *idyllic* about man's relationship with nature: the Mediterranean is not the South Seas.'²⁴⁶

Leask has argued that 'Only Byron's strange late poem *The Island* (1823), in some respects a return to the genre of the *Eastern Tales*, remains as a partial mitigation of the negativity of the earlier narrative series.'²⁴⁷ His return to the Tale genre in *The Island* suggests some sense in which Byron is remedying his past visions of foreign climes by liberating the geographical Other from the negative connotations that ensnared the Turkish Tales. The setting of *The Island* is a realisation of the utopian dreams of the 'unwilling' crew of a mutinous crew: 'Young hearts, which languished for some sunny isle, / Where summer years and summer women smile' (I.27-28). The setting of *The Island* exists as an embodiment of the yearnings of the sailors, who envisage:

The gushing fruits that Nature gave untilled;
 The wood without a path but where they willed;
 The field o'er which promiscuous plenty poured
 Her horn; the equal land without a lord;
 The wish,—which ages have not yet subdued
 In man—to have no master save his mood;
 The Earth, whose mine was on its face, unsold
 The glowing sun and produce all its gold;
 The freedom which can call each grot a home;

²⁴⁴ Franklin has termed such a reading as 'a commonplace of modern criticism ... Greece's bid for independence is symbolized by Mrs Greece's cry for sexual autonomy' (73); I would agree with Franklin that in these poems 'The heroine is not merely conventionally used as the genius of her country' (75).

²⁴⁵ Sharafuddin, 234.

²⁴⁶ Sharafuddin, 235.

²⁴⁷ Leask, *Anxieties of Empire*, 62.

The general garden, where all steps may roam,
 Where Nature owns a nation as her child (I.33-43)
 Such dreams compare closely to Gonzalo's imagined commonwealth in the second act of *The Tempest*. Unlike Gonzalo's vision of his commonwealth which shall be 'all foison, all abundance' (*The Tempest* II.i.141-158), the mutineers' visions are realised in Toobonai: 'Where all partake the earth without dispute, / And bread itself is gathered as a fruit' (I.13-14). Watkins' exploration of the treatment of the natural landscape in *The Giaour* is equally applicable to the opening of *The Island*, where the dissatisfied crew yearn for an alternative existence:

The issue is traceable to the unsatisfactory conditions of the present, which is not idyllic, and it involves a process of displacement and abstraction whereby the ostensibly ideal landscape supplants real political and social relations as a source of value, effectively removing them from the stage of the scarred human imagination. Under the pressures of alienating material circumstances the landscape becomes a domain of utopian perfection that the human imagination would hold outside the destructive path of human history.²⁴⁸

In *The Island*, the setting is 'a domain of utopian perfection', yet it is threatened by 'the destructive path of human history by both the Fijians, who are referred to at the start of the second canto ('Alas! for them the flower of Manhood bleeds; / Alas! for them our fields are rank with weeds', II.37-38)²⁴⁹ and the mutineers who ruthlessly pursue Torquil. That the South Seas paradise has been affected by *external* threats contrasts with the *internal* disintegration of order in Byron's *Turkish Tales*. McGann argues that 'In the end Byron's poetry discovers what all Romantic poems repeatedly discover: that there is no place of refuge, not in desire, not in the mind, not in imagination. Man is in love and loves what vanishes, and this includes—finally, tragically—even his necessary angels.'²⁵⁰ Being in love with what must necessarily vanish would certainly be applicable to the imaginative impulse of Shelley's poetry, but Byron was too much in

²⁴⁸ Watkins, 37.

²⁴⁹ We can observe here another possible parallel with *The Sensitive Plant*: 'And thistles, and nettles, and darnels rank, / And the dock, and henbane, and hemlock dank, / Stretched out its long and hollow shank / And stifled the air, till the dead wind stank.' (III.54-57).

²⁵⁰ McGann, *Romantic Ideology* 145. McGann alludes to Wallace Stevens's 'Angel Surrounded by Paysans' (*The Auroras of Autumn*, 1950): 'Yet I am the necessary angel of earth, / Since, in my sight, you see the earth again.' (I.11-12).

love with the material not to envisage at least one refuge for desire, mind, and imagination, as the final stanza of *The Island* indicates:

Again their own shore rises on the view,
 No more polluted with a hostile hue;
 No sullen ship lay bristling o'er the foam,
 A floating dungeon:—all was Hope and Home! [. . .]
 An hundred fires, far flickering from the height,
 Blazed o'er the general revel of the night,
 The feast in honour of the guest, returned
 To Peace and Pleasure, perilously earned;
 A night succeeded by such happy days
 As only the yet infant world displays. (IV.401-404; 415-420)

These closing lines are unequivocally positive. The alliterative threat of 'hostile hue' is replaced by the emphatically celebratory 'Hope and Home!'. Byron reminds us that such a Utopia has been 'perilously earned', but the focus of the stanza is on peace, pleasure, and plenty. The ending of *The Island* is characterised by a sense of resolution, or return to a state only disturbed by the presence of outsiders, which we are reminded of by the emphatic 'Again' that begins the first line of the stanza. Such a resolution is indeed denied to the rest of Byron's *Tales*, though *The Island* remains an exception that proves McGann's rule. Byron makes explicit one of the reasons why the South Seas succeeds where other Others have failed in the final two lines: 'such happy days / As only the yet infant world displays'. Only the New World can offer the realisation of the utopian dreams that provide an arena for alternative models of gender relations. As

Leask states:

If *Lara* sadly represents things as they *are* (and have been), *The Island*, its pastoral qualities aside, offers a fragile vision of hope in terms of the relations between a predatory Europe and its colonial Others. Along with the brilliant final cantos of *Don Juan*, the greatest achievement of the late Byron is his poetic vision of the love of Torquil, voluptuary and plebeian hero, and Neuha, liberated from the riven condition of the heroes and heroines of the *Tales* into a utopian space where the violent dichotomies of culture, class and gender are briefly suspended.²⁵¹

The Island resolves the Byron's dystopian vision of Eastern patriarchy: the South Seas becomes the place of egalitarian refuge that Byron failed to find in the Orient.

²⁵¹ Leask, *Anxieties of Empire*, 67.

(ix) Fearful Desires

Contemporary reviewers had no difficulty in connecting *The Island* to Byron's Turkish Tales.²⁵² The *New Monthly Magazine* states with apparent relief that the poet 'has returned, in this instance, to that style, or rather that class of work which he seemed to have finally abandoned for something, certainly less generally interesting and attractive, however elevated in rank and ambitious in pretention' and goes on to extol the significance of the earlier poems: 'It is to his narrative poems—his Giaours, his Corsairs, his Laras, &c. that Lord Byron owes his *popularity* at least, if not his reputation.'²⁵³ Reviewers were especially keen to note parallels with *The Corsair*, with *The Examiner* noting that 'it bears greater affinity to "The Corsair" than to any other of the previous productions of his lordship'.²⁵⁴ *The Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review* similarly states that 'Lord Byron's present poem will remind the reader more of his 'Corsair' than any of his preceding works'.²⁵⁵ Only *The British Critic* saw the poem as in some way remedying Byron's earlier Tales, offering a somewhat backhanded compliment in writing: 'we think by continuing to write as he has here written, he will effectually furnish an antidote to much of his former poison.'²⁵⁶

Peter Kitson argues that 'More than any other theatre of discovery, Oceania influenced contemporary theories of difference.'²⁵⁷ Certainly for Byron, Oceania

²⁵² In arguing that *The Island* returns to themes and techniques encountered in the Turkish Tales I am following Leask's lead (*Anxieties of Empire*, 64-67). Said has also argued for the plausibility of extending the methodology of Orientalism to the South Seas as part of the wider context of Otherness: 'The increasing influence of travel literature, imaginary utopias, moral voyages, and scientific reporting brought the Orient into sharper and more extended focus. If Orientalism is indebted principally to the fruitful Eastern discoveries of Anquetil and Jones during the latter third of the century, these must be seen in the wider context created by Cook and Bourganville, the voyages of Tournefort and Adanson ... by French traders in the Pacific ... by innumerable speculations on giants, Patagonians, savages, natives, and monsters supposedly residing to the far east, west, south, and north of Europe' (*Orientalism*, 117).

²⁵³ *New Monthly Magazine* (1823): 136 [1923].

²⁵⁴ *The Examiner* (June 16 1823): 394 [1034].

²⁵⁵ *Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review* (June 21 1823): 385 [1337].

²⁵⁶ *The British Critic* (July 1823): 22 [330].

²⁵⁷ Peter J. Kitson, *Romantic Literature, Race, and Colonial Encounter* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007) 8.

becomes the favoured arena in which to stage a radical vision of gender performance. *The Island* is partly based upon William Mariner's *Account of the Natives of the Tonga Islands*, and partly reconstructed from Lieutenant Bligh's 'Narrative of the Mutiny and Seizure of the *Bounty*, in the South Seas (in 1789).²⁵⁸ The first canto relates Bligh and a 'faithful few' (I.125) being cast adrift from the ship by mutineers. In the second canto Byron describes the Oceanic idyll of Toobonai (now Tubuai) and introduces the reader to the goddess-like Neuha (II.123-162) and her Western lover, the 'blue-eyed northern child' (II.163) Torquil, who have been dwelling in connubial bliss, we presume for the duration of the *Bounty*'s five month sojourn at Toobonai. Torquil is 'piped... To quarters' (II.520-521) at the close of the second canto by the chief mutineer, Acting Lieutenant Fletcher Christian. The third canto opens with the crushing defeat of the mutineers and their flight from the *Bounty* onto Toobonai (III.9-18). At the close of the canto Neuha and Torquil are reunited (III.183-192—she finds him) moments before 'The plash of hostile oars' are heard (III.215). In what appears a misguided act of heroism, Neuha takes her own canoe and Torquil, and diverts the pursuers away from Christian and the surviving mutineers ('*She* would take / The rest upon herself for Torquil's sake', IV.39-40); just as their capture seems imminent ('Within an hundred boats' length was the foe, / And now what refuge but their frail canoe?', IV.51-52),

The South Seas enjoyed notable literary fame in the early part of the eighteenth-century with the publication of Cooke's *A Voyage to the South Seas, and Round the World* (1712), Rogers's *A Cruising Voyage Round the World* (1712), and Shelvocke's *A Voyage Round the World by Way of the Great South Sea* (1726). The South Pacific continued to attract the attention of the Western imagination into the middle and latter part of the century with Captain Cook's voyaging of the Pacific Ocean. Cook's first voyage (1768-71), sponsored by the Royal Society, was to the South Pacific to chart the path of Venus across the sun. Byron's Grandfather, John Byron ('Foul-weather Jack'), discovered various islands in the Pacific, and documented his travels in his own contribution to the travelogue genre, *The Narrative of the Honourable John Byron* (1768). Byron cites his 'grand-dad's Narrative' following the shipwreck scene in the second canto of *Don Juan* (II.1096). See also Neil Rennie, *Far Fetched Facts: The Literature of Travel and the Idea of the South Seas* (Oxford: OUP, 1995).

²⁵⁸ The head note reads: 'The foundation of the following Story will be found partly in the account of the Mutiny of the *Bounty* in the South Seas (in 1789) and partly in 'Mariner's Account of the Tonga Islands.' (CPW VII.26). With regards to the latter, I shall be citing from William Mariner, *An Account of the Natives of the Tonga Islands in the South Pacific Ocean with an original Grammar and Vocabulary of Their Language*, 2 vols., ed. John Martin (London: John Murray, 1818).

Neuha then dives beneath the waves, again, followed closely by Torquil. As with *The Corsair*, the rescue of the hero by the heroine was seen by the reviewers to be the focal point of the action, with *The British Magazine* commenting that ‘the really interesting part of the volume is a sort of Episode describing the manner of Torquil’s escape, favoured by the fair Neuha’.²⁵⁹ The heroine leads her hero to an underwater refuge, ‘a spacious cave’ (IV.121), where they await the departure of Bligh and his men, ‘Who, disappointed of their former chase, / In search of Christian now renewed their race’ (IV.237-238). Bligh’s men kill Christian,²⁶⁰ and Neuha and Torquil survive to live happily ever after in their South Seas paradise. Byron’s choice of an island in the South Pacific to establish his Utopia is in accord with the optimism that informed the discovery of Oceania. Kitson outlines how recent criticism ‘has stressed how the South Seas figured as a construction of Western desires *and* fears’ (my emphasis).²⁶¹ Oceania, like the East, was not a region that could be straightforwardly categorised as paradisaical. *The Island*, like the Turkish Tales, recognizes the complexities of exoticism as a concept that is simultaneously informed by danger and desire.

The earlier poems construct exotic spaces as essentially violent with a latent sensualism; by contrast, the geographic arena of the later poem is one that articulates Western sensual fantasy, whilst being haunted by a latent violence. Byron wrote *The Island* conscious of an extensive literary heritage that documented these Western desires and fears. The fear of the South Seas was largely based upon a morbid fascination with cannibalism. Mariner’s *Account* details a first-hand encounter of cannibalism when his hosts decide to kill several prisoners of war ‘then to roast and eat

²⁵⁹ *The British Magazine* (July 1823): 195 [386].

²⁶⁰ Both McGann and Cochran have observed this departs from historical fact. McGann notes, ‘he was one of those who escaped the pursuit of law’ (*CPW* VII.133).

²⁶¹ Kitson, 124.

them'.²⁶² Mariner reacts with horror at being offered human liver: 'overcome by disgust, he threw it in the man's face, who only laughed, and asked him if it were not better to eat good meat than die of hunger.'²⁶³ The passage posits such behaviour as the result of Fijian influence: 'When Captain Cook visited these islands, cannibalism was scarcely thought of among them: but the Fiji people soon taught them this, as well as the art of war; and a famine, which happened some time afterwards, rendered the expedient for a time almost necessary.'²⁶⁴ The first volume of George Forster's account of Cook's *Voyage Round the World in His Majesty's Sloop Resolution* (1777) gives an equally unequivocal first-hand account:

Captain Cook had already, in his former voyage, received strong proof that the practice of eating human flesh existed in New Zealand; and as now we have with our own eyes seen the inhabitants devouring human flesh, all controversy on that point must be at an end.²⁶⁵

The conviction of the existence of cannibalistic tendencies among the South Pacific islanders was so strong as to cause Byron's literary and political nemesis, Southey (who had at one time shared in a fantasy of a South Pacific island-idyll²⁶⁶), to write the following damning verdict on the inhabitants of Tahiti: 'it appears indisputably that their iniquities exceed those of any other people, ancient or modern, civilized or savage; and that human never has been exhibited in such utter depravity as by the inhabitants of these terrestrial Paradises!'²⁶⁷ Unlike Southey, however, the younger poet doubted the

²⁶² Mariner, I.108.

²⁶³ Mariner, I.110.

²⁶⁴ Mariner, I.110.

²⁶⁵ George Forster, *A Voyage Round the World in His Majesty's Sloop Resolution, commanded by Capt. James Cook, during the years 1772, 3, 4, and 5*, vol. 1 of 2 (London, 1777) 514.

²⁶⁶ In a long letter penned to Grosvenor Charles Bedford between 25th January and 8th February 1793, Southey eulogises the qualities of Tahiteite, which 'independent of its women had many inducements not only for the sailor but the philosopher... he might be truly happy in himself and his happiness would be increased by communicating it to others. He might introduce the advantages and yet avoid the vices of cultivated society. I am again getting into my dreams and sober Reason has so little to balance them that I can scarcely wake myself'. Kenneth Curry ed. *New Letters of Robert Southey*, vol. 1 of 2 (New York: Columbia UP, 1965) 19.

²⁶⁷ Carol Bolton, *Writing the Empire: Robert Southey and Romantic Colonialism* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007) 123. The citation is taken from his article 'Transactions of the Missionary Society in the South Sea Islands' in the *Quarterly Review*. He wrote similarly unforgiving accounts for the *Annual*

value of received opinion now that the customs in Tahiti were ‘better known’.

Despite the proliferation of texts that addressed the issue of cannibalism, Byron omits any mention of it in *The Island*. Byron had demonstrated his willingness to address the issue of cannibalism in the shipwreck scene of the second canto of *Don Juan* where Juan’s luckless tutor, Pedrillo, is washed down with salt water (*DJ* II.609-616). As in the South Seas travelogues with which he was familiar, Byron explains the cause of cannibalism as:

savage hunger which demanded,
Like the Promethean vulture, this pollution;
None in particular had sought or plann’d it,
’Twas nature gnaw’d them to this resolution. (II.595-598)

Byron’s decision to avoid addressing cannibalism in *The Island* is all the more remarkable considering his previous interest in it. Kitson believes it is too notable an omission to be *simply* an omission and suggests that ‘cannibalism does exist at the fringes of the poem as an absent presence’²⁶⁸ owing to the exploration of that and other unsavoury practices in *Mariner’s Account*. The plausibility of Kitson’s assertion is seemingly upheld at the start of the second canto of the poem when we are told that it is the Fijians who impart lessons of violence to the native inhabitants: ‘*they* taught us how to wield / The club, and rain our arrows o’er the field’ (II.41-42). When read alongside *Mariner’s* assertion of cannibalism ‘as being the result of Fijian influence’, the lines potentially allude to the adoption of more horrific practices than merely martial expertise. The suggestion, however, remains rather tenuous. Even Kitson recognises that this claim does not quite explain why Byron’s poem so carefully ‘avoids depicting the Polynesian Tongan customs of infanticide, human sacrifice, and cannibalism, which were in his chief source’, and does not explain why the poem ‘fails to mention the

Review.

²⁶⁸ Kitson, 139.

scandalous issue of cannibalism at all, though the Fijians were by 1823, when the poem was published, famous for the practice'.²⁶⁹

If one turns to the letters, it is evident that Byron was not only aware of legendary 'Polynesian Tongan customs' but chastised Southey for paying attention to them: 'from the East, we have nothing but S * * 's [Southey's] unsaleables,—and these he has contrived to spoil, by adopting only their most outrageous fictions' (*BLJ* III.101). Byron's refusal to present 'their most outrageous fictions', then, is not simply because mentioning such practices would unequivocally damage the portrayal of the native islander as superior to his Western counterpart. Indeed, as Montaigne's essay 'Of Cannibals' exemplifies, the supposed barbarism of the practice could be used to illustrate even more reprehensible practices in the West:

I am not sorry that we notice the barbarous horror of such acts, but I am heartily sorry that, judging their faults rightly, we should be so blind to our own. . . So we may well call these people barbarians, in respect to the rules of reason, but not in respect to ourselves, who surpass them in every kind of barbarity.²⁷⁰

The major reason for Byron's deliberate omission of the 'more outrageous fictions' of the New World was his desire to sustain the utopian possibilities that he saw in a poetic construction of *Oceania*. Louis Antoine de Bougainville, the French explorer, provides a more positive account of the Tahitian people than Southey and his *Voyage Round the World*, which helps to explain why *Oceania* was of especial interest to Byron: 'The very air which the people breathe, their songs, their dances, almost constantly attended with indecent postures, all conspire to call to mind the sweets of love, all engage to give themselves up to them.'²⁷¹ Carol Bolton observes that 'Bougainville even goes so far as to name the island 'La nouvelle Cythere' in honour of Aphrodite (or Venus) so

²⁶⁹ Kitson, 139.

²⁷⁰ Michel de Montaigne, 'Of Cannibals'. *The Complete Works: Essays, Travel Journal, Letters*, trans. Donald M. Frame (London: Everyman, 2003) 189.

²⁷¹ Louis-Antoine de Comte Bougainville, *A Voyage Round the World*, trans. J. R. Forster (London: J. Nourse, 1772) 257.

dedicating the island to the worship of the ideal female form and spontaneous female sexuality.²⁷² Small wonder then that, as Kitson indicates, ‘Male poets, such as the young Coleridge and Byron were keen to stress the sexual freedoms of Tahiti and to figure the island as a place of retreat and escape.’²⁷³

The idea of *Oceania* as a sensual retreat certainly appealed to Byron and he contributed to such constructions in *The Island*, which from the start appears dedicated to the worship of the ideal female form:

How lovely are your forms! how every sense
Bows to your beauties, softened, but intense,
Like to the flowers on Mataloco’s steep,
Which fling their fragrance far athwart the deep: (II.59-62)

Byron places emphasis on the sensory experience of the island, and the intense fragrance of its flowers is shared by the overpowering sensuality of its female inhabitants. There is a suggestion of European chivalry succumbing in ‘Bows to your beauties’, yet latent in this description is the image of a branch laden with ripe—and hitherto forbidden—fruit. Byron plays on the conventional trope of comparing women to flowers, therefore indirectly setting up a contrast between the sweet English roses of ‘home’ and the exotic blooms of *Oceania*. We also are aware of the poet beginning to reconcile disparate qualities in the South Sea women; whilst they are ‘softened’, any sense of their fragility is qualified by their intensity.

In *Natives of the Tonga Islands*, the sexual autonomy of South Pacific tribal women is of particular interest to the writer: ‘once divorced they may remain single if they please’;²⁷⁴ however, ‘the force of sentimental affections blinds them to the probability of a disappointment, and they willingly make a generous sacrifice of their

²⁷² Bolton, 118.

²⁷³ Kitson, 136.

²⁷⁴ Mariner, II.173.

liberty to prove the strength of their attachment'.²⁷⁵ Mariner's description suggests two obvious areas of comparison with Byron's poetry; firstly the relationship between liberty and love, and secondly the application of Western matrimonial labels to culturally specific domestic arrangements. For Byron, as with Shelley, liberty and love are mutually inclusive (as is conventional marriage and tyranny). The capacity for love and the desire for freedom are frequently figured as synonymous, the most notable examples being *The Corsair* and *The Island*.

In both *Lara* and *Sardanapalus* we can observe the blinding effect of sentimental affections. In the former, as discussed earlier, the heroine Myrrha, is a Greek slave who is in love with her Assyrian Master, Sardanapalus. It is made clear that this affection is, however, in spite of her better judgement:

Why do I love this man? My country's daughters
Love none but heroes....
. . . I love him;
And that's the heaviest link of the long chain—
To love whom we esteem not. (I.ii.641-645)

In *Lara*, Kaled enters into a complex Master/Slave dynamic and makes a generous sacrifice both of her liberty and—eventually—her life to prove the strength of her attachment. Martin's description applies Western matrimonial terminology to the native islanders; they can be 'divorced' and become long-suffering wives for the sake of an original, idealized attachment. Similarly, Byron uses Western labels to articulate an alternative approach to matrimony: Neuha's cave is described as 'a chapel of the Seas' (IV.160), 'Their nuptial vault' (IV.225), and likened to 'some old cathedral's glimmering aisle' (IV.133), with Neuha herself being labelled as Torquil's 'Mermaid bride' (IV.214) and simply 'his bride' (IV.218), and Torquil being identified as 'The husband of the bride of Toobonai' (II.211). That Byron, like Mariner, deliberately calls

²⁷⁵ Mariner, II.174.

attention to a comparison of the romantic conventions of the Old and New Worlds appears to have gone unnoticed by many of the reviewers. Whilst *The Examiner* refers to the lovers as just that, others assume a conventional Western matrimonial *costume*; the *Literary Museum* refers to Torquil as ‘the happy husband of the fair savage’,²⁷⁶ while the *Literary Register’s* synopsis of the poem describes Torquil as being ‘saved, by the female whom he had chosen as his wife, in a miraculous manner’,²⁷⁷ seemingly believing that the poem concludes, like an Austen novel, with the marriage of the affianced pair: ‘Neuha, one of the Tonga maidens, becomes the bride of Torquil’.²⁷⁸

Stabler has explored how the challenge posed to conventional British courtship by alternative exotic methods plays a significant role in Byron’s epic, *Don Juan*:

The return to England in Byron’s process of digression is complicated by the suggestion that sexual mores are stranger at home than they are abroad. This reverses the usual tendency of travel literature to highlight social oddity abroad in order to endorse English codes of behaviour.²⁷⁹

Stabler’s suggestion that Byron is doing something unique in his positive treatment of the sexual traditions of the Other is further supported by *The Island* where active female sexuality is celebrated rather than chastised. Extending Stabler’s argument, I would argue that Byron’s celebration of love in the South Seas, indirectly but purposefully calls into question the normality of English codes of behaviour:

And let not this seem strange; the devotee
Lives not in earth, but in his extasy;
Around him days and worlds are heedless driven,
His soul is gone before his dust to heaven.
Is love less potent? No—his path is trod,
Alike uplifted gloriously to God;
Or linked to all we know of heaven below,
The other better self, whose joy or woe
Is more than ours

(II.370-378)

Byron preempts the reader finding Neuha and Torquil’s alternative arrangement ‘strange’ and immediately provides reassurance that their love is no ‘less potent’ as a

²⁷⁶ *Literary Museum* (June 21 1823): 385 [1503].

²⁷⁷ *Literary Register* (June 28 1823): 405 [1561].

²⁷⁸ *Literary Register* (June 28 1823): 406 [1562].

²⁷⁹ Stabler, *Poetics*, 157.

result. For Byron, the lover ‘Lives not in earth’, and therefore his geographic location should be irrelevant. The lover is ‘heedless’ to his surroundings and, by extension, to governing romantic mores. The naturalness of the union, by extension, suggests the lovers’ relationship as an idealized alternative to ‘civilized’ relations, which distance individuals from the very humanity that should form the basis of social interaction.

Neuha’s character is informed by a natural, unaffected femininity. The poem does not construct hero and heroine as generic beings, yet their relationship implicitly questions the relationship between *naturalness* and *human nature*. Beauvoir's citation of Marx serves to illustrate:

The direct, natural, necessary relation of human creatures is the *relation of man to woman*...The nature of this relation determines to what point man himself is to be considered as a *generic being*, as mankind; the relation of man to woman is the most natural relation of human being to human being. By it is shown, therefore, to what point the *natural* behavior of man has become *human* or to what point the *human* being has become his *natural* being, to what point his *human nature* has become his *nature*.²⁸⁰

‘To what point the *human* being has become his *natural* being, to what point his *human nature* has become his *nature*’ is a central concern within *The Island*. Byron bridges the concept of naturalness and human nature through his presentation of femininity, thus amplifying the significance of the heroine. The opening canto prefigures Neuha through explicitly connecting Naturalness and femininity: ‘Nature, and Nature’s Goddess—Woman’ (I.211). When we first encounter Neuha, she is ‘The infant of an infant world, as pure / From Nature’ (II.127-128); on diving into the waves, Neuha becomes *of* the waves: ‘her track beneath her native sea / Was as a native’s of the element’ (IV.106-107). In her unveiling of the secret cave, she has seemingly conspired with Nature, and the blurring of Neuha’s human nature with her naturalness reaches its climax: ‘Thus Nature played with the Stalactites, / And made herself a chapel of the Seas’ (IV.159-160). The figuring of Nature as an alternative religion, and Neuha as Nature’s goddess

²⁸⁰ Beauvoir, 767.

further unites the exotic with the paradisaical, the alternative pathway to Paradise being the feminine ‘other better self’, who exists as ‘all we know of heaven below’.

The South Seas are connected throughout the poem to natural and feminine qualities:

Her woods, her wilds, her waters, the intense
Reply of *hers* to our intelligence! (II.384-385)

The femininity of nature is figured as a form of ownership. The insistent emphasis of ‘hers’ conveys an element of feminine control, thereby figuring femininity as territorial. P. D. Fleck has commented that ‘Neuha is herself the spirit or the genius of the island’.²⁸¹ Certainly, the primary *OED* entry on ‘genius’²⁸² is applicable to Neuha’s relationship, both with Torquil whom she essentially conducts out of the world and whose fortunes she can be seen to govern, and Toobonai where her intimate knowledge of its geography suggests a degree of topographical control. Neuha astonishes the mutineers by defying assumed natural limits. The significance of this is at once figurative and literal. In their flight from the enemy, Neuha leads Torquil to the safety of ‘a spacious cave / Whose only portal was the keyless wave / (A hollow archway by the sun unseen, / Save through the billows’ glassy veil of green...) (IV.121-124). Like the Nereids, to whom she is compared (II.231; III.184; IV.392), Neuha is fluidly mobile; her ability to transcend the physical boundary between sea and earth is an extension of her ability to transcend artificially imposed social bounds.²⁸³ Deidre Lynch cites McClintock’s argument that attention to gender differences abroad is limited to

²⁸¹ P. D. Fleck, ‘Romance in Byron’s *The Island*’, *The Byron Journal* 3 (1975): 11. Fleck’s description invites comparison between Neuha and *The Tempest*’s Ariel.

²⁸² “genius, n.”. *OED Online*. September 2011. Oxford University Press. 4 November 2011 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/77607?redirectedFrom=genius>>.

l.a.: ‘With reference to classical pagan belief: The tutelary god or attendant spirit allotted to every person at his birth, to govern his fortunes and determine his character, and finally to conduct him out of the world; also, the tutelary and controlling spirit similarly connected with a place, an institution, etc.’

²⁸³ In Captain Cook’s *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean* (London, 1784), the author remarks on the South Sea islanders’ aquatic antics: ‘Swimming is not only a necessary art, in which both their men and women are more expert than any people we had hitherto seen, but a favourite diversion amongst them.’ (III.145).

masculine behavioural traits:

gender difference between women and men serves to symbolically define the limits of *national* difference and power between *men*. Excluded from direct action as national citizens, women are subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as its boundary and metaphorical limit.²⁸⁴

Whilst Neuha is literally subsumed beneath the wave, she is in fact excluded symbolically from the national body politic (the British navy) that seeks to contain her (and Torquil). Her direct action moves her beyond the socially prescribed notion of *gendered* boundaries and metaphorical limits.

Oceania enables Byron to explore beyond projected Western fears, using it as an arena for challenging accepted notions of gender roles and boundaries. As such, Byron cannot be accused of excluding women from direct action and McClintock is in danger of making a generalization that reinforces the same artificial limitations that she seeks to critique. *Natives of the Tonga Isles* exemplifies an alternative approach to the definition of gender roles and limits. The most pertinent episode for the purposes of this essay is Mariner's observations of the heroic attitude of the tribal women. During a discussion concerning whether or not to wage war on a troublesome neighbouring tribe, the men appear reluctant, causing one of the women to declare, "if the men are turned women, the women shall turn men"²⁸⁵. The women are conscious of stepping into the men's required role as warriors and, in so doing, demonstrate the manifest permeability of gender roles.

²⁸⁴ Deidre Lynch, 'Domesticating Fictions and Nationalising Women: Edmund Burke, Property, and the Reproduction of Englishness', *Romanticism, Race, and Imperial Culture, 1780–1834*, ed. Richardson and Hofkosh (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996) 48.

²⁸⁵ Mariner, I.156-57.

(x) Byron's *Belle Sauvage*

Through his presentation of Neuha, Byron appropriates the tradition of the *Belle Sauvage* that was *en vogue* during the latter part of the eighteenth century.²⁸⁶ The most famous incarnation of the figure of *La Belle Sauvage*, Pocahontas, was 'discovered' in the Americas; the legend of Pocahontas first appeared on the British stage in J. N. Barker and John Bray's *The Indian Princess, ou, La Belle Sauvage* (1808).²⁸⁷ Oceania and the Americas formed the exciting geographical space of the New World, and the travel literature that documented its exploration demonstrates an outward consideration of material possibilities, combined with an inward contemplation of cultural values. Muthu concurs with Kitson's premise concerning the political and anthropological debates that this new space provoked, stating that 'The New World travel literature inspired a diverse range of arguments about the role of women in society, and more generally about the themes of love, marriage, and sexuality.'²⁸⁸ Both *The Indian Princess* and *The Island* are testimony to such arguments concerning gendered cultural relativism. *The Indian Princess* was the first American play to be performed in England after opening in the United States, but was not staged in England until 1820 when it appeared under the heroine's name at Drury Lane. Though Byron would not have witnessed the play, having left England in April 1816 never to return, the evident similarities between *The Indian Princess* and *The Island* clearly suggest that the *Belle Sauvage* motif was present in the public consciousness. A brief comparison of

²⁸⁶ Whilst discussing one of London's best known coaching inns of the same name, a letter to *The Spectator* revealed the origins in 'an Old Romance translated out of the French; which gives an account of a very beautiful woman who was found in a wilderness, and is called in the French *la Belle Sauvage*; and is everywhere translated by our countrymen The Bell-Savage' *The Spectator* 28 (April 2 1711). *La Belle Sauvage* was also the title of Mr. Lyttleton's novel, *La Belle Sauvage, or A Progress through the Beau-Monde* (London: Minerva, 1803).

²⁸⁷ Parenthetical citations (indicating act, scene, and page number) taken from J. N. Barker and John Bray, *The Indian princess; Or, La belle sauvage. An operatic melo-drame* (Philadelphia: T. & G. Palmer, 1808).

²⁸⁸ Muthu, 26.

the two plays highlights Byron's originality in his rendition of the subject.

As in *The Island*, Barker and Bray's play features a highborn selfless heroine who rescues the man she loves at her own peril:

At hazard of her own dear life she saved me. E'en the warm friendship of the prince had fail'd, And death, inevitable death, hung over me. O had you seen her fly, like Pity's herald To stay the uplifted hatchet in its flight; Or heard her, as with cherub voice she pled, Like Heaven's own angel—advocate for mercy (II.34).

In contrast to Byron's oeuvre, *The Indian Princess* begins to suggest the shortcomings of the Native women in contrast to the ladies at home. As one of the male protagonists remarks to his Western belle:

Could a grim wolf rival my gentle lamb?...though in this wilderness The tree hang full of divers colour'd fruit...They'll hang until they rot or ere I pluck them, while I've my melting rosy nonpareil. (III.i.47)

The wolfish Native women and the domesticated flock of their Western counterparts are clumsily constructed as diametrically opposed. The speaker uses the quasi-Edenic image of the tree laden with ripe fruit to compare his own temptation with that of Adam, though unlike the first man, this protagonist remains unmoved. The racist jibe of 'divers colour'd fruit' is somewhat gauche, and in keeping with the unsavoury nature of the character in question. The fruit imagery calls to mind a similar—though more adroit—analogy in the following passage from 'Of Cannibals':

Those people are wild, just as we call wild the fruits that Nature has produced by herself and in her normal course; whereas really it is those that we have changed artificially and led astray from the common order, that we should rather call wild. The former retain alive and vigorous their genuine, their most useful and natural, virtues and properties, which we have debased in the latter in adapting them to gratify our corrupted taste. And yet for all that, the savour and delicacy of some uncultivated fruits of those countries is quite as excellent, even to our taste, as that of our own.²⁸⁹

Montaigne deliberately avoids Biblical overtones so there is no ambiguity to his emphasis of the positive qualities of 'uncultivated' peoples. The conceit is extended to illustrate the distance society has placed between man and his natural state, and Montaigne implores us to recognize the value of unadulterated naturalness by inverting

²⁸⁹ Montaigne, 185.

the Western suspicion of ‘wildness’ and investing it with more positive connotations.

The Indian Princess, however, does not demonstrate such enlightened thought. Pocahontas is characterised as being grateful for Rolfe’s efforts to distance her from her native identity: ‘Thou has ta’en me from the path of savage error, / Blood-stained and rude’ (III.ii.52). This motif of the bestial and savage women being ‘improved’ by Western refinement is repeated towards the end of the play when another *beau* of a Native woman describes her as: ‘A wild thing, sir, that I caught in the wood here. But when I have clipt her wings, and tamed her . . .’ (III.iii.73). The speaker is explicit that the girl he has entrapped will be all the better for his imparting British manners upon her, unwittingly conforming to Aristotle’s premise that ‘tame animals are by nature better than wild, and it is better for all of them to be ruled by men, because it secures their safety. Again, the relationship of male to female is that one is by nature superior, the other inferior, and the one is ruler, the other ruled.’²⁹⁰

The desire to domesticate untamed femininity, according to Beauvoir, pervades the history of gender relations:

It is this ambivalence of the Other, of Woman, that will be reflected in the rest of her history; she will be subjected to man’s will up to her own times. But this will is ambiguous: by complete possession and control woman would be abased to the rank of a thing; but man aspires to clothe in his own dignity whatever he conquers and possesses; the Other retains, it seems to him, a little of her primitive magic. How to make of the wife at once a servant and a companion is one of the problems he will seek to solve; his attitude will evolve through the centuries, and that will entail an evolution also in the destiny of woman.²⁹¹

Byron’s women bear out Beauvoir’s thesis remarkably well, for it is just ‘this ambivalence’ with which the poet plays. Byron enables Neuha to retain ‘a little of her primitive magic’ by equipping her with the necessary means to resist ‘complete possession and control’. In contrast with the earlier play, it is the ‘civilized’ hero who is clothed in the dignity of the native heroine, rather than the inverse. Byron challenges

²⁹⁰ Aristotle, *Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995) I.v.1254^b11-14.

²⁹¹ Beauvoir, 85-86.

the easily recognizable trope of the noble savage. As Muthu has succinctly stated, ‘First and foremost, the concept of the noble savage was a critical device that could serve the interests of thinkers who sought to challenge a variety of orthodox doctrines.’²⁹² Byron seeks to challenge orthodox doctrine throughout *The Island*:

True, they had vices—such are Nature’s growth—
But only the Barbarian’s—we have both:
The sordor of civilization, mixed
With all the savage which man’s fall hath fixed. (II.67-70)

Byron acknowledges the ‘vices’ of the Islanders as a direct result of their being closely connected to Nature rather than emanating from an innate corruption. Indeed, for Byron it is clear that physical and moral ‘sordor’ emerge from ‘civilization’ rather than from sin inherent from ‘man’s fall’. More pertinently, Byron explicitly connects civilized man to the Islander—there is no attempt to distance the West from the Other. In doing so, Byron engages in what Schwab considers a major dilemma for the civilized world: ‘The great question facing civilized man for three centuries would be knowing where the savage began and ended, and which of the two events was the worthier.’²⁹³ Rather than ponder on where each began and ended, Byron is far more interested in where they overlap.

As Kitson has stated, ‘Byron breaks down the traditional binary of European civilization and native savagery’,²⁹⁴ a dissolution that the poet achieves through a similar technique of an acknowledgement of savage faults followed by the admonishment of civilized ones that we observe throughout ‘Of Cannibals.’ Such admonishment is characteristic, too, of Rousseau’s defense of the natural state of uncivilized man:

²⁹² Muthu, 20.

²⁹³ Schwab, 16.

²⁹⁴ Kitson, 138.

At first glance, it would seem that because in the state of nature men have no kind of moral relationship to each other, nor any recognized duties, they would be neither good nor evil, and could have neither vices nor virtues; unless we took those words in a physical sense and could call an individual's 'vices' those attributes that might be deleterious to his own survival and 'virtues' those that might be propitious for it, in which case we should have to call most virtuous the person who least resisted simple impulses of nature. But without diverging from ordinary usage, we would do well to suspend judgement on this situation and guard against our own biases until we have observed, with the scales of impartiality in our hands, more virtues than vices among civilized men²⁹⁵

The Island is not a didactic poem. Yet it is not entirely free from moral judgement. For Byron, as with Rousseau, it is 'the person who least resist[s] simple impulses of nature' who is the 'most virtuous.' Throughout the poem we encounter Byron's harsh criticism of the results of colonialism; Byron critiques the West's imperialist impulse, imaging the invasion of an Edenic idyll:

The Goldless Age, where Gold disturbs no dreams,
Inhabits or inhabited the shore,
Till Europe taught them better than before,
Bestowed her customs, and amended theirs,
But left her vices also to their heirs.
Away with this! behold them as they were,
Do good with Nature or with Nature err. (I.216-222)

The tone of these lines is latently sardonic. The use of 'heirs' ironizes the legacy that the West has endowed on their colonies, such as sexually transmitted diseases,²⁹⁶ as well as implicitly referencing the 'heirs' of unions between native women and Western sailors. Akeel Bilgrami's writings on Occidentalism would suggest that Byron's early nineteenth-century critique does not appear to differ significantly from twenty-first century complaints about the West: 'phenomena such as permissive and sinful metropolitan life in the West that has abandoned the organic links that individuals have to nature and community; commercial rather than heroic ideals . . .'.²⁹⁷ Indeed, Byron's use of 'Goldless' levels criticism at Western capitalism, and elevates the organic above the polish of civilization. Byron here subscribes to Rousseau's categorization that 'For

²⁹⁵ Rousseau, 43-44.

²⁹⁶ See Forster, I.369-370 and Cook, I.141.

²⁹⁷ Akeel Bilgrami, 'Occidentalism, the Very Idea: An Essay on Enlightenment and Enchantment', *Critical Inquiry* 32 (Spring, 2006): 384.

the poet it is gold and silver...that first civilized and ruined the human race.’²⁹⁸ David Davis has suggested that the literary convention of the noble savage ‘modif[ied] Europe’s arrogant ethnocentrism and provide[d] expression for at least a momentary ambivalence toward the human costs of modern civilization.’²⁹⁹ Byron’s diction certainly engages with a politicized language of human cost, and worth. The use of ‘Goldless’ is further striking to consider alongside the tradition of an idealized *golden* age of man, which Byron is plausibly engaging with.³⁰⁰ Montaigne elevates these ‘Goldless’ societies above such fictionalized accounts:

I am sorry that Lycurgus and Plato did not know of them; for it seems to me that what we actually see in these nations surpasses not only all the pictures in which poets have idealized the golden age and all their inventions in imagining a happy state of man, but also the conceptions and the very desire of philosophy.³⁰¹

The Indian Princess’s representation of the Western impulse to ‘civilize’, or tame, native femininity sits in stark contrast to *The Island*, where Byron’s heroine is in no need of ‘refinement’:

Neuha, the sun-flower of the Island daughters,
 Highborn (...)
 Of a long race, the valiant and the free,
 The naked knights of savage chivalry, (II.213-217)

Neuha, like Haidée before her, is another of Byron’s ‘Highborn’ heroines with an extensive and notable pedigree. Franklin indicates that Byron’s harem heroines ‘are quintessential subjects, inferior in sex, class, and colonized race.’³⁰² By contrast, Neuha is of superior birth and differs significantly from the active heroines of the Turkish

²⁹⁸ Rousseau, 62.

²⁹⁹ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (New York: Cornell UP, 1975) 47. Byron’s genuine concern with the human costs of modern civilization is evident in his Frame Work Bill Speech of 1812 (*CMP* 22-27).

³⁰⁰ This is further reinforced by the title and subject of Byron’s penultimate major work, *The Age of Bronze*, composed few months prior to *The Island* (the poem was written largely between 2 and 17 December 1822 and published by Hunt on 1st April 1823; see *CPW* VII.119) laments the current state of Western societies. McGann similarly argues that ‘B. uses his romance of the islands as a lever to expose and criticize the spirit of European imperialism. In this respect the poem is a companion piece to the *Age*—a work which, to all appearances, can seem so different.’ (*CPW* VII.134).

³⁰¹ Montaigne, 186.

³⁰² Franklin, *Heroines*, 75.

Tales in that freedom is written into her heritage. Her connection with an alternative aristocracy, ‘the naked knights of savage chivalry’ is not evidence of Byronic snobbery, but is rather a further example of Byron investing his heroine with conventional heroic qualities.

In his construction of Neuha, Byron does not attempt to isolate her from her ‘savage’ ancestry but builds upon the stereotype of a beautiful Native hostess, echoing his construction of Haidée. Mirroring the earlier heroine, Neuha retreats with Torquil to a cave and establishes a primeval Eden:

And she herself, as beautiful as Night,
To fling her shadowy spirit o’er the scene.
And make their subterranean world serene.
She had foreseen, since first the stranger’s sail
Drew to their isle, that force or flight might fail,
And formed a refuge of the rocky den
For Torquil’s safety from his countrymen. (IV.176-182)

Again, we witness the trope of the heroine being responsible for setting up a domestic refuge, a situation already explored by Byron in the Haidée Cantos of *Don Juan* and also in *The Corsair*. Unlike Medora, the passive heroine of the latter poem, Neuha does not meekly await her returning hero, but actively ensures his safety by secreting him away. In his description of Neuha, Byron evokes the supernatural feminine; Night becomes feminized and Neuha embodies her shadowy and seductive spirit. There are also possible allusions to two earlier lyric pieces by Byron: ‘She Walks in Beauty’ where the unnamed object of affection ‘walks in beauty, like the night / Of cloudless climes and starry skies’ (1-2); and ‘So, We’ll Go No More A Roving’ where we are told that ‘the night was made for loving’ (9); from Byron’s presentation of her it is clear that Neuha shares in this purpose. Made for loving, certainly, but not fallen. As Franklin argues: ‘Though she is, from the European point of view, a fallen woman, Neuha is the first heroine whose independence and active sexuality are in no conflict with her own

society.³⁰³

Neuha's retreat to the cave-sanctuary is, significantly, an inevitability she has 'foreseen', not a decision she has made on a whim. Whilst Franklin has argued that Neuha's 'capacity for feeling not thinking is her hallmark',³⁰⁴ she later draws attention to 'her keen intelligence and practicality' which is evidenced by 'the detailing of how she had had the foresight and bravery to retrieve her abandoned drifting canoe the night before and secure it for their return to the island when the English had left (IV, 393-400).'³⁰⁵ So, Neuha is both a feeling *and* thinking heroine. Byron here challenges Western prejudices concerning native women of foreign lands who, William Alexander writes in his *History of Women* (1779), possess 'bodies of a firmer texture, and of stronger nerves' than their Western counterparts and so are 'entirely destitute' of 'many of the finer and more delicate feelings'—which, one presumes, the author felt the Western woman possessed in abundance.³⁰⁶ If one again turns to Rousseau, however, we observe that Neuha's capacity for foresight is in no way antagonistic to her identity as 'savage':

Give the civilized man the time to assemble all his devices around him, and he will no doubt easily surpass the savage, but if you would like to see an even more unequal match, pit the two naked and unarmed against each other, and you will soon see the advantage of having all one's strength constantly available, of being ever ready for any eventuality, and of always carrying, so to speak, one's whole self with one.³⁰⁷

In *The Island* we are prepared for 'an even more unequal match' in that Neuha is not only 'the savage', but also a woman facing the pride of the British navy. Yet her preparedness 'for any eventuality', alongside her ability to be complete in herself, enables her to save herself, and her (Western) hero.

In Neuha, Byron not only successfully combines the conventional qualities of

³⁰³ Franklin, *Heroines*, 98.

³⁰⁴ Franklin, *Heroines*, 87.

³⁰⁵ Franklin, *Heroines*, 97.

³⁰⁶ William Alexander, *The History of Women* (London: Strahan and Cadell, 1779) 41-42.

³⁰⁷ Rousseau, 27-28.

woman as homemaker with the popular assumption of female intuition, but also informs Neuha's character with traditional heroic virtues. In his *Historical Collection of the Several Voyages and Discoveries in the South Pacific Ocean* (1769), Alexander Dalrymple gives the following definition of heroism:

True heroism is not the mere contempt of life, or pleasure; there is required to constitute this character, a *sublimity of conception*, supported by *dauntless* and *perseverant* resolution; whence the soul, possessed with *possibility* of effecting, what *it alone* had *energy* to *conceive*, disregards the obstacles which little minds would think *insurmountable*, and, though not insensible to difficulties and dangers, acquires a confidence superior to them.³⁰⁸

Neuha's love of life and pleasure may be at odds with more stoical concepts of heroism, yet her decision to remove herself and Torquil to an underwater sanctuary certainly demonstrates 'a *sublimity of conception*, supported by *dauntless* and *perseverant* resolution'. Her preparation of 'their refuge submarine' (IV.135) is supported by her dauntless determination to save Torquil. She brings into effect what she '*alone* had *energy* to *conceive*', deceiving the 'little minds' of their pursuers who 'looked amazed o'er sea and shore' (IV.68) at the pair who 'melted from them like the spray' (IV.94). Her confidence encourages Torquil to similarly acquire a confidence superior to the difficulties and dangers they face: 'Headlong he leapt' (IV.65). Neuha is domestic goddess and protector and significantly succeeds in the traditionally masculine task of starting a fire:

. . . a flint she took,
A few shrunk withered twigs, and from the blade
Of Torquil's knife struck fire, and thus arrayed
The grot with torchlight. (IV.142-145)

Significantly, Neuha uses Torquil's knife to start the fire, actively stepping into his masculine role by appropriating his tools. The fire she has made casts a civilized glow over the cave that poses a challenge to early nineteenth-century preconceptions of 'the savage'.

³⁰⁸ Alexander Dalrymple, *An Historical Collection of the Several Voyages and Discoveries in the South Pacific Ocean*, vol.1 of 2 (1769. London: J. Nourse, 1770) xvii.

Franklin contends that ‘heroines are encountered as types, representative of their countries—foreign exotic lands which must be explored, and which constitute a testing-ground for the male protagonist.’³⁰⁹ I do not dispute that Byron's treatment of his foreign, exotic heroines is very different from his portrayal of Western women; however, in cataloguing the heroines as ‘types’ there is the danger of overlooking their individuality. Though the Eastern heroines in particular may share certain qualities—beauty, bravery, sensuality, passion and adoration of their hero—they maintain their individual identities. As I argued earlier, the devotion of Zuleika and Kaled, though motivated by a similar love for the hero, manifests itself according to the heroines’ personal attributes: in the case of the former this is a willingness to defy her father, in the latter it is her valour on the battlefield. The contrasting identities of the heroines across poems can equally be observed within the same poem, specifically in *The Corsair*, where Byron more explicitly engages with competing identities of the Eastern heroines through his construction of Medora and Gulnare, both in love with the same hero, but clearly intended to contrast Western domestic female heroism with a forceful Eastern alternative.

Whilst the heroine’s role is always related to the hero’s, he never governs it. Indeed, the hero is often remarkably passive in any decision-making process: ‘uprore / Neuha, and pointing to the approaching foes, / Cried, ‘Torquil, follow me, and fearless follow!’’ (IV.57-59). This is the only piece of dialogue Neuha is given in the poem, yet it is highly significant. Before considering the words she uses, the fact she is given speech at all is remarkable. Literary representations of the Other throughout the

³⁰⁹ Franklin, ‘Juan’s Sea Changes: Class, Race and Gender in Byron’s *Don Juan*’, *Don Juan*, ed. Nigel Wood (Buckingham: Open UP, 1993) 75.

nineteenth century—notably in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*³¹⁰—differentiate between the savage and the civilized through the bestowal of language. In his celebrated essay on racism in Conrad’s novella, Chinua Achebe contrasts the encounter with the Amazon, which is marked by ‘A formidable silence’ (100), with Kurtz’s Intended, who talks ‘as thirsty men drink’ (120):

The difference in the attitude of the novelist to these two women is conveyed in too many direct and subtle ways to need elaboration. But perhaps the most significant difference is the one implied in the author’s bestowal of human expression to the one and the withholding of it from the other. It is clearly not part of Conrad’s purpose to confer language on the “rudimentary souls” of Africa. They only “exchanged short grunting phrases” even among themselves but mostly they were too busy with their frenzy.³¹¹

Conrad’s novella is far from an isolated example of the presentation of native communication as resembling ‘no sounds of human language’ (108). Even Rousseau, who so faithfully believed in the nobility of the savage, denies them the nobility of language and renders them bestial:

It is easy to see that such dealings among them would not require a language any more sophisticated than that of crows or monkeys, which band together in much the same way. The universal human language must long have been made up of inarticulate cries, numerous gestures, and some imitative noises³¹²

In granting Neuha a voice, Byron identifies her with civilization over savagery. Her words, like her actions, are smooth flowing: ‘follow me, and fearless follow.’ She calls on Torquil not just to follow her physical example, but also her emotional one—he is to follow her into the sea and to be brave about it. Certainly, the urging of a man to be brave by a woman in the Romantic era is not commonplace; it does, however, build upon the leadership of earlier heroines of Byron’s poetry, notably Gulnare who directs the action of the latter section of *The Corsair* and leads the escape from the Sultan’s palace. Butler has argued that inverting the conventional patterns of leadership exposes the artificiality of gendered notions of power: ‘The radical dependency of the masculine

³¹⁰ First published in *Blackwood’s Magazine* in 1899; all references taken from Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin, 2000).

³¹¹ Chinua Achebe, ‘An Image of Africa’, *Massachusetts Review* 18 (Winter, 1977): 786.

³¹² Rousseau, 58.

subject on the female ‘Other’ suddenly exposes his autonomy as illusory.³¹³ Neuha reinforces her verbal command in leading by graceful example. Her actions at this point are explicitly couched in heroic diction: ‘So smoothly, bravely, brilliantly she went’ (IV.108). The progressively shortening vowel sounds lend the description a sense of pace and urgency whilst the alliterative emphasis draws attention to ‘brilliantly’. The use of ‘brilliantly’ not only affirms her bravery but images her as bright and glittering which, if one recalls Byron’s later comparison of Neuha with the Night, suggests the reconciliation of extremes in one character, further supporting the unity of domesticity and heroism. Perhaps we can also observe a further allusion to ‘She Walks in Beauty’; the heroine poetically subdues under her light yoke irreconcilable opposites,³¹⁴ Neuha possessing ‘all that’s best of dark and bright’ (3).

In adopting masculine traits of bravery and action, Neuha is rendered no less alluring, as contemporary opinion might have suggested she would be: ‘Men are endowed with boldness and courage, and women are not; the reason is plain, these are beauties in our character, in theirs they would be defects.’³¹⁵ Byron constructs the quality of strength as admirable in a heroine because it is necessary in moments of conflict for survival:

They pulled; her arm, though delicate, was free
And firm as ever grappled with the sea,
And yielded scarce to Torquil’s manlier strength. (IV.45-47)

The final paragraph of Beauvoir’s *Second Sex* emphasizes that the path to liberty for—and equality of—the sexes necessarily relies upon the establishment of a genderless fraternity:

³¹³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxx.

³¹⁴ Shelley, ‘A Defence of Poetry’, 533.

³¹⁵ Alexander, 42.

It is for man to establish the reign of liberty in the midst of the world of the given. To gain the supreme victory, it is necessary, for one thing, that by and through their natural differentiation men and women unequivocally affirm their brotherhood.³¹⁶

This vision of a brotherhood that recognizes natural differences is realized in Neuha and Torquil's partnership. Byron reconciles Neuha's feminine delicacy with a feminine strength that scarce yields (the use of yield being especially pertinent considering Hazlitt's characterization of Byron's heroines cited earlier) to its masculine counterpart. Neuha fights for their existence as hard as her hero does. Strength is not, therefore, the defining condition of Byron's conception of the heroic, but it certainly helps.

³¹⁶ Beauvoir, 767.

III. REINVENTING EPIC, RETHINKING HEROISM

(i) Byron's Revolutionary Discourse

Don Juan's epic heritage is manifest, yet Byron's relationship to epic is one of reformation and resistance: we can observe the adoption of features, yet we are constantly aware of the poet's refusal of classical epic wholeness. The norms of such refutation do not exemplify Kermode's concept of an "anti-genre";¹ nor does the poem adhere to Susan Stewart's ideas concerning 'distressed genres'.² From the start of the thirteenth Canto, Byron proceeds beyond even his own epic blueprint: the poet's alertness to this manifests itself in heightened awareness and in intensified allusions to his epic predecessors. Epic is the genre of heroism; as Gregory Nagy indicates, the genre and the concept share a common socio-historic origin: 'the Panhellenic Epos is the product of the same era that produced an upsurge in local hero cults.'³ Such inextricability dictates that any renegotiation of the form requires a reconsideration of heroism—the reinvention of heroism itself. In its commitment to reinvention, *Don Juan* conforms to the expectations of a genre contingent on continual recreation and transformation. Taking its title from the opening of the third Canto of *Don Juan*, the introduction of Colin Burrow's *Epic Romance*, 'Hail, Muse! *Etcetera*', at once exhibits Byron's formula in *Don Juan* of epic invocation followed swiftly by derision of the very machinery he purports to operate. Burrow explains this process of identification and rejection as characteristic of how writers negotiate their ancestral heritage:

¹ Frank Kermode, 'The Argument of Marvell's 'Garden'', *Essays in Criticism* (1952) 229: 'One might call the 'norms' of the refutation an anti-genre.'

² Susan Stewart, 'Notes on Distressed Genres', *The Journal of American Folklore* 104.411 (Winter, 1991) 6.

³ Gregory Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (1979. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1999) 116.

The rebellions of these great figures against their predecessors are not patriarchal gigantomachies, as a poet-hero struggles for mastery over a Great Name from the past. They are revolutions of discourse, which consist in rejecting the established mechanisms and stylistic mannerisms by which past texts had previously been assimilated.⁴

Rather than engaging in anxious combat, Burrows suggests great writers triumph over their forebears, not simply by turning away from the Great Names of the past, but in their refusal of the processes by which these Great Names brought their own literary productions into being. *Don Juan* can be read as a powerful example of Byron's engagement in such revolutions of discourse, which he had first declared his commitment to in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809). Before contemplating Byron's combative writing practice and his rejection of established mechanisms, I shall consider Byron's invocation of his literary forebears.

English Bards and Scotch Reviewers, Byron's poetic polemic against modern practices of writing, is a declaration of his own commitment to classicism and condemnation of his contemporaries. He lauds Gifford, Pope, and Dryden, whilst deriding the 'vain conceit' (171) of Scott, 'the Ballad-monger Southey' (202), 'the dull disciple' (235) Wordsworth, and the 'turgid ode, and tumid stanza' (256) of Coleridge. Of the Lake School, Byron's 'Preface' declaims: 'each has his separate tabernacle of proselytes, by whom his abilities are overrated, his faults overlooked, and his metrical canons received without scruple and without consideration' (*CPW* I.228). Byron invests poets and poetry with the same powers and abuses he sees in the Christian Church. Each of his contemporaries has disciples, whom he converts to his peculiar brand of alternate poetic practice, and who in turn uphold the Master's metrical canons,⁵ presumably agreed upon by the Convocation of Lake Poets. Byron returns to the metaphor of Christian worship in the first Canto of *Don Juan*:

⁴ Colin Burrow, *Epic Romance: Homer to Milton* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 5.

⁵ 'Canon' is not adopted as a literary critical term until 1929. "canon, n.1". OED Online. September 2011. Oxford University Press. 5 November 2011
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/27148?rskey=BjDbbM&result=3&isAdvanced=false>>.

If ever I should condescend to prose,
 I'll write poetical commandments, which
 Shall supersede beyond all doubt all those
 That went before; in these I shall enrich
 My text with many things that no one knows,
 And carry precept to the highest pitch:
 I'll call the work 'Longinus o'er a Bottle,
 Or, Every Poet his *own* Aristotle.' (I.1625-1632)

Those 'That went before' encompass both Longinus' *On the Sublime* and Aristotle's *Poetics*—previously labeled by Byron as 'The *vade mecum* of the true sublime' (I.1603)—and also those contemporaries who have condescended to prose to codify poetry. Byron doubtless has in mind Wordsworth's various Prefaces to the *Lyrical Ballads* and Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* [SC (1827) 48]; and, of especial importance for this portion of the study, Hayley's *Essay on Epic Poetry* (1782).⁶ Byron's own poetical commandments appear in the following stanza:

Thou shalt believe in Milton, Dryden, Pope;
 Thou shalt not set up Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey;
 Because the first is crazed beyond all hope,
 The second drunk, the third so quaint and mouthey (I.1633-1636)

Byron decrees we place our poetic faith in three writers who arguably made the most notable contributions to epic practice and tradition in the English language, be that by example, as with Milton's *Paradise Lost*, or the 'enriched' translations of Dryden and Pope.⁷ Byron here chooses to depart from two of the most prolific epic contenders of his period. By the appearance of the opening Cantos of *Don Juan*, Wordsworth had published the 1814 *Excursion*, the preface of which outlined his three-part epic project, the *Recluse*, and Southey's epic tally was at seven: the first three, *Wat Tyler*, *Joan of Arc*, and *The Fall of Robespierre* (1794), all concerned with political revolution, the last written jointly with Coleridge.⁸ The epic backdrop for Byron's literary pronouncements lends a sense of calculated competitiveness to the poet's evaluation of

⁶ William Hayley, *An Essay on Epic Poetry* (1782. Gainesville: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1968).

⁷ All three are well represented in the 1816 Sale Catalogue of Byron's library, which contains *Paradise Lost* [9]; Dryden's Works [75]; and Bowles's edition of Pope [257].

⁸ *The Excursion* (1814) is also listed in the 1816 Sale Catalogue [361].

his poetic—and epic—rivals. The centrality of such rivalry to epic endeavour, as with any constituent conventions of the genre, can be traced to the Homeric epic. Jasper Griffin contemplates: ‘It is likely enough that the poet of the *Odyssey* was roused by the existence of the *Iliad* to rival its great size in his own work.’⁹ Whether we adhere to the conviction that Homer was one poet who produced two epics of differing characters at radically different points of his literary career, or prefer, as Griffin does, the suggestion that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were written by different writers of similar greatness, it is clear that the latter emerged from a reformation of the mechanics and stylistics of the former. We can similarly observe this pattern of recognition and rejection established by the Homeric epics in Pope’s negotiation of Dryden, and equally in Byron’s repudiation of Wordsworth, revolutions of discourse being central to the epic process from its very inception.

English Bards and Scotch Reviewers lays down the gauntlet to Byron’s literary predecessors. He characterizes his efforts as a ‘Self-constituted Judge of Poesy’ (62), and his task is reminiscent of classical labours: ‘it would, indeed, require a Hercules to crush the Hydra’ (*CPW* I.229). Such heroic posturing is identified by Lukacs in his *Theory of the Novel* as central to the epic process:

More profound minds, who try to forge an armour of purple steel out of their own streaming blood so that their wounds may be concealed forever and their heroic gesture may become a paradigm of the real heroism that is to come—so that it may call the new heroism into being—compare the fragmentariness of the forms they create with the Greeks’ harmony, and their own sufferings, from which their forms have sprung, with torments which they imagine the Greeks’ purity had to overcome.¹⁰

Yet in *Don Juan* we never get the sense that Byron is trying to staunch the bloody outpourings of his epic agonies. There are no wounds to be concealed. In *Don Juan* Byron practices the ‘art of easy writing’ that he had protested against possessing in his

⁹ Jasper Griffin, *Homer* (Oxford: OUP, 1980) 47.

¹⁰ Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin, 1971) 31.

first attempt at the *ottava rima* in an extended narrative, *Beppo* (1817).¹¹ Ease of composition characterises the second generation's experimentation with the *ottava rima*. In the dedicatory stanzas to 'The Witch of Atlas' Shelley mocks Wordsworth's protracted 'Considering and retouching' of *Peter Bell*, 'Watering his laurels with the killing tears / Of slow, dull care' (26-28); Shelley comedically contrasts the time taken in composition of his 'Witch', who 'matches Peter, / Though he took nineteen years, and she three days / In dressing', a disparity explained by her formal dress: 'Light the vest of flowing metre / She wears' (35-38). Anticipating the boastings of the second generation, a twenty-one year old Southey proclaims that the first version of *Joan of Arc* took a mere six weeks to complete.¹² Such easy writing is of a different stamp to the rapidly produced Romantic epics that Byron satirizes in *English Bards*: 'Another Epic! who inflicts again / More books of blank upon the sons of men?' (385-386); and in the opening stanza of *Don Juan*: 'I want a hero: an uncommon want, / When every year and month sends forth a new one' (I.1-2).¹³

Ease of composition is certainly not characteristic of epic writing of the period. The title of *The Task* is at once an ironic nod to the nature of the origin of the poem's composition as the task set by Lady Austen, and also a statement of purpose as a weighty poetic endeavour reminiscent of the labours of Hercules. Byron's efforts in writing *Don Juan* can be seen as an inversion of the compositional process of Cowper's *The Task*. Byron's epic starts out by declaring a seriousness of purpose: 'I want a hero' (though this is swiftly qualified by his rhyming of 'true one' (I.4) with 'Juan' (I.6), forcing the mispronunciation that alerts readers to the poem's comic intentions), and

¹¹ Byron's first use of the form was in his 'Epistle to Augusta' (1816), though the poet had experimented with it previously in 'La Ravanche' (1812) and 'On Southey's Laureateship' (1813) (see *CPW* III.427).

¹² Southey, *Joan of Arc, Robert Southey: Poetical Works*, ed. Lynda Pratt, vol. 1 of 5 (Pickering and Chatto, 2004) 4.

¹³ See Herbert Tucker, 'In Style: Epic Plush 1815-1820', *Epic: Britain's Heroic Muse 1790-1910* (Oxford: OUP, 2008) 190-233.

seriousness of form: ‘My poem’s epic, and is meant to be’ (I.1593; though whenever Byron postulates an unqualified absolute, we know he is at his least serious). Cowper’s epic, by contrast, begins with the somewhat un-epical subject of a sofa, before the poet, as he explains in his ‘Advertisement’, ‘having much leisure, connected another subject with it; and pursuing the train of thought to which his situation and turn of mind led him, brought forth at length, instead of the trifle which he at first intended, a serious affair—a Volume.’¹⁴ The characterisation of epic composition as a task is evident in Wordsworth’s the Preface to the *Excursion*:

The preparatory Poem is biographical, and conducts the history of the Author’s mind to the point when he was emboldened to hope that his faculties were sufficiently matured for entering upon the arduous labour which he had proposed to himself; and the two Works have the same kind of relation to each other, if he may so express himself, as the Anti-chapel has to the body of a gothic Church. Continuing this allusion, he may be permitted to add, that his minor Pieces, which have been long before the Public, when they shall be properly arranged, will be found by the attentive Reader to have such connection with the main Work as may give them claim to be likened to the little Cells, Oratories, and sepulchral Recesses, ordinarily included in those Edifices.¹⁵

Wordsworth is steeling himself for the ‘arduous labour’ of epic construction. His *Recluse* will be architecturally engineered as a church, the reader entering the main body, the *Excursion*, via the ante-chapel of the *Prelude* (not to appear before the public until 1850, shortly after Wordsworth’s death). That Wordsworth is composing to an epic blueprint, indicates not only his reverent alertness to the scale of such a project, but is also symptomatic of a systematic method of epic composition. Byron, by contrast, is dismissive of such meticulous design, exasperating to Murray: ‘You ask me for the plan of Donny Johnny—I *have* no plan—I *had* no plan—but I had or have materials’ (*BLJ* VI.207). Byron’s flippancy is thrown into relief by Wordsworth’s weighty schema. The younger poet appears to anticipate such an association when he invites direct comparison between Wordsworth’s outline of the *Recluse* and his own epic endeavours in the thirteenth Canto of *Don Juan*:

¹⁴ William Cowper, *The Task, and Selected Other Poems* (London: Longman, 1994) 55.

¹⁵ William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, ed. Sally Bushell, James A. Butler, and Michael C. Jaye (New York: Cornell UP, 2007) 38.

The mansion's self was vast and venerable,
 With more of the monastic than has been
 Elsewhere preserved: the cloisters still were stable,
 The cells, too, and refectory, I ween:
 An exquisite small chapel had been able,
 Still unimpair'd, to decorate the scene;
 The rest had been reform'd, replaced, or sunk,
 And spoke more of the baron than the monk.

Huge halls, long galleries, spacious chambers, join'd
 By no quite lawful marriage of the Arts,
 Might shock a Connoisseur; but when combined,
 Form'd a whole which, irregular in parts,
 Yet left a grand impression on the mind,
 At least of those whose eyes are in their hearts.
 We gaze upon a Giant for his stature,
 Nor judge at first if all be true to Nature. (XIII.521-536)

Though Byron here describes the Amundeville's ancestral home, there is an implied meta-textual consciousness in his invocation of the monastic quality of the gothic structure. Similarly to Wordsworth's 'little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses', Byron's venerable mansion is formed of cloisters, cells, refectory, and 'An exquisite small chapel'. The overall impression is vastness: 'Huge halls, long galleries, spacious chambers'; and though there is an absence of any artistic or aesthetic coherence to the arrangement, it forms 'a whole which, irregular in parts' leaves 'a grand impression on the mind'. Byron's irreverence for the epic structure Wordsworth deems sacrosanct is evident in his description of the mansion's architectural 'improvements': 'The rest had been reformed, replaced, or sunk, / And spoke more of the baron than the monk.' Again we are returned to Byron's attentiveness to his methods of epic reformative and renovation, his own composition being informed by an aristocratic levity that stands in stark contrast to Wordsworth's ascetic gravity.

By choosing to delay exploration of the architectural qualities of his poem until the thirteenth Canto, Byron casts himself as the accidental engineer in a manner reminiscent of *Tristram Shandy*, Tristram postponing the emergence of his own blueprint until the latter stages of the fourth volume: 'With all my hurry and precipitation, I have but been clearing the ground to raise the building—& such a

building do I foresee it will turn out, as never was planned and as never was executed since *Adam*' (IV.xxxii.400).¹⁶ Sterne's playful use of the unfinished simile 'as never was' to exalt the incomparable nature of his work, can equally be read as a literal declaration of the absence of planning and absence of execution, Shandy only declaring at the beginning of the sixth volume of the novel, 'I am now beginning to get fairly into my work' (VI.xl.570). Byron similarly withholds his own narrative schema until the twelfth Canto:

But now I will begin my poem.—'Tis
 Perhaps a little strange, if not quite new,
 That from the first of Cantos up to this
 I've not begun what we have to go through.
 These first twelve books are merely flourishes,
 Preludios, trying just a string or two
 Upon my lyre, or making the pegs sure;
 And when so, you shall have the overture.

My muses do not care a pinch of rosin
 About what's called success, or not succeeding:
 Such thoughts are quite below the strain they have chosen;
 'Tis a 'great moral lesson' they are reading.
 I thought, at setting off, about two dozen
 Cantos would do; but at Apollo's pleading,
 If that my Pegasus should not be foundered,
 I think to canter gently through a hundred.

(XII.425-440)

Byron's recognition that his 'Preludios' are 'not quite new' quite possibly refers to the delayed action of *Tristram Shandy*; though Byron would not have been aware of the title of the *Prelude*, he may also reference Wordsworth's description of the poem in his preface to the *Excursion*, the first twelve Cantos of *Don Juan* being preparatory 'flourishes'. At this point we can again observe a departure from an alternative model of Romantic epic. Wordsworth's self-effacing introduction to his epic ('he was emboldened to hope'; 'if he may so express himself'; 'he may be permitted to add') is expressed in a suitably sober tone of one about to embark upon an 'arduous labour'.

¹⁶ All citations taken from Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. Melvyn New and Joan New, 3 vols. (Gainesville: Florida UP, 1978-1984).

Byron, however, had no intention of pursuing such an undertaking, as he makes clear in a letter to Murray:

So you and Mr. Foscolo &c. want me to undertake what you call a “great work” an Epic poem I suppose or some such pyramid.—I’ll try no such thing—I hate tasks—and then “seven or eight years!” God send us all well this day three months—let alone years—if one’s years can’t be better employed than in sweating poesy—a man had better be a ditcher (*BLJ* VI.105).

Again, we are alerted to the art of easy writing as being a central quality of *Don Juan*’s epic process. Byron here protests against the strained construction of some great architectural landmark, refusing the task of epic composition. As the above stanzas illustrate, *Don Juan* gives us little sense of the strenuous endeavour of composition. For Byron, poetic composition is a recreational activity; there is no sense of the vocation that lies behind Wordsworth’s exertions. As Pope’s ‘Preface’ to his *Iliad* (which Byron allegedly preferred to the original¹⁷) stresses, an effortless superiority was characteristic of the greatest of epic composers:

Methinks I see these different Followers of *Homer*, some sweating and straining after him by violent Leaps and Bounds, (the certain Signs of false Mettle) others slowly and servilely creeping in his Train, while the Poet himself is all the time proceeding with an unaffected and equal Majesty before them (‘Preface’ I.18).¹⁸

Byron echoes Pope’s disdain for those that sweat and strain over their poetic labours. Under-horsed, their own winged steeds cannot hope to attain the heights set by Homer’s Majestic example; despite strenuous efforts, they can only hope for a clumsy pursuit. The dual implications of ‘Mettle’ extends Pope’s equestrian conceit, its usage being

¹⁷ ‘Macaulay on Byron’, *Lord Byron: the Critical Heritage*, ed. Andrew Rutherford (London: Routledge, 1995) 307: ‘In his Letter to Mr Bowles he uses expressions which clearly indicate that he preferred Pope’s *Iliad* to the original.’ Macaulay refers to the following passage of Byron’s letter, which favours Pope’s translation above Cowper’s blank verse efforts: ‘who will ever lay down Pope—unless for the Original?—Pope’s was “not Homer it was Spondanus”—but Cowper is not Homer either, it is not even Cowper.—As a Child I first read Pope’s Homer with a rapture which no subsequent work could ever afford—& Children are not the worst Judges of their own language.—As a boy I read Homer in the original—as we have all done—some of us by force—and a few by favour—under which description I came is nothing to the purpose—it is enough that I read him’ (*CMP* 147). Byron was also supposed to have remarked to Lady Blessington that ‘Translations almost always disappoint me; I must, however, except Pope’s “Homer,” which has more of the spirit of Homer than all the other translations put together’ (Marguerite Countess of Blessington, *Conversations of Lord Byron* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1969), 141).

¹⁸ All citations of Pope’s *Iliad* taken from *The Iliad of Homer*, 2 vols., ed. Maynard Mack (London: Methuen, 1967).

equally legitimate in reference to the feigned vigour of the poets' metaphorical mounts, or their own strength of character. Homer's example tests the followers mettle, putting them through their paces and showcasing their skill. Pope had already exercised the mettlesome poetic Pegasus in his *Essay on Criticism* (1711):

'Tis more to guide, than spur the muse's steed,
 Restrain his fury, than provoke his speed,
 The winged courser, like a generous horse,
 Shows most true mettle when you check his course. (l.84-87)

Good horsemanship does not require the artificial aid of whip or spur; the generous 'winged courser', unlike the fallacious followers of Homer, is possessed of true mettle. No sense of being overstretched is evident in his paces, indeed, his athletic scope is most evident in attempts to rein him in.

Byron extends the analogy of poetic aptitude and superior horsemanship over the course of *Don Juan*. That Byron has hit his stride by the twelfth Canto is picked up on his thinking to 'canter gently through a hundred'; 'canter' is a common rendition of a Canterbury Gallop, defined by Johnson's dictionary (1773) [SC (1816) 208] as 'The hand gallop of an ambling horse...probably derived from the monks riding to Canterbury on easy ambling horses.'¹⁹ Byron here seeks to outpace his epic competitors, and win in a canter: 'to distance all the other horses in a race so much that galloping is unnecessary at the end; and to come off victor with the greatest ease.'²⁰ Indeed, the metrical impulsion of Byron's chosen vehicle of *ottava rima* canters the reader through each unforced Canto of *Don Juan* with ease that evidences great skill. As Virginia Woolf remarked, 'He writes 16 Cantos without once flogging his flanks.'²¹ Byron was alert to the difficulties of his chosen metrical vehicle; *Don Juan* being

¹⁹ Samuel Johnson, 'Canterbury Gallop', *A Dictionary of the English Language*, vol. 1 of 2 (London: Longman, 1990).

²⁰ "canter, n.3". OED Online. September 2011. Oxford University Press. 5 November 2011 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/27236?rskey=all7Cd&result=3&isAdvanced=false>>.

²¹ Virginia Woolf, 'Friday, August 9th', *A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth, 1965) 4.

demonstrative of Pope's assertion in *Essay on Criticism* that 'True ease in writing comes from art, not chance, / As those move easiest who have learned to dance' (II.362-363). Writing to Murray about Moore's *Lalla Rookh* a few years before the publication of the opening Cantos of *Don Juan*, Byron is 'convinced the more I think of it—that he and *all* of us—Scott—Southey—Wordsworth—Moore—Campbell—I—are all in the wrong—one as much as another—that we are upon a wrong revolutionary poetical system' (*BLJ* V.265). *Don Juan* can therefore be read as articulating Byron's efforts to turn himself loose of this 'wrong revolutionary poetical system' by setting a new poetic pace.

(ii) Evolving and Revolving Epic

Thus far, this chapter has used ‘revolution’ in the currently accepted sense of the overthrow of an established order. ‘Evolution’ is a term similarly concerned with change or movement, equally informed by a sense of development, and, in the eighteenth century, a sense of freedom. The *OED* gives the pre-Darwinist understanding of ‘evolution’ as the ‘emergence or release from an envelope or enclosing structure’; this coming from the French *evolution*: ‘tactical maneuver to effect a change of formation’.²² The semantic confusion surrounding the word in the eighteenth century is explored in *Tristram Shandy* [SC (1827) 171]:

“Kingdoms and provinces, and towns and cities, have they not their periods? and when those principles and powers, which a first cemented and put them together, have performed their several evolutions, they fall back.”—Brother *Shandy*, said my uncle *Toby*, laying down his pipe at the word *evolutions*—Revolutions, I meant quoth my father,—by heaven! I meant revolutions, brother *Toby*—evolutions is nonsense. (V.iii.421-422)

Yet, as uncle Toby rightly contends, ‘Tis not nonsense’ (V.iii.422). Central to both ‘revolution’ and ‘evolution’ is the idea of development. Implicit in both is the idea of progression from a simpler to a more advanced and complex state. Evolution is, however, a process of gradual change—of natural development,—rather than the instigated change of revolution. The movement from a more simple to a more complex system, occasioned by evolutions and revolutions is central to developments of the epic.

Pre-Darwinist understanding of the processes of evolution held intellectual, as well as biological significance; the *OED* exemplifies using an extract from Coleridge’s 1820 letter to C. A. Tulk in reference to his knowledge of cosmology: ‘I had arrived at this conclusion by necessary evolution from the First Principle of my Philosophy’.²³

The next portion of the study shall similarly consider ‘revolution’ as a cerebral process

²² "evolution, n.". OED Online. September 2011. Oxford University Press. 29 October 2011 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/65447?redirectedFrom=evolution>>.

²³ *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E.L. Griggs, vol. 5 of 6 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971; rpt. 2000) 18.

rather than as an historical event. Revolution in this instance is understood as consideration or reflection—as internal dialogue or discourse. As Boswell’s citation of Orme in his *Life of Johnson* [SC (1816) 39] illustrates: ‘There are in that book [*Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland*] thoughts, which, by long revolution in the great mind of Johnson, have been formed and polished like pebbles rolled in the ocean.’²⁴ Orme’s connection between oscillations of thought and tidal patterns draws us closer to an understanding of the formal evolution of epic. It is through these revolutions of the mind—the constant circumlocutions of the creative psyche—that poetic form emerges. The oceanic nature of Orme’s allusion is itself characteristic of epic heritage, from Milton’s ‘rising world of waters dark and deep, / Won from the void and formless infinite’ (*Paradise Lost* iii.11-12),²⁵ to Wordsworth’s ‘strange seas of Thought’ (*Prelude* III.63).²⁶ For Byron, the oceanic characterizes a broadness of perspective integral to embarking on the *right* revolutionary poetical system:

. . . through still continued fusion
 Of one another’s minds at last have grown
 To deem as a most logical conclusion
 That Poesy has wreaths for you alone;
 There is a narrowness in such a notion
 Which makes me wish you’d change your lakes for ocean. (*DJ* ‘Dedication’ 35-40)

Byron’s critique of the Lake poets’ ‘narrowness’ in part alludes to the first generation’s close affinity to a particular geographical area, in contrast to the international range of his own poetry.²⁷ The characterization of the Lake poets’ constricted poetic efforts is reinforced by the ‘fusion / Of one another’s minds’; the cerebral connectedness is not, however, a grand synthesis, but rather, in the resulting limited range of motion, reminiscent of the ossification of an arthritic joint. The growth of the Lake poets’ minds

²⁴ James Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (London: OUP, 1970) 581.

²⁵ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (2nd ed. London: Longman, 1998).

²⁶ Cited from William Wordsworth, *The Fourteen-Book Prelude* (the line is absent from both the ‘AB-Stage Reading Text’ and the ‘C-Stage Reading Text’ of the *Thirteen-Book Prelude*), ed. W. J. B. Owen (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) 62.

²⁷ For further discussion see Fiona Stafford, *Local Attachments: The Province of Poetry* (Oxford: OUP, 2010).

has an unexpected echo in the notion of formal evolution proposed by Bakhtin at the start of his essay ‘Epic and Novel’:

We encounter the epic as a genre that has not only long since completed its development, but one that is already antiquated. With certain reservations we can say the same for the other major genres, even for tragedy. The life they have in history, the life with which we are familiar, is the life they have lived as already completed genres, with a hardened and no longer flexible skeleton²⁸

For Bakhtin, the epic is a calcified generic structure, inflexible and incapable of growth.

This he places in direct contrast to the novel, which he describes as ‘plasticity itself’

(39). Though *Don Juan* maintains an epic backbone—it is vertebral—we might see the epic skeleton of *Don Juan* as Ishmael sees the whale’s skeleton in *Moby Dick*:

In considering these ribs, I could not but be struck anew with the circumstance, so variously repeated in this book, that the skeleton of the whale is by no means the mould of his invested form.²⁹

For Byron, the epic skeleton does not become the mould of the form with which he invests his poem. Rather, the form of the poem embodies a more Hegelian concept of epic: ‘For epic in general is inwardly most akin to the plasticity of sculpture, and its objectivity, in virtue of both its substantial content and the fact that what it portrays has the form of objective appearance.’³⁰ Hegel’s (and Byron’s) understanding is of a more flexible form than Bakhtin’s concept of the calcified structure of epic. The substantial content of *Don Juan* is, in essence, plastic, as inherently malleable as bronze. Hegel’s *Lectures on the Aesthetics of Fine Art* provides further illumination on the nature of Byron’s peculiar epic project:

The sculptured shape is therefore emancipated from the architectural purpose of serving as a mere external nature and environment for the spirit and exists simply for its own sake. But despite this freedom, a sculpture does nevertheless remain essentially connected with its surroundings.³¹

As with sculpture, the plasticity of *Don Juan* achieves an artistic freedom from any sort of structural blueprint; and, as with sculpture, the poem achieves such freedom whilst remaining in contact with its surroundings.

²⁸ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: Texas UP, 1981) 3.

²⁹ Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (Oxford: OUP, 1988) 464.

³⁰ Georg Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 2 of 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975) 1094.

³¹ Hegel, II.702.

Though Byron's rendition of the epic is hardly characterized by rigidity, Bakhtin suggests such elasticity is symptomatic of the novelization of Byron's poetry, a position he shares with Lukacs: '*Don Juan* and *Onegin*, although written in verse, belong to the company of the great humorous novels'.³² *Don Juan* therefore becomes the inverse of *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne's 'comic epic poem in prose', being for Bakhtin and Lukacs a comic novel in verse. For Bakhtin, the salient features of novelization are fourfold: (i) the form becomes 'more free and flexible'; (ii) the language employed by the writer 'renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the "novelistic" layers of literary language'; (iii) the writing becomes 'dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humour, elements of self-parody'; (iv) most importantly, 'the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openedness, a living contact with unfinished, still evolving contemporary reality (the opened present)'.³³

All four of these novelistic processes can be observed in *Don Juan*. The flexibility of form is present in the overarching structure of the poem, Byron being able to expand the number of Cantos *ad infinitum*. With typical Byronic perversity, the parameters of the poem are liberated through a more localized commitment to the formal constrictions of the *ottava rima* of the Italian tradition, inspired by the poet's reading of Frere's *Whistlecraft*, and, more obliquely perhaps, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*.³⁴ Byron is conscious that his choice of formal vehicle indicates a departure from the blank verse that dominated contemporary epics: 'Prose poets like blank-verse, I'm fond of rhyme, / Good workmen never quarrel with their tools'

³² Bakhtin, 5 and Lukacs, 59.

³³ Bakhtin, 7.

³⁴ Byron mentions the 'octave stanza' of both Ariosto [SC (1816) 28 & 29] and Frere in a letter to Murray, the latter providing the model for *Beppo*, mentioned in the same letter: 'I have since written a poem (of 84 octave Stanzas) humorous, in or after the excellent manner of Mr. Whistlecraft (whom I take to be Frere), on a Venetian anecdote—which amused me' (*BLJ* V.266).

(I.1605-1606). In characterizing himself as a poetic workman, Byron reiterates the connection between craftsmanship and epic composition whilst highlighting the centrality of his formal method to his negotiation of epic. The connection between poetics and skilled workmanship, or craft, is suggested by the title of Frere's epic, which hints at the composition of *ottava rima* as song-craft. In *Don Juan*, the necessary compositional tool of rhyme becomes a defining feature of Byron's negotiation of epic. It is through rhyme that the language of *Don Juan* is constantly renewed. Byron is quite evidently writing *Don Juan* in a polyglot universe; the poem features a polyphony of European languages and, significantly, languages of classical and Renaissance epic: Greek, Latin, and Italian.³⁵ When he rhymes these with English he forces us to reconsider our use of both languages, for example:

I feel this tediousness will never do—
 'Tis being *too* epic, and I must cut down
 (In copying) this long Canto into two;
 They'll never find it out, unless I own
 The fact, excepting some experienced few;
 And then as an improvement 'twill be shown:
 I'll prove that such the option of the critic is
 From Aristotle *passim*.—See *Ποητικῆς*.³⁶ (III.977-984)

In underscoring the metric and phonic qualities of the final foot and a half of each of the lines of the closing couplet, Byron literalizes the critic's consuming obsession in Aristotle's generic strictures—the critic is acoustically absorbed by the *Poetics*. Byron manipulates the *ottava rima* verse form to his comic advantage, and the humour manifest in the above stanza pervades the poem.

Though Bakhtin sees laughter as destructive of epic, there is an extensive tradition of epic being permeated with laughter, irony, humour, and elements of self-

³⁵ For further discussion of Byron's language in *Don Juan* see Richard Cronin, 'Words and the Word: The Diction of *Don Juan*', *Romanticism and Religion from William Cowper to Wallace Stevens*, ed. Gavin Hopps and Jane Stabler (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) 137-153.

³⁶ *Poiētikēs*.

parody. Until doubts were vindicated in the nineteenth century, Homer was regarded as the progenitor of comedy, in addition to epic.³⁷ Aristotle explains:

As well as being the most creative poet of high actions..., Homer also first adumbrated the form of comedy by dramatizing the ridiculous instead of producing invectives; his *Margites* bears the same relation to comedy as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* do to tragedy.³⁸

Aristotle clearly acknowledges the ability to excel in both the serious style and comedy as indicative of Homer's superior skill, yet there is no sense of the incompatibility of the comic and the epic. The belief that Homer fathered both genres extends well into the eighteenth century, writers looking to him as the progenitor of their own efforts.³⁹ In the *Dunciad*'s prefatory 'Martinus Scriblerus of the Poem', Pope goes so far as to suggest that not only are comic and epic compatible, but that the latter was born of the former:

MARGITES was the name of this personage, whom Antiquity recordeth to have been *Dunce the First*; and surely from what we hear of him, not unworthy to be the root of so spreading a tree, and so numerous a posterity. The poem therefore celebrating him, was properly and absolutely a *Dunciad*; which tho' now unhappily lost, yet is its nature sufficiently known by the infallible tokens aforesaid. And thus it doth appear, that the first *Dunciad* was the first Epic poem, written by *Homer* himself, and anterior even to the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*.⁴⁰

Margites is not only 'Dunce the first' but also hero (or at least protagonist) the first. By casting Homer's *Margites* as 'the first epic poem', Pope assumes integral compatibility between the two genres. Pope's playful suggestion that epic proper was born of the comic was not, however, shared by his contemporaries. Though Shaftesbury accepted

³⁷ *Margites* is currently considered among the many works erroneously attributed to Homer in antiquity; however, 'Although the attribution of *Margites* to Homer can be given no weight, there is no reason to treat the poem as a late forgery; it could well belong to the seventh or sixth century and was widely quoted from the fourth century onwards'; in addition, the fragment is identified as 'a piece of epic parody', rather than a piece of comic epic (J. P. Barron, P. E. Easterling, and G. S. Kirk, 'The Epic Tradition after Homer and Hesoid', *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, vol.1 of 4 (Cambridge: CUP, 1985) 110). *Margites* is also cited as an example of parody in the *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (Oxford: OUP, 2003), and again described as a poem attributed to Homer in antiquity only (1114).

³⁸ Aristotle *Poetics* 1449^a, *Classical Literary Criticism*, ed. D.A. Russell and Michael Winterbottom (Oxford: OUP, 1998) 55.

³⁹ Ulrich Broich, *The Eighteenth-century Mock-heroic Poem* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990) 63-64.

⁴⁰ Pope, *The Dunciad, The Poems of Alexander Pope, The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, vol. 5 of 11 (London: Methuen, 1963) 48; Pope also refers to the *Margites* in his 'Essay on Homer': 'The *Margites*, which is lost, is said by *Aristotle* to have been a Poem of a comick Nature, wherein *Homer* made use of *Iambick* Verses as proper for Raillery. It was a Jest upon the Fair Sex, and had its Name from one *Margites*, a weak Man who was the Subject of it. The Story is something loose, as may be seen by the Account of it still preserv'd in *Eustathius*'s Comment on the *Odysseys*' (*Iliad* I.53).

that ‘*the grand poetick SIRE* was, by the consent of all Antiquity, allow’d to have furnish’d Subject both to the *Tragick*, the *Comick*, and every other kind of genuine Poetry’⁴¹ he emphasises in a note that:

According to this HOMERICAL Lineage of Poetry, *Comedy* wou’d naturally prove the *Drama* of latest Birth. For tho ARISTOTLE, in the same place, cites HOMER’s *Margites* as analogous to Comedy, yet the *Iliad* and *Odyssee*, in which the Heroick Stile prevails, having been ever highest in Esteem, were likeliest to be first wrought and cultivated.⁴²

Shaftesbury’s reasonable assertion is that comedy is most likely to have been born of the more highly esteemed heroic style than the other way around. Such an assertion draws upon the notion that Homer’s epics proved fertile ground for their comic offspring. In so doing, Shaftesbury extends the view put forward by Longinus, that in the *Odyssey* ‘The realistic description of Odysseus’ household forms a kind of comedy of manners.’⁴³

The Romantics inherited the eighteenth-century open-mindedness concerning the fusion of genres which later critics have deemed not merely incompatible, but, as with Bakhtin, mutually destructive. For Schlegel, the coalescence of the two genres in one work engendered a novel form as pleasing as it is surprising. He writes: ‘The strange combination of the tragic and the comic turns into the peculiar beauty of a new, charming hybrid formation [*Bildung*]. This combination is not in any way intrinsically monstrous nor is it in itself illicit.’⁴⁴ If Schlegel’s observations can be taken to be representative of the Romantic belief in the plausible coexistence of seemingly contradictory genres within one work, then it renders the assumed relation between mock-epic and epic proper inherited from their critical antecedents all the less surprising. Yet whilst Hayley’s *Essay on Epic Poetry* suggests generic kinship by

⁴¹ Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, vol. 1 of 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999) 134.

⁴² Shaftesbury, 134n.

⁴³ Longinus, *On Sublimity* (§15), *Classical Literary Criticism*, ed. Russell 153. Comic moments can also be observed in the *Iliad* I.573ff; II.246-277; VI.466-471. For further discussion of Homer’s epic comedy see Donald Lateiner, *Sardonic Smile: Nonverbal Behaviour in Homeric Epic* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1995).

⁴⁴ Friedrich Schlegel, *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, trans. Stuart Barnett (New York: SUNY, 2001) 80.

grouping mock-heroic with epic proper,⁴⁵ there are clear distinctions between the two. In Mock-epics, such as *The Battle of Frogs and Mice*, misattributed to Homer since antiquity, or long poems that adopted the high style of epic diction, such as Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, non-epic subjects form the basis of the comedy. Laughter stems from the disparity between the subject and the formal vehicle. *Don Juan* proves problematic because Byron takes for his subject a more traditionally epic figure as its central subject: an aristocratic hero who embarks upon a journey of (self-)discovery. Though *Don Juan* resists generic classification as an epic, it is less convincing still to categorise it as mock-epic—a genre whose rules lack the flexibility even of the strictures of conventional epic. The one concomitant feature of *Don Juan* with mock-epic is laughter; and though laughter in *Don Juan* is not entirely destructive of epic, it is suggestive of leanings towards the novelistic. Byron clearly draws on Fielding, Sterne, and even Austen in the poem; indeed, possible parallels can be drawn between the final Cantos of *Don Juan* and *Northanger Abbey*, both works using generic disparity as a source of comedy.

Don Juan can be seen to fulfill Bakhtin's most important criterion of novelization in a 'semantic openedness' that permeates its very form. As I have already explored, a factor in the large-scale flexibility of the poem's form is the lack of a structural blueprint. In reading *Don Juan* the audience is aware of being in living contact with the unfinished. The world of *Don Juan* is a still evolving contemporary reality, which Bakhtin sees as incompatible with the epic's preoccupation with the 'absolute past'.⁴⁶ For Bakhtin, in choosing to write on the same time-and-value-plane as oneself, the writer undertakes a radical revolution, steps out of the world of the epic and

⁴⁵ This is especially the case in his consideration of Italian Epic: 'Such various Sons, of Epic fire possest, / Italia foster'd on her feeling breast.' (III.201-202).

⁴⁶ Bakhtin, 13: 'a national epic past—in Goethe's and Schiller's terminology the "absolute past"—serves as the subject for the epic'.

into the world of the novel. Yet Byron's commitment to the verse form of *Don Juan* makes this a step too far. Evident throughout the poem is the mutual dependency of form and language. It is this symbiotic relationship between verse vehicle and word choice that *Don Juan* is most resistant to Bakhtin's concept of the novel. In the novel, experimentation with form is in response to language; in other words, by refusing to commit to local formal features (rhyme, line length, consistent metrical patterns) the novel ensures maximum linguistic flexibility. By contrast, *Don Juan* participates in the form-making of older genres—notably epic and tragedy—by assimilating language to form. Byron finds occasion to remind the reader that there is an expected rhyme scheme, the laws of which his choice of language must follow:

Never could she survive that common loss;
 But just suppose that moment should betide,
 I only say suppose it—*inter nos*—
 (This should be *entre nous*, for Julia thought
 In French, but then the rhyme would go for nought.) (l.668-672)

Though not in hexameters, *Don Juan* is written in the recognizably epic meter of Ariosto and Tasso, which further demonstrates Byron's self-consciousness as a European, rather than an English, epic writer.

It is through his negotiation of localised formal features that Byron again alerts the reader to his peculiar epic artistry. Whilst the above lines play on the notion of formal constraint, the language outwits the form; though the Latin 'inter nos' has allegedly been forced by the choice of 'loss' two lines earlier, Byron's closing couplet is a comic rebuff to any sense of language's subservience to form. The poet's negotiation of foreign rhymes serves to remind the reader that he is manipulating of the English language within a foreign form. *Ottava rima* is best suited to the linguistic tendencies of Italian. The high frequency of rhyming words, and more specifically, feminine rhyming words, make selecting sounds to suit the sense far easier—there is simply a far greater pool from which to select similar sounding words. Byron's earlier

success with the notoriously difficult form in *Beppo* had not gone unnoticed by contemporary reviewers. Jeffrey speaks with admiration of ‘the matchless facility with which he has cast into regular, and even difficult versification, the unmingled, unconstrained, and unselected language of the most light, familiar, and ordinary conversation.’⁴⁷ Jeffrey’s attention to the conversational aspect of Byron’s chosen verse vehicle returns us to Aristotle’s judgement on ‘the iambic being the most speakable of all metres’⁴⁸, additionally offering similarities with *Tristram Shandy*, whose eponymous narrator declares: ‘Writing, when properly managed, (as you may be sure I think mine is) is but a different name for conversation’ (II.xi.125).

Jane Stabler suggests that the conversational mode in Byron’s poetry is comparable with the manner in which Sterne’s attentiveness to his reader shapes his discourse.⁴⁹ The receptiveness of Sterne’s formal method to the shaping forces of conversational impulse requires a flexible narrative structure, more readily found in prose than verse. As Stabler observes, ‘getting speech into poetry usually involves a loosening of formal constraints’.⁵⁰ Though not as boundless as prose, the formal constraints of *ottava rima* appear enabling, rather than restrictive of Byron’s conversational method. Indeed, the poet’s negotiation of the form proves an endless talking point:

I don’t know that there may be much ability
 Shown in this sort of desultory rhyme;
 But there’s a conversational facility,
 Which may round off an hour upon a time.
 Of this I’m sure at least, there’s no servility
 In mine irregularity of chime,
 Which rings what’s uppermost of new or hoary,
 Just as I feel the ‘Improvisatore.’ (XV.153-160)

⁴⁷ Francis Jeffrey on *Beppo* for the *Edinburgh Review* 29 (Feb, 1818) 302 [889].

⁴⁸ Aristotle, *Poetics* (1449^a), 56.

⁴⁹ Jane Stabler, ‘Byron, Conversation and Discord’, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 139 (2006) 116.

⁵⁰ Stabler, ‘Conversation and Discord’, 113.

Byron's contemplation of *ottava rima*'s exhibition of the 'conversational facility' of his verse is informed by a characteristic false modesty, hyper-conscious of the poetic ability demonstrated in his mastering of the *ottava rima*. His coy denial prefigures his determined demonstration of such ability. The choice of an Italian noun to complete the feminine rhyme of the final couplet serves as a reminder that the poet is composing in an idiom foreign to the form.⁵¹ Yet, as the stanza insists, 'there's no servility' of the English language within the rhymes themselves; as if to showcase the strength of the poet's native tongue, the heavier Anglo-Saxon 'hoary' dominates the pronunciation of the delicate Latinate ending to the Italian 'Improvvisatore.'

Emphasising the significance of Byron's chosen form of *ottava rima* over blank verse, Stabler notes the conversational aspect of rhyme itself: 'The volatile play between connection and impediment in finding a rhyme, the sound that will answer back, articulates the role of conversation'.⁵² In this instance the conversation becomes bi-lingual, and as I have previously noted, Byron's discourse in *Don Juan* is consistently informed by continentality. Byron's vocabular exhibitionism is central to his affected art of easy writing; in his selection of particular rhyme words, Byron demonstrates a poetic freedom that prose poets had turned to blank verse to achieve. The pretence of the poet's absolute linguistic liberty is, however, a façade; Byron's poetry reveals a very deliberate choice of words—a selection that is not arbitrary, but subtle and complex.⁵³ Such selective sampling of language returns us to the poet's use of 'desultory', from the Latin '*desultorius*' meaning 'of or belonging to a vaulter, superficial, desultory', from which we have the noun 'desultor', 'A circus horse-leaper',

⁵¹ The 'foreignness' of Byron's style has been noted throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, from Wordsworth to Eliot; for a succinct survey of critical comments regarding Byron's foreignness of style see Stabler, 'Conversation and Discord', 124.

⁵² Stabler, 'Conversation and Discord', 117.

⁵³ My idea here stems from Nagy's analysis of Homeric epithet: 'The words should not be viewed merely as random vocabulary that passively reflects the themes sought by the poet. The semantic range of a key word in context can be expected to be as subtle and complex as the poetry in which it is encased' (4).

whose mounts are known as ‘desultories’.⁵⁴ Implicit in Byron’s mock-critique of ‘this sort of desultory rhyme’ is Byron’s athletic skill as desultor as he vaults with ease from one rhyme to the next. Byron returns to the parallel between poetics and horsemanship throughout the poem, more specifically, to his own superior equestrian skills:

Sir Walter reigned before me; Moore, and Campbell,
 Before and after; but now grown more holy,
 The Muses upon Sion’s hill must ramble,
 With poets almost clergymen, or wholly;
 And Pegasus hath a psalmodic amble
 Beneath the reverend Cambyses Croly,
 Who shoes the glorious animal with stilts,
 A modern Ancient Pistol—‘by these Hilts!’

(XI.449-456)⁵⁵

Byron’s well-shod winged steed of the fifth Canto has been a victim of perverse farriery; rather than his proud hooves imprinting the earth, Pegasus has become a parson’s pony that resembles Yorick’s broken-winded mounts, upon whom ‘he could unite and reconcile every thing,—he could compose his sermon,—he could compose his cough,—and, in case nature gave a call that way, he could likewise compose himself to sleep.’ (I.x.21).

In likening himself to the ‘Improvisatore’, or wandering poet (so named after the skill of impromptu verse composition) Byron again returns us to the art of easy writing. Central to conveying the effect of spontaneous composition is the *ottava rima*. As Virginia Woolf wrote whilst reading *Don Juan* for the first time, ‘The method is a discovery by itself. It’s what one has looked for in vain—an elastic shape which will hold whatever you choose to put into it. Thus he could write out his mood as it came to him; he could say whatever came into his head.’⁵⁶ To return to Jeffrey’s review of *Beppo*, it is via the *ottava rima* that Byron achieves a synthesis of poetic discourse and spontaneous conversation, being ‘characterized, exactly as good conversation is, rather

⁵⁴ "desultory, adj. and n.". OED Online. September 2011. Oxford University Press. 14 November 2011 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/51148?redirectedFrom=desultory>>.

⁵⁵ See also Byron’s diagram in his 1813 journal where Scott is depicted as ‘the Monarch of Parnassus’ (*BLJ* III.219-220).

⁵⁶ Woolf, 3.

by its constant ease and amenity, than by any traits either of extraordinary brilliancy, or of strong and ludicrous effect.⁵⁷ Jeffrey's insistence on the absence of extraordinary brilliance reveals the extent to which Byron convinces the reader of an effortlessness of composition, whilst simultaneously hinting at the requisite skill for such deft handling of language. As Woolf comments, 'it doesn't seem an easy example to follow; and indeed like all free and easy things, only the skilled and mature really bring them off successfully.'⁵⁸ The 'desultory rhyme' which may not show much ability points towards the poet's shifting, flitting, and seemingly disconnected thoughts, which, in spite of this, strike the ear with a regularity that manages to avoid any sense of insistency, but rather—almost paradoxically—maintains a sense of the unexpected.

It should be emphasised that at no point does Byron depart from a formally conscious mode of composition: he is never at risk of inadvertently stepping into the world of the novel. Brian Wilkie interprets Byron's turning away from the limitations of the epic form in *Don Juan* as a calculated formlessness.⁵⁹ For Byron, it was *Childe Harold* that was 'a thing without form or substance'.⁶⁰ In *Don Juan*, this formlessness is calculated to grant the poem perhaps its most significant epic quality: boundlessness. It is boundlessness that Pope regards as the distinguishing quality of Homer:

Homer like the *Nile*, pours out his Riches with a boundless Overflow; *Virgil* like a River in its Banks, with a gentle and constant Stream. When we behold their Battels, methinks the two Poets resemble the Heroes they celebrate: *Homer*, boundless and irresistible as *Achilles*, bears all before him, and shines more and more as the Tumult increases; *Virgil* calmly daring like *Aeneas*, appears undisturb'd in the midst of the Action, disposes all about him, and conquers with Tranquility ('Preface', *Iliad* I.12)⁶¹

⁵⁷ Woolf, 3.

⁵⁸ Woolf, 4.

⁵⁹ Brian Wilkie, *Romantic Poets and Epic Tradition* (Madison: Wisconsin UP, 1965) 189.

⁶⁰ Thomas Medwin, *Medwin's Conversations of Lord Byron*, ed. Lovell (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1966) 164.

⁶¹ The editor suggests Pope uses 'boundless' in the eighteenth century sense of 'sudden' (1715-36). Yet the contrast of the boundless Nile, which floods the delta on an annual basis, with the river in its banks, along with the word's later application to Achilles' heroism would also suggest our current understanding of the term as meaning 'Without bounds or limits' is equally legitimate. "boundless, adj. and n.". OED Online. September 2011. Oxford University Press. 6 November 2011
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/22068?redirectedFrom=boundless>>.

At this point, Pope does not suggest such boundlessness as indicative of superior skill. The editors of the Twickenham edition of Pope's poems emphasize the significance of the critical heritage surrounding the competing qualities of the two ancient poets: 'Dryden's version of Book I, as a matter of fact, brought the burlesque tradition of Homer translation, a tradition fostered by the belief that Homer was crude and primitive compared to Virgil, down almost to Pope's day, and forced Pope to take account of it' (*Iliad* I.cxxv). Dryden's belief in the competing virtues of Homer and Virgil is further evident in his *Essay of Dramatick Poesie* (1688). The character Neander's assessment of the comparative skills of Shakespeare and Johnson reveals received opinion regarding the status of Homer and Virgil:

If I would compare him with *Shakespeare*, I must acknowledge him the more correct Poet, but *Shakespeare* the greater wit. *Shakespeare* was the *Homer*, or Father of our Dramatick Poets; *Johnson* was the *Virgil*, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love *Shakespeare*.⁶²

The correctness of Virgil stands against the magnitude of Homer, and is defeated. In the above quotation, Pope too appears to emphasize Homer's lack of polish in contrast to Virgil, elucidated in his contrasting of Achilles and Aeneas. The humility in the motion of Virgil's prose runs counter to the grandiosity of Homer's and is suggestive of a sophistication that eluded the earlier poet. Pope, however, makes a virtue of Homer's perceived brazenness, being as lustrous as his hero and similarly irrepressible. When extolling Homer's virtues in his 'Essay on Homers *Iliad*' (1715), Pope again returns to the image of aquatic boundlessness, stating that 'His comprehensive Knowledge shews that his Soul was not form'd like a narrow Chanel for a single Stream, but as an Expanse which might receive an Ocean into its Bosom' ('An Essay on Homer', *Iliad* I.50).

⁶² John Dryden, *The Works of John Dryden: Prose 1668-1691: An Essay Of Dramatick Poesie and Shorter Works*, vol. 17 of 20 (Berkeley: California UP, 1971) 58.

Boundlessness is indicative of superior epic quality as recognised by Byron's contemporaries, Goethe describing *Don Juan* as 'a work of boundless genius' in an early review of the poem.⁶³ 'Boundlessness' is more integral to the poem, however, than simply an applied superlative. We return twice to the boundlessness of matter in *Don Juan*. Crucially, each instance is in reference to a heroine. The second describes the last heroine to be introduced to the poem, Aurora Raby: 'in her / There was a depth of feeling to embrace / Thoughts, boundless, deep, but silent too as Space' (XVI.430-432). Aurora's boundless thoughts in turn refer back to Juan's contemplation of Julia's beauty in the first Canto:

He thought about himself, and the whole earth,
Of man the wonderful, and of the stars,
And how the deuce they ever could have birth;
And then he thought of earthquakes, and of wars,
How many miles the moon might have in girth,
Of air-balloons, and of the many bars
To perfect knowledge of the boundless skies;
And then he thought of Donna Julia's eyes. (I.729-736)

Julia is at once the stimulus and the obstacle of Juan's 'perfect knowledge of the boundless skies'. The perfection of the *a* and *c* rhymes is heightened by the incongruous ending of the fourth line of the stanza; 'wars', much like Kubla's 'ancestral voices' enters as a discord in the midst of the harmony between 'stars' and 'bars', illustrative, perhaps of Byron's impatient note to Murray that 'no poetry is *generally* good—only by fits & starts—& you are lucky to get a sparkle here & there—you might as well want a Midnight *all stars*—as rhyme all perfect' (*BLJ* VII.84).

The above episode recalls Tristram's passions for his 'earthly goddess', whom he places 'in the very centre of the milky way—Brightest of stars! thou wilt shed thy influence upon some one—' (VIII.xi.669); alongside the comic elements of Juan's stargazing, we can also perceive Byron's observance of epic precedent, suggesting that he is here again being 'Led by the light of the Maeonian star' (*Essay on Criticism*,

⁶³ Cited from J. G. Robertson, "Byron and Goethe", *PEGS* 2 (1925): 63.

III.645-648). At the opening of the stanza, Juan is situated in Lukacs' 'happy' age of epic:

when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths—ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars. Everything in such ages is new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own. The world is wide and yet it is like a home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars; the world and the self, the light and the fire, are sharply distinct, yet they never become permanent strangers to one another, for fire is the soul of all light and all fire clothes itself in light.⁶⁴

Recognizable in Juan's romantically-inspired musings are echoes of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, each of whose three books ends on the word 'stars'. Dante's epic, recently translated in full by the Rev. Henry Francis Cary, was highly influential for the second generation Romantics.⁶⁵ Stars provide a focal point throughout; existing only in heaven, the sight of the stars is denied to those in hell, hence, when Dante and Virgil emerge from the ninth circle it is of such significance that: 'Thence issuing we again beheld the stars' (*Inferno* XXXIV.133).⁶⁶ One of Dante's more burning questions for Beatrice concerns the connection between the stars and the souls of men. He has begun to doubt "That spirits to the stars, as Plato deem'd, / Return"⁶⁷ (*Paradise* IV.23-25); Beatrice in part assuages his fears, assuring him "If his meaning be / That to the influence of these orbs revert / The honor and the blame in human acts, / Perchance he doth not wholly miss the truth"⁶⁷ (IV.57-60). The kinship between stars and souls, elucidated in the previous citation from Lukacs, is suggestive of the influence these celestial bodies hold over man's actions on earth. Stars, then, might be held as symbolic of literary influence: the stars Juan gazes upon in Byron's epic are indebted to Dante's stars of his *Divine Comedy*, which in turn are indebted to Plato's. As the thoughts of the lover who gazes

⁶⁴ Lukacs, 29.

⁶⁵ Cary's two-volume partial translation of *Inferno of Dante* was published in 1805-06, followed by a full three-volume translation, *The vision: or Hell, Purgatory and Paradise of Dante*, first published in 1814. For further discussion of the Romantics' reading of Dante see Ralph Pite, *The Circle of Our Vision: Dante's Presence in English Romantic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994); Antonella Braidà, *Dante and the Romantics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); and Fred Burwick ed., *Dante and Italy in British Romanticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

⁶⁶ All citations from Dante taken from Cary's 1814 translation.

⁶⁷ Cary's note reads: 'Plato, *Timæus*, v.ix. p.326. "The Creator, when he had framed the universe, distributed to the stars an equal number of souls, appointing to each soul its several star."⁶⁷

at the inaccessible stars inevitably turn to his unobtainable *amore*, so the poet's thoughts are inexorably drawn to those who have gazed before him.

(iii) Epic Intentions

Byron may have claimed to be many things that he most certainly was not—an Orientalist, for example—but he was an accomplished classicist. He had sufficient grasp of the genre to reinvent the machinery he resisted; to invoke and then dismiss: ‘HAIL, Muse! *et cetera*’ (*DJ* III.1). His attention to epic details is evident both within the poem itself, and in discussions of the poem. Speaking to Medwin, he upholds *Don Juan*’s epic form:

If you must have an epic, there’s ‘Don Juan’ for you. I call that an epic: it is an epic as much in the spirit of our day as the *Iliad* was in Homer’s. . . It shall have twenty-four books too, the legitimate number. Episodes it has, and will have, out of number; and my spirits, good or bad, must serve for the machinery. If that be not an epic, if it not be strict according to Aristotle, I don’t know what an epic poem means.⁶⁸

The depth of Byron’s sincerity is, as ever, in shallow supply. The above passage finds echoes in any number of epic postures throughout *Don Juan*, most famously, perhaps:

My poem’s epic, and is meant to be
 Divided in twelve books; each book containing,
 With love, and war, a heavy gale at sea,
 A list of ships, and captains, and kings reigning,
 New characters; the episodes are three:
 A panorama view of hell’s in training,
 After the style of Virgil and of Homer,
 So that my name of Epic’s no misnomer. (I.1593-1600)

Byron here asserts his epic intentions and exhibits his familiarity with the epic machinery of the *Aeneid* (‘Divided in twelve books’); the *Odyssey* (‘With love, and war, a heavy gale at sea’); the *Iliad* (‘A list of ships’); and the *Divine Comedy* (‘A panorama view of hell’s in training’). The semantic confusion of ‘epic’ in the first line of the stanza, employed adjectively, and in the final line of the stanza, when Byron renders it a proper noun, indicates his intention that the poem to be read as being ‘a little quietly facetious upon every thing’ (*BLJ* VI 67)—including its genre. In upholding the pretence of an epic outline in the opening Canto, Byron is following mock-epic

⁶⁸ Medwin, 165.

convention, illustrated here by Pope's 'Martinus Scriblerus of the Poem' with which he prefaces the *Dunciad*:

As it beareth the name of Epic, it is thereby subjected to such severe indispensable rules as are laid on all Neotericks, a strict imitation of the antient; insomuch that any deviation accompanied with whatever poetic beauties, hath always been censured by the sound critick.⁶⁹

To ensure that the 'name of Epic's no misnomer', mock-epic poets gave strict imitations of the ancients. Broich indicates that this includes a 'high' style of writing, as 'epic diction was an essential feature of the genre'.⁷⁰ As I have previously argued, the major difference between *Don Juan* and the eighteenth-century mock-heroic poem is that Byron writes on a more traditionally epic subject; in addition, *Don Juan* departs from the epic diction of its satirical predecessors, favouring the comic.

Byron is careful throughout the poem, however to maintain the central features of the supporting framework of epic: (i) unity of action; (ii) *in medias res*; (iii) fable; (iv) episode; (v) digression; and (vi) heroism. Aristotle's prescriptions for epic unity are extended from his principles concerning tragic drama: 'Clearly one should compose the plots here to be dramatic, just as in the case of tragedies, that is, about one whole or complete action with a beginning, middle parts, and end, so that it produces its proper pleasure like a single whole living creature.'⁷¹ For Aristotle, epic unity is achieved by a self-sufficiency (i.e. there should be no supernatural intervention) and completeness of action, in line with the Homeric model of the *Iliad*. Though Byron promises 'new mythological machinery, / And very handsome supernatural scenery' (I.1607-1608), the supernatural elements remain part of the artistic backdrop to the poem; at no point is the action of *Don Juan* influenced by the supernatural. Even in the Gothic Cantos, the 'ghost' is bodied 'Forth into something much like flesh and blood' (XVI.1028) and

⁶⁹ Pope, *Dunciad*, 52.

⁷⁰ Broich, 51.

⁷¹ *Poetics* (1459^a), 81; the extension of tragic principles to incorporate epic ones is stated more explicitly at the end of the first chapter: 'any judge of excellence in tragedy can judge of epic too, since tragedy has everything that epic has, while epic lacks some of tragedy's elements' (1449^b), 57.

unmasked as being the predatory Duchess Fitz-Fulke —alarming, certainly, but without breaching the realms of the paranormal. Despite fulfilling the Aristotelian requirement of self-sufficient action, Byron places two major obstacles in the way of unity of action. Firstly, his plot is incomplete, and there is suggestion made by the continued publication of Cantos that the poet did not intend to ever complete his ‘epic’; this leads to the second obstacle, that Juan’s wanderings are exactly that: he has no quest. In his rushings around the battlefield of Ismail, ‘As travellers follow over bog and brake / An ‘Ignis fatuus’ (VIII.252-253), Juan merely intensifies his general aimlessness throughout the poem.⁷² In its boundlessness, *Don Juan* requires unity of action to be absent—there can be no *lusis*, or unravelling of the action. Both of these obstacles are inevitable consequences of Byron’s chosen subject matter. Rather than following Homer’s example and writing on one event, Byron instead follows the example of those poets Aristotle opposes who, in Renee le Bossu’s words, were ignorant in imagining ‘that the Unity of the Fable or Action was sufficiently preserved by the Unity of the Hero: and who compos’d their *Theseids*, *Heracleids*, and the like, wherein they only heap’d up in one Poem every thing that happen’d to one Personage’.⁷³ *Don Juan*’s unity is not, then, held together by its action, as with the *Iliad*, but rather by its hero, similarly to the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*. Rather than forging unity of action through simplicity of design, Byron’s epic is more reminiscent of the complex structures of the great Italian Renaissance epic romances, such as Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*.

As with his negotiation of classical unities, in his departure from *in medias res* we can observe Byron’s conscious evolution of epic requirements being manifest

⁷² For an exhaustive study of Byron’s use of the *ignis fatuus* see Peter Cochran, ‘Byron and his Will’o’th’wisp’, *The Newstead Byron Society Review* (2009): 66-71.

⁷³ Renee le Bossu, ‘A General View of the Epic Poem and of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*’, trans. Pope, *The Odyssey of Homer*, 2 vols., ed. Maynard Mack (London: Methuen, 1967) 11; all further citations from the *Odyssey* taken from this edition. Bossu’s wording here is strikingly similar to Aristotle’s *Poetics* (1451^a), 61.

throughout *Don Juan*: ‘Most epic poets plunge in ‘*medias res*,’ [. . .] That is the usual method, but not mine— / My way is to begin with the beginning’ (I.41; 49-50)—so begins Juan’s story. Gibbon would have approved; he complains of the imaginative discomfort caused, ‘When, without any preparation, we are thrown at once into the midst of the subject, unacquainted with the characters or situation of the hero’.⁷⁴ Byron is careful to acquaint us with the origins of our hero, though unlike *Tristram Shandy*, there is no danger of the beginning becoming the whole. Byron’s preference of *ab ovo* above *in medias res* is in part required by his determination to be the poet-hero of his own verse. Rodney Delasanta explains that ‘Exclusive use of the omniscient voice dictates an *ab ovo* and not an *in medias res* structure; and this fact is exemplified by *ab ovo* epics (*Beowulf*, the *Iliad* and *Gerusalemme Liberata*) that employ generally no voice but the omniscient’.⁷⁵ To begin with the beginning is not, therefore, antithetical to epic convention; rather than disregarding epic tradition, Byron demonstrates his alertness to developments in the genre. That *Gerusalemme Liberata* similarly disregards the ‘usual method’ once more illustrates Byron’s preferential engagement with continental, especially Italian, developments in the epic tradition.

In his negotiation of Fable within *Don Juan*, Byron demonstrates his awareness of the distinction between the concept of *fabula* as plot,⁷⁶ and of Fable as a short story with a moral impetus. In his definition of fable as ‘the imitation of one entire and perfect action, whose parts are so joined and knit together, as nothing in the structure can be changed, or taken away, without impairing or troubling the whole’, Ben Jonson resorts to a familiar analogy:

⁷⁴ Edward Gibbon, *The English Essays of Edward Gibbon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 32; Gibbon’s 3 vol. *Miscellaneous Works* (1796) are listed in the 1816 Sale catalogue [166].

⁷⁵ Rodney Delasanta, *The Epic Voice* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967) 30.

⁷⁶ Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the theatre: terms, concepts, and analysis*, trans. Christine Schanz (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1998): 138-140. Pavis identifies ‘two opposing conceptions of *fabula*: (1) as material anterior to the play’s composition; and (2) as the narrative structure of the story’.

if a man would build a house, he would first appoint a place to build it in, which he would define within certain bounds: So in the Constitution of a *Poeme*, the Action is aym'd at by the *Poet*, which answers Place in a building; and that Action hath his largenesse, compasse, and proportion. But, as a Court or Kings Palace requires other dimensions then a private house: So the *Epick* asks a magnitude, from other Poëms. Since, what is Place in the one, is Action in the other, the difference is in space. So that by this definition wee conclude the fable, to be the *imitation* of one perfect and intire Action; as one perfect, and intire place is requir'd to a building. By perfect, wee understand that, to which nothing is wanting; as Place to the building, that is rais'd, and Action to the fable, that is form'd.⁷⁷

If perfection is equivalent to wholeness, then *Don Juan*'s use of fable again resists conventional epic ideals. Byronic fables are not 'the imitation of one perfect and entire action'; the action of the poem occurs in truncated episodes which are concluded by Juan's untimely removal from one place to another, 'compelled by fate, or wave, or wind, / Or near relations' (VIII.425-426). Byron's engagement with the second definition of 'Fable' similarly signals his departure from generic convention; allusions to Fables that stand outside epic litter the poem, for example, 'the old fable of the Minotaur' (II.1234) and 'The nightingale that sings with the deep thorn, / Which Fable places in her breast of Wail' (VI.693-694). These two examples also illustrate Byron's refusal to remain within one literary tradition; his invocation of the Minotaur corresponds to the classical origins of epic, whereas the fable of the Nightingale emerges from a competing Persian tradition.⁷⁸

Byron's maneuverings around the competing concepts of fable are symptomatic of his treatment of morality within the poem. The qualities of the didactic Fable are of equal import for the Aristotelian model; guidelines for the latter prescribe morality being similarly central to the formation of the epic and the foundation of Fable.

Unsurprising, perhaps, given the structural reliance of the former on the latter, illustrated above by Jonson. Byron demonstrates his alertness to the moral purpose of

⁷⁷Ben Jonson, *Discoveries, 1641; Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden, 1619* (Edinburgh: Barnes & Noble, 1966) 101.

⁷⁸Byron alludes to the same fable in *The Giaour* in a note to line 22: 'The attachment of the nightingale to the rose is a well-known Persian fable—if I mistake not, the 'Bulbul of a thousand tales' is one of his appellations' (*CPW* III.416); As Cochran has indicated (*Orientalism*, 62), Byron is likely to have gleaned this information from Beckford's *Vathek* (58n2; 143).

Fable in the opening Canto:

The tree of knowledge has been pluck'd—all's known—
 And life yields nothing further to recall
 Worthy of this ambrosial sin, so shown,
 No doubt in fable, as the unforgiven
 Fire which Prometheus filch'd for us from heaven. (I.1012-1016)

In the same Canto, Byron pre-empts objections to *Don Juan* lacking a similar moral purpose:

If any person should presume to assert
 This story is not moral, first, I pray,
 That they will not cry out before they're hurt,
 Then that they'll read it o'er again, and say,
 (But, doubtless, nobody will be so pert)
 That this is not a moral tale, though gay;
 Besides, in Canto twelfth, I mean to show
 The very place where wicked people go. (I.1649-1656)

Byron intends that even after two sittings, his reader will be unable to categorize *Don Juan* as a moral tale, though it may be informed by an overall didacticism: the poem will end by showing 'The very place where wicked people go.' In doing so, Byron fulfills Le Bossu's strictures on Morality and Epic. Though Le Bossu advises that 'since the End of the Epic Poem is to regulate the Manners, 'tis with this first view the Poet ought to begin' (*Odyssey* I.5), he makes clear that it is 'The Action of a Poem is the Subject which the Poet undertakes, proposes, and builds upon. So that the Moral and the Instructions which are the End of the Epic Poem are not the Matter of it' (*Odyssey* I.13).⁷⁹ The reader assumes Juan is destined for hell, having been informed in the opening stanza that according to mythology Don Juan is 'Sent to the devil somewhat ere his time' (I.8). Byron's plans for Juan's demise appear to correspond, though he writes to Murray that he 'had not quite fixed whether to make him end in Hell—or in an unhappy marriage,—not knowing which would be the severest.—The Spanish tradition says Hell—but it is probably only an Allegory of the other state' (*BLJ* VIII.78). As it is, the twelfth Canto finds Juan in London, 'The very place where wicked people go';

⁷⁹ Rene Le Bossu's 'A General View of the Epic Poem, and of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*' (first included within his *Traité du Poëme Epique*, 1675), which Pope selected to preface his *Odyssey*.

perhaps recalling his earlier narratological promise, on his arrival Byron has Juan drive past ‘St. James’s Palace, and St. James’s ‘Hells’’ (XI.232), glossing the latter as slang for ‘gaming-houses’ (CPW.748).

In the thirteenth Canto, Byron once again returns to the question of morality and literature. Speaking of *Don Quixote*, the narrator laments: ‘But his adventures form a sorry sight;— / A sorrier still is the great moral taught / By that real Epic unto all who have thought’ (XIII.70-72). The moral lesson taught to us by ‘real Epic’ is revealed in the following stanza, where Byron laments its demise in contemporary versions:

Redressing injury, revenging wrong,
 To aid the damsel and destroy the caitiff;
 Opposing singly the united strong,
 From foreign yoke to free the helpless native;—
 Alas! Must noblest views, like an old song,
 Be for mere Fancy’s sport a theme creative?
 A jest, a riddle, Fame through thin and thick sought?
 And Socrates himself but Wisdom’s Quixote? (XIII.73-80)

Don Juan is, at least on the surface, guilty of sporting with ‘noblest views’ for the sake of ‘A jest, a riddle.’ Juan comes closest to fulfilling the moral requirement of epic heroism in his action on the battlefield of Ismail, where his rescue of the child Leila both revenges wrong and aids the damsel, such actions being reminiscent of the heroic endeavours of the earlier Turkish Tales. Such ethically motivated heroism is not characteristic of Juan’s actions or the tenor of the poem as a whole, whose story is motivated by laughter rather than morals. When Byron conjectures that readers will find *Don Juan* ‘not a moral tale, though gay’ (I.1654) he draws attention to the assumed incompatibility between morality and laughter, suggesting that a surfeit of mirth may make up for a deficiency in decency. Byron goes somewhat towards anticipating Bakhtin’s charge that laughter is destructive of epic fundamentals by implying its culpability in the demise of heroism:

Cervantes smiled Spain's Chivalry away;
 A single laugh demolished the right arm
 Of his own country;—seldom since that day
 Has Spain had heroes. (XIII.81-84)

Laughter and fable are, however, presented in *Don Juan* as necessary accompaniments to human existence; Byron's declaration 'And if I laugh at any mortal thing, / 'Tis that I may not weep' (IV.25-26) is echoed in sentiment by his lauding of Fable: "'Tis wonderful what fable will not do! / 'Tis said it makes reality more bearable' (XV.708-709). Laughter and fable are employed by Byron to negotiate between truth and reality; the former is used to expose the fiction that all life is comprised of: 'But, ne'ertheless, I hope it is no crime / To laugh at *all* things—for I wish to know / *What* after *all*, are *all* things—but a *Show*?' (VII.14-16); the latter is able to take us from fiction to authenticity: 'Apologue, fable, poesy, and parable, / Are false, but may be render'd also true / By those who sow them in a land that's arable' (XV.705-707). It is the malleable quality of Fable, however, that gives Byron grounds for using the term more frequently in *Don Juan* as shorthand for fabricated truths in opposition to the realities explored by the poem:

There's only one slight difference between
 Me and my epic brethren gone before,
 And here the advantage is my own, I ween;
 (Not that I have not several merits more,
 But this will more peculiarly be seen)
 They so embellish, that 'tis quite a bore
 Their labyrinth of fables to thread through,
 Whereas this story's actually true. (I.1609-1616)

Byron claims that it is the truth behind *Don Juan*'s story that distinguishes it from epics 'gone before'; elsewhere, however, he is careful to distinguish between his relaying of real events and the poetic fable he is crafting:

The other evening ('twas on Friday last)—
 This is a fact and no poetic fable—
 Just as my great coat was about me cast,
 My hat and gloves still lying on the table,
 I heard a shot—'twas eight o'clock scarce past—
 And running out as fast as I was able,
 I found the military commandant
 Stretch'd in the street, and able scarce to pant. (V.257-264)

The above lines describe Byron's witnessing of the assassination of the Military Commandant of Ravenna.⁸⁰ The poet's assurance of the truth of this anecdotal digression, in contrast to the fabrications customary to composition, throws his 'truthful' storytelling thus far into relief. Juan's story is less true in events than the Commandant's assassination, being 'a theme creative', yet its material prompts the same central question: 'what is life or death?' (V.281). *Don Juan*, though poetic fable, explores the same existential problems as factual events, or to return to Byron's earlier proposition, it has been sown in such arable land as to render it true.

In his use of episode, Byron again reveals his alertness to, yet resistance of epic criteria. Though Byron's epic is rather more episodic than would have suited Aristotle's tastes,⁸¹ Juan's wanderings bear resemblance to the archaic epic example of the *Odyssey*, each episode's parameters being marked out by a journey. Unlike the Homeric hero, Juan's odyssey emerges *ab ovo* and so is relayed as it happens, and so resists the sense of order that the retrospection of an *in medias res* narrative enables. McGann has argued that even if one is to read the narrative of *Don Juan* retrospectively, we do not gain 'a sense of probabilities but of achieved possibilities',⁸² yet Juan's lack of final destination, or *telos*, renders it impossible to read *Don Juan* with the same kind of retrospective that one reads the adventures of Odysseus; rather than binding together the progression from each episode with a teleological purpose and awareness of where

⁸⁰ Byron writes several letters on the subject (see *BLJ* VII.245-256).

⁸¹ See Aristotle's comments regarding the limits of poetic extension in *Poetics* (1451^b), 61.

⁸² McGann, *Don Juan in Context* (London: John Murray, 1976) 101.

the journey will eventually lead, Byron leaves Juan's journey contingent on circumstance. By retaining ultimate freedom of narrative direction, Byron ensures the fluid transition from one episode to the next. McGann contrasts Wordsworth's difficulty with transitional passages in *The Prelude* with Byron's ease:

Byron can manage such shifts and transitions because the whole point of the style of *Don Juan* is to explore the interfaces between different things, events, and moods. *Don Juan* is a poem that is, in fact, always in transition—not in the Wordsworthian sense of “something evermore about to be,” but in the Byronic sense that “there woos no home, nor hope, nor life, *save what is here*” (*Childe Harold IV*, 105, my italics). And for Byron, “what is here” is a vast spectacle of incongruences held together in strange networks between the poles of sublimity and pointlessness. Transitions between styles, lines, stanzas, and tones not only do not present a problem for Byron, they are the locus of all his opportunities.⁸³

In his ease of transition from one episode to the next, Byron partly conforms to classical requirements of epic unity of action. Drawing primarily on Aristotle's principles, Le Bossu illustrates three factors that comprise Unity of the Epic Action: (i) ‘to make use of no Episode but what arises from the very platform and foundation of the Action, and is as it were a natural member of the body’; (ii) ‘to Unite these Episodes and these Members with one another’; and (iii) ‘never to finish any Episode so as it may seem to be an entire Action; but to let each Episode still appear in its own particular nature, as the member of a body, and as a part of itself not compleat’ (*Odyssey*, 13-14). *Don Juan* can be seen to fulfil the first of these requirements: each new episode arises from the preceding Action ‘as it were a natural member of the body’, for example, Juan's romance with Haidée is no more a contrived episode than Odysseus's encounter with Nausicaa or Calypso. The third requirement in particular is characteristic of the action of the poem; in allowing episodes to overspill the parameters of each Canto, Byron ensures each episode is connected, rather than complete in itself, thereby fulfilling Le Bossu's second requirement.

By refusing to sequester episodes in narrow formal channels, each episode spans two or more Cantos. The Julia episode is the sole example to be self-contained in one

⁸³ McGann, *Don Juan*, 95.

Canto (the first); the Haidée episode spans the second, third, and fourth Canto, with Juan's enforced departure from the island 'For the slave market of Constantinople' (IV.728) toward the end of the latter; the harem episode begins with Juan's arrival in the slave market at the end of Canto four (IV.897); its conclusion remains unclear until details of the escape from the seraglio emerge in the final portion of Canto seven when the Ismail episode is well under way: "...these are but two Turkish ladies, who / With their attendant aided our escape, / And afterwards accompanied us through / A thousand perils in this dubious shape" (VII.569-572); having begun in the seventh Canto, the Ismail episode is declared closed by the poet toward the end of Canto eight: 'But let me put an end unto my theme: / There was an end of Ismail—hapless town!' (VIII.1009-1010); however, the episode does not reach its final conclusion until one hundred lines later when Juan is sent to Russia:

I by and bye may tell you, if at all:
But now I choose to break off in the middle,
Worn out with battering Ismail's stubborn wall,
While Juan is set off with the dispatch,
For which all Petersburg is on the watch. (VIII.1108-1112)

The Catherine episode begins in Canto nine and continues until mid-way through Canto ten, when Juan departs for England, sent by Catherine for the sake of his health 'on a mission, / But in a style becoming his condition' (X.351-352). The English Cantos (eleven onwards), can be divided into two episodes; the first is the London episode, lasting from Juan's first sighting of London from Shooter's Hill (X.656) to the excursion to Norman Abbey in Canto thirteen (XIII.433); the second episode (often referred to as the Gothic Cantos) begins at the same point the first ends, without Byron's usual digressive interlude, and continues until the poem's unfinished 'end'.

Perhaps the most famous epic quality of *Don Juan* is digression:

But let me to my story: I must own,
 If I have any fault, it is digression;
 Leaving my people to proceed alone,
 While I soliloquize beyond expression;
 But these are my addresses from the throne,
 Which put off business to the ensuing session:
 Forgetting each omission is a loss to
 The world, not quite so great as Ariosto. (III.857-864)

The poet is here characteristically Byronic: in owning to his digressive tendencies, the poet again embarks upon a digression before continuing with his story. Though superficially admitting his fault, Byron writes in defense of his digressions, which do not impinge upon the action of the poem, his protagonists being able ‘to proceed alone.’ Similarly to his inability to wholly denigrate his verse, Byron’s attempt to flatter his own compositions by suggesting the lines of his story omitted in favour of an introspective detour are ‘a loss to / The world’ does not wholly exalt his efforts either, being ‘not quite so great as Ariosto.’ His allusion to Ariosto reinforces his debt to the Italian Renaissance epic, rather than the Homeric or Virgilian epic, though the latter two are equally reliant on excursive material; Hegel explains:

Epic poetry not only lingers over the portrayal of external reality and inner situations but in addition puts *hindrances* in the way of the final denouement. Therefore it especially turns aside in many ways from the execution of the main purpose, of which with its logically developing conflict the dramatic poet may never lose sight, and this gives it an opportunity to bring to our view the entirety of a world of situations which could not otherwise be brought on the tapis.⁸⁴

Byron’s digressions act as hindrances to the final untying of the epic tapestry of *Don Juan*. Or rather, Byronic digressions act as recurrent unravellings to eternally postpone the final *denouement* of the narrative. Like Penelope, Byron carefully unravels all he has woven of his epic tapestry, thereby postponing the anticipated conclusion of his story. Though he turns away from the execution of the main purpose of his narrative, in lingering over the external reality and inner situations of both his protagonist and the narrative voice he brings new and necessary perspectives to the epic landscape he has spun.

⁸⁴ Hegel, II.1086.

Unlike Hegel's analysis of epic proper, Byron's epic has no logically developing conflict. The digressions form a considerable portion of the poem, though not to the same extent as the eighteenth-century novelistic model, *Tristram Shandy*; *Don Juan* covers more narrative (and geographical) ground than Sterne's text, in which digressive material forms nearly the entirety, to the extent that the excursive qualities of *Don Juan*'s can be seen to almost invert that of *Tristram Shandy*: there is more narrative action and more *actual* excursive travel in the first half of Byron's poem than the second, whereas the excursions in *Tristram* are figurative until the seventh volume, when Tristram and his family begin their travels round Europe. In the meta-conscious commentary on digression as a literary technique, however, similarities between the two texts are evident; in particular, Byron's facetious self-defence of his digressive tendencies is reminiscent of the narrator of *Tristram Shandy*:

I declare, I do not recollect any one opinion or passage of my life, where my understanding was more at a loss to make ends meet, and torture the chapter I had been writing, to the service of the chapter following it, than in the present case: one would think I took pleasure in running into difficulties of this kind, merely to make fresh experiments of getting out of 'em—Inconsiderate soul that thou art! What! are not the unavoidable distresses with which, as an author and a man, thou art hemm'd in on every side of thee—are they, Tristram, not sufficient, but thou must entangle thyself still more? (VIII.vi.662-663)

The similarity lies in the adamant denial of purposive hindrances: 'one would think I took pleasure in running into difficulties of this kind, merely to make fresh experiments of getting out of 'em'. Tristram here anticipates the Hegelian notion of the digressive agency of epic, which 'puts *hindrances* in the way of the final denouement'.

Both Tristram and the *Juan* narrator protest at the accusation that their poetic excursions are in any way calculated; yet both protest too much. The conversational nature of Byron's digressions is markedly similar in tone to those in *Tristram Shandy*; in neither text, however, do digressions function in a one-dimensional discursive manner. Though the delay of event and retardation of plot is characteristic of both texts, these textual disruptions also serve to challenge not simply the way these particular

texts are read, but rather seek to reconfigure the relation between text and reader more radically. Commenting on McGann's assertion that 'The matter of digression is the key to Byron's method',⁸⁵ Stabler rightly cautions that 'we cannot fully understand this method if we confine our notion of digression simply to conversational deviation from the plot. Rather, Byron's digressions comprehend multiple challenges to a placid readerly experience.'⁸⁶ One such challenge relates to Byron's use of episode; digression is often used by Byron as a means of circumventing details of geographic transition, for example, Juan is left 'to proceed alone' between the harem and Ismail, whilst the poet soliloquizes 'beyond expression'.

The selective element so evident in Byron's digressions reinforce McGann's reading of *Don Juan* as an epic of contingency and circumstance; Stabler furthers McGann's argument, suggesting that 'digressions keep the reader aware of alternative routes so that a sense of indeterminacy is heightened even as a choice about interpretation is made.'⁸⁷ Rather than such 'textual indeterminacy'⁸⁸ serving to reinforce a sense of his epic as an organic whole, Byron's digressions achieve the exact opposite; in so doing, Byron departs from Sterne's model, whose digressions are more traditional in what Stabler has recognised as their 'upholding the decorum of parts contributing to a whole'; rather than disrupting the reader's capacity for narrative retrospective, Sterne's digressions create a potential space for 'better recollection'.⁸⁹ His digressive narrative goes some way towards reconfiguring the traditional readerly experience: '— How could you Madam, be so inattentive in reading the last chapter? [. . .] I do insist upon it, that you immediately turn back, that is, as soon as you get to the next full stop, and read the whole chapter over again' (I.xx.64-65). Despite such disruptions, Sterne

⁸⁵ McGann, *Fiery Dust*, 278.

⁸⁶ Stabler, *Poetics*, 3.

⁸⁷ Stabler, *Poetics*, 11.

⁸⁸ Stabler, *Poetics*, 11.

⁸⁹ Stabler, *Poetics*, 53.

upholds a commitment to narrative continuity that Byron deliberately deviates from in his digression of omission. If we are to understand Byron's use of digression as central to his departure from literary convention, then we should, as Stabler argues, be calling for a 'broader understanding of digression', which moves beyond the perceived limitations of 'the strict structuralist definition of a (usually lengthy) deviation from the narrative subject'; rather, we should remain alertness to contemporary understanding of digression, or textual deviation, as related to a broader sense of deviance, covering 'a multitude of sins including misanthropic or political perversion, contradictory principles, sudden changes of tone, and personal or cultural allusions in a variety of shapes and forms.'⁹⁰

Byron indicates his intention to adhere to epic propriety in the opening lines of *Don Juan*: 'I want a hero' (I.1). Yet as Wilkie has already observed, and as the remainder of this section shall explore in more detail, 'For the most part, Byron's twisting of epic conventions involves the hero and his function';⁹¹ the poet is supposed to have explained to Medwin: 'I shall make my hero a modern Achilles for fighting,—a man who can snuff a candle three successive times with a pistol-ball'.⁹² Byron here demonstrates his alertness to the evolving definition of hero, which has undergone four major transmutations since its coinage in antiquity; the Homeric concept of the hero as a man 'of superhuman strength, courage, or ability, favoured by the gods'⁹³ is its first manifestation, hence the close relationship in Homeric epic between heroes (hērōes) and half-gods (hēmítheoi). Nagy takes pains to demonstrate 'how closely the diction of archaic hexameter poetry responds to variant traditional perspectives on heroes.

⁹⁰ Stabler, *Poetics*, 18.

⁹¹ Wilkie, 212.

⁹² Medwin, 164-165.

⁹³ This and the three subsequent definitions of "hero, n." are taken from the OED Online. June 2011. Oxford University Press. 13 September 2011
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/86297?rskey=uBARc5&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>.

Whereas **hērōes** is the appropriate word in epic, **hēmítheoi** is more appropriate to a style of expression that looks beyond epic.⁹⁴

Byron's reconsideration of heroism in *Don Juan* initially emerges through his hero, who is in the most contemporary coinage, 'The man who forms the subject of an epic; the chief male personage in a poem, play, or story; he in whom the interest of the story or plot is centred.' This final permutation of 'hero' is first cited by Knightly Chetwood in his *Life of Virgil* ('His Heroe falls into an...ill-tim'd deliberation'), originally prefixed to Dryden's *The works of Virgil* (1697). Dryden was a central figure for this new concept of heroism that emerged in the late seventeenth century that was more concerned with narrative status than actions performed; in his *Essay Of Dramatick Poesie* he questions the conventional expectations placed upon the portrayal of the hero in the English tradition:

'Tis a great mistake in us to believe the *French* present no part of the action on the Stage: every alteration or crossing of a design, every new sprung passion, and turn of it, is a part of the action, and much the noblest, except we conceive nothing to be action till the Players come to blows; as if the painting of the Heroes mind were not more properly the Poets work then the strength of his body.⁹⁵

It was this kind of generous reasoning that led to Dryden's later statement in the 'Dedication' of his translation of the *Aeneid* that Satan is the hero of Milton's *Paradise Lost*.⁹⁶ Dryden's assurance that a poet's proper task is the portrayal of his hero's mind even more so than his physicality extends conventional English attitudes regarding what constitutes heroic action. It is reasonable to suggest that Byron's familiarity with Dryden enabled, and perhaps even prompted him to exhibit in *Don Juan* a similar kind of semantic challenge to more narrow definitions of heroism.

⁹⁴ Nagy, 160.

⁹⁵ Dryden, *Essay Of Dramatick Poesie*, 41.

⁹⁶ Dryden, *The Works of Virgil in English*, vol. 5 of 20 (Berkeley: California UP, 1987) 276. Dryden writes that Milton's inclusion in 'the File of Heroick Poets' would have been more likely 'if the Devil had not been his Heroe instead of *Adam*.' All future parenthetical citations of Dryden's *Aeneid* from *Poems: The Works of Virgil in English 1697, The Works of John Dryden*, ed. William Frost and Vinton A Dearing, vols. 5 and 6 of 20 (Berkeley: California UP, 1987).

(iv) Gender, Genre, and *Juan*

Having established *Don Juan* as a Byronic revolutionary discourse by considering the nature of Byron's discursive engagement with his epic forebears, I will now turn to examine how this impacts upon feminist readings of Byron's work. On a basic level, Byron's *Don Juan* is demonstrable of the premise that the evasion of genre requires the evasion of gender: his treatment of both is evasive. Via its negotiations of epic, romance, and the novel, *Don Juan* emerges, formally speaking as a cross-dressed epic. As I shall come onto explore in more detail in the next section, Byron's presentation of gender in the poem is equally cross-dressed. In Canto five Juan is literally cross-dressed as the harem slave Juanna for his encounter with the powerful Sultana, Gulbeyaz: the gender roles of hero and heroine become the inverse of their biological sex. In *Don Juan*'s treatment of gender, Byron seems to anticipate the demands of Hélène Cixous when she requests of us: 'Let us try as quickly as possible to abandon these binary distinctions which never make any sense.'⁹⁷

Critical discourse surrounding gender and genre is extensive. Such proliferation of material is perhaps partly because they form a neatly echoing pair. The shared Gallic linguistic origin of 'genre' and 'gender', both originally meaning kind, or sort, also encourages a partnership to exist between the two words. The centrality of the terms within feminist discourse is palpable in the semantic shift that the latter term, this shift being contemporaneous with the emergence of second-wave feminism and reappraisals of sexuality. 'Gender' is first used as a euphemism for 'sex' by Alex Comfort in *Sex in Society* (1963). Less than a decade later, the additional nuance was appropriated by feminist discourse, Anne Oakley unequivocally stating in *Sex, Gender & Society* (1972) that 'Sex differences may be 'natural', but gender differences have their source in

⁹⁷ Hélène Cixous, 'Extreme Fidelity', *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers (London: Routledge, 1994) 135.

culture' (viii. 189).⁹⁸ For Lidia Curti, the diminutive 'd' that stands between genre and gender embodies an extensive discourse of difference':

'D' is always there in presence/absence, indicating the imperfect closure between genre and gender, and within each of the two: the boundaries between genres constantly redefined through the endless play of repetition and difference, the boundary masculine/feminine forever open and constantly deferred. The reader/viewer is the essential final link for the constitution both of genre and of gender in the narrative discourse.⁹⁹

Following the contemporary trend of feminist thinkers reappraising male philosophers of the twentieth century, Curti here alludes to Derrida's dialogue on gender and genre in his essay 'The Law of Genre', in which he argues that 'the question of the literary genre is not a formal one'; for Derrida the question of genre is characterized by alterity: 'it covers the motif of the law in general, of generation difference, sexual difference between the feminine and masculine genre/gender, of the hymen between the two, of a relationless relation between the two, of an identity and difference between the feminine and masculine.'¹⁰⁰

Gender/genre studies have been dominated by women, looking at women, in books written by women. The examination of the significance of male-authored texts for an understanding of the relation between gender and genre has historically, however, been a critically perilous exercise. Since Elaine Showalter's launch of 'gynocriticism',¹⁰¹ the value of feminist studies of male-authored texts has been rendered innately problematic. A more nuanced approach is offered by Myra Jehlen, who argues that 'we gain no benefit from either disclaiming the continuing value of the "great tradition" [i.e. of male canonical authors] or reclaiming it as after all an

⁹⁸ "gender, n.". OED Online. March 2011. Oxford University Press. 14 April 2011
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/77468?rskey=ZEK0H9&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>.

⁹⁹ Lidia Curti, *Female Stories, Female Bodies: Narrative, Identity and Representation* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988) 31.

¹⁰⁰ Jacques Derrida, 'The Law of Genre', trans. Avital Ronell, *Critical Inquiry* 7.1 (Autumn, 1980): 74.

¹⁰¹ See Showalter's essay, 'Toward a Feminist Poetics', *Women Writing and Writing About Women*, ed. Mary Jacobus (Totowa: Barnes & Noble, 1979) 22-41.

expression of our own viewpoint. On the contrary, we lose by both.’¹⁰² If anything *is* to be gained from reclamation, then epic, the preserve of male writers, seems an unlikely candidate. As Burrow writes, ‘for most ‘epic’ connotes everything which [we’re not] predisposed to like: eulogy, heroism, unity, dull officialdom, maleness’.¹⁰³ These are all qualities of epic that Byron alludes to in *Don Juan* before swiftly demonstrating his derision, both through poetic expression—the versification of his conviction that contemporary poets were pursuing the wrong revolutionary system—and poetic action—he is *doing* something different. Yet if epic does articulate the kind of universality that we explored earlier, then we cannot simply overlook its articulation and problematization of gender.

There exists a long-standing critical dialogue concerning the gendered qualities of epic. Writing on the gendered qualities of the Homeric epic in his *Remarks Upon a Late Discourse of Free-Thinking* (1713), Richard Bentley states: ‘the *Ilias* he made for the men, and the *Odyssseis* for the other sex.’¹⁰⁴ Perhaps the most distinctly masculine quality of the *Iliad* is in its adherence to a clear narrative trajectory through a fixed unity of action. Such fixity stands in contrast to the meandering motion of the *Odyssey*’s plot. As I have already observed, the episodic nature of *Don Juan* is more easily identifiable with Homer’s second epic than his first. Did Byron too write for the other sex?¹⁰⁵ Attributing the success of *The Corsair* to its appeal to a female audience, Byron allegedly remarked to Medwin, ‘Who does not write to please the women?’¹⁰⁶ and to Trelawny supposedly stated that ‘all I have yet written has been for women-

¹⁰² Myra Jehlen, ‘Archimedes and the Paradox of Feminist Criticism’, *Signs* 6.4 (Summer, 1981): 578.

¹⁰³ Burrow, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Richard Bentley, *Remarks Upon a Late Discourse of Free-Thinking* (London: John Morphew, 1713) 18.

¹⁰⁵ See Moyra Haslett, ‘*Don Juan* and the Female Reader’, *Byron’s Don Juan and the Don Juan Legend* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) 187-230. For further discussion of female writers reading Byron’s poetry see Franklin, ‘Byron and Women Novelists’, *The 2001 Byron Foundation Lecture* (2001. Nottingham: The Byron Centre for the Study of Literature and Social Change, 2010) and her forthcoming *The Female Romantics: Nineteenth-Century Women Novelists and Byronism* (London: Routledge, 2012).

¹⁰⁶ Medwin, 206.

kind'.¹⁰⁷ Like *Tristram Shandy's* 'Madam', Byron's female reader is ever-present.

Byron, however, reveals the strength of his resistance to such type-casting in a letter to

Murray:

I have not written for their pleasure;—if they are pleased—it is that they chose to be so,—I have never flattered their opinions—nor their pride—nor will I.— Neither will I make “Ladies books” “al diletta le femine e la plebe”—I have written from the fullness of my mind, from passion—from impulse—from many motives—but not for their “sweet voices” (*BLJ* VI.105-6).

Though Byron is aware of his popularity among the female readership, his motives are not confined to the gratification of the other sex.

Byron's negotiation of gender and genre in *Don Juan* extends beyond questions of readership. Selene Scarsi's reappraisal of the Renaissance epic asserts the significance of the central episodes' rotation around women;¹⁰⁸ like the Renaissance epics of Ariosto and Tasso that Byron was so alert to, the central episodes of *Don Juan* revolve around women. The centrality of women to the progression of the action is, however, prompted by earlier epic examples. Speaking of *Don Juan's* epic credentials, Byron declares to Medwin that 'In the very first Canto you have a Helen'.¹⁰⁹ Donna Julia, then, becomes the face that launches somewhat short of the requisite thousand ships. Byron might also have mentioned the Nausicaa-come-Calypso-come-Dido-figure of the exotic Haidée, 'the lady of the cave' (II.953), who rescues the shipwrecked Juan, and also the Amazonian presences of Gulbeyaz and Catherine the Great. Yet as with the poet's other negotiations of epic precedents set by the ancients, Byron's utilization of women to propel his narrative provides a further example of his rethinking epic. Wilkie sees Juan's reluctance to leave these women, 'Unless compelled by fate, or wave, or wind, / Or near relations, who are much the same' (VIII.425-426), as an endorsement of love as an alternative to war: 'thus reversing the antifeminism which is

¹⁰⁷ Edward Trelawny, *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron* (London: Edward Moxon, 1858) 30.

¹⁰⁸ Selene Scarsi, *Translating Women in Early Modern England: Gender in the Elizabethan versions of Boiardo, Ariosto and Tasso* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010) 84.

¹⁰⁹ Medwin, 164.

implied in one form or another by almost every traditional epic.’¹¹⁰ In the presentation of his epic heroines, Byron participates in an unexpected revolutionary discourse, though there should be little surprise that Byron’s radicalism informs his renegotiation of the epic genre. In no way is he the first to find epic a suitable vehicle of protest against oppression; since Lucan’s *Pharsalia*—a text with which Byron was familiar—the epic has been symbolic of ancient republican ideals and aspirations.¹¹¹

The kind of language—or discourse—that we resort to when contemplating problematized notions of gender, is reminiscent of that which we rely upon to articulate crises in artistic expression. In the preface to *The Theory of the Novel*, a text ‘written in a mood of permanent despair over the state of the world’,¹¹² Lukács inverts Hegel’s concept of the problematization of art being the result of non-problematic reality, asserting that ‘the problems of the novel form are here the mirror-image of a world gone out of joint. This is why the ‘prose’ of life is here only a symptom, among many others, of the fact that reality no longer constitutes a favourable soil for art’.¹¹³ Byron is writing in a similar historic moment; the major problem he faces in writing *Don Juan* is his ‘uncommon want’ (I.1) for a hero at a time when heroism, the life-blood of the epic, faces extinction. As the poet of the third Canto sings to Juan and Haidée: ‘The heroic lay is tuneless now— / The heroic bosom beats no more!’ (III.715-16); in so doing, he echoes Byron’s lament in the opening stanzas of the first Canto:

¹¹⁰ Wilkie, 215.

¹¹¹ Byron alludes to the second book of Lucan’s *Pharsalia* in an early letter to Hobhouse (*BLJ* II.14); a copy of Lucan’s *Pharsalia* was donated to Harrow by Henry Drury’s son (and Byron’s godson), Byron Drury, purportedly inscribed by Byron: “The Pharsalia is not sufficiently appreciated [...] I consider it an epic poem of great merit [...] What charm there is in looking over these pages [...] Caesar - Brutus - Greece and Harrow - Eheu!!” The inscription has since been identified as a forgery by the noted forger George De Luna Byron, alias de Gibler (see Hunter 70); the *fin de siècle* critic Lionel Johnson identifies in Byron a similar oratorical capacity and labels him ‘much of a Lucan’ (‘Lord Byron’, *Post Liminium: Essays and Critical Papers*, ed. T. Whittemore (London: E. Mathews, 1911) 198).

¹¹² Lukacs, 12.

¹¹³ Lukacs, 17.

Brave men were living before Agamemnon
 And since, exceeding valorous and sage,
 A good deal like him too, though quite the same none;
 But then they shone not on the poet's page,
 And so have been forgotten:—I condemn none,
 But can't find any in the present age
 Fit for my poem (that is, for my new one);
 So, as I said, I'll take my friend Don Juan. (1.33-40)

In times of crisis, questions are asked about the fundamentals of literary practice. In *Don Juan*, similarly to the novel form it anticipates, we observe the mirror image of a world gone out of joint. What I would like to suggest is that the problematized situation of form—of the textual body—in *Don Juan* finds its counterpart in the situation of sex and gender. Though suggesting that Byron's poem finds its origins in such a situation is not without complication. Rosi Braidotti questions:

Is it the case that only at times of crisis a culture actually does ask questions about sexuality and the sexed nature of the human subject? In other words, is the discourse about the embodied, sexed structures of subjectivity a sign of the troubled times of crisis, a symptom of loss of stability and certainty? Does the question of sexual difference have to be associated with decline and nihilism – as in the Nietzschean legacy – or, even worse, be rejected as decadent as in the fascist nostalgia for a 'strong, wilful subject'? Can we posit the terms of sexual difference positively?¹¹⁴

Yet it is exactly this positive positing of sexual difference that is observable in Byron's epic. I do not deny that *Don Juan* is symptomatic of the troubled times of crisis, but suggest that the question of sexual difference is not associated with decline, but rather with evolution. The coupling of gender and genre in *Don Juan* is mutually beneficial. Byron's productive partnership puts into practice contemporary ideas concerning the future of epic. Hayley's *Essay on Epic Poetry* was written at a time when contemporary readers felt that the epic was an endangered species. Hayley suggests ways of resuscitating the genre; his strong convictions as to which direction the epic should now take include the incorporation of more convincing character drawing and—most significantly for the purposes of this chapter—'raising women from minor figures,

¹¹⁴ Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance: A Study of Women in Contemporary Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991; rpt. 1996) 12.

sometimes allegorical, to participation in the epic action as principal characters' (see V.105-182).¹¹⁵ It is these principal epic heroines that form the focus of the rest of the chapter.

¹¹⁵ Hayley, 'Introduction' xii.

(v) Epicene Epic Scenes¹¹⁶

Central to Byron's innovations in epic form is his cross-dressing of gender roles. The following section will first argue that such playful renegotiation of gender binaries is enabled by a generic cross-dressing crucial to Byron's reinvention of epic, before demonstrating how the poet's engagement with Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* can be seen to underpin comic transvestitism in *Don Juan*.¹¹⁷

Ovid provides the ancient literary model for the metamorphosis of epic; formed of fifteen books and never completed (ostensibly owing to his exile by Augustus, but more convincingly remaining unfinished owing to the substance of the poem—a text based on endless reformations of the body can never itself achieve a 'completed' form), the *Metamorphoses* makes Ovid's refigurative purpose clear from the opening of the first book:

My mind is bent to tell of bodies changed into new forms. Ye gods, for you yourselves have wrought the changes, breathe on these my undertakings, and bring down my song in unbroken strains from the world's very beginning even unto the present time. (I.1-4)¹¹⁸

The *Metamorphoses* itself metamorphoses language into new forms, from the Greek script which Ovid's material is drawn from, to the Latin letters with which he composes. In his re-appropriation of Grecian myth for Latin culture, Ovid partakes in a markedly Virgilian revisionary process.¹¹⁹ Alert to his engagement in a revolutionary discourse, the above citation advertises its epic pretensions. Ovid emphasises the 'unbroken' nature of his poem; the *Metamorphoses* is not a collection or anthology of

¹¹⁶ 'And next she gave her (I say *her*, because
The Gender still was Epicene, at least
In outward show, which is a saving clause)' (*DJ* VI.457-459)

¹¹⁷ Erich Segal coins the term 'transvestite comedy' in relation to *Twelfth Night* in his *The Death of Comedy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001), 305.

¹¹⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, vol. 1 of 2 (London: William Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1956) 3.

¹¹⁹ I use the term 're-appropriation' conscious of Michael O'Neill's deployment in his article 'Romantic re-appropriations of the epic' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Epic*, ed. Catherine Bates (Cambridge: CUP, 2010) 193-210. O'Neill argues that Romantic epic both witnesses and reflects upon its own evaporation, whilst remaining a re-appropriation of the genre.

separate myths, but is comprised of stories woven together as episodes to form a larger epic schema. Ovid's purposeful turning away from the earlier Roman epic example should, however, be stressed; as Brooks Otis comments: 'The *Metamorphoses* is like the *Aeneid* only in its size, its epic style and its ambitious purpose: in most other respects it is its deliberate antithesis.'¹²⁰ In regarding the *Metamorphoses* as the deliberate antithesis of the *Aeneid* we once again return to the kind of revolutionary discourse encountered at the start of this chapter. If, as I have argued, epic composition inherently requires the poet's engagement in a revisionary dialectical process, each revision contributing to an extensive epic discourse that informs the genre up until its latest inception, then we should consider the *Metamorphoses* as a significant link in an evolving epic chain. As a Roman writer, Ovid is faced with a similar predicament to Virgil: how to write a successful post-Homeric epic that is simultaneously characteristically Augustan. Otis suggests that:

Ovid can also be said to have solved the same problem that confronted Virgil. What is unique about the *Aeneid* is not that it is an imitation of Homer—the Hellenistic and Roman eras were rife with such imitations—but that it is a successful epic in its own right, as intrinsically Augustan as it is ostensibly Homeric. In other words, Virgil made the old bones live: unlike his predecessors he made contemporary poetry out of quite incredible and anachronistic material. But the same thing is true of the *Metamorphoses*, however different its nature and aim may have been.¹²¹

Both Virgil and Ovid are engaged in a revolutionary discourse whose primary intention is to animate the skeletal frame of the epic and to restore its functionality within a contemporary literary environment. As I suggested earlier in the chapter, this resuscitative impulse characterises the epic tradition.

Byron encountered Ovid in two major ways; firstly, through a direct familiarity with the Roman poet's work, which Nicholson has already explored;¹²² secondly, via

¹²⁰ Brooks Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet* (Cambridge: CUP, 1966) 2.

¹²¹ Otis, 2.

¹²² See Andrew Nicholson, 'Byron and Ovid', *The Byron Journal* 27 (1999): 76-81; Nicholson focusses on 'three very specific allusions'; the first two of these explore the dialogue of two Byronic heroines: Eve's speech in *Cain* (III.I.441-43) and Donna Julia's letter (*DJI*.194).

the cipher of Shakespeare.¹²³ It is through the Ovidian Shakespeare that we can trace the influence of an experimental approach to gender and genre that is manifest in *Don Juan*. In this section I build upon work by Wolfson in arguing that Byron inherits Shakespeare's resistance to the literary convention of gender binaries.¹²⁴ I shall develop this line of argument and contend that this Shakespearean model of influence was also poetical. Specifically, I shall consider the influence *Venus and Adonis* had on *Don Juan* through the performative dynamic of hero and heroine. Shakespeare's adaptation of *Venus and Adonis* reformulates two Ovidian myths: that of Venus and Adonis in the Tenth Book of the *Metamorphoses*, informed by the story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus from the Fourth Book. The amalgamation of these two tales to produce his own epyllion is symptomatic of Shakespeare's conscious reformulation of epic material. I have already discussed Byron's engagement with the revolutionary discourse that shapes the evolution of the epic; I would additionally suggest that through close examination of the Harem Cantos and Catherine Cantos of *Don Juan* we can observe Byron's participation in a revisionary process that we can trace back to Homer and the origins of epic, via Virgil, Shakespeare, and Ovid.

In his introduction to *The Romantics on Shakespeare*, Jonathan Bate argues that, among 'the race of Shakespearians in the early nineteenth century...Byron plays his accustomed role of court jester, debunking the age's excessive adulation of Shakespeare'.¹²⁵ Bate presumably had in mind the well-known example of Byron's letter to James Hogg in 1814: 'Shakespeare's name, you may depend on it, stands absurdly too high and will go down. He had no invention as to stories, none whatever' (*BLJ* IV.84). Byron protests, too much perhaps, that his writing was 'very unlike

¹²³ For further discussion on this literary relationship see Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

¹²⁴ See especially: "'Their She Condition'"; and 'Don Juan and the Shiftings of Gender', *Palgrave Advances in Byron Studies*, ed. Jane Stabler (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 257-280.

¹²⁵ Jonathan Bate ed., *The Romantics on Shakespeare* (London: Penguin, 1992) 1.

Shakespeare—and so much the better in one sense—for I look upon him to be the *worst* of models—though the most extraordinary of writers’ (*BLJ* VIII.152). The frequency of Byron’s allusions to Shakespeare within his writing undermine such an emphatic denial of the Shakespearean model; as Bate argues, ‘Byron’s private letters are full of incidental provocations of this sort; glancing and off-the-cuff, they must always be treated lightly’;¹²⁶ on the whole they should be treated lightly, but to do so always risks overlooking more serious literary (and ideological) objectives implied by Byron’s Shakespearean allusions.

Anne Barton states, ‘Taking into account both his poetry and prose, only *The Comedy of Errors* and *Venus and Adonis* seem to be missing from the long list of Shakespearean quotations and allusions, whether intentional or subconscious, that everywhere inform Byron’s work.’¹²⁷ Yet Byron’s absolute exclusion of references to *Venus and Adonis* throughout his work is disputable. Allusions to Shakespeare’s early poem within both Keats and Shelley have attracted extensive critical attention.¹²⁸ Given the accepted presence of *Venus and Adonis* in the poetry of the second generation, the absence of this narrative poem in Byron’s oeuvre would prove peculiar, not only in respect to the poet’s extensive interaction with Shakespeare’s other works, but also to the afterlife of Shakespeare’s poem during the long eighteenth century—especially if one accepts *Venus and Adonis* as an influence on the poetic construction of gender

¹²⁶ Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986. Rpt. 1992), 225.

¹²⁷ Anne Barton, *Byron and Shakespeare*, *The Cambridge Companion to Byron*, ed. Drummond Bone (Cambridge: CUP, 2004) 229.

¹²⁸ Keats’ admiration of the poem is well-known: Helen Vendler ‘reproduces Keats’ markings in his copy of Shakespeare’s poems in the Keats Museum Library’ in *The Odes of John Keats* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1983) 314 n9; Geoffrey Miles has already stated, ‘Shelley’s use of the Adonis story was no doubt partly suggested by Keats’s own use of it in *Endymion*’, *Classical Mythology in English Literature: A Critical Anthology* (London: Routledge, 1999) 204. It is clear that the poem was not, however, universally popular; Philip C. Kolin notes in his introduction to *Venus and Adonis: Critical Essays* that ‘near the time Coleridge and Keats honored *Venus and Adonis*, Ezekiel Sanford, in 1819, spoke, I fear, for the majority of nineteenth-century readers in observing that ‘So long as we are concerned for the interests of morality, we cannot wish that it may again become popular’ (London: Routledge, 1997) 14.

dynamics. For example, Wolfson has argued that Keats's own poetry correlates to the unequal gender dynamic in *Venus and Adonis*:

His unassertive male ego, moreover, typically finds poetic correlatives not in figures of sexual equality, but in tales of young men dominated—sometimes fatally so—by powerful women: recall Venus and Adonis, Circe and Glaucus, Cynthia and Endymion, Moneta and the poet-dreamer, Lamia and Lycius, “Fanny” and her poet-lover.¹²⁹

In contrast to Keats, Byron's male ego is far from unassertive, which makes the sexual passivity of his hero Juan all the more remarkable; as W. H. Auden has noted: ‘In three cases he is seduced—by Julia, Catherine, the Duchess of Fitz-Fulk—and in the other two, circumstances outside his control bring him together with Haidée and Dudù, and no persuasion on his part is needed.’¹³⁰ Juan is nearly fatally dominated by Catherine, and to an extent by Gulbeyaz, which again, risks his life. His sexual relationships with other heroines, Donna Julia, Haidée, and Dudu, are, however, markedly reciprocal.

Without wanting to suggest that either Gulbeyaz or Catherine possess the same kind of heroic interest as other examples of empowered femininity within *Don Juan*, an understanding of their role as female protagonists within the poem is crucial to an appreciation of Byron's manipulation of accepted gender binaries. Both the Oriental Sultana and the Russian Empress challenge contemporary visions of femininity through their dramatization of the mobility of gendered ‘qualities’; significantly, this challenge is posed most explicitly through their performed relationships with Juan, which exhibit a manifestly Shakespearean dynamic.

Both *Venus and Adonis* and *Don Juan* use the girlish hero / dominant heroine dynamic to explore the performative potency of reversing conventional notions of gendered behaviour. To maintain the dramatic tension of such an unconventional gender dynamic, the man's femininity is emphasised. G. Wilson Knight has already commented on Don Juan's ‘continual admiration of an almost feminine beauty in its

¹²⁹ Wolfson, ““Their She Condition””, 603.

¹³⁰ W. H. Auden, ‘Don Juan’, *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (London: Faber, 1963) 392.

hero',¹³¹ indeed, we are told that he is 'a most beauteous Boy, / And had retained his boyish look beyond / The usual hirsute seasons which destroy' (IX.417-19). In Shakespeare's poem, Adonis' youth becomes synonymous with effeminacy: he is but a 'tender boy' (32),¹³² 'Rose-cheeked' (3), and 'Thrice fairer' (7) than Venus herself. Venus describes him as 'more lovely than a man' (9) yet whilst Adonis might be more lovely, he is clearly less than a man. This inadequacy is highlighted later in the poem when Venus, exasperated, declares: 'Thou art no man, though of a man's complexion, / For men will kiss even by their own direction' (215-16). Juan's appearance is similarly haunted by the suggestion of manliness:

There was a something in his turn of limb,
And still more in his eye, which seemed to express
That though he looked one of the Seraphim,
There lurked a Man beneath the Spirit's dress. (IX.371-374)

Whereas Venus accuses Adonis of outward deception of his true gender—he possesses the appearance of masculinity, without the requisite capacity for amorous action—Juan has all the apparent asexuality of an ethereal being which clothes a rather more masculine physicality.

Don Juan extends Shakespeare's playful presentation of the discrepancy between performed gender and biological sex. Wolfson concludes '*Don Juan* and the Shiftings of Gender', with a declaration of the complexities of Byron's approach to binary divisions of gender:

If the masculine tradition that Byron inherited is famed for writing 'Woman' as other, and *Don Juan* intermittently signs on to the binaries of 'masculine' and 'feminine', the cross-dressings of Byron's imagination are increasingly attracted to unstable borderlines of definition.¹³³

Wolfson correctly indicates a potent dynamic between the masculine tradition's polarization of gender identities and simultaneous recognition and destabilisation of

¹³¹ G. Wilson Knight, *The Burning Oracle: Studies in the Poetry of Action* (London: OUP, 1939) 268.

¹³² All references to *Venus and Adonis* are taken from Colin Burrow ed., *The Oxford Shakespeare: Complete Sonnets and Poems* (Oxford: OUP, 2002).

¹³³ Wolfson, '*Don Juan* and the Shiftings of Gender', 274.

gender binaries in *Don Juan*. Clearly one has to qualify the inclusion of Shakespeare in this ‘masculine tradition that Byron inherited’; as I have already mentioned, Wolfson argues elsewhere in her work that it is Shakespeare who provided Byron with a dramatic model that recognised the potency of fluid gender boundaries.¹³⁴ Judith Butler enables a closer inspection of the concept behind cross-dressing and what it signifies, asking: ‘Is drag the imitation of gender, or does it dramatize the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established?’¹³⁵ Reading *Don Juan* as demonstrative of the latter suggests the poet’s playful cross-dressed scenes additionally offer more serious contemplation of the limitations of traditional gender roles. The process of Juan being dressed as a harem woman (“Juanna”) is not the imitation of gender, but a dramatization of the artificiality of fulfilling a particular gender identity:

And now being femininely all array’d,
With some small aid from scissors, paint, and tweezers,
He look’d in almost all respects a maid (V.633-5)

Achieving the appearance of femininity requires Juan to undergo a process of external conformity to social expectation. The process of being ‘femininely all array’d’ does not merely require a change of clothes, but participation in the preparatory beauty ritual used by women themselves in order to look ‘in all respects a maid’. Women to make up for natural deficiencies in appearance have long wielded scissors, paint, and tweezers to ‘enhance’ feminine features.

Byron’s satirization of such preparatory rites is indebted to an Augustan heritage that unveiled of the artifice of femininity most memorably at Belinda’s dressing table in Pope’s *Rape of the Lock* and Corinna seated on her ‘three-leg’d Chair’ (9) in Swift’s *A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed* (1731, 1734).¹³⁶ To face society as a woman

¹³⁴ See especially “‘Their She Condition’”, 591.

¹³⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 263.

¹³⁶ All citations of Pope’s ‘Rape of the Lock’ taken from *The Rape of the Lock and Other Poems*, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson (3rd ed. London: Methuen, 1962); all citations of Swift’s poem taken from *Jonathan*

Belinda needs ‘Files of Pins’ (137), ‘Puffs, Powders, Patches’ (138), and the labours of Betty (148). The process by which ‘awful Beauty puts on all its Arms’ (139) is described with all the solemnity of preparation for battle—the ultimate masculine performance. Like Juan, Belinda’s femininity is revealed through concealment: as the layers go on, we see ‘a purer blush arise’ (143) and ‘keener lightnings quicken in her Eyes’ (144). We witness the dramatisation of a process that is later inverted by Swift’s grotesque narration of ‘Corinna, Pride of *Drury-Lane*’ (1) as she removes, one by one, her ‘artificial hair’ (10), her ‘Chrystal Eye’ (11), ‘Her Eye-brows from a Mouse’s Hyde / Stuck on with Art on either Side’ (13-14), her false ‘Set of Teeth’ (20), ‘the Rags contriv’d to prop / Her flabby Dugs’ (21-22), ‘her Steel-rib’d Bodice’ (24), ‘The Bolsters that supply her Hips’ (28), the ‘Dawbs of White and Red’ (34) that disguise her true colours before finally creeping into bed. If truth is beauty, artifice the inverse, then the cosmetic poetics of Pope, Swift, and Byron can be seen to question which aspects of socially prescribed femininity are honest, and which are parody? That Juan’s approximation of aesthetic requirements of femininity remains approximated rather than fulfilled—he appears ‘in *almost* all respects a maid’ (my italics)—is not so much an indicative of Byron’s commitment to an insurmountable correspondence between sex and gender, but rather revealing of the artifice of such correspondence. Juan’s pantomiming of femininity is moreover necessary for the farcical nature of his encounter with the Sultan: “I see you’ve bought another girl; ’tis pity / That a mere christian should be half so pretty.” (V.1239-1240). Peter Cochran has observed that ‘The comedy whereby the Sultan is homosexually aroused, while imagining himself to be heterosexually so, is the opposite from that which Shakespeare portrays in Orsino’s

Swift: *the Essential Writings: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Claude J. Rawson and Ian Higgins (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2010).

love for “Cesario” in *Twelfth Night*;¹³⁷ a closer comparison from the same Shakespearean source would be Olivia’s love for Viola as “Cesario”—she, like the Sultan, is seduced by performed gender.

The manipulation of the very basic aesthetic principle behind gender identification becomes a key aspect of both *Venus and Adonis* and *Don Juan*. To continue with Butler, the boyish—or girlish—appearance of the heroes renders the dramatization of the signifying gestures through which femininity itself is established as more convincing. In both poems, blushing becomes a signifier of femininity: Adonis is ‘Rose-cheeked’ (3), whilst Juan is ‘Blushing and beardless’ (IX.370). Christopher Ricks indicates the frequency of blushing and embarrassment in *Don Juan* and emphasises the reader as an outside observer; neither is the reader implicated by Adonis’ embarrassment in *Venus and Adonis*. Shakespeare describes the ‘the maiden burning of [Adonis’] cheeks’ (50); as Burrow notes, it had been nearly a century since “maiden” could be legitimately used to describe virginity asexually, and in this case, according to Burrow, it ‘re-emphasizes Adonis’ androgynous youth’;¹³⁸ to extend Burrow’s suggestion, such clear denotation of gender is suggestive not only of Adonis’ androgyny, but of his femininity. This virginal glow is also displayed by ‘Juanna’ when ‘she’ is complimented by the Sultan for “her” prettiness: ‘This compliment, which drew all eyes upon / The new-bought virgin, made her blush and shake’ (V.1241-2). Certainly no virgin, Juan’s anger is mistaken for modesty; the joke of the blush is that it is a cross-dressed signifying gesture, which contributes to the hero’s perceived femininity.¹³⁹ A further parallel of Juan’s blushing anger can be observed in the sexually reluctant Adonis, ‘Who blushed and pouted in a dull disdain’ (33). Yet

¹³⁷ Peter Cochran ed., ‘*Don Juan: Canto 5*’ (2009) 64n192.

<http://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/don_juan_Canto_5.pdf> 11:02 on 21/09/11

¹³⁸ Burrow, 178n.

¹³⁹ Christopher Ricks, *Keats and Embarrassment* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974) 83.

whereas Juan's shaking anger is misconstrued to belie his masculinity, Adonis' petulance appears to confirm his ambiguous status as effeminate youth.

"Juanna's" heightened colour exemplifies the ambiguity of the blush, which is exploited by both Byron and Shakespeare. Ricks has carefully explored the allure of the blush for Romantic poets and argues that:

it is not only the obvious association of blushing with sexual attraction or the physicality of the sensation, but also its strange relationship to the involuntary which makes blushing so important to erotic art (which so invigorated Romanticism); for both love and desire have a strange relationship to the involuntary.¹⁴⁰

Involuntary desire, or unreciprocated lust, are central themes in both *Don Juan* and *Venus and Adonis*; the blush is symptomatic of the emotions of both pursuer and pursued, as in this example from *Venus*, when Shakespeare contrasts Venus's lust with Adonis's resistance: 'She red, and hot, as coals of glowing fire, / He red for shame, but frosty in desire' (35-6). Venus is flushed with 'wanton blood'¹⁴¹ whereas Adonis 'burns with bashful shame' (49). For Byron, the erotic suggestiveness of blushing is not only associated with *involuntary* desire; the tenth Canto of *Don Juan* opens with the lewd observation that 'We left our hero, Juan, in the *bloom* / Of favouritism, but not yet in the *blush*' (X.33-34). Though Byron hints at the kind of virginal imagery that we encounter in Shakespeare through the floral 'bloom' and 'blush', the dominant meaning of these lines is rather more coarse, and hints at the blush of sexual shame or excitement; though the previous Canto ends suggestively with Juan accompanying Catherine the Great to her apartments 'With *her* then, as in humble duty bound' (IX.673), he has not yet consummated his new role as the Empress's 'favourite'. The progress of Juan's carnal relationship with Catherine can be traced via the colour of his cheeks; the coy suggestion of youthful arousal with which the tenth Canto opens is soon

¹⁴⁰ Ricks, 143.

¹⁴¹ Compare *Romeo and Juliet* II.v.70: 'Now comes the wanton blood up in your cheeks'. All citations of Shakespeare's plays taken from *The Arden Shakespeare complete works*, ed. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson and David Scott Kastan (London: Arden Shakespeare, 1998; rev. ed. 2011).

exposed as the price payable for the Empress's affections; before long Juan is exhausted: 'the hue / Of health but flickered with a faint reflection / Along his wasted cheek' (X.341-343).

The Romantic poets continued the Shakespearean interest in multifarious flushes. Keats' citation of 'the old song' on blushing provides a lexicon of the phenomenon:

There's a blush for want, and a blush for shan't
 And a blush for having done it,
 There's a blush for thought, and a blush for naught
 And a blush for just begun it.¹⁴²

In both *Don Juan* and *Venus and Adonis* it is the men who 'blush for shan't' and the women who 'blush for want'. Like Venus, as we can see in the following description, Gulbeyaz too reddens with desire:

. . . o'er her bright brow flash'd a tumult strange,
 And into her clear cheek the blood was brought,
 Blood-red as sunset summer clouds which range
 The verge of Heaven; and in her large eyes wrought
 A mixture of sensations might be scann'd
 Of half-voluptuousness and half command. (V.859-864)

This image of 'half-voluptuousness and half command' is remarkably Venus-esque. This mixture of sensuousness and stipulation is evident from her blushing cheek to her large eyes: Juan's safety is conditional on his satisfying the Sultana's demands. Hence, the description of 'Blood-red' is simultaneously suggestive and sinister. Byron later similarly depicts the tyrannical blush of Catherine at the news of the fall of Ismail:

Glory and triumph o'er her aspect burst,
 As an East Indian Sunrise on the main.
 These quenched a moment her Ambition's thirst—
 So Arab Deserts drink in Summer's rain:
 In vain!—As fall the dews on quenchless sands,
 Blood only serves to wash Ambition's hands! (IX.467-472)

The Imperial simile of the East Indian Sunrise—an image readily associated with the British Empire—is a satirical gesture that implies a kindred brutality between the quenchless international ambitions of both England and Russia. A more literary

¹⁴² John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821*, ed. Rollins, vol. 1 of 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1958) 219-220.

connection is also drawn by the bloody washing of hands, which insinuates a ruthless resemblance between Catherine and Lady Macbeth. The connection between Catherine and the Scottish play is elsewhere suggested by the description of the Empress as Catherine as ‘bold and bloody’ (IX.554); in her military campaigns, Catherine seemingly heeds the words of the Second Apparition to Macbeth in Act Four: ‘Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn / The pow’r of man’ (IV.i.79).

Byron’s Catherine is, however, more easily paralleled with the comic Venus than the tragic Lady Macbeth. A dominant similarity between Shakespeare’s Venus and the Empress is their fleshliness. Here is Catherine:

Though somewhat large, exuberant, and truculent,
 When *wroth*; while *pleased*, she was as fine a figure
 As those who like things rosy, ripe, and succulent,
 Would wish to look on, while they are in vigour.
 She could repay each amatory look you lent
 With interest, and in turn was wont with rigour
 To exact of Cupid’s bills the full amount
 At sight, nor would permit you to discount. (IX.489-96)

The investment of Catherine’s sexual advances with pecuniary imperatives in the last four lines of this stanza is directly comparable to Venus’ seduction of Adonis by extortion: ‘Her lips are conquerors; his lips obey, / Paying what ransom the insulter willeth’ (549-50); though the conflation of sex and money is hardly unique to poetry, the similarities between the descriptions of Venus and Catherine are clearly telling. Ricks has argued that Byron’s use of ‘succulent’ resists being categorized as ‘either a pleasurable or distasteful sensation; and since it is a word with “ripe” potentialities for both, he pinions it with ‘truculent’ and ‘look you lent’.¹⁴³ Ricks rightly draws attention to the ambiguous positioning of ‘succulent’; its paring with ‘truculent’ constructs an interplay between feminine yielding and masculine aggression which is reinforced by the repeated ‘r’ sounds (*exuberant*; *truculent*; *wroth*; *rosy*, *ripe*; *rigour*) that make the narrator’s description of Catherine almost purr as seductively as one imagines the

¹⁴³ Ricks, 54.

Empress might have done herself—and likewise with the hint of a menacing growl ever present. ‘Succulent’ also hints at Catherine’s succubus tendencies, indeed, she ‘used her favourites too well’ (IX.500).

Both Shakespeare and Byron find comic potential in the imaging of boyish slightness overborne by a more expansive femininity. Venus’s size is humorously depicted in her abduction of Adonis: ‘Over one arm the lusty courser’s rein, / Under her other was the tender boy’ (31-32); the comic discrepancy in size between the lovers similarly informs the relationship between Catherine the Great and Juan: ‘Her Majesty looked down, the Youth looked up— / And so they fell in love’ (IX.529-530). The Empress’s ‘preference of a boy to men much bigger’ (IX.571) is the source of much of the ribaldry of the ninth Canto, which is perhaps the poem’s crudest. Juan’s physical appearance is contrasted with Catherine’s usual taste for lovers of more stereotypically masculine proportions: ‘But they were mostly nervous six-foot fellows, / All fit to make a Patagonian jealous.’ (IX.367-368). The large and succulent Catherine and the ‘slight and slim’ (IX.369) Juan enjoy a more reciprocal desire than their Shakespearean counterparts:

Shakespeare talks of ‘the Herald Mercury
New lighted on a Heaven-kissing hill;’
And some such visions crossed her Majesty,
While her young Herald knelt before her still.
’Tis very true the hill seemed rather high
For a Lieutenant to climb up; but skill
Smoothed even the Simplon’s steep, and by God’s blessing,
With Youth and Health all kisses are ‘heaven-kissing.’ (IX.521-528)

Byron’s Shakespearean allusion to *Hamlet* (III.iv.58-59) (the positioning of his line break preserves that of the original) recalls Hamlet’s conversation with his mother the Queen regarding her ‘unnatural’ relationship with Claudius: ‘Such an act / that blurs the grace and blush of modesty’ (III.iv.41-42). Similarly, the *unnaturalness* of Juan’s relationship with Catherine is ironically invoked through the natural image of a hill that

reinforces the incongruity of the lovers' size. The analogy of Catherine's body as a natural landscape is one that is foreshadowed in Shakespeare's poem, Venus declaring to Adonis:

'I'll be a park, and thou shalt be my deer:
Feed where thou wilt, on mountain, or in dale;
Graze on my lips, and if those hills be dry,
Stray lower, where the pleasant fountains lie.' (231-234)

Though the expansive landscape of Venus's form is more erotically figured than Catherine's, we can observe a similar portrayal of the absurdity of the dimensions of the female lover in relation to the male.

The excessive physicality of Venus and Catherine is indicative of appetite having dominated action, so contributing to the emphasis of the heroines as lustful. Like the blushing heroes, aesthetics translate to performance; Venus' size enables her to dominate Adonis: 'Backward she pushed him, as she would be thrust, / And governed him in strength though not in lust' (41-2). It is made clear, however, that physical force is not going to achieve the desired result. As Bate points out, 'Venus' problem is that she can't actually rape Adonis'.¹⁴⁴ Male ravishment by a female was a particularly personal Byronic concept, Byron considering himself as having been 'more ravished myself than anybody since the Trojan war' (*BLJ* VI.237), yet it is the futility of aggressive female sexuality that Byron explores in the harem Cantos; the comic petulance of Gulbeyaz illustrates the futility of force which renders the female suitor as impotent as the object of her affections: 'Though he deserved it well for being so backward, / The cutting off his head was not the art / Most likely to attain her aim—his heart' (V.1118-20). The threat of execution in this perverted courtly dynamic is later returned to in the Catherine Cantos with reference to Shakespeare's queen, who Byron contrasts with the more generous affections of Catherine:

¹⁴⁴ Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, 64.

Love had made Catherine make each lover's fortune;
 Unlike our own half-chaste Elizabeth,
 Whose avarice all disbursements did importune,
 If History, the grand liar, ever saith
 The truth; and, though Grief her old age might shorten,
 Because she put a favourite to death,
 Her vile, ambiguous method of flirtation,
 And Stinginess, disgrace her Sex and Station. (IX.641-648)

Byron's allusion to Queen Elizabeth serves as a reminder that Juan's erotic entanglement with the Russian Empress is a courtly one, which draws immediate comparison with his encounter with the Sultana four Cantos earlier. The public nature of Juan's relationship with Catherine contrasts strongly with his more secretive encounters with Julia and Haidée; moreover, it is clear that Juan's involvement with Catherine is more explicitly carnal rather than romantic:

. . . the Sovereign was smitten,
 Juan much flattered by her love, or lust;—
 I cannot stop to alter words once written,
 And the two are so mixed with human dust,
 That he who *names one*, both perchance may hit on (IX.610-614)

Byron not only articulates the usually unspoken admission that romantic idolization is necessarily accompanied by erotic desire, but additionally debunks the myth that women's sexual passivity is natural: women, given sufficient social status, will act on their desires as men do. Catherine's position of sovereignty enables her to gain sexual satisfaction where, all things being equal, she would otherwise be denied, Juan's affection for Catherine being the explicit result of his ability to attract the attentions of an Empress:

He, on the other hand, if not in love,
 Fell into that no less imperious passion
 Self-love—which, when some sort of Thing above
 Ourselves, a singer, dancer, much in fashion,
 Or dutchess, princess, Empress, 'deigns to prove,'
 ('Tis Pope's phrase) a great longing, tho' a rash one,
 For one especial person out of many,
 Makes us believe ourselves as good as any. (IX.537-544)

Byron's allusion to Pope invokes the question of the possibility of love's immunity to the seductions of power and riches. Eloisa's epistle to Abelard declares: 'Should at my

feet the world's great master fall, / Himself, his throne, his world, I'd scorn 'em all: / Not Caesar's empress would I deign to prove; / No, make me mistress to the man I love' (*Eloisa to Abelard* 85-88). In turn, Eloisa's declaration of faithfulness echoes that of Desdemona's, who proclaims she would not be faithless 'for all the world' (IV.iii.67); unlike Eloisa and Desdemona, Juan appears to adopt a more Emilia-esque philosophy, that 'it is a great price / For a small vice' (*Othello* IV.iii.68-69). Byron characteristically undermines such serious contemplation of the cause of Juan's infatuation, positing the cruder defense that: 'Besides, he was of that delighted age / Which makes all female ages equal—when / We don't much care with whom we may engage' (IX.545-547).

Byron takes his lead from Shakespeare in finding comedy in the perversion of an accepted courtly dynamic between pursuer and pursued. In both poems, there are rules that are being followed, just by the wrong players. Such bending of the rules is evident from the opening stanza of *Venus and Adonis* when Venus 'like a bold-faced suitor' 'gins to woo' Adonis (4-6). Venus explicitly wishes the inversion of sex to suit the power dynamic between herself and Adonis: 'Would thou wert as I am, and I a man' (369). From her own experience in love, Venus is further aware of the reversal of roles in this unequal courtship: 'I have been wooed as I entreat thee now' (97). If we turn to *Don Juan* we can observe that in Russia, Juan experiences the inversion of the accepted courtly dynamic and 'instead of courting courts, was courted' (X.225). In experimenting with conventional notions of courtship, both poets emphasise the unconventional roles of the hero and heroine. Each writer's experimentation with gender roles is further underlined by the rhetoric of courtly seduction. When Venus appeals to Adonis as 'sweet above compare' (8) we can observe the repetition of sentiments expressed in Sonnet 18, 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day', which is

again revisited a few lines later with: ‘A summer’s day will seem an hour but short’ (23).¹⁴⁵ The pressure of time equally resonates in the Gulbeyaz episode of *Don Juan*, and we can trace parallels between Venus’ and Gulbeyaz’s employment of the *carpe diem* rhetoric of the male courtier:¹⁴⁶ ‘To lose the hour would make her quite a martyr, / And they had wasted now almost a quarter’ (V.975-6). Gulbeyaz’s entreaties to Juan coyly nod towards the opening lines of Marvell’s famous poetic exploration of the *carpe diem* theme. Strikingly, Juan’s resistance of the Sultana’s advances suggests a form of female empowerment through refusal: something he’s more successful at as a woman than as a man, Gulbeyaz being the only heroine *not* to succeed in her designs to seduce him.

The reasons for the reluctance of both Juan and Adonis can be equated to their lack of freedom: an issue that both writers also explore with their heroines who frequently refuse to love to order.¹⁴⁷ When Juan declares “‘Love is for the free!’” (V.1012) we witness a clear echo of Gulnare, heroine of *The Corsair*: “‘I felt—I feel—love dwells with—with the free’” (*The Corsair* II.502). This lack of freedom stifles any amorous affection that might have grown between Juan and Gulbeyaz had they met under different circumstances: ‘although sensitive to beauty, he / Felt most indignant still at not being free’ (V.967-8). Such indignation is shared by Adonis who repeatedly calls for Venus to release him: “‘For shame,” he cries, “let go, and let me go”” (379); nearly

¹⁴⁵ Though publication dates of *Venus and Adonis* (1595) and *The Sonnets* (1609) would suggest that the former acted as a precursor to the latter, there is little certainty as to the date of the composition of the sonnets. Leslie Hotson’s collection, *Shakespeare’s Sonnets Dated and Other Essays* (London: Hart-Davis, 1949) suggest the cycle of 126 sonnets was completed by 1589; more recently David Honneyman has advanced the ‘Navarre thesis’ which dates the composition of the entire series between 1571-1585 (see his chapter on ‘The Dating of the Sonnets’ in *Shakespeare’s Sonnets and the Court of Navarre* (Braunton: Merlin, 1996) 27-35).

¹⁴⁶ Bate has spoken of ‘the traditional *carpe diem* argument of the male lover put into the mouth of the aggressive female wooer’ in relation to Shakespeare’s *Venus* (*Shakespeare and Ovid*, 57).

¹⁴⁷ Examples of Shakespearean and Byronic heroines who bestow their love autonomously and often outside of patriarchal dictates are too numerous to mention here. Cleopatra, Desdemona, Juliet, Miranda and Viola go some way to exemplify the former; Gulnare, Haidée, Leila, Neuha and Zuleika provide a few examples of the latter.

three hundred lines later he is still complaining ““Let me go; / You have no reason to withhold me so”” (612). Both Juan and Adonis are in a curiously feminine predicament of being held hostage for their sexual allure: ““Give me my hand,” saith Adonis; ““Why dost thou feel it?”” / ““Give me my heart,” saith Venus, “and thou shalt have it”” (373-4). This exchange is only just redeemed from the sinister, and is implicitly in dialogue with a wider tradition of female sexual autonomy being bound up with concepts of freedom and slavery.¹⁴⁸ For both Byron and Shakespeare, such female sexual tyranny articulates a concern with sexual imperialism. For Byron especially, concepts of power and of sexual dominance are closely related, as we see with Gulbeyaz: ‘She deem’d her least command must yield delight’ (V.1019). The concept of ‘yielding’ is resonant throughout Canto five of *Don Juan*. We hear from Juan that: ‘I yield thus far; but soon will break the charm / If any take me for that which I seem’ (V.653-654). (Juan is clearly aware here of the perils of convincing transvestitism: a transvestitism that, ironically, enables his next amorous encounter with the harem slave Dudu.) The notion of yielding is similarly dramatized in *Venus and Adonis*, Adonis demanding: ““Remove your siege from my unyielding heart: / To love’s alarms it will not ope the gate”” (423-424). Adonis’ description of Venus’ seduction in explicitly military diction emphasises the masculine tradition behind her advances, which requires Adonis to adopt a feminine position of passive resistance. Closed gates are symbolic of female chastity, and it is made clear that yielding is a feminine response to masculine sexual advances: to ‘yield’ is to be compliant, however tacitly.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Again, the figure of Gulnare (a harem slave) is of direct relevance; see also Carl Thompson’s remarks on the proliferation of captivity narratives in the Romantic period; such narratives emphasise ‘the cruelties and indignities’ which the captive suffers; see *The Suffering Traveller and the Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2007) 177-8.

¹⁴⁹ Shakespeare’s use of ‘yield’ in his plays is too prolific to provide an exhaustive list here, but as a passive feminine response it is worth citing *Taming of the Shrew*, Petruchio talking of Kate: ‘Yet extreme gusts will blow out fire and all. / So I to her, and so she yields to me’ (*Taming of the Shrew* II.i.136-7) and, perhaps more importantly for the purposes of the thesis, *Antony and Cleopatra*, Cleopatra defending

When Juan and Adonis do eventually yield—emotionally if not sexually—it is not at a demonstration of the heroines’ physical prowess or rhetorical flourish, but at their feminine weakness. Juan

. . . had made up his mind
To be impaled, or quarter’d as a dish [. . .]
Rather than sin—except to his own wish:
But all his great preparatives for dying
Dissolved like snow before a woman crying. (V.1121-1122; 1126-1128)

Likewise, Venus’ fainting (or feinting) response to Adonis’ killing look—‘like the deadly bullet of a gun’ (461)—prompts the hero to seek ‘a thousand ways...To mend the hurt that his unkindness marred’ (477-8). Whilst both poems award the courtly masculine virtues of strength and rhetoric to women, physical power and prompt eloquence are demonstratively ineffective compared with feminine wiles of emotional entrapment.

Both Byron’s and Shakespeare’s disrupted versions of seduction rituals maintain the paradox that even when women become men, strength remains weakness. The tangled interplay of masculinity and femininity, strength and weakness, power and impotence is crucial to the comedy of each poem, but also to their more serious statements of the artificiality of gender roles. As Judith Butler indicates, ‘A heightened awareness of the artifice of gender generates a critical energy along the unstable edges’.¹⁵⁰ Like Shakespeare, Byron’s comic transvestitism destabilizes the conditions of sexual attraction by inverting the sex of the lovers but being consistent in gendered qualities of attraction: Juan and Adonis would clearly make highly attractive women with their youth, beauty and vulnerability; Venus, Gulbeyaz and Catherine possess that most elusive quality of masculine allure: power. The power that these female protagonists demonstrate is not, however, of heroic proportions. That Byron ridicules

herself by stating: ‘Mine honour was not yielded / But conquered merely.’ (*Antony and Cleopatra* III.xiii.64-5).

¹⁵⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 258.

rather than glorifies the historical figure of Catherine the Great is symptomatic of his disregard for tyranny, regardless of the sex of the tyrant: 'For me, I deem an absolute Autocrat / *Not* a Barbarian, but much worse than that' (IX.183-184). Both Gulbeyaz and Catherine are central to Byron's experimentation with prescribed gender roles and his subsequent exemplification of a feminine capacity for 'masculine' behaviours. A more positive rendition of masculine empowerment is exhibited by Byron's militaristic heroic heroines, which are the focus of the following three sections.

(vi) 'Stranger than Fiction'¹⁵¹

The Maid of Saragoza, from the opening Canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, is Byron's first experiment with female military heroism. Based on an historical figure, Byron's depiction of Agustina of Aragon (also known as the Spanish Joan of Arc) straddles the boundaries between the historical and the fictional, the contemporary and the classical. Byron's fictionalization of Agustina is illustrative of how the archetype of the female military hero enabled women to negotiate patriarchal notions of valour whilst nevertheless retaining their 'femininity'. Much like her Gallic namesake, Agustina of Aragon has attracted intense scrutiny from historians and poets alike. The following is taken from a nineteenth-century historical account, written by Ellen Clayton:

During the second siege of Saragoza, Agustina distinguished herself again as a warrior. . . Her husband was severely wounded, but Agostina took his duties, while he lay bleeding at her side. Besides loading and firing this famous gun, Agostina frequently headed sallying parties; when, knife or sword in hand, her cloak wrapped round her, she cheered and encouraged the soldiers by her example and her words. Although constantly under fire, she escaped without a wound.¹⁵²

Far from an objective account, Clayton's feminist agenda is manifest in the imaging of the heroine. The incapacitated lover lying passive at Agustina's side conveys a powerful image of male vulnerability next to female authority, inverting anticipated gender roles. The heroine's inspirational voice and example echoes the epic portrayal of the goddess Minerva; the identification of the historical figure and the mythical goddess is reinforced by the seeming immortal qualities of Agustina herself, who supposedly escapes 'without a wound' despite being 'constantly under fire'.

¹⁵¹ 'Tis strange—but true; for Truth is always strange,
Stranger than Fiction: if it could be told,
How much would novels gain by the exchange!
How differently the world would men behold!
How oft would vice and virtue places change!
The new world would be nothing to the old,
If some Columbus of the moral seas
Would show mankind their souls' Antipodes. (*DJ XIV.801-808*)

¹⁵² Ellen C. Clayton, *Female Warriors: Memorials of Female Valour and Heroism, from the Mythological Ages to the Present Era*, vol. 2 of 2 (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1879) 86-87.

By contrast, Byron's depiction of the Maid moves beyond the transparent celebration of feminine fortitude in Clayton's Account. Diego Saglia argues that 'it was Byron's treatment that contributed most to Agustina's renown . . . [turning] her into a combination of the old stereotype of the sexual Spanish woman and the new Amazon image.'¹⁵³ Such poetic transmutation was not figured without political intent. The poetic Maid is born out of an emergent concern with the failure of heroism in the modern world that manifests itself in a more focused critique of contemporary Spain:

Awake, ye sons of Spain! awake! advance!
Lo! Chivalry, your ancient goddess, cries,
But wields not, as of old, her thirsty lance,
Nor shakes her crimson plumage in the skies:
Now on the smoke of blazing bolts she flies,
And speaks in thunder through yon engine's roar:
In every peal she calls—'Awake! arise!'
Say, is her voice more feeble than of yore,
When her war-song was heard on Andalusia's shore? (I.405-413)

At this point, Byron engages with a characteristically epic convention of lamenting the deterioration of heroism. In his *Iliad*, Homer laments the disparity between heroes of old and 'Such Men as live in these degenerate Days' (XII.540);¹⁵⁴ whilst Virgil's nostalgic reminiscence in the *Aeneid* betrays similar disillusionment with contemporary masculinity: 'What Warriours in our ancient Clime were bred, / What Souldiers follow'd, and what Heroes led' (VII.891-892). Byron's feminization of Chivalry—traditionally a masculine virtue—as a Minerva-esque figure prefigures the appearance of the Spanish Maid a little under twenty stanzas later, who answers the seemingly impotent call to arms offered by her immortal counterpart in both her action and example:

Is it for this the Spanish maid, arous'd,
Hangs on the willow her unstrung guitar,
And, all unsex'd, the Anlace hath espous'd,
Sung the loud song, and dar'd the deed of war?
And she, whom once the semblance of a scar

¹⁵³ Diego Saglia, *Poetic Castles in Spain: British Romanticism and Figurations of Iberia* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000) 196.

¹⁵⁴ See also XX.337 and XXI.472.

Appall'd, an owlet's 'larum chill'd with dread,
 Now views the column-scattering bay'net jar,
 The falchion flash, and o'er the yet warm dead
 Stalks with Minerva's step where Mars might quake to tread.

Ye who shall marvel when you hear her tale,
 Oh! had you known her in her softer hour,
 Mark'd her black eye that mocks her coal-black veil,
 Heard her light, lively tones in Lady's bower,
 Seen her long locks that foil the painter's power,
 Her fairy form, with more than female grace,
 Scarce would you deem that Saragoza's tower
 Beheld her smile in Danger's Gorgon face,
 Thin the clos'd ranks, and lead in Glory's fearful chase.

Her lover sinks—she sheds no ill-tim'd tear;
 Her chief is slain—she fills his fatal post;
 Her fellows flee—she checks their base career;
 The foe retires—she heads the sallying host:
 Who can appease like her a lover's ghost?
 Who can avenge so well a leader's fall?
 What maid retrieve when man's flush'd hope is lost?
 Who hang so fiercely on the flying Gaul,
 Foil'd by a woman's hand, before a batter'd wall?

Yet are Spain's maids no race of Amazons,
 But form'd for all the witching arts of love:
 Though thus in arms they emulate her sons,
 And in the horrid phalanx dare to move,
 'Tis but the tender fierceness of the dove
 Pecking the hand that hovers o'er her mate:
 In softness as in firmness far above
 Remoter females, fam'd for sickening prate;
 Her mind is nobler sure, her charms perchance as great. (I.558-593)

As in Clayton, we see the sunken lover and the fearless Agustina taking charge of the action. We also see the word 'sallying' that both Clayton and Byron use in the accepted definition of 'To issue suddenly from a place of defence or retreat in order to make an attack.'¹⁵⁵ In both too, is the latent suggestion of 'sallying' as a transgressive action, 'A sudden departure from the bounds of custom, prudence, or propriety'¹⁵⁶: in following a woman, the host's sally breaks free of both siege and custom. The evident similarities between Clayton's 'historic' account and Byron's poetic rendition quite potentially suggest Clayton's familiarity with Byron's poem; that a nineteenth-century woman

¹⁵⁵ "sally, v.2". OED Online. September 2011. Oxford University Press. 31 October 2011
 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/170078?rskey=5GRpU5&result=2&isAdvanced=false>>.

¹⁵⁶ "sally, n.1". OED Online. September 2011. Oxford University Press. 31 October 2011
 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/170072>>.

writer should find Byron's heroine a compelling figure of female valour should hardly be surprising. Byron's depiction of the Maid's movement within the stanza is positive, mimetically reflective of the advancing troops—as the stanza advances, so does the sallying host. Strikingly, Byron invests his fictionalized Maid with emphatically positive reactions to the events that unfold around her: 'Her lover sinks—she sheds no ill-timed tear; / Her chief is slain—she fills his fatal post; / Her fellows flee—she checks their base career; / The foe retires—she heads the sallying host.' Every departure or evasion is responded to with positive leadership, which contrast with the negative figuration of Chivalry cited earlier: 'But wields *not...Nor* shakes' [my emphasis]. Even the fact of the Maid's *not* crying is syntactically figured as an action: 'She *sheds* no ill-timed tear'. The exceptionally balanced form of the stanza—four rhetorical questions following four statements of action—reinforces the idea of her exceptional performance.

Throughout these stanzas, the Maid's femininity is consistently emphasised by the repetition of feminine pronouns and allusions to her beauty: 'Her fairy form, with more than female grace.' This line is simultaneously working in two ways: the Maid of Saragoza has more than the usual amount of female grace—she is exceptionally beautiful—and she possesses more than *just* female grace. This heroine has something more to offer: 'In softness as in firmness far above / Remoter females'. Byron's use of 'above' recalls his description of Gulnare being 'at once above—beneath her sex' (III.514). Gulnare is 'unsex'd' by a violent action which sits uneasily with her femininity; whilst the Maid is also 'all unsex'd' we do not get the same uneasy sense of walking in Lady Macbeth's shadow—her heroic actions do not deprive the Maid of Saragoza of her femininity, indeed, such capacity for violence stems from an explicitly feminine source: 'Tis but the tender fierceness of the dove, / Pecking the hand that

hovers o'er her mate'. The Maid's actions are motivated by Love—a point I shall return to with Myrrha. The use of the dove, the symbol of peace, illustrates the tension implicit between femininity and war. The Maid confronts the conventional monstrosity of female warriors, smiling 'in Danger's Gorgon face'—Gorgons being the embodiment of terrifying femininity. The Maid instead finds her mythological parallel in Minerva; she 'Stalks with Minerva's step where Mars might quake to tread.' Minerva is traditionally cast as heroically superior to Mars; as Pope indicates in a note to the fourth book of his *Iliad*, Mars represents 'Courage without Conduct', Minerva 'Courage with Conduct' (249n). As the Goddess of the disparate activities of war, poetry, and the arts, Minerva's comparison with the inherently contradictory Byronic heroine is apt. That the Maid will tread in Minerva's footsteps is anticipated in the opening description of the Maid having 'Sung the loud song'—a description which provides a possible allusion to the inspirational 'symphony and song' of the Abyssinian maid in 'Kubla Khan'—and certainly anticipates the later figuration of Myrrha as a warlike poetess.

Later in the second Canto of *Childe Harold* invokes Minerva's Grecian counterpart in a lament for the decline of heroic virtues: 'Ancient of days! august Athena! where, / Where are thy men of might? thy grand in soul? / Gone—glimmering through the dream of things that were' (II.10-12). In a poem haunted by questions regarding contemporary European heroism, it is remarkable, but perhaps unsurprising, that Byron saw such an arena as a fit space for his first heroic female protagonist. Carlyle's comment in *On Heroes* that 'Not a Hero only is needed but a world fit for him'¹⁵⁷ perhaps in part explains—nineteenth-century Europe may have been an unfit world for *men* of might and grand in soul, but the Maid of Saragoza becomes representative of the feminine ability to perform in the masculine arena of violence

¹⁵⁷ Carlyle, 186.

when heroes are not to be found. I do not want to suggest some sort of heroic opportunism on Byron's part, but rather that he contributes to the growing debate surrounding the social situation of women by poeticizing an historical figure through investing her with qualities of a Goddess who had traditionally made her appearance when the heroic conviction of masculine warriors was waning.

Yet Byron's depiction of the heroic Spanish Maid does not entirely depart from his satirical agenda. Byron's notes to this passage disillusion any straightforward celebration of an alternative heroic model: 'Such were the exploits of the Maid of Saragoza. When the author was at Seville she walked daily in the Prado, decorated with medals and orders, by command of the Junta' (*CPW* II.189). Though the note primarily offers factual verification for the existence of this modern Minerva, her fate of being paraded along the streets of Seville under the orders of the militaristic Junta perverts the notion that heroism emerges out of patriotism by forcing patriotism out of heroic exploit; hence, she has become assimilated with the patriotic resistance Byron critiques throughout the first *Canto* of *Childe Harold*.

The Maid plays a central role in Byron's questioning of the possibility of heroism in a modern European context. Like all heroes, she emerges at a time of crisis, and this military moment of crisis is representative of a larger heroic crisis faced by contemporary Europe. At this point, Byron maintains a belief in the necessary *cultural* role played by heroes and the reverence for the heroic—for hero-worship—prefiguring Carlyle's treatment of the subject later in the century:

For myself in these days, I seem to see in this indestructibility of Hero-worship the everlasting adamant lower than which the confused wreck of revolutionary things cannot fall. The confused wreck of things crumbling and even crashing and tumbling all round us in these revolutionary ages, will get down so far; *no* farther. It is an eternal corner-stone, from which they can begin to build themselves up again. That man, in some sense or other, worships Heroes; that we all of us reverence and must ever reverence Great Men: this is, to me, the living rock amid all rushings down whatsoever;—the one fixed point in modern

revolutionary history, otherwise as if bottomless and shoreless.¹⁵⁸

Though Byron shares Carlyle's belief in the culturally regenerative force of heroism, the above passage can equally be read as a gloss on the earlier poet's plans for literary renovation: heroism is the literary cornerstone of the epic edifice that Byron seeks to reconstruct from the wreckage of the contemporary literary moment. By constructing the Maid out of mythological materials Byron signals his commitment to resuscitating a specifically *literary* form of heroism. Byron's recruitment of heroic heroines for his revolutionary epic agenda becomes more of an explicitly literary concern toward the end of his career. As I shall come on to explore in more detail, Byron invokes more exclusively mythological reference points in the creation of his later actively heroic heroines; such mythologizing suggesting a departure from the more explicitly historico-cultural concerns articulated by the earlier example of the Maid of Saragoza.

The military heroism of the Spanish Maid provides the first example of a heroine symptomatic of Byron's commitment to a revolutionary poetical turn. Mary Orr's comments concerning the relationship between the female knight-errant and the reinforcement of tradition apply:

Within one tradition, anti-models are not necessarily breaks, but links within more complex meshing of influences to form 'traditions' within a tradition. These may actually strengthen rather than weaken the genre's or plot's ability to survive...To illustrate this socio-political point, of note is the Chinese *xia* or knight-errant tradition. This spawned the *nüxia*, or female knight-errant tradition, and has since become an ideal vehicle in which to insert the modern New Woman, for it was already a tale of intrigue integrity and transgressive, yet appropriate, conduct.¹⁵⁹

In the present section I have attempted to demonstrate how closer examination of heroines *outside* of the epic parameters of *Don Juan* reveals the poet's negotiation of the contemporary cultural crisis heroism faced through his transmutation of historical examples via a mythological lens. The capturing of Byron's imagination by these military heroines is perhaps explained by the way in which such figures have

¹⁵⁸ Carlyle, 14-15.

¹⁵⁹ Mary Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003) 87-88.

traditionally been used to distort the boundaries between fact and fiction. As Marina

Warner writes:

There is an actual historical content to the stories preserved by the emblematic figures, like the *Neuf Preuses*, who were so popular in fifteenth-century France. When Cleopatra sailed on her flagship in the thick of the battle of Actium, she acted according to the principles of Eastern royalty, which did not debar women from war, but expected their leaders, kings and queens, to attend the field. Achilles's own shield depicted women defending a city wall; Plato allowed women to be warriors in his republic, if they so desired. . . . The particular insult of defeat at the hands of a woman turns into special respect for that woman; both reflect the assumption that only manliness is equivalent to strength and a woman's victory is a travesty of the natural order, worthy of either horror or respect.¹⁶⁰

Byron's portrayal of the Maid is careful to mitigate any charges of horror: 'Yet are

Spain's maids no race of Amazons, / But form'd for all the witching arts of love'

(I.585-586); his presentation of Gulnare, however, demonstrates his alertness to the

uneasy yoking of violence and femininity—the true synthesis of which is not achieved

until later in his career. The crucial difference between the Maid and Gulnare is that the

Maid performs within an arena where violence is sanctioned by an extensive literary

and cultural tradition of military valour; open combat on the battlefield is a far cry from

secret assassination in private apartments, which Conrad articulates when he chastises

Gulnare's murderous suggestion: 'And therefore came I, in my bark of war, / To smite

the smiter with the scimitar; / Such is my weapon—not the secret knife—' (*Corsair*

III.362-364). By participating in a masculine arena of violence, the heroine is allowed

to participate in heroic action usually reserved for male protagonists.

¹⁶⁰ Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc: the Image of Female Heroism* (1981. Berkeley: California UP, 1999) 207-208.

(vii) Necessary Angels¹⁶¹

Byron had an evident fascination for the relationship between experience and fantasy. Famously hating ‘things *all fiction*’ (*BLJ* V.203), his experimentation with these concepts is evident throughout his work. It is the uncertain and permeable boundary between the historical and the mythological that enables Byron to employ heroic female figures within an authoritative recuperation of classical models of heroism. Byron’s poetic process constantly takes into account the boundaries between fact and fiction, which also (in part) explains why the Maid of Saragoza is the sole example of an explicitly historical heroine, and even then she is invested with mythological reference points. Byron’s poetic need to ground fiction in fact has the necessary reciprocal requirement of elevating fact through fiction and actual historical personages, especially those from recent history, are not as malleable in this mythologizing process. If Byron’s poeticization of the historical figure of Agustina of Aragon can be taken as revealing of his negotiation of the boundaries between poetical truth and empirical truth, then the question remains as to whether this dialectic of fact and fiction is evident in other examples of heroic heroines? If so, is such treatment of these women warriors illustrative of a specifically Byronic grappling of the distinctions between competing realities? Before examining the heroic figures of Byron’s women warriors, I shall first explore the distinction drawn by Byron between history and mythology.

In his late play *Sardanapalus*, Byron’s poetical motivation is to begin ‘to dramatize like the Greeks’ (*BLJ* VIII.152)—that is, to infuse the relaying of an historical narrative with a mythological sense. Why does Byron’s poetical method, which has hitherto been *fact* driven turn towards the transmutation of fact by *fiction*?¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ See Chapter 1, fn250. In his collection of essays, *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (New York: Knopf, 1951) Stevens focusses on the relationship between poetic and empirical truth.

¹⁶² Byron’s irritation with Wordsworth and Southey surfaces when their poetry does not adhere to

The crux is that Byron's works, whilst insisting on factual correctness, *always* filter empirical reality through an imaginative lens. The previous chapter of the thesis explored Byron's utilization of his knowledge of the Orient for poetical purposes; though reliant on his actual experience of the East, or, indeed, the foreign in general, Byron paints an aesthetic experience 'coloured' by the imagination. He is not interested in replicating reality, but in constructing an alternative *poetic* reality, and in doing so can be seen to engage with Romanticism's wider concern with the relation between the two states; as Schiller writes in 'On the Use of the Chorus in Tragedy', 'Every one expects from the imaginative arts a certain emancipation from the bounds of reality: we are willing to give scope to Fancy, and recreate ourselves with the possible',¹⁶³ or, as Byron declared in his Journal, 'To withdraw *myself* from *myself* (oh that cursed selfishness!) has ever been my sole, my entire, my sincere motive in scribbling at all' (*BLJ* III.225)—a sentiment that often surfaces within his poetry:

material truths; we can take Byron's opinion of Southey's Madoc to be reflective of his opinion of Southey himself, that he 'Tells us strange tales, as other travellers do, / More old than Mandeville's, and not so true.' (*English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, lines 223-224). In a letter to Leigh Hunt Byron corrects what he regards as inaccuracies in the *Excursion*: 'He says of Greece in the body of his book—that it is a land of

"rivers—fertile plains—& sounding shores
Under a cope of *variegated* sky"

The rivers are dry half the year—the plains are barren—and the shores *still & tideless* as the Mediterranean can make them—the Sky is anything but variegated—being for months & months—but "darkly—deeply—beautifully blue" (*BLJ* IV.324-6). Byron's observation on the tideless Mediterranean is remarked upon in his own *Siege of Corinth*, line 81: 'There shrinks no ebb in that tideless sea', which he annotates 'The reader need hardly be reminded that there are no perceptible tides in the Mediterranean'.

¹⁶³ Schiller, 'On the Use of the Chorus in Tragedy', *The Bride of Messina*, trans. Adam Lodge (3rd Ed. London: T. F. A. Day, 1867) 3. Byron lists a familiarity with Schiller in his early reading lists and *Il Visionario* (1819) is documented in the 1827 SC [179]; translations of Schiller's other plays would also have been available to him: *Fiesco* was translated twice (1796 and 1799) and *Die Räuber* three times (1792, 1795, and 1799). Jerome McGann has suggested both of these, along with 'the political tragedies of Alfieri and Monti', as influences on Byron's *Corsair*, despite a rather glaring chronological incongruity—Byron's reading of Schiller taking place after the completion of the tale (*CPW* III.446). Byron was also evidently familiar with Schiller's novel *Der Geisterseher* (*BLJ* V.203).

If in the course of such a life as was
 At once adventurous and contemplative,
 Men who partake all passions as they pass,
 Acquire the deep and bitter power to give
 Their images again as in a glass,
 And in such colours that they seem to live;
 You may do right forbidding them to show 'em,
 But spoil (I think) a very pretty poem. (DJ IV.849-856)

Though Byron reveals himself to be highly Romantic in his construction of an imaginative reality from empirical experience, as Barton rightly points out, Byron ‘participated fully in the world of fact. It was scarcely surprising that he should develop a respect for this world, as opposed to its less substantial, fictional twin, which sets him apart from most of his poetic contemporaries’.¹⁶⁴ Byron does not embark upon imaginative pursuits without being alert to the limiting factor of skepticism. To avoid this interruption, he insists on the facts being correct. In establishing a foundation of believability, the structure of the story that emerges holds firm. Byron’s meticulous attention to the credibility of his poetic fictions is evident from his careful direction of the reader to printed textual sources for his poetic narratives, exemplified by his late tale *The Island*, which was based upon two textual sources concerning the mutiny on *The Bounty* and life on the Tonga Isles.¹⁶⁵ Even the less believable Turkish Tales are posited as being elaborative efforts based on real events; extensive textual apparatus further reinforces such assertion of the authority of the printed word. As he writes in his journal having finished *The Bride of Abydos*:

This afternoon I have burnt the scenes of my commenced comedy. I have some idea of expectorating a romance, or rather a tale in prose;—but what romance could equal the events—

“quæque ipse...vidi,
 Et quorum pars magna fui”¹⁶⁶ (BLJ III.205)

Though in reference to *The Bride*, Byron’s allusion to Virgil recalls the compositional

¹⁶⁴ Anne Barton, ‘Byron and the Mythology of Fact’, *Nottingham Byron Lecture* (1968. Nottingham: The Byron Centre, 2009) 7.

¹⁶⁵ See Chapter 1, fn258.

¹⁶⁶ Marchand’s translation reads: ‘Virgil, *Aeneid*, II, 5. “I myself saw these things in all their horror, and I bore great part in them”’ (BLJ III.205n).

circumstances of *The Giaour*; he writes to Moore in 1821: ‘I suppose I told you that the Giaour story had actually some foundation on facts;...However, the *real* incident is still remote enough from the poetical one, being just such as, happening to a man of any imagination, might suggest such a composition’ (*BLJ* IX 80). A version of the events which the poem is supposedly based on is given in a letter by the Marquis of Sligo.¹⁶⁷ In summary, whilst in Athens in 1811, Byron witnessed an incident of a girl accused of adultery who, by order of the New Governor ‘unaccustomed to have the intercourse with Christians which his predecessor had, had of course the barbarous Turkish <Customs> {Ideas} with regard to Women’, was sewn into a sack and to be drowned; Byron allegedly intervened and ‘succeeded partly by personal threats & partly by bribery & entreaty, to procure her pardon on condition of her leaving Athens’.¹⁶⁸ Byron was alert to the advantages of the intrigue surrounding *The Giaour*, and aware that ‘the circumstances which are the groundwork make it’ (*BLJ* III.208). His reluctance to fully divulge the truth of his involvement sustained public fascination: ‘L. [Matthew Gregory “Monk” Lewis] wondered I did not introduce the situation into “the Giaour”. He *may* wonder;—he might wonder more at that production’s being written at all. But to describe the *feelings* of *that situation* were impossible—it is *icy* even to recollect them’ (*BLJ* III.230).

The significance of Byron’s historical-poetical method is, therefore, firstly owing to a poetic determination to facilitate imaginative truth; or, in other words, for Byron poetic truth first and foremost owes its origins to historical truth. Barton has

¹⁶⁷ A copy is housed in the John Murray Archive in the National Library of Scotland (NLS Acc.12604 / 4227).

¹⁶⁸ Peter Cochran ed., ‘Byron’s Correspondence and Journals 04: From London and other Places in England, 1813’ (2009) 33 <<http://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/02/04-london-18137.pdf>> 12:41 on 22/09/11.

Byron received Sligo’s letter on August 31st 1813 and forwarded a copy to Lady Melbourne immediately, writing ‘I think it will make you laugh when you consider all the poetry & prose which has grown out of it’ (*BLJ* III.102); he forwarded the letter to Moore the next day, stating it ‘will let you into the origin of ‘The Giaour’, explaining that ‘This letter was written to me on account of a different story circulated by some gentlewomen of our acquaintance, a little too close to the text.’ (*BLJ* III.104-5).

argued that the relationship between historical truth and poetical truth is further elucidated by Byron's separation of the poet and the hero in *Don Juan*, 'from the fact that Juan must stand opposite the narrator in that strange dialectic between fiction and reality, art and life, which the poem sustains.'¹⁶⁹ Byron's preoccupation with the separation of his own historical reality from the poetic reality that he constructs for Juan is evident throughout *Don Juan*. The strangely oxymoronic concept of poetic reality demands some elucidation. Byron's commitment to poeticizing empirical truth manifests itself by his careful navigation between the *too* real and too mundane, or, equally objectionable, too isolated from reality; as E. H. Coleridge notes, 'Byron loved to make fact and fancy walk together'.¹⁷⁰ To return briefly to Byron's comments regarding *The Giaour*, it is not so much that the '*real* incident is still remote enough from the poetical one', but that the poetical version is sufficiently invested with the imaginary to be differentiated from the real, whilst being no less authentic. Byron derides the shortcomings of contemporary poets' compositions that suffer from being *too* real:

Why do their sketches fail them as inditers
Of what they deem themselves most consequential—
The *real* portrait of the highest tribe?
'Tis that, in fact, there's little to describe. (XIV.157-160)

The dominant reading of final line is a typically Byronic slur on the interest provided by the upper echelons of society. A further permutation of this line is that facts alone are insufficient for persuasive poetics: in *fact* there is little to describe. The best poetry requires the vibrancy of imagination to cause the reader to fully invest in the alternative poetic reality painted by the poet. Byron's poetic treatment of historic material is central to his poetic methodology; as he states in the first Canto of *Don Juan*, 'This

¹⁶⁹ Barton, 'Mythology', 19.

¹⁷⁰ E. H. Coleridge ed., *The Works of Lord Byron*, vol. 6 of 7 (London: John Murray, 1903; rpt. 1924) 576n.

liberty is a poetic licence' (I.956). *Don Juan* repeatedly exhibits such 'poetic licence', much of the poem's material being derived from historical events and personages; for example, during the infamously bloody Russian siege of Ismail (1790-91) Juan fights alongside the historical figure Suvarrow (Alexander Suvorov, 1729-1800) before conducting his affair with a yet more renowned historical figure: Catherine the Great (1729-1796).

The poet of *Don Juan* provides a meta-commentary concerning the importance of sustaining a realistic poetics:

But then the fact's a fact—and 'tis the part
Of a true poet to escape from fiction
Whene'er he can; for there is little art
In leaving verse more free from the restriction
Of truth than prose, unless to suit the mart
For what is sometimes called poetic diction,
And that outrageous appetite for lies
Which Satan angles with, for souls, like flies. (VIII.681-688)

Byron's use of 'fact' in the poem is remarkable; there are fifty-three instances within the main body of the poem, and it occurs at least once in each Canto with the exception of the unfinished seventeenth Canto.¹⁷¹ Byron's syntactical play on the definition of a 'true poet' is revealing of what he sees as the function, or requirement, of greater art. Verse, like prose, should be held accountable to the facts. The assumed poetic licence, where poets are sanctioned by their chosen literary medium to indulge 'that outrageous appetite for lies' is for Byron exactly that—an outrage. Byron invokes more traditional Christian rhetoric to illustrate his point: poetic fabrications are the work of the Devil, an artful Satanic sport to hook its credulous readers. Byron's choice of poetry over prose was, however, demonstrative of his desire to reinvent the facts and to transmute reality.

¹⁷¹ The (almost) exhaustive list runs as follows (I have not included use of the word in Byron's notes: such notes are intended to reinforce empirical claims made in the poetry, prose being the formal vehicle of fact. As such, the word's appearance in Byron's prose notes is less remarkable than when it appears in verse): I.352, 964, 1166, 1310, 1401, 1422, 1618; II.205, 321, 467, 548, 625, 1083; III.58, 78, 272, 295, 314, 825, 981; IV.38, 634 (see B.'s note), 691, 762; V.106, 251, 258, 1090; VI.471, 679, 826; VII.59, 409, 558, 641; VIII.78, 587, 681; IX.10, 16, 413; X.449; XI.292; XII.316, 342, 562, 609, 635; XIII.512, 807; XIV.98, 160; XV.100, 638; XVI.124, 382.

Pure invention might be the talent of a liar (*BLJ* V.203), but there were equal risks in adhering too closely to the real: ‘I began a comedy and burnt it because the scene ran into *reality*;—a novel, for the same reason. In rhyme, I can keep more away from facts; but the thought always runs through, through...yes, yes, through’ (*BLJ* III.209). Barton appears correct in her assertion that for Byron ‘The formal patternings of verse transformed actuality as the more naturalistic discipline of prose could not.’¹⁷² The poetic reality of *Don Juan* is at once committed to imaginative truth and empirical fact; though, as the poet declares in the opening Canto of the poem, ‘my poetic skill / For want of facts would all be thrown away’ (I.963-964), poetry requires these facts to entertain something more than truth: ‘I defy / Historians, heroes, lawyers, priests to put / A fact without some leaven of a lie’ (XI.290-292). The fermentation necessary to enable fact to achieve its fullest proportions is only possible through the addition of the expansive agency of falsehood.

Byron’s avoidance of too much reality perhaps explains his desire to dramatise like the Greeks. Classical literature—be that epic or tragedy—did not simply seek to replicate historical events, but to mythologize them and to invest them with a supernatural machinery that would heighten poetic interest and so sustain their retellings. As I began to suggest above, we can also observe a contrary compulsion in Byron—to historicize myth, an impulse that can again be elucidated by his fascination for Greek literary techniques. Byron’s interpretation of what it meant to ‘dramatise like the Greeks’ appears to anticipate Nietzsche’s observations on the topic:

it is the fate of every myth to creep by degrees into the narrow limits of some alleged historical reality, and to be treated by some later generation as a unique fact with historical claims: and the Greeks were already fairly on the way toward restamping the whole of their mythical juvenile dream sagaciously and arbitrarily into a historico-pragmatical *juvenile history*¹⁷³

¹⁷² Barton, ‘Mythology’, 11.

¹⁷³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy; and, The Case of Wagner* (New York: Vintage, 1967) 75.

Both the inclination to mythologize history and to historicize mythology can be observed in the literary treatment of women warriors. Byron's location of the dialectic of fact and fiction within his heroic heroines engages with an extensive literary heritage of using such figures to articulate the problematic yet productive relationship between poetic and empirical truth.

In *The Faerie Queene*, the formal model for *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Spenser contemplates the problematic question of accurate historical representations of female military heroes—a historical narrative written by men distorts the actual historical content that these figures are based upon:

Here haue I cause, in men iust blame to find,
That in their proper prayse too partiall bee,
And not indifferent to woman kind,
To whom no share in armes and cheualrie
They do impart, ne maken memorie
Of their braue gestes and prowesse martiall;
Scarse do they spare to one or two or three,
Rowme in their writs; yet the same writing small
Does all their deeds deface, and dims their glories all.

But by record of antique times I find,
That women wont in warres to beare most sway,
And to all great exploits them selues inclind:
Of which they still the girlond bore away,
Till enuious Men fearing their rules decay,
Gan coyne streight lawes to curb their liberty;
Yet sith they warlike armes haue layd away:
They haue exceld in artes and pollicy,
That now we foolish men that prayse gin eke t'enuy. (III.ii.1-18)¹⁷⁴

Without denying the evident socio-historic flourish—Spenser writes his epic at a point with a historical example of a woman who ‘wont in warres to beare most sway’—what I would like to emphasize is the significance of these lines as a commentary on literary composition. Spenser expresses the evident need to look beyond the defacing histories of modern European Christian culture, to records of ‘antique times’ for more impartial written examples of heroic women—to move beyond the contemporary, toward the classical. Spenser's contemplation of the motivations for effacing women from the

¹⁷⁴ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene* (London: Penguin, 1987) 402.

narrative of history, and the legislative repression that later comes into action illustrates the consequences of Warner's claim that the victorious woman warrior is assumed to be a travesty of the natural order. Three centuries later, Virginia Woolf would analogously ponder the discrepancy between the historical and the literary representation of women: 'She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history...It was certainly an odd monster that one made up by reading the historians first and the poets afterwards—a worm winged like an eagle'.¹⁷⁵ At the same time that the historical heroine is having her deeds defaced and glories dimmed, her fictional counterpart is proving to all great exploits herself inclined. Byron extends such distortive tendencies to the historian as well as the poet. Speaking of the posthumous reputation of Madame de Staël in a note to the fourth Canto, Byron writes: 'We have her picture embellished or distorted, as friendship or detraction has held the pencil: the impartial portrait was hardly to be expected from a contemporary' (*CPW* II.235)—perhaps we might extend his judgment to the literary representation of women throughout history.

The Amazons provide the clearest example of the synthesis of fact and fiction. Gibbon notes: 'Among barbarous nations, women have often combated by the side of their husbands. But it is *almost* impossible, that a society of Amazons should ever have existed either in the old or new world.'¹⁷⁶ That Amazons are only '*almost*' an impossibility (Gibbon's emphasis) is revealing of their imaginative potency. As Kathryn Schwarz writes, 'By the second half of the [sixteenth] century the intertextuality of Amazons, their simultaneous appearance as mythological figures and as objects of the explorer's quest, has itself become a trope; notorious for undermining categorical certainties, Amazons figure the sense in which boundaries between

¹⁷⁵ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own; and, Three Guineas* (Oxford: OUP, 2008) 56.

¹⁷⁶ Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. David Womersley (London: Penguin, 2005) 321n.

experience and fantasy are permeable.¹⁷⁷ In other words, Amazons are suggestive of the creative potentialities of the simultaneous embodiment, or synthesis, of the seemingly irreconcilable qualities of historical plausibility and poetic believability—of historical truth and poetic truth. The Amazons and women warriors after them are perhaps also illustrative of the hierarchical significance of the empirical and the imaginative for poetry. Schiller's reflections in his essay 'Upon the Pathetic' elucidates this point further:

how little the poetic power of the impression which moral characters or actions make upon us, depends upon their *historical reality*. The pleasure we take in ideal characters loses nothing by the recollection that they are poetic fictions: for all aesthetic effect is based upon *poetic*, not upon *historic*, truth. But poetic truth does not consist in the fact that something has really happened but that it could happen—in the internal potentiality, then, of things. The aesthetic power must then already lie in the represented possibility.¹⁷⁸

The aesthetic potency of women warriors lies in the fact that they are representative of a historic dimension, whilst also garnering sufficient poetic interest to be legitimate poetic fictions.

It is less surprising than may first appear that Schiller would go on to use Joan of Arc as the character to work through his thoughts on the aesthetic reciprocity of poetic and historical truth. Carlyle explains in his *Life of Schiller*: 'Considered as an object of poetry or history, Jeanne D'Arc, the most singular personage of modern times, presents a character capable of being viewed under a great variety of aspects, and with a corresponding variety of emotions.'¹⁷⁹ Though Byron never uses Joan of Arc explicitly in his own poetry, her influence on Romantic conceptions of heroic heroines, specifically female military heroism, is too significant to overlook. Through an examination of the contemporary literary treatment of Joan of Arc, we can better

¹⁷⁷ Kathryn Schwarz, 'Amazon Reflections in the Jacobean Queen's Masque', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 35.2 (Spring, 1995): 295.

¹⁷⁸ Friedrich Schiller, 'Upon the Pathetic', *The Philosophical and Aesthetic Essays and Letters* (London: Chapman, 1845) 236.

¹⁷⁹ Thomas Carlyle, *The Life of Friederich Schiller: Comprehending an Examination of His Works* (1825. London: Chapman & Hall, 1872) 135.

understand Byron's own construction of heroic heroines on the battlefield as a mode of negotiating the dialectic of historical fact and poetic fiction.

Caroline Franklin has illustrated how Byron's warrior maidens engage in dialogue with both contemporary and classical literary tradition:

Byron creates in Gulnare - as later in Kaled and Myrrha - a warrior maiden who not only accompanies the hero but proves herself indispensable to his mission. Southey's *Joan of Arc* was probably an influence. (One of her comrades in arms is named Conrade.) Brian Wilkie notes epic precedents for Southey's warrior-maiden: Camilla in the *Aeneid*, Clorinda in *Jerusalem Delivered*, Bradamant in *Orlando Furioso*, and Britomart in *The Faerie Queene*.¹⁸⁰

Though she rightly indicates the connection between European Romanticism and Classical epic, Byron's poetry exhibits a more direct literary lineage with epic precedents than Franklin allows. Southey was very likely an influence on Byron's construction of these heroic female figures. Southey chooses Joan of Arc, Byron chooses the Spanish Joan of Arc. Southey's epic would have undoubtedly drawn Byron's attention to the figure of Joan, yet the important individual here is Joan rather than Southey. As Marina Warner indicates, 'Joan of Arc is a preeminent heroine because she belongs to the sphere of action, while so many feminine figures or models are assigned and confined to the sphere of contemplation...She has extended the taxonomy of female types; she makes evident the dimensions of women's dynamism'.¹⁸¹ Franklin's suggestion appears to be that Byron's warrior maidens are classically informed via the cipher of Southey, yet it is entirely plausible that Byron draws *directly* on the epic precedents that Wilkie notes. Though we know that Byron read Virgil, Tasso, Ariosto and Spenser, his familiarity with Southey's epic remains conjectural. The poem is referred to in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, the Maid fairing rather better than her poetic biographer:

Behold the Ballad-monger SOUTHEY rise!
To him let CAMOENS, MILTON, TASSO, yield,
Whose annual strains, like armies, take the field.

¹⁸⁰ Franklin, 84.

¹⁸¹ Warner, 9.

First in the ranks see Joan of Arc advance,
 The scourge of England, and the boast of France!
 Though burnt by wicked BEDFORD for a witch,
 Behold her statue placed in Glory's niche;
 Her fetters burst, and just released from prison,
 A virgin Phoenix from her ashes risen. (202-210)

There is no conclusive evidence in the *Letters and Journals* to suggest that Byron actually read *Joan of Arc*, however, there were five editions available in his lifetime, the poem being first published in 1796 (figures not available), then 1798 (1,000 copies—all copies were purchased by Longman from Joseph Cottle at the same time as the copyright); 1806 (500 copies); 1812 (750 copies); and 1817 (500 copies). A sixth edition was published in 1837 as part of the *Poetical Works* vol. 1 (1837).¹⁸²

The fictional potency of Joan of Arc is in part owing to the mythic quality of her history. Her evolution from historic figure to mythical heroine was, somewhat cynically, assumed by Hume to be a process begun in her own lifetime to enhance her appeal to the French populous:

Her former occupation was even denied: she was no longer the servant of an inn. She was converted into a shepherdess, an employment much more agreeable to the imagination. To render her more interesting, near ten years were subtracted from her age; and all the sentiments of love and chivalry were thus united to those of enthusiasm, in order to inflame the fond fancy of the people with prepossessions in her favour.¹⁸³

If Hume is correct, and the history of Joan was being rewritten as mythology even as she lived it, then her fictional appeal is in part, as Carlyle suggests above, owing to her malleability. That she emerges as such a potent figure in the Romantic period can be explained historically by her symbolic status as a freedom fighter and rebel against tyrannical forces. Certainly, Southey's epic rendering of her history was intended as a political statement of his commitment to the radical cause—not only does he choose a

¹⁸² For more detailed statistical information regarding print runs see Fig. 1 'Print runs for *Poetical Works*, 10 vols (1837-8) 1837-54' in 'General Introduction' of *Joan of Arc, Robert Southey: Poetical Works*, vol. 1 of 5, ed. Pratt (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2004) xxv-xxvi.

¹⁸³ David Hume, *History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to The Revolution in 1688. Electronic Edition* Vol. 2 of 6 (InteLex, 1995) 399.
 <<http://pm.nlx.com/xtf/view?docId=hume/hume.12.xml;chunk.id=div.hume.hist.v2.20;toc.depth=1;brand=default;query-prox=#>> 17:06 on 09/11/11.

hero who is female, but one who is French, and most of the epic focusses on her victories against the English forces. In addition to the apposite historical circumstances of Southey's epic, Joan's epic presence is informed by an extensive literary heritage.

The European literary fascination with Joan as an epic subject intensifies in the mid-seventeenth century, with the publication of works such as Jean Chapelain's *The Maid, or the Heroic Poem of France Delivered* (1656); this was followed in the eighteenth century by a flurry of publications in France, including Père Néon's *L'Amazone Française* (1721), Jean de Roussy's *Aurélia, ou Orléans Délivré* (1738), and Voltaire's *La Pucelle d'Orléans* (not published officially until 1762, but widely circulated in pirated copies from the mid-1730s). The latter, argues Nora Heimann, 'played a pivotal part in inspiring the birth of the modern cult of Joan of Arc'.¹⁸⁴ Voltaire's efforts were, however, in a rather less tasteful vein than one would imagine Joan would warrant; Carlyle writes that 'Our illustrious *Don Juan* hides his head when contrasted with Voltaire's *Pucelle*: Juan's biographer, with all his zeal, is but an innocent, and a novice, by the side of this arch-scorner.'¹⁸⁵ As such, the pivotal role Voltaire's composition played was in inspiring contemporaries to write against his version of Joan. Carlyle continues, 'Such a manner of considering the Maid of Orleans is evidently not the right one. Feelings so deep and earnest as hers can never be an object of ridicule: whoever pursues a purpose of any sort with such fervid devotedness, is entitled to awaken emotions, at least of a serious kind, in the hearts of others.'¹⁸⁶ The extensive artistic attention granted to Joan extended well into the nineteenth-century,

¹⁸⁴ Nora M. Heimann, *Joan of Arc in French Art and Culture (1700-1855): From Satire to Sanctity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) 14. Heimann retells the legendary origin of the poem, which Voltaire was 'induced to write...when a friend challenged him to produce a better treatment of the subject than Jean Chapelain's *The Maid, or the Heroic Poem of France Delivered*'.

¹⁸⁵ Carlyle, *Schiller*, 135.

¹⁸⁶ Carlyle, *Schiller*, 136.

beyond the Romantic period, with Friedrich Schiller's *The Maid of Orleans*' (1801)¹⁸⁷ inspiration of both Verdi's *Giovanna d'Arco* (first performed in Milan on 15th February 1845), and Tchaikovsky's *The Maid of Orleans* (first performed in St. Petersburg on 25th February 1881). Joan's status in the literary consciousness of European Romanticism is not, then, in any way limited to Southey's epic.

A close examination of literary representations of Joan in the Romantic period exposes the manner in which writers negotiate her historical-mythical qualities. For example, Schiller portrays the inspirational quality of his Joan of Arc as inextricable from her mythological qualities. She is described as a 'godlike girl' (I.1129) by one of her compatriots, and her first appearance on the battlefield is reminiscent of the celestial machinery that intervenes in epic scenes of war: 'For suddenly out of the woodland depths / A maiden stepped, a helmet on her head, / And like a warrior-goddess beautiful / Yet terrifying to behold' (I.954-957). Lest we assume that it is simply French partiality that construes Joan as a goddess-like figure, Schiller is careful to construct a similar reaction from an English General:

Who is she who is thus invincible,
This terror-goddess who all of a sudden
Reverses battle fortunes and transforms
A shy and coward pack of deer to lions?
Can an imposter learn a heroine's role
And play it to strike terror into real heroes?
A woman robs me of my victor's fame? (II.1542-1548)

At this point, the English General calls into questions the correctness of Joan's action presence; not only is she an 'imposter', but also a woman. He also questions Joan's true status as a heroine, suggesting that the word denotes not merely a female protagonist, but the feminine counterpart of 'hero'. It is not Joan's action that renders her thus, but her inspirational abilities, and it is as an inspirational, Minerva-esque figure that the French troops wish Joan to remain: 'Appoint the way of victory for the army / And bear

¹⁸⁷ Parenthetical citations from Schiller's *Mary Stuart; The Maid of Orleans: Two Historical Plays*, trans. Charles E. Passage (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1961).

the flag in your pure hand before us, / But do not take the deadly sword yourself

(II.1511-1513). Schiller's play introduces a masculine anxiety concerning the propriety of Joan's joining the fray that Southey pays no heed:

. . . the Maid
 Led fierce the fight; the Maid, tho' all unus'd
 To the rude conflict, new inspir'd by Heaven,
 Flashing her flamy falchion thro' the troops,
 That like a thunderbolt, where'er it fell,
 Scattered the trembling ranks. (VI.262-267)

The above lines reveal Joan not simply to be an inspirational figure, but an inspired one. Throughout the epic Southey images Joan as a divinely inspired figure, titling the Ninth Book the 'Vision of the Maid'. There is the suggestion that her heroic motivation is connected to a phenomenon akin to poetic mania:

"Anon my raptured eye would glance
 A wild prophetic meaning. I have heard
 Strange voices in the evening wind. Strange forms
 Dimly discovered throug'd the twilight air." (I.464-67)

Schiller constructs his heroine along similar lines; Joan's speech in the first act of *The Maid of Orleans* is given '(in a state of inspiration)' (I.302-327), and he makes her celestial inspiration central not only to her actions, but to others' perceptions of her: 'She calls herself a seeress and a God- / Appointed prophetess' (I.989-990). Schiller's Joan is described as exhibiting the features of poetic mania: 'In her eye the lightning / Flashes and her cheeks blaze fervent fire!' (I.330-331). Coleridge's contributions to the first edition of *Joan of Arc* formed the basis of his own *Maid of Orleans* in 'The Destiny of Nations', where again we can observe images of Joan in a state akin to poetic inspiration:

. . . the Maid
 Brooded with moving lips, mute, startful, dark!
 And now her flushed tumultuous features shot
 Such strange vivacity, as fires the eye
 Of Misery fancy-crazed! and now once more
 Naked, and void, and fixed, and all within
 The unquiet silence of confuséd thought
 And shapeless feelings. For a mighty hand
 Was strong upon her (‘Destiny of Nations’ 254-262)

The recurrent presentation of Joan as an inspired heroine can be regarded as revealing of her as a muse-like figure representative of the poet's mind, by herself possessing the capacity for entering into an inspirational state akin to poetic mania. Joan therefore becomes a heroine via whom poets can work through their own creative anxieties regarding the powers and capacities of the imagination to impact upon the real world; in other words, to articulate their concerns regarding the relationship between imaginative realities and empirical truth.

(viii) Furious Femininity

The Romantic concern with the poetic synthesis of the mythical qualities of women warriors with a sense of actual historical content is most clearly seen in Byron's construction of Myrrha in the late play *Sardanapalus* (1821). Byron makes clear the antique sources of the play, writing in his Ravenna Journal:

Sketched the outline and Drams. Pers. of an intended tragedy of Sardanapalus, which I have for some time meditated. Took the names from Diodorus Siculus, (I know the history of Sardanapalus, and have known it since I was twelve years old), and read over a passage in the ninth vol. octavo of Mitford's Greece,¹⁸⁸ where he rather vindicates the memory of this last of the Assyrians....I carried Teresa the Italian translation of Grillparzer's Sappho, which she promises to read. She quarrelled with me, because I said that love was *not the loftiest* theme for true tragedy; and, having the advantage of her native language, and natural female eloquence, she overcame my fewer arguments. I believe she was right. I must put more love into "Sardanapalus" than I intended (*BLJ* VIII.26).

Byron's clear signalling of the ancient historical material that inspired the play is part of a conscious apolitical agenda. This was accompanied by a desire to emulate Greek method, not just in the formal qualities of the play—though he does remark frequently on these¹⁸⁹—but in their mutual reliance on the historic and the mythic. He appears to overstate his reliance on the historical in a letter to Murray: 'I trust that "Sardanapalus" will not be mistaken for a *political* play—which was so far from my intention that I thought of nothing but Asiatic history.—The Venetian play too is rigidly historical.—

¹⁸⁸ Byron reproduces the passage from William Mitford's *The History of Greece*, vol. 7 of 8 (1784-1810. London: T. Cadell, 1829) 482; Mitford refers to 'the inconsistency of traditions concerning Sardanapalus . . . in Diodorus's account of him.' See also McGann's note in *CPW* VI.615. For further discussion of Byron's interaction with the Sardanapalus myth see Lynn Byrd's 'Old Myths for the New Age: Byron's *Sardanapalus*', *History & Myth: Essays on English Romantic Literature*, ed. Stephen C. Behrendt. (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1990) 166-187.

¹⁸⁹ During the composition of *Sardanapalus*, Byron is reading Seneca—albeit in a desultory fashion; he talks of having 'turned over' the Roman's tragedies (*BLJ* VIII.27). In his correspondence he makes clear his determination to stick to the Senecan tragic conventions, which provides a further example of the extent of Byron's knowledge of classical generic conventions, and also that he could stick to them when he wished to. He writes to Murray: 'You will remark that the *Unities* are all *strictly* observed.—The Scene passes in the same *Hall* always. —The time—a *Summer's night* about nine hours—or less, though It begins before Sunset—and ends after Sunrise.' (*BLJ* VIII.128-9); and again the same day to Kinnaid: 'In this play—I have observed the *unities* (*all three*) strictly—the whole action passes in the *same hall* of the palace of Sardanapalus.' (*BLJ* VIII.129); a few days later he writes to Thomas Moore: 'You will be surprised to hear that I have finished another tragedy in *five* acts, observing all the unities strictly. It is called "Sardanapalus," and was sent by last post to England. It is *not for* the stage, any more than the other was intended for it—and I shall take better care *this* time that they don't get hold on't.' (VIII.134); and again to Moore (seemingly forgetting the content of his former letter): 'I have sent to Murray a new tragedy, ycleped "Sardanapalus," written according to Aristotle—all, save the chorus—I could not reconcile me to that' (*BLJ* VIII.141).

My object has been to dramatize like the Greeks (a modest phrase!) striking passages of history, as they did of history & mythology' (*BLJ* VIII.152). The play is being written at a time when Byron is contemplating the purpose and meaning of poetry itself. He provides a 'Memoranda' in his Ravenna Journal: 'What is Poetry?—The feeling of a Former world and Future' (*BLJ* VIII.37).¹⁹⁰ It is through the synthesis of the historical and the mythical that Byron injects a sense of the former world into his poetry. In his heroine Myrrha, we can observe the competitive, but ultimately productive partnership, between the feeling of a 'Former world and Future'. That Myrrha is a heroine from a former world is articulated by her extensive presence in classical literature. She first appears in the tenth book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* which relates the story of her incestuous desire for her father, the consummation of which results in the birth of Adonis (*Metamorphoses* 10.298-518).¹⁹¹ Alternate classical versions of her story appear in (pseudo-)Apollodorus' *The Library* (3.14.4); Hyginus' *Fabulae* (58); and Antonian Liberalis's *Metamorphoses* (34).¹⁹² Myrrha's afterlife in European literature has been similarly rich and varied: Dante refers to her in *The Divine Comedy* (*Hell* XXX.38-40); Dryden translated the relevant passage of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in 1700,¹⁹³ she inspires the titular heroine of Vittorio Alfieri's *Mirra* (1785), which is first translated into English by Charles Lloyd in 1815;¹⁹⁴ and, particularly significant given Byron's intimacy with the author and the close proximity in publication date to the composition

¹⁹⁰ See J. Drummond Bone, 'Byron's Ravenna Diary Entry: What is Poetry?', *Byron Journal* 6 (1978): 78-89.

¹⁹¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, vol. 2 of 2 (London: William Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1926) 85-101.

¹⁹² Apollodorus, *The Library*, vol. 2 of 2 (London: William Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1921) 85-87; Hyginus, *The Myths of Hyginus*, trans. and ed. Mary Grant (Lawrence: Kansas UP, 1960) 61; Antonian Liberalis, *The Metamorphoses of Antonian Liberalis: A Translation with a Commentary*, trans. and ed. Francis Celoria (London: Routledge, 1992) 93.

¹⁹³ John Dryden, 'Cinyras and Myrrha, Out of the Tenth Book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. William Frost and Vinton A. Dearing, vol. 7 of 20 (Berkeley: California UP, 2000) 248-259.

¹⁹⁴ Mary Shelley read and translated (at least some of) Alfieri's play in 1818 (see *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844*, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert, vol. 1 of 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) 226).

of *Sardanapalus*, she is mentioned in Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* (1820).¹⁹⁵ On an empirical note, Myrrha is the result of Teresa Guiccioli's demand that Byron 'must put more love into "Sardanapalus" than [he] intended', and so she is the product of two competing historical moments: of past literary material and present personal anxieties. More crucially, it is in Myrrha that we can observe Byron's articulation of an alternative model of gender—a specifically *female* form of heroism. Such an alternative model of gendered heroism interacts at once with the feeling of a former world via the mythic reference points with which Myrrha is invested, whilst simultaneously challenging contemporary restrictive notions of appropriate gendered spheres of action, thereby pointing towards an alternative future. Such a synthesis of the feeling of a former world and future should be primarily read in terms of the literary. In his memoranda, Byron seeks to answer the question 'What is *poetry*?' (my emphasis), and it is to poetry that I now turn.

As I have already outlined, Byron's late heroines, Myrrha and Neuha, both exhibit qualities that are suggestive of the poet's engagement with classical notions of heroism.

The following passage describes Myrrha's actions in battle:

SARDANAPALUS. Know'st thou, my brother, where I lighted on
This minion?
SALEMENES. Herding with the other females,
Like frighten'd antelopes.
SARDANAPALUS. No: like the dam
Of the young lion, femininely raging,
(And femininely meaneth furiously,
Because all passions in excess are female,)
Against the hunter flying with her cub,
She urged on with her voice and gesture, and
Her floating hair and flashing eyes, the soldiers

¹⁹⁵ Cochran has also suggested Melitta, a heroine of Franz Grillparzer's *Sappho* (1818) as a forerunner of Myrrha (Cochran ed., *Sardanapalus* (2009) 5).

<<http://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/sardanapalus2.pdf>> 16:29 on 23/09/11).

Byron never witnessed the play being performed, but read it in the Italian translation by Guido Sorelli (*BLJ* VIII.11-51; Jan 12th 'midnight'); it was *Sappho* that was the subject of Byron's quarrel with Teresa concerning the propriety of Love as a subject for Tragedy (see above citation).

In the pursuit.¹⁹⁶

(*Sardanapalus* III.i.376-385)

Close attention to the language used by Byron in the above passage is revealing of a surprisingly extensive epic debt—one that simultaneously negotiates the contemporary and the classical. Before examining the epic significance of Myrrha's appearance, I shall first elucidate on the importance of the operative word at this point: 'raging'.¹⁹⁷ Rage, the Greek concept of *mēnis*,¹⁹⁸ is the first word of the *Iliad*: 'μῆνιν ἄειδε θεὰ Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος'—'The wrath sing, goddess, of Peleus' son, Achilles' or, as Pope translates it: 'Achilles' Wrath, to Greece the direful Spring / Of Woes unnumbered, heav'nly Goddess, sing!' (I.1-2). Achilles' wrath, not the Trojan wars, forms the subject of the *Iliad*, hence why it is considered an example of *ab ovo* epic, and also why commentators from Aristotle onwards have remarked on its perfect unity. Crucially, Myrrha's wrath is not separable from the resulting action: she is not merely enraged, but raging. As Muellner indicates, this is a defining feature of *mēnis*: 'It is the name of a feeling not separate from the actions it entails'.¹⁹⁹ Byron's linguistic assertion of the significance of Myrrha's action aligns her behaviour with the military heroics of epic heroes. The following description of Diomedes from Pope's *Iliad* illustrates the evident parallel Byron draws between his heroine and classical masculine heroic action:

¹⁹⁶ The language here is markedly similar to Byron's description of his Venetian mistress, Margarita Cogni: 'She was always in extremes either crying or laughing—and so fierce when angered that she was the terror of men women and children—for she had the strength of an Amazon with the temper of Medea. She was a fine animal—but quite untameable. [. . .] I found her on the open steps of the Mocenigo palace on the Grand Canal—with her great black eyes flashing through her tears and the long dark hair which was streaming drenched with rain over her brows & breast [. . .] Her joy at seeing me again—was moderately mixed with ferocity—and gave me the idea of a tigress over her recovered Cubs.' (*BLJ* VI.195-196).

¹⁹⁷ I am aware that what Myrrha experiences here is closer to an *aristeia*; the distinction between this and *mēnis* is a subtlety that is beyond the scope of this discussion to elaborate upon.

¹⁹⁸ Though the etymology *mēnis* is now generally agreed to be unknown (see Robert Beekes (with the assistance of Lucien van Beek), "μῆνις" in: *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, Indo-European Etymological Dictionaries Online, ed. Alexander Lubotsky (Leiden: Brill, 2012) Brill Online, April 13 2012 < <http://iedo.brillonline.nl/dictionaries/lemma.html?id=gr4516> >), its enduring force is noted as central to the etymology purported by Eustathius (12 C. AD): 'according to the ancients, *mēnis* is the rage that remains, from the verb *ménō* [abide, stay].' Cited from Eustathius, *Commentary on Homer's "Iliad"* I.13.10 in Leonard Muellner, *The Anger of Achilles: Mēnis in Greek Epic* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1996) 2.

¹⁹⁹ Muellner, 8.

In ev'ry Quarter fierce *Tydides* rag'd,
 Amid the *Greek*, amid the *Trojan* Train,
 Rapt thro' the Ranks he thunders o'er the Plain,
 Now here, now there, he darts from Place to Place,
 Pours on the Rear, or lightens in their Face. . .
 So rag'd *Tydides*, boundless in his Ire (V.111-115; 124)

Again, 'rage' manifests itself on both occasions as a verb—no distinction can be drawn between the emotion and the resulting action. At this point, Pope implies a connection between the boundless heroism of Achilles, and that of Diomedes. It is the absence of Achilles that requires Diomedes' action on the field. The younger hero is required to fill a heroic vacuum, as Patroclus does latterly. It is this unfailing insistence on the significance of individual words for specific heroic gestures that the action of epic hangs upon. At no point in the *Iliad* do the concepts of *mênis* or boundlessness appear without reference to the central figure of the epic: Achilles. As the central concept behind the *Iliad*, *mênis* cannot be used without alertness to its epic heritage. The potency of *mênis* in part owes to the boundlessness of its influence. *Mênis* does not simply operate on an individual level—its impact is more far-reaching than that; as Mueller states: '*Mênis* is an emotion that acts to change the world.'²⁰⁰

Muellner has indicated that 'patterns of transgression and the issues of world maintenance [are] raised in other instances of the *mênis* theme',²⁰¹ and it is this transgressive potency of *mênis* that further informs my reading of Myrrha as exemplifying classical notions of heroism. Franklin comments on Myrrha's behaviour as transgression symptomatic of a disordered society, explaining that 'It was a commonplace of Enlightenment historicism to point out the sign of ultimate corruption of authority in a regime as the moment when slaves and women begin to wield illicit power.'²⁰² If we move beyond the Enlightenment, to more ancient understandings of society, contemporaneous with Greek epic, we can equally read Myrrha's behaviour

²⁰⁰ Muellner, 194.

²⁰¹ Muellner, 28.

²⁰² Franklin, 208.

according to classical notions of transgression. Dumézil has determined the ideal structure of Indo-European society as tripartite, that is, comprising of sovereignty, warfare, and fertility.²⁰³ Myrrha disrupts all three components of this tripartite arrangement; she transgresses sovereignty by being a slave who gives the King orders, who, in her own words seeks to ‘teach him how to reign’ (I.ii.664); she transgresses codes of warfare by trespassing in a masculine arena of violence; and as a concubine she threatens socially sanctioned fertility. As such, Myrrha clearly fulfills what Muellner describes as one of the fundamental goals of the epic hero: to ‘enrich and ambiguate’ the categories which define the dominant social order.²⁰⁴

The power of *ménis* to enrich and ambiguate can be observed on a local level through the epic function of simile. Simile itself, indeed, any metonymic language, functions through the enrichment and ambiguation of meaning. So when Sardanapalus likens Myrrha to ‘the dam / Of the young lion, femininely raging,.../ Against the hunter flying with her cub’, he is self-consciously reacting against Salemenes’ own constructed similitude of women’s reaction to war as that of ‘frightened antelopes’ by invoking the language of epic heroism. The evolution of simile within one text is an established classical trope. In the *Iliad*, the lion simile is of fundamental importance to the narrative arc of the epic, used to illustrate the mobility and changing nature of the governing theme of *ménis*. The following examination of four key episodes from the *Iliad* demonstrates the extensive epic heritage of Byron’s use of simile; more specifically, these episodes make clear how the poet’s use of the lion simile in relation to Myrrha invokes a remarkable heroic heritage that is explicitly associated with the

²⁰³ See Georges Dumézil, *L'idéologie tripartite des Indo-Européens* (Bruxelles: Latomus, 1958) for an overview of this thesis; a more detailed treatment of subject using examples from epic texts can be found in the later study, *Mythé et épopée, I: L'idéologie des trois fonctions dans les épopées des peuples indo-européens* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).

²⁰⁴ Muellner, 27. He applies Mary Douglas’ analysis of ambiguous symbols in *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 2002) 49: ‘ambiguous symbols can be used in ritual for the same ends as they are used in poetry and mythology, to enrich mean or to call attention to other levels of existence.’

bravest Homeric heroes. In offering a further evolution of the epic simile of the lion in relation to a female warrior, Byron can again be seen to engage in revolutionary discourse with his epic predecessors.

The first Homeric example of the lion simile is drawn from a description of Patroclus, who has entered the field of battle in Achilles' stead and is wearing his armour: 'Swift as a Lion, terrible and bold, / That sweeps the Fields, depopulates the Fold' (XVI.909). Patroclus is fighting for the Greeks in an attempt to deceive the Trojans into believing that Achilles has emerged from his *mênis* (caused by Menelaus's abduction of Briseis) and returned to war. During his fight with Hector, Apollo causes Achilles' helmet to fall from Patroclus, revealing his true identity and enabling Hector to kill the young hero. At which point, the simile of the lion returns, this time in relation to Ajax, which I shall take as my second example:

Meanwhile great *Ajax* (his broad Shield display'd)
 Guards the dead Hero with the dreadful Shade;
 And now before, and now behind he stood:
 Thus in the Centre of some gloomy Wood,
 With many a Step the Lioness surrounds
 Her tawny Young, beset by Men and Hounds;
 Elate her Heart, and rowzing all her Pow'rs,
 Dark o'er the fiery Balls, each hanging Eye-brow lowrs. (XVII.143-150)

The lion of the previous book has become feminized, and Ajax's protective maneuvers are likened to that of a lioness defending her cubs against the hunter, in striking parallel with Byron's use of the simile cited above. More pertinently for our understanding of Myrrha, Byron's presentation of furious femininity evidently finds its origins in a well-established epic and tragic trope. The crucial difference exhibited by the example of Ajax is that Myrrha's fury is informed by her femininity, in contrast to the above example where Ajax's masculinity is underlined by his stature ('great *Ajax*'), his strength (he wields a 'broad Shield'), and his agility ('now before, and now behind he stood')—the latter being reminiscent of Diomedes' darting exploits in the passage cited

earlier. Byron's use of the simile of the angered maternal animal is not, however, an isolated instance in contemporary presentations of brave women. A further parallel can be found in Schiller's *Maid of Orleans*, in which Joan responds to an English soldier's plea for mercy by stating: 'If you had robbed the lioness of her young brood, / You might perhaps have found some mercy or compassion,—' (II.1596-1597). That Joan has less capacity to be moved by compassion than a lioness robbed of her cubs exemplifies the kind of hyperbolic rhetoric with which Schiller invests his heroine. The closing lines of Coleridge's 'Destiny of Nations' invokes a strikingly similar image to illustrate Joan's grief at the vanishing of her vision:

And first a landscape rose
 More wild and waste and desolate than where
 The white bear, drifting on a field of ice,
 Howls to her Sundered cubs with piteous rage
 And savage agony. (470-474)

Whether Byron's use of simile was influenced by his reading of the classics or by his familiarity with other Romantic writers such as Schiller or Southey is a less significant conclusion to draw than to deduce that in their construction of female heroes, Romantic poets looked to the classical images of the heroic. That they also glanced over each other's shoulders I do not dispute.

The evolving Homeric simile of the lion undergoes a third permutation in the *Iliad* when news of Patroclus's death reaches Achilles:

Stern in superior Grief *Pelides* stood;
 Those slaught'ring Arms, so us'd to bathe in Blood,
 Now clasp his clay-cold Limbs: Then gushing start
 The Tears, and Sighs burst from his swelling Heart.
 The Lion thus, with dreadful Anguish stung,
 Roars thro' the Desert, and demands his Young;
 When the grim Savage to his rifled Den
 Too late returning, snuffs the Track of Men,
 And o'er the Vales, and o'er the Forrest bounds;
 His clam'rous Grief the bellowing Wood resounds. (XVIII.367-376)

Again, the simile of the parent lion and the hunter is invoked to illustrate the extent of the hero's *mênis*. The lion has become re-masculinized in an illustration of Achilles'

grief. Achilles' grief is of a very different character to the kind of lamentations we encounter in the private sphere of the home, for example when Andromache learns of Hector's death; though similarly incapacitated by his grief, clasping his clay-cold Limbs in with his arms, the simile is one of action, the lion bounding through Vales and Forrest to proclaim his anguish. Homer is careful to sustain a sense of Achilles' superior active masculinity, even when at his most vulnerable; such vulnerability has metamorphosed into strength at the close of the *Iliad* and the conclusion of Achilles' *mênis*, which is the fourth and final instance of the simile:

That Iron Heart, inflexibly severe;
A Lion,²⁰⁵ not a Man, who slaughters wide
In Strength of Rage and Impotence of Pride,
Who hastes to murder with a savage Joy,
Invades around, and breathes but to destroy. (XXIV.51-55)

Byron's use of an equivalent simile to illustrate Myrrha's active response—her *mênis*—finds a striking similarity in this description of Achilles. Again, I do not want to suggest that the epic significance of Myrrha is exclusively classical or to deny plausible echoes that can be traced between this image of Myrrha and contemporary representations of female military heroism. Myrrha's transformation by Sardanapalus from a timorous antelope to a raging lioness echoes Schiller's Joan's ability to transform the French troops from 'A shy and coward pack of deer to lions' (II.1545); her 'floating hair and flashing eyes' have been suggested by E. H. Coleridge as a possible allusion to the poet's 'flashing eyes and floating hair' in 'Kubla Khan'²⁰⁶—they also recall us to the 'raptured eye' of Southey's Joan. The focus on the flashing eyes of the protagonists is

²⁰⁵ Fascinatingly, at this point Pope renders the Homeric simile as metaphor: Achilles *becomes* 'A Lion, not a Man' at the climactic point of the action. *Mênis* has elided the distinction between Achilles' humanity and the bestial rage that informs his heroic action. This is in striking contrast to the original where the similitudinary distance is maintained: ' . . . but his heart is set on cruelty, even as a lion that at the bidding of his great might and lordly spirit goeth forth against the flocks of men to win him a feast; even so hath Achilles lost all pity, neither is shame in his heart, the which harmeth men greatly and profiteth them withal' (XXIV.40-45). A. T. Murray trans. *Homer: The Iliad: The Loeb Classical Library*, vol. 2 of 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1925; rpt. 1985) 565.

²⁰⁶ Coleridge ed. *Works*, vol. 5 of 7 (London: John Murray, 1924) 73n.

itself an epic method, as Vernant explains:

The vocabulary of vision does not concern so much the eye of the spectator as those of the characters represented. They are the ones who look, either sidelong or behind. They are the ones who observe one another, and it is their eyes that flash, eyes that gaze savagely, provoking terror, shooting forth flames²⁰⁷

There are recurrent allusions to Joan's floating hair in Southey's epic, both when she is on the battlefield:

The Maid, her brows in reverence unhelm'd,
Her dark hair floating on the morning gale. (III.526-527)

and also:

there, elevate, the Martial Maiden stoop.
Her brow unhelmed, and floating on the wind
Her long dark locks. (X.68-70)

As I explored in the previous section, the myth of possession and the significance of flashing eyes and floating hair is symptomatic of poetic mania. Such behaviour is found in classical literature as suggestive of true vision, as we see with the Possession of the Sibyl in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, rendered by Dryden as follows:

Her Colour chang'd, her Face was not the same,
And hollow Groans from her deep Spirit came.
Her Hair stood up; convulsive Rage possess'd
Her trembling Limbs, and heav'd her lab'ring Breast.
Greater than Human Kind she seem'd to look:
And with an Accent, more than Mortal, spoke. (VI.72-77)

That the *ménis* of feminine military heroism should find a simultaneous echo in poetic inspiration is perhaps unsurprising, given the clear literary predecessor of Athena, goddess of war and poetry. A further, historical example is the repulsion of the Spartan Cleomenes by Telesilla, a lyric poetess. The verb 'rage' also entertains the competing notions of violence and poetic mania, an antiquated variant meaning 'Of a poet: to be seized by inspiration, to be in the grip of a creative frenzy.'²⁰⁸ The dangerous qualities of such poetic mania are suggested in the cautionary 'Beware! Beware!' that prefaces

²⁰⁷ Jean-Pierre Vernant, 'Semblances of Pandora: Imitation and Identity', trans. Froma Zeitlin, *Critical Inquiry* 37.3 (Spring 2011): 416 fn3.

²⁰⁸ "rage, v.". OED Online. September 2011. Oxford University Press. 14 November 2011
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/157440?rskey=rF7jSz&result=3&isAdvanced=false>>.

the vision of the poet's distorted features in Kubla Khan are also suggested by the particular kind of mania with which both Joans are seized. In Southey's epic, a French

General warns:

“Rest not in too full faith”
 D’Orval replied, “on this miraculous aid.
 “Some frenzied female whose wild phantasy,
 Shaping vain dreams, infects the credulous
 With her own madness.” (VI.72-76)

These lines are reminiscent of the descriptions of Schiller's Joan cited at the end of the previous section. Equally, the rage of Schiller's Joan on the battlefield is reminiscent of one possessed: ‘There the awful Maiden dealing deadly blows about her / Like the fury of the fire’ (II.1565-1566). Poetic mania and militaristic fury are synthesised in one figure that is transparently indebted to the warlike inspiration of Athena/Minerva.

That Athena is a possible model for Myrrha is also suggested by her inspirational encouragement of the troops: ‘She urged on with her voice and gesture, /...the soldiers / In the pursuit.’ By galvanizing and energizing those around her, Myrrha resembles the goddess of war, whose favour could ensure victory. In Pope's *Iliad*, Athena's heroism transcends gender, the goddess being described as in masculine terms: ‘So great a Hero, and so great a God’ (V.1033); Pope is careful to justify this in his notes: ‘The Translation has ventured to call a Goddess so; in Imitation of the *Greek*, which uses the word $\Theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$ promiscuously for either Gender.’²⁰⁹ For the Greeks, however, inspirational speech was a feminine virtue: ‘So voluble a weapon is the Tongue [. . .] / Women alone, [. . .] / Perhaps excel us in this wordy War’ (*Iliad* XX.297-301). It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that the rhetorical power of Athena finds a further Romantic echo in Southey's classically inspired Joan: ‘Nor did she speak in vain; / For as she spoke the thirst of battle dies / In every breast, such awe and love pervade / The listening troops’ (X.36-39). Myrrha's inspirational voice is therefore a

²⁰⁹ *Iliad*, vol. 1, 315n.

significant element of her classically informed female heroism; her urging gesture is of equal import in its relation to contemporary renditions of female military heroism.

Having established the centrality of *ménis* for heroic action, I shall now go on to trace one further instance of epic heritage suggested by the description of Myrrha on the battlefield. In writing on the heroines' engagement with the classical heroic concept of *virtù*, Franklin distinguishes between the active masculinity expressed by those heroes that possess *virtù*, and the passive heroines that are responsible for fostering the quality in their male counterparts. In so doing, she recognises the remarkably active qualities Myrrha exhibits, comparing her briefly to the Greek goddess of victory, Nike, whom Sardanapalus likens Myrrha to, the heroine seeming 'unto the troops a prophetess / Of victory, or Victory herself, / Come down to hail us hers.' (III.i.388-400); Franklin, however, emphasizes her resemblance of the contemporary French goddess of Liberty, 'the passionate Marianne of republicanism', who emerges in the late eighteenth-century and is famously depicted in Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (1830).²¹⁰ In underplaying Myrrha's Greek heritage, Franklin resists the literary implications of Myrrha's self-identification with classical military femininity:

SARDANAPALUS. Myrrha, retire unto a place of safety.
 Why went you not forth with the other damsels?
 MYRRHA. Because my place is here.
 SARDANAPALUS. And when I am gone—
 MYRRHA. I follow.
 SARDANAPALUS. *You!* to battle?
 MYRRHA. If it were so,
 'Twere not the first Greek girl had trod the path. (III.i.148-152)

²¹⁰ Franklin, 208. Perhaps a more striking literary illustration of Delacroix's painting would be Schiller's Joan of Arc:

' . . . the Maid of Arc
 Bounds o'er the bridge, and to the wind unfurls
 Her hallowed banner. At that welcome sight
 A general shout of acclamation rose. . .
 and fired anew with hope,
 The fierce assailants to their prize rush on
 Resistless.' (VIII.409-12; 415-17).

Myrrha here emphasises her cultural heritage as central to her capacity as a warrior—one that she again alludes to in the closing Act of the play in response to a similarly posited question by Sardanapalus:

SARDANAPALUS. [. . .] Yet pause,
 My Myrrha! dare'st thou truly follow me,
 Freely and fearlessly?²¹¹
 MYRRHA. And dost thou think
 A Greek girl dare not do for love, that which
 An Indian widow braves for custom? (V.i.463-467)

The clearest parallel to draw between Myrrha and a classical female warrior would, however, not be Greek, but Roman. Camilla, the 'Warriour Dame' (VII.1094) introduced in the seventh book of the *Aeneid* is constructed by Virgil as an alternative model of femininity, 'Unbred to Spinning, in the Loom unskill'd' (VII.1096), distinguishing her from the passive, virtuous, lamenting wives of Homeric tradition, Andromache and Penelope, both of whom are skilled in spinning and the loom. Camilla, noted by Wilkie as an epic precedent for Southey's Joan, is perhaps the most striking example of classical rendering of furious femininity:

Mix'd with the first, the fierce Virago fought,
 Sustain'd the Toils of Arms, the Danger sought:
 Outstrip'd the Winds in speed upon the Plain,
 Flew o're the Fields, nor hurt the bearded Grain:
 She swept the Seas, and, as she skim'd along,
 Her flying Feet unbath'd on Billows hung. (VII.1098-1103)

It is not Camilla's strength that is emphasised, but similarly to the examples of Diogenes and Ajax cited above, her bravery and agility. In Romantic versions of female warriors, swiftness becomes integral to the manifestation of the heroic heroine; Schiller's Joan is described in battle by a soldier as 'stalk[ing] amid the battle.—Her pace is / More swift than sight.—Now she is here—now there— / I see her all at once in many places' (V.iii.3485-3487). Byron's familiarity with the passage is revealed in his description of Juan's nimble footed prowess on the dance floor: 'Like swift Camilla, he

²¹¹ Byron returns to the free and fearless following of one lover by another in *The Island* (1823), though with the gender of the pursuer inverted.

scarce skimm'd the ground' (XIV.307). As with other epic allusions, Byron's use of Camilla is far from straightforward; Wolfson notes: 'The comparison may appear to feminize Juan, but it actually entertains a dizzying interchange of properties, for as a hunter and epic warrior, Camilla is associated with typically male pursuits.'²¹² Indeed, Camilla's swiftness and lightness of foot is not an exclusively feminine heroic virtue. In a striking contrast to Camilla, Boreas' equine offspring are described in the *Iliad* thus:

These lightly skimming, when they swept the Plain,
Nor ply'd the Grass, nor bent the tender Grain;
And when along the level Seas they flew,
Scarce on the Surface curl'd the briny Dew

(XX.270-273)

Nagy indicates the parallel between these horses and Iphikos: 'He is pictured in Hesiod *fr.* 62MW (quoted by Eustathius 323.42) as racing through a field of grain with such speed that his feet barely touch the tips of the grain stalks';²¹³ Iphikos' parallel with Camilla is perhaps more striking still. The swiftest of heroes is, however, Achilles, as Nagy observes, 'Achilles is in fact the only hero in the *Iliad* who is called *podarkês* 'relying on his feet' (over 20x), *podas ôkus* 'swift with his feet' (over 30x), and *podôkês* 'swift-footed' (over 20x).'²¹⁴ His horses, too, are in possession of similarly superior swiftness, Xanthos declaring that they can run as fast as Zephyros, the fastest of the winds (XIX.415).

In appearance too, we can observe parallels between Byron's heroic heroines and their classical ancestresses. Though no description is given of Myrrha in the 'Dramatis Personae', she is referred to as beautiful on several occasions by Sardanapalus, who declares to her 'my beauty! Thou art very fair' (I.ii.506), also referring to her as 'Beautiful being!' (I.ii.421) and 'The fair Greek' (III.i.59), the latter in response to Altada's (a Palace official) description of her as 'The fair Ionian'

²¹² Wolfson, "Their she Condition", 592.

²¹³ Nagy, 327.

²¹⁴ Nagy, 326.

(III.i.56). The first and only indication of Myrrha's physical form is given by Sardanapalus who is transfixed by her appearance on the battlefield:

SARDANAPALUS. You see, this night
 Made warriors of more than me. I paused
 To look upon her, and her kindled cheek;
 Her large black eyes, that flash'd through her long hair
 As it stream'd o'er her; her blue veins that rose
 Along her most transparent brow; her nostril
 Dilated from its symmetry; her lips
 Apart; her voice that clove through all the din,
 As a lute's pierceth through the cymbal's clash,
 Jarr'd but not drown'd by the loud brattling; her
 Waved arms, more dazzling with their own born whiteness
 Than the steel her hand held, which she caught up
 From a dead soldier's grasp (III.i.385-397)

Similarly to the Maid of Saragoza before her, Myrrha emerges as the vital entity which triumphs where masculinity lies inert. Her beauty is undiminished by her heroism, instead, the two qualities appear in mutual amplification. The relationship between beauty and female military heroism is also suggested in Virgil's depiction of Camilla:

Men, Boys, and Women stupid with Surprise,
 Where e're she passes, fix their wond'ring Eyes:
 Longing they look, and gaping at the Sight,
 Devour her o're and o're with vast Delight,
 Her Purple Habit sits with such a Grace
 On her smooth Shoulders, and so suits her Face;
 Her Head with Ringlets of her Hair is crown'd,
 And in a Golden Caul the Curls are bound. (VII.1104-1111)

There is a clear parallel to be drawn with Sardanapalus' longing look at Myrrha's battlefield appearance and Camilla's audience, struck 'stupid with surprise'. Her attire significantly corresponds aesthetically to her facial beauty, implying a sense of heroic unity.²¹⁵

The creation of such fearsome heroic heroines is, however, not without risk. As Franklin has rightly observed, 'The ambivalence of the warlike woman, however, lies in her dangerous capacity for action. Once raised, will she be content to return to her

²¹⁵ As Vernant has argued, it is this aesthetic heroic unity that is disrupted in order to disguise epic heroes; its restoration is necessary for the hero to be recognizable as such (408).

former subject state and obedience to the male leader?’²¹⁶ The fear of the military heroine’s uncontrollable capacity for action clearly haunts Romantic representations of Joan. In his notes to *Joan of Arc*, Southey cites Thomas Fuller on Joan:

Ever after she went in man’s cloaths, being armed cap-a-pee, and mounted on a brave steed: and, which was a wonder when she was on horseback, none was more bold and daring; when delighted, none more tame and meek; so that one could scarce see her for herself, she was so changed and altered, as if her spirits dismounted with her body.²¹⁷

Hume’s historical account also seeks to epitomize Joan as swift to ‘return to her former subject state’: ‘The maid of Orleans, after the coronation of Charles, declared to the count of Dunois, that her wishes were now fully gratified, and that she had no further desire than to return to her former condition, and to the occupations and course of life which became her sex’.²¹⁸ These historical accounts are echoed by poetic

representations of the Maid of Orleans. Such an alteration is articulated by Schiller:

‘How terrifying this girl was in battle, / And how peace shines in grace around her now!’ (III.i.2028-2029). Coleridge too emphasises her gentleness: ‘Bold her mien, / And like an haughty huntress of the woods / She moved: yet sure she was a gentle maid!’ (‘Destiny of Nations’, 170-172). As with Joan, so with Byron’s military

heroines; he is careful to state in *Childe Harold*:

Though thus in arms they emulate her sons,
And in the horrid phalanx dare to move,
'Tis but the tender fierceness of the dove
Pecking the hand that hovers o’er her mate (I.587-590)

Myrrha’s restoration to devoted subservience is, however, more complex. After witnessing her foray into battle, Sardanapalus dreams that her place is taken by the ghost of his warrior grandmother, Semiramis, in whose name, as Malcolm Kelsall has indicated, Myrrha’s name is embedded (*Semiramis*):²¹⁹

SARDANAPALUS. In thy own chair—thy own place in the

²¹⁶ Franklin, 215.

²¹⁷ Southey, *Joan*, 6; citing Thomas Fuller, *The Profane State* (Cambridge: N.P., 1642) 360.

²¹⁸ Hume, 406-407.

²¹⁹ See Kelsall, ‘Slave Woman’, 326.

banquet—
 I sought thy sweet face in the circle—but
 Instead—a grey-hair'd, wither'd, bloody-eyed,
 And bloody-handed, ghastly, ghostly thing,
 Female in garb

(IV.i.102-106)

He wakes to find the real, rather less formidable Myrrha beside him, who reassures him of her steadfastness, articulating the devotion of Kaled, another battlefield predecessor:

'So shalt thou find me ever at thy side, / Here and hereafter, if the last may be'

(IV.i.166-167). The crucial distinguishing feature of female military heroism therefore

lies in the heroine's capacity to separate her action in the public, masculine arena of violence, and her suitably feminine demeanour in the private, domestic sphere.

Romantic portrayals of her do not suggest that these two alternate facets of her character are by any means mutually exclusive, indeed, for Byron the capacity for action corresponds to the heroine's softer feelings—military might is always motivated by love.

(ix) Cunning Intelligence

As I have argued above, the *Iliad* is characterized by the *mênis* that informs its hero. This kind of active, typically masculine heroism, associated with military might equally informs the second-half of the *Aeneid*, where we first encounter Camilla.²²⁰ From the *mênis* of the *Iliad* and the latter portion of the *Aeneid*, we move to an evolved form of heroism that first manifests itself in the *Odyssey*, and is then adopted by Virgil for the heroic requirements of the first half of the *Aeneid*. As Jasper Griffin has indicated: ‘the epic hero Odysseus is plunged into adventures and situations in which the heroism of an Achilles would be impossible, and that a new heroism of patience and cunning is thus to some extent forced upon him.’²²¹ In Homer’s second epic the old heroism of outstanding strength and bravery (*biē*) is replaced by a new form of heroism that enables the weak (or weaker) and ordinary to vanquish those far more indomitable than themselves; a good example would be Odysseus’ vanquishing of the Cyclops Polyphemus as ‘No-man’ (*Odyssey* IX). This newer form of heroism is informed by *mêtis*, defined in Detienne and Vernant’s study, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society* as:

. . . a type of intelligence and of thought, a way of knowing; it implies a complex but very coherent body of mental attitudes and intellectual behaviour which combine flair, wisdom, forethought, subtlety of mind, deception, resourcefulness, vigilance, opportunism, various skills, and experience acquired over the years. It is applied to situations which are transient, shifting, disconcerting and ambiguous, situations which do not lend themselves to precise measurement, exact calculation or rigorous logic.²²²

Though, as I have already suggested, the heroism of ‘knowing’ is most easily associated with the *Odyssey*, the *Iliad* provides one of the clearest explanations of the function of *mêtis*. In the following passage, taken from the twenty-third book of the *Iliad*, Nestor is advising his son Antilochus as how best to win the chariot race that forms part of the

²²⁰ Virgil’s epic inverts the shift from the epic action of the *Iliad* and then the *Odyssey* by arranging the action first around Aeneas’ wanderings, and then around warfare.

²²¹ Griffin, 56.

²²² Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1991) 3-4.

funeral games which commemorate Patroclus' death, even with his father's horses that are 'slow, and past their Vigour':

Fear not thy Rivals, tho' for Swiftness known,
 Compare those Rivals Judgment, and thy own:
 It is not Strength, but Art,²²³ obtains the Prize,
 And to be swift is less than to be wise:
 'Tis more by Art, than Force of num'rous Strokes,
 The dext'rous Woodman shapes the stubborn Oaks;
 By Art, the Pilot thro' the boiling Deep
 And howling Tempest, steers the fearless Ship;
 And 'tis the Artist wins the glorious Course,
 Not those, who trust in Chariots and Horse.
 In vain unskillfull to the Goal the strive,
 And short, or wide, th' ungovern'd Courser drive:
 While with sure Skill, tho' with inferior Steeds,
 The knowing Racer to his end proceeds;
 Fix'd on the Goal his Eye fore-runs the Course,
 His Hand unerring steers the steady Horse,
 And now contracts, or now extends the Rein,
 Observing still the foremost on the Plain. (XXIII.381-398)

Antilochus follows his father's advice, and partially succeeds—not winning, but coming second, and, significantly, beating Menelaus who is characterized throughout by a crude, *mênis*-like heroism. In the description of his victory, Antilochus' *mêtis* is emphasised in contrast to Menelaus' coarser advantage of superior strength and horsepower: Young *Nestor* follows (who by Art, not Force, / O'er past *Atrides*) second in the course' (XXIII.597-598).

As Detienne's and Vernant's study indicates, *mêtis* is 'more than mere strength'²²⁴—you will always come up against someone stronger than yourself. *Mêtis*, then, is a refined heroic trait: 'It is, in a sense, the absolute weapon, the only one that has the power to ensure victory and domination over others, whatever the circumstances, whatever the conditions of the conflict.'²²⁵ In this way, it becomes evident that *mêtis* is the ultimate form of feminine heroism, being distanced from the stereotypically *masculine* requirements of the cruder form of the heroic which informs

²²³ Throughout his *Iliad*, Pope translates *mêtis* as 'Art'; I shall return to the connection between *mêtis* and artistic *craft* in my coda.

²²⁴ Detienne, 13.

²²⁵ Detienne, 13.

mênis. The curiously feminine features of *mêtis* are inherent in the etymology of the word itself. As Detienne and Vernant explain, *mêtis* as a common noun is feminine, meaning ‘a particular type of intelligence; an informed prudence; as a proper name it refers to a female deity, the daughter of Ocean’.²²⁶ The interplay between the common noun and proper name is further revealing of the significance of *mêtis* in the Olympian heroarchy.²²⁷ In mythology, Metis more generally emerges as a minor figure, being Zeus’ first wife before Hera. Zeus is warned any offspring he and Metis have will be more powerful than himself; on hearing Metis is pregnant, Zeus consumes her, before then ‘bearing’ Athena, who emerges fully formed from his head, complete with armour. Zeus’s superiority as ruler of the Gods is owing to his consumption of Metis, which endows him with *mêtis* and grants him ultimate authority, over and above the strength of those Gods he rules over; as Detienne and Vernant highlight, ‘Kratos and Bie, Domination and Brute Force flank the throne of Zeus, as servants forever following at his heels.’²²⁸

Two major conclusions emerge from the above discussion: (i) that *mêtis* is an heroic quality not simply more suited to female heroes, but itself informed by femininity by which it is characterised; (ii) that *mêtis*—not despite, but *because* of this alternative femininity that it is characterized by—is superior to the concepts of Kratos and Bie that inform *mênis*. It is *mêtis*—cunning intelligence—that enables Neuha to save Torquil from the British and lead him to safety at the pivotal moment of the narrative of *The Island*:

She had foreseen, since first the stranger’s sail
Drew to their isle, that force or flight might fail,
And formed a refuge of the rocky den
For Torquil’s safety from his countrymen. (IV.179-182)

²²⁶ Detienne, 11.

²²⁷ See Carlyle’s *On Heroes* (12): ‘All dignities of rank, on which human association rests, are what we may call a *Heroarchy* (Government of Heroes)’.

²²⁸ Detienne, 13.

Aware they are outnumbered, aware she cannot save him through strength alone, Neuha makes use of her superior knowledge of her surroundings. Neuha's actions are therefore not characterized by the same *mênis* that informs Byron's warrior women, but rather a more subtle and thoughtful heroism. But it is not cunning intelligence alone that informs *mêtis*. True *mêtis* is further invested with a sense of multiplicity and diversity; it is associated with the adjective *poikilos* (pied, glittering, dappled); Detienne and Vernant explain: 'This many-coloured sheen or complex of appearances produces an effect of iridescence, shimmering, an interplay of reflections which the Greeks perceived as the ceaseless vibrations of light.'²²⁹ We are again reminded of Neuha and the description of her swimming ahead of Torquil:

Young Neuha plunged into the deep, and he
Followed: her track beneath her native sea
Was as a native's of the element,
So smoothly, bravely, brilliantly she went,
Leaving a streak of light behind her heel,
Which struck and flashed like an amphibious steel. (IV.105-110)

The adjectives used to describe Neuha's motion crescendo to brilliance. Byron uses 'brilliant' both to illuminate the visual phenomenon of Neuha's physical brilliance—she is 'Brightly shining, glittering, sparkling, lustrous'; the description of Neuha's brilliance also operates figuratively, to indicate the quality of her action as 'Splendid, illustrious, distinguished, striking the imagination.'²³⁰ Byron's repeated use of 'native' further underlines Neuha's changeability: initially, it is employed to indicate her sense of belonging to, and natural connection with, the South Sea Island paradise which is her home, positing her in opposition to the invading, foreign British navy who are alien to the region; the second usage transmutes Neuha as not simply a native inhabitant of the South Sea Islands, but being of the sea itself—she *becomes* Ocean's daughter, belonging as naturally to the watery element of the Sea as to her Island home. This

²²⁹ Detienne, 18.

²³⁰ "brilliant, adj. and n.2". *OED Online*. June 2011. Oxford University Press. 17 July 2011 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/23337?rskey=pHZz0U&result=2&isAdvanced=false>>.

amphibious quality is reinforced by the simile of the streak of light she leaves in her wake, ‘Which struck and flashed like an amphibious steel’. Neuha’s amphibian qualities—being both one and the other, entertaining two opposites—is a further manifestation of *mêtis*, and for the ancients is closely related to what is *poikilos*; as Detienne and Vernant explain: ‘Plato associates what is *poikilos* with what is never the same as itself, *oudépote taútón* and, similarly, elsewhere opposes it to that which is simple, *haploús*.’²³¹ These associative qualities of *mêtis*, of the multiple (*pantóie*), many-coloured (*poikilē*), and shining (*aiólē*) are, as Detienne and Vernant explain, ‘all qualities which betray the polymorphism and polyvalence of a kind of intelligence which, to render itself impossible to seize and to dominate fluid, changing realities, must always prove itself more supple and more polymorphic than they are.’²³² Such polymorphism returns us again to the goddess Metis, who possessed, like Thetis after her, the power of metamorphoses, and could change into anything to escape Zeus’s embrace.

One further connection between the defining qualities of *mêtis* and the heroism of Byron’s late heroine is that of illusion. Neuha and Torquil flee from the relentless pursuit of their enemies, who gain at every stroke:

Within an hundred boats’ length was the foe,
And now what refuge but their frail canoe?
This Torquil asked with half upbraiding eye,
Which said—‘Has Neuha brought me here to die?’ (IV.51-54)

When the lovers first dive into the waters, the narrative perspective is that of their astonished onlookers:

The wave rolled on, no ripple on its face,
Since their first plunge recalled a single trace;...
The quiet proa wavering o’er the tide
Was all that told of Torquil and his bride;
And but for this alone the whole might seem
The vanished phantom of a seaman’s dream. (IV.73-74; 79-82)

²³¹ Detienne, 19.

²³² Detienne, 27.

Neuha and Torquil's vanishing, their melting away like ocean spray, corresponds closely to the confounding effects of *mêtis*. I again cite from *Cunning Intelligence*:

In *mêtis* appearance and reality no longer correspond to one another but stand in contrast, producing an effect of illusion, *apatē*, which beguiles the adversary into error and leaves him as bemused by his defeat as by the spells of a magician.²³³

Neuha triumphs over those stronger than herself, beguiling their senses and confusing the boundaries of reality and dream, so becoming the ultimate expression of liminality; as such, Neuha too is expressive of Byron's experimentation with the limits of historical truth and poetical truth.

²³³ Detienne, 21.

(x) Perfecting the Epic Heroine

It is through the female protagonists of *Don Juan* that Byron's increasing interest in the poetic and narrative significance of the heroine is most evident. Franklin has observed that in reading *Don Juan* we are confronted by 'a work of art consisting predominantly of a gallery of female portraits'.²³⁴ She suggests that 'It has gone largely unrecognized that his subtle and complex representation of women in *Don Juan* is unrivalled in male-authored art of the period', arguing that the poet's focus 'on different models of female social and sexual behaviour is comparable only with the novels of Jane Austen'.²³⁵ The reasons for this are perhaps best explained contextually. Both *Don Juan* and *Mansfield Park*, as Franklin argues, are texts that emerge from an historico-cultural moment preoccupied with the social status of femininity and alert to the need for reform.²³⁶ Byron's library appears to verify his interest in the woman question, containing both Ségur's *Women* (1803) and Meiners' *History of the Female Sex* (1808). Suggesting that the Enlightenment relativist historicist method of each of these books which examine the position of women historically and in less advanced societies, Franklin detects a shared procedure with *Don Juan*: his hero's travels mirror such chronological and wide-ranging studies, the poem being 'structured to illustrate a secular and relativist view of sexual morality, in which the status of women indicates the nature of a nation's government'.²³⁷ As I argued in my previous chapter, the Turkish Tales provide the earliest parallel between Byron's poetry and proto-feminist discourse, by questioning contemporary assumptions of the essentialist characteristics of gender. Franklin too finds parallels with Wollstonecraft, not least in the poet's attitude towards gender as a

²³⁴ Franklin unconsciously echoes Jasper Griffin's comments regarding the differing gender focus of Homer's two epics (66): 'In the *Odyssey*, by contrast, we find a whole gallery of contrasting female figures.'

²³⁵ Franklin, 99.

²³⁶ Franklin, 99.

²³⁷ Franklin, 102.

socially and culturally determined construct—an attitude that is most transparently revealed in *Don Juan*.²³⁸

Lady Adeline is the first of three pivotal heroines to be introduced in the latter Cantos of *Don Juan*, and is first presented on the ninth line of the thirteenth Canto. It is from Canto thirteen onwards that Byron moves beyond the epic parameters he initially established for the poem. As such, the materialization of new female protagonists provides a fresh opportunity to address questions of gender and genre and to consider how best to integrate femininity and epic. Lady Adeline is introduced as the most decorous of Byron's heroines: 'To all she was polite without parade' (XIII.249); in appearance and lineage she meets the requirements of Byron's previous female portraits, being 'high-born, wealthy by her father's will, / And beauteous, even where beauties most abound' (XIII.13-14); and like the heroic heroines of previous poems, there is more to Adeline than meets the eye:

But when it was, she had that lurking demon
Of double nature, and thus doubly named—
Firmness yclept in heroes, kings, and seamen,
That is, when they succeed; but greatly blamed
As *obstinacy*, both in men and women,
Whene'er their triumph pales, or star is tamed:—
And 'twill perplex the casuists in morality
To fix the due bounds of this dangerous quality.

Had Bonaparte won at Waterloo,
It had been firmness; now 'tis pertinacity:
Must the event decide between the two?
I leave it to your people of sagacity
To draw the line between the false and true,
If such can e'er be drawn by man's capacity:
My business is with Lady Adeline,
Who in her way too was a heroine. (XIV.705-720)

Adeline's duplicitous nature has been hinted at in the previous Canto, being introduced as 'The fair most fatal Juan ever met, / Although she was not evil, nor meant ill' (XIII.91-92). Such multiplicity perplexes even the casuist for whom sophistry is a profession, is doubly enacted in its resistance of nomenclature—'this dangerous

²³⁸ See especially Franklin's comparison of the two writers: 129; 143; 163.

quality' can be in turn and according to circumstance 'Firmness', 'obstinacy', or 'pertinacity'. Byron is careful to indicate the egalitarian nature of the 'lurking demon' which can manifest itself 'As obstinacy, both in men and women'; the genders are made equal in the potential to succumb to the paling of triumph—femininity is not opposed to the quality of masculinity, rather *heroism*, along with kingship and seamanship, is opposed to a sense of the segregation of genders. Heroes, kings, and seaman are identified with firmness through the archaism 'yclept',²³⁹ suggesting an outdatedness on par with the adjective itself—a sentiment that is reinforced through Byron's invocation of Napoleon, his favourite emblem of the impracticability of contemporary heroism, in the next stanza. Manifest in these two stanzas are what this chapter has previously established as the two defining features of *Don Juan*: boundlessness and the division between false and true. Adeline's double nature resists 'due bounds' and such resistance is characteristic of the heroic heroines and also of the poem itself. Adeline, again, like the epic in which she features requires careful navigation to distinguish falsity and veracity—this heroine stands between the two. The couplet that concludes the stanzas cited above indicates a return from a digression: 'My business is with Lady Adeline, / Who in her way too was a heroine'. Byron's poetic pursuit is professionalised ('My business') and by alerting the reader to his digressive tendencies—a device used throughout the poem—Byron highlights his own poetic 'double nature'. The rhyme scheme ensures that Adeline has it her own way; in forcing 'heroine' to rhyme with 'Adeline', Byron inverts the same comic procedure employed at the start of the epic in forcing the pronunciation of 'Juan' to rhyme with 'true one'. Being 'in her way too' a heroine, Adeline forces reconsideration of the term 'heroine' and at this point of the

²³⁹ Having emerged in the mid-tenth Century, 'yclept' is only in usage until the fin-de-siecle: "yclept | ycleped, adj.". OED Online. September 2011. Oxford University Press. 24 November 2011 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/231389?redirectedFrom=yclept>>.

poem the reader anticipates it will be similarly revolutionary to Juan's answering of the poet's demand for a hero with which the poem opens.

It is through Adeline that Byron initially insinuates a connection between writing the epic heroine and writing in the epic genre. More significantly, it is with Adeline that Byron rethinks, or reinvents, epic metaphor:

But Adeline was not indifferent: for
 (Now for a commonplace!) beneath the snow,
 As a Volcano holds the lava more,
 Within—*et cetera*. Shall I go on?—No!
 I hate to hunt down a tired metaphor:
 So let the often used volcano go.
 Poor thing! How frequently, by me and others,
 It hath been stirred up till its smoke quite smothers.

I'll have another figure in a trice:—
 What say you to a bottle of champagne?
 Frozen into a very vinous ice,
 Which leaves few drops of that immortal rain,
 Yet in the very centre, past all price,
 About a liquid glassful will remain;
 And this is stronger than the strongest grape
 Could e'er express in its expanded shape:

'Tis the whole spirit brought to a quintessence;
 And thus the chilliest aspects may concentrate
 A hidden nectar under a cold presence.
 And such are many—though I only meant her,
 From whom I now deduce these moral lessons,
 On which the Muse has always sought to enter:—
 And your cold people are beyond all price,
 When once you have broken their confounded ice. (XIII.281-304)

The volcano, the emblem of revolution and a simile previously invoked by Byron to convey qualities of masculine heroism in his earlier work²⁴⁰, is discarded in favour of the more revolutionary figure of 'a bottle of champagne'. As Andrew Elfenbein has indicated, 'Byron rejects it in *Don Juan* because it would be inappropriate to use the same figure that described a masculine subjectivity to describe a feminine one'.²⁴¹

Adeline is the first of Byron's British heroines, the poet up until this moment favouring

²⁴⁰ See 'On the Star of the Legion of Honour' (1816), line 12; *The Prophecy of Dante* (1819) III.187; and *DJ X*.642. The same year he composes *DJ XIII* he writes *The Island*, in which its hero Christian is described as being 'Like an extinct volcano in his mood' (III.140).

²⁴¹ Andrew Elfenbein, *Byron and the Victorians* (CUP, 1995) 43. Elfenbein omits to mention Byron's use of the volcano metaphor in an explicitly feminine context in his correspondence with Caroline Lamb: 'Then your heart—my poor Caro, what a little volcano! that pours *lava* through your veins, & yet I cannot wish it a bit colder' (*BLJ II*.170).

heroines from warmer climes—a tendency that did not go unnoticed by his female readers, as I explored in my previous chapter. These stanzas are the first instance of Byron suggesting that the cold, English model of femininity is ‘beyond all price’ and the first of the English Cantos imply that Adeline is the quintessence of womanhood.

The champagne simile proves to be sufficiently malleable to entertain the dual possibilities of Adeline’s character; Byron returns to vintnery in Canto fifteen to elucidate Adeline’s elevation from the rest of her sex—she is not to be classed as a mere woman, but (albeit in her own way) as a heroine:

The Lady Adeline, right honourable,
 And honour’d, ran a risk of growing less so;
 For few of the soft sex are very stable
 In their resolves—alas! that I should say so!
 They differ as wine differs from its label,
 When once decanted;—I presume to guess so,
 But will not swear: yet both upon occasion,
 Till old, may undergo adulteration.

But Adeline was of the purest vintage,
 The unmingled essence of the grape; and yet
 Bright as a new Napoleon from its mintage,
 Or glorious as a diamond richly set;
 A page where Time should hesitate to print age,
 And for which Nature might forego her debt—
 Sole creditor whose process doth involve in ’t
 The luck of finding every body solvent. (XV.41-56)

The implication that Adeline is at risk of committing a marital indiscretion with Juan is swiftly dismissed by her comparison with ‘the purest vintage’, the unadulterated gold Napoleon and the uncorrupted and incorruptible diamond. She resists the usual instability of resolve with which Byron charges her sex and he goes so far as to propose that both Time and Nature might ‘hesitate’ before leaving their mark. Byron elects, however, not to leave Adeline in a state of superior isolation, choosing instead to introduce a heroine with hidden depths more boundless than even Adeline’s.

Aurora Raby has attracted more critical consideration than any other of Byron’s heroines, partly because, as Leslie Marchand states, ‘more attention is given to her

personality than of any other character other than Adeline.²⁴² Since being described by T. S. Eliot as ‘the most serious character of [Byron’s] invention’,²⁴³ Aurora has been subsequently labelled by Karl Kroeber as the ‘most complex representation of [Byron’s] dream heroine, the pure and wise child-woman’²⁴⁴ and by Andrew Rutherford as ‘exceptionally interesting’ albeit ‘not as a successful character creation, but as an attempt on Byron’s part to establish a religious-moral idea of the kind we find in Pope, in place of the ‘romantic’ values of some of the earlier Cantos’.²⁴⁵ E. D. Hirsch contends that Aurora is ‘there to preserve the possibility of the ideal’,²⁴⁶ and though McGann rather gloomily sees her as ‘fated to join the company of Haidée’²⁴⁷ and Bernard Blackstone regards her role as ‘dubious’,²⁴⁸ later critics have tended to favour Hirsch’s line of argument ahead of Blackstone’s. Significantly, Charles Clancy coined the term ‘Byronic heroine’ in an essay devoted to Aurora, arguing that ‘Her character is in many respects that of the typical Byronic hero transmuted into feminine form’.²⁴⁹ The most attentive of Aurora’s critics is Bernard Beatty who suggests ‘some single evolution in *Don Juan*’²⁵⁰ that Aurora is inherently part of, managing as she does to ‘reconcile both the satiric and romantic thrusts of the poem and suggest the containment of comedy’.²⁵¹ In response to Beatty, Stephen Cooper suggests that ‘What Aurora Raby finally does in her more-than-epic function is to enable the comic containment of such

²⁴² Leslie Marchand, *Byron’s Poetry: A Critical Introduction* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965) 229.

²⁴³ T. S. Eliot, ‘Byron’, *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber, 1969) 205.

²⁴⁴ Karl Kroeber, *Romantic Narrative Art* (Madison: Wisconsin UP, 1960) 49.

²⁴⁵ Rutherford, 202.

²⁴⁶ E. D. Hirsch, ‘Byron and the Terrestrial Paradise’, *From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle*, ed. Frederick Whiley Hilles, Frederick Albert Pottle, and Harold Bloom (New York: OUP, 1965) 477.

²⁴⁷ McGann, *Fiery Dust*, 200.

²⁴⁸ Bernard Blackstone, *Byron: A Survey* (London: Longman, 1975) 319.

²⁴⁹ Charles J. Clancy, ‘Aurora Raby in “Don Juan”: A Byronic Heroine’, *Keats-Shelley Journal* 28 (1979) 28.

²⁵⁰ Bernard Beatty, *Byron’s Don Juan* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1985) 140.

²⁵¹ Beatty, 141.

contradiction, not excluding the ultimate contradiction bespoken in and of herself'.²⁵² Franklin stresses the proto-feminist significance of Aurora, regarding her as 'Byron's portrait of the modern woman: newly confident of her moral value to society, she refuses to be continually judged through the medium of her sexuality'.²⁵³ More recently, Vincent Newey has viewed Aurora as the location of 'soul' in the poem, and stresses her differentiation from previous heroines: 'Aurora Raby represents not just a different kind of Byronic woman, self-contained, a mystery of 'radiant and grave', but a whole 'other' order of knowledge and being. . . Aurora Raby is a surpassing triumph of emblemization.'²⁵⁴ That one single heroine can attract such significant critical speculation when the heroines as a group have suffered such notable critical neglect is remarkable. The attention granted to Aurora outweighs her narrative presence in the poem; far fewer lines are devoted to her than to Adeline for example. It would be a mistake, however, to read Aurora exclusively in relation to the other heroines; her relation to the Byronic hero is equally significant, as Clancy has indicated. For Clancy, though Aurora 'draws upon the catalogue of heroic attributes possessed by the Byronic hero',²⁵⁵ she is 'not merely a Byronic hero in feminine form', but rather the epitome of a 'literary type'.²⁵⁶ In his creation of Aurora, Byron was able to recapitulate the qualities he had inscribed in his Byronic heroes, whilst moving beyond them; Aurora similarly possesses the mystery and ambiguity which characterizes the Byronic hero; we equally have a sense of her constancy despite the volatility of her surroundings, which Clancy argues 'is a product of the *mind*, that great single principle which the

²⁵² Stephen Cooper, 'Beyond All Contradiction: Aurora Raby and Containment in Byron's "Don Juan"', *Keats-Shelley Journal* 38 (1989): 25

²⁵³ Franklin, 158.

²⁵⁴ Vincent Newey, 'Rival Cultures: Charles Dickens and the Byronic Legacy', *Romantic Echoes in the Victorian Era*, ed. Andrew Radford, Mark Sandy (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008) 81.

²⁵⁵ Clancy, 33.

²⁵⁶ Clancy, 29.

later Byronic heroes use to visualize the world.²⁵⁷ Aurora's surprising cerebral strength in a transient world is insisted upon by the poet: 'Apart from the surrounding world, and strong / In its own strength—most strange in one so young!' (XV.375-376). In his assertion that 'there is a static quality about Aurora's serenity that, for all her enviable self-possession, itself verges on the catatonic',²⁵⁸ Cooper overlooks the crucial importance of such stasis: it is through her tranquility of mind that she moves beyond the Byronic hero, as Clancy remarks, 'She possesses the serenity the Byronic heroes seek, a personal communion with the infinite.'²⁵⁹ Aurora's ability to commune with the infinite is an extension of her connective role; even in her inactive state, she functions to unify disparate elements of the poem by spanning the social, the existential, and the metapoetic.

Aurora's poetic significance does not merely lie in her actual presence within *Don Juan*, but in her connective function that extends beyond the parameters of the final Cantos of the poem. Aurora's shadowy presence can be traced back to the opening Cantos and forward to those which remain unwritten; as Beatty rightly concludes in response to Eliot that 'He does not grasp that continuing the poem without her would have been impossible.'²⁶⁰ It is Beatty who best explains Aurora's import in terms of her unifying capacities. For Beatty, comprehending Aurora's connection with the Abbey itself is crucial; to fail to grasp this is to risk the same limited outlook as the Amundevilles. It is her link to the house itself and her alertness to its 'secret life' that underlies Aurora's superior status to her society hosts: 'Like Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park* or Ravenswood in *The Bride of Lammermoor* she is, in her disregarded solitude,

²⁵⁷ Clancy, 33.

²⁵⁸ Cooper, 24.

²⁵⁹ Clancy, 34.

²⁶⁰ Beatty, 140.

the real heir to a house whose true life is not comprehended by its present usurpers.²⁶¹ Beatty suggests two sources that ‘nourish’ the connection between the lives of Aurora and the Abbey. Firstly, in the spatial consciousness of both the heroine and the house, which Newey also considers;²⁶² Aurora’s ability to synthesize her inner life and outer life mirrors the Abbey’s articulation of the cooperation between landscape and architecture. In their assimilation of interiority and the world outside both Aurora and the Abbey operate in a strikingly similar manner to the poem itself, *Don Juan* bridging the private poetical realm and the public empirical realm. Secondly, Beatty discerns a spiritual connection between the Catholic heroine and the Catholic life of the buildings where we encounter her, which again emphasises her connective function: ‘There can be no doubt that Aurora represents, in a precise and pondered way, that holiness, a specifically feminine wholeness, which the original building (dedicated to the Blessed Virgin) was designed to celebrate and, oddly, still does.’²⁶³ Aurora’s spiritual function must be considered alongside her secular role; she has to be *absolutely* both things to truly synthesize each.

Contradictions within Aurora’s characterization are also noted by Franklin who observes that ‘Aurora is close to being a feminist heroine, in her independent outlook. But she is also insistently characterized as virginal.’²⁶⁴ Such insistence is not, however, explicit. The most direct reference to Aurora’s virginity emerges in a general comment regarding girls of a certain age:

²⁶¹ Beatty, 143-144. Franklin also compares Aurora to Fanny Price: ‘An orphan, scorned by the fine lady of the house, the bookish Aurora is a Cinderella figure, whose loneliness and rejection, despite her self-evident worth, constitute a reproach to the landed gentry for their worldly and materialist outlook. Austen’s Fanny Price performs a similar function in *Mansfield Park*’ (157).

²⁶² Newey explores Aurora’s connection to the Madonna and also her spatial setting, especially in terms of Abbey and landscape (81).

²⁶³ Beatty, 152.

²⁶⁴ Franklin, 156.

And girls of sixteen are thus far Socratic,
 But innocently so, as Socrates:
 And really, if the Sage sublime and Attic
 At seventy years had phantasies like these,
 Which Plato in his dialogues dramatic
 Has shown, I know not why they should displease
 In virgins—always in a modest way,
 Observe; for that with me's a 'sine quâ.' (XV.681-688)

Byron further implies Aurora's virginity through association. Byron lays emphasis on her youth at regular intervals, describing Aurora as 'A lovely being, scarcely form'd or moulded, / A Rose with all its sweetest leaves yet folded' (XV.343-344); remarking on her infantile appearance (XV.353); further reinforcing her sexual immaturity through Adeline's astonishment that Juan would see anything 'in such a baby / As that prim, silent, cold Aurora Raby' (XV.391-392). The connection between youth and virginity is further elaborated in the discrepancy between Aurora's age and wisdom, being 'very young, although so very sage, / Admiring more Minerva than the Graces' (XV.674-675). Minerva's primary attribute is virginity, as with her Greek counterpart Athena, or Athene Parthenos (Virgin Athene), whose major temple is the Parthenon, the 'Temple of the Maiden'.²⁶⁵ By connecting Aurora to Minerva, the pre-Christian Virgin of antiquity Minerva, Byron deliberately complicates Aurora's Catholic connection through the introduction of the competing mythology of epic. Similarly to both the Virgin Mary and Minerva, Aurora's serenity encourages a reverence tantamount to idolatry: 'There was awe in the homage which she drew; / Her spirit seem'd as seated on a throne' (XV.373-374). As Beatty has indicated, in her enthroned elevation from the rest of mankind Aurora recalls the earlier description of the statue of the Virgin in Norman Abbey's chapel:²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ See 'Parthenon' in *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, 3rd ed., ed. M. C. Howatson (Oxford: OUP, 2011) 424; and *Encyclopedia of Greco-Roman Mythology*, ed. Mike Dixon-Kennedy (Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 1998) 126.

²⁶⁶ Beatty, 150.

But in a higher niche, alone, but crown'd,
 The Virgin Mother of the God-born child,
 With her son in her blessed arms, look'd round,
 Spared by some chance when all beside was spoil'd;
 She made the earth below seem holy ground.' (XIII.481-485)

More obtusely, Beatty suggests that Byron's description of Aurora's countenance as having 'something of sublime / In eyes which sadly shone, as seraphs' shine' (XV.354-355) recycles the Seraph simile used to imagine the light shining through the now absent stained glass that once adorned the window below the niche where the statue of the Virgin stands:

A mighty window, hollow in the centre,
 Shorn of its glass of thousand colourings,
 Through which the deepen'd glories once could enter,
 Streaming from off the sun like seraph's wings (XIII.489-492)

In contrasting Aurora with two such culturally revered figures as Minerva and the Virgin Mary, Byron implicitly suggests that a similarly beatific light illuminates his heroine. That Aurora embodies antiquated ideals of femininity, whilst also embodying ideals of modern womanhood appears to be a further contradictory element of her character, as the above citation from Franklin suggests. Such incongruity can be read as expressive of a social reality; as Franklin goes on to argue, the comparison of Aurora and Adeline plausibly articulates 'the unresolved tension between modern woman's assertion of moral and intellectual equality, and the repression of her sexuality which this nineteenth-century feminism entails.'²⁶⁷

Aurora's ability to entertain and transcend mutually opposing qualities is central to her connective function within the poem. As I previously argued in agreement with Beatty, Aurora's inner life is inextricably linked to her outer life; hence, the oppositions that are present internally are equally manifest externally, in her relation to *Don Juan's* other heroines. Byron is overt in his intention that Adeline, Aurora, and the Duchess

²⁶⁷ Franklin, 162.

Fitz-Fulke are to be considered in light of their comparative literary tastes: Adeline ‘Was weak enough to deem Pope a great poet, / And what was worse, was not ashamed to show it’²⁶⁸ (XVI.423-424) Aurora is ‘more Shakespearian’ (XVI.428);²⁶⁹ whilst the Duchess ‘was seen reading the “Bath Guide”’ (XVI.442). The heroines’ literary pedigree, however, extends beyond their chosen reading material. Byron establishes a precedent for his basing his contrasting heroines upon literary models from the opening Canto of *Don Juan*. As Franklin observes: ‘The contrasts between Inez and Julia is the familiar device of conduct novelists, like Edgeworth and Austen, whose Carolines and Eleanors adopted a rational, prudent approach to marriage, instead of the unstable sensibility of a Marianne or Julia’; Byron, however, reverses the usual value judgment by declaring in Julia’s favour, enabling him to ‘reintroduce the claims of sentiment’.²⁷⁰ Byron’s antagonistic contrasting of his heroines throughout *Don Juan* relates to an easily discernible trend within the nineteenth-century novel; Beatty cites Thackeray’s Becky Sharpe and Emilia Sedley, Austen’s Fanny Price and Mary Crawford, as well as D. H. Lawrence’s Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen, though admits the latter pair ‘are almost emblematically differentiated but remain within a single world’.²⁷¹ A more interesting subsequent pair would be Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre and Blanche Ingram,²⁷² whose dynamic so closely resembles that of Fanny and Mary in *Mansfield Park*—that Brontë might draw simultaneously upon Austen and Byron is not unlikely. Of the examples listed above, only Austen can be seen to have a legitimate claim to influencing Byron’s own dual heroines, however, one further writer deserves especial mention; as Beatty states, ‘Only one novelist provides a close parallel to Byron here.

²⁶⁸ Byron’s own preference for Pope is well-documented; see especially ‘The Bowles/Pope Controversy (1821)’ in *CMP* 120-183.

²⁶⁹ For an answer to the question ‘How is Aurora “Shakespearean”?’ see Beatty, 155-156.

²⁷⁰ Franklin, 125.

²⁷¹ Beatty, 141.

²⁷² Beatty comments on Byron and Shelley’s influence on Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (175).

Byron was reading Scott's novels in preference to all other authors whilst he was writing these Cantos [i.e. the English Cantos]'.²⁷³ The contrast between Flora McIvor²⁷⁴ and Rose Bradwardine finds echoes within work produced throughout Byron's career. Scott's heroines emerge from starkly different social realms, much like the faithful Medora and the homicidal Gulnare, or Julia and Haidée, or even Julia and Inez who are clearly cast as rivaling types of heroine and whose relationship in the opening Canto of *Don Juan* foreshadows the dynamic between Aurora, Adeline, and the Duchess Fitz-Fulke in the final Cantos.²⁷⁵

This novelistic literary debt is partly explained by the rejected 'Juliet stanzas' from the second Canto of *Don Juan*:

Shakespeare exclaims—"Hang up Philosophy
 Unless Philosophy can make a Juliet"
 But This is not the death that it should die—
 For when the turbid Passions are unruly, it
 No doubt can soothe them with a lullaby—
 Last night I had another proof how truly it
 Can calm—for what it "made" me on that same
 Night, *was* a "Juliet" to the very name.

²⁷³ Beatty, 141.

²⁷⁴ Beatty returns to *Waverly* and Flora McIvor elsewhere in the chapter: 'Aurora Raby owes a great deal to Scott's Catholic heroines and is supported, as they are, by a charged Romantic landscape.' (47).

²⁷⁵ Beatty has remarked that the differentiation of the three heroines in the final Cantos of *Don Juan* 'represent [Byron's] most ambitious attempt to write in this almost allegorical fashion' ('Fiction's Limit and Eden's Door', *Byron and the Limits of Fiction*, 23; see also *Byron's Don Juan*, 141). If Beatty is correct and we are to read these three heroines—Adeline, Aurora Raby, and the Duchess Fitz-Fulke—as contrasting *almost* allegories, then Byron may once again be turning to Spenser as a further model in the crafting of his female protagonists. Though Byron does not suggest that his three heroines be read according to the strictures of allegorical romance—and Beatty is right to qualify the extent to which we can read these heroines allegorically—there are evident parallels between the qualities embodied by the major heroines of the *Faerie Queene* and the last heroines of *Don Juan*. Adeline's double nature is suggestive of the personification of duplicity, Duessa, who is contrasted with the personification of truth, Una; as with Aurora, Una's virginity is one of her most important characteristics, protecting her from the lion in Canto three, who instead of attacking her is pacified by her innocence and becomes her loyal companion. Echoes of the emodiment of chastity, the female knight Britomart, can also be observed in Aurora; whilst Adeline's role as hostess encourages comparison with Radigund, the Amazonian queen who holds Artégall captive until he is rescued by his paramour Britomart, who defeats Radigund in Canto five. The femme fatal Acrasia, who seduces knights only to turn them to beasts has evident parallels with the *Odyssey's* Circe and *Orlando Furioso's* Alcina, and also with Juan's seductress, the Duchess Fitz-Fulke.

Juliet—or—Giulietta—which last was
 The real name of this fair Veronese—
 Oer whose sad tale Love echos still Alas!—
 And Youth still weeps the tender tears that please—
 Another Juliet—whom I would not pass—
 Her tale is told with so much simple ease—
 Is Rousseau's Julietta;—I neer knew
 One of the name but that I loved her too.²⁷⁶

Franklin rightly indicates that Byron's allusion to 'Rousseau's Julietta' would immediately refer contemporary readers to a particular literary mode: 'The very use of the name would instantly indicate to contemporaries a long line of novelistic heroines deriving from Rousseau's novel of sentiment.'²⁷⁷ Franklin contends that these cancelled stanzas are written in connection with Donna Julia,²⁷⁸ which is only very loosely true; the cancelled stanzas were intended to elaborate the poet's contemplation of the nature of romantic constancy which is prompted by Juan's enamored encounter with Haidée: 'But Juan! had he quite forgotten Julia? / And should he have forgotten her so soon?' (II.1657-1658). Given that the cancelled stanzas are written in reference to the tragic fate of Juliet, their connection with the equally tragic fate of Haidée provides a suitably fitting foreshadowing of events to come. In addition to the cancelled stanzas elaboration of the thematic concerns of the close of the second Canto, they are also revealing of Byron's negotiation of literary examples, or rather, of his weaving of the fictional and the (albeit alleged) empirical. The Juliet stanzas begin with an overt allusion to *Romeo and Juliet* (III iii 56-7): "'Hang up Philosophy, / Unless Philosophy can make a Juliet'". Byron inserts these lines with almost complete fidelity to Shakespeare's text, preserving the line-break and only omitting the exclamation mark; he then renegotiates the allusion

²⁷⁶ 'Rejected Stanzas', *Byron's Don Juan: A Variorum Edition*, ed. Truman Guy Steffan and Willis W. Pratt, vol. 2 of 4 (Austin: Texas UP, 1957) 272-273. It has been speculated whether these stanzas were intended to be inserted following stanza 211 (see Steffan and Willis, 269) or stanza 210 (see Frederick L. Beaty, 'The Placement of Two Rejected Stanzas in "Don Juan"', *Notes and Queries* (November, 1962), 422-423); given the thematic concerns of the stanzas, along with Byron's usual mode of recalling himself from digression, Beaty's perspective appears the more likely.

²⁷⁷ Franklin, 125.

²⁷⁸ Franklin, 125.

in defense of philosophy on evidence of personal experience of his own Veronese Giulietta (her name carefully transcribed according to the Italian), before relocating the reader in the literary sphere with the allusion to Rousseau's Julietta.

If the cancelled stanzas achieve their best fit following stanza 210 as Frederick Beaty has argued, then stanza 211 not only recalls the poet to the task in hand, but also continues the multidimensional allusive quality of the heroines who can be simultaneously read alongside external literary models, contrasting figures in their poetic moment, in addition to comparable female figures whom either anticipate their presence or emerge in their wake:

'Stop!' so I stopp'd.—But to return: that which
 Men call inconstancy is nothing more
 Than admiration due where nature's rich
 Profusion with young beauty covers o'er
 Some favour'd object; and as in the niche
 A lovely statue we almost adore,
 This sort of adoration of the real
 Is but a heightening of the 'beau ideal.' (II.1681-1688)

Written in relation to the inconstancy question which features both Julia and Haidée, these lines also anticipate the introduction in the English Cantos of the Virgin Mary, 'as in the niche / A lovely statue we almost adore' and Aurora, whose presence forces a reconsideration of the relation between the real and ideal:

He gained esteem where it was worth the most.
 And certainly Aurora had renewed
 In him some feelings he had lately lost
 Or hardened; feelings which, perhaps ideal,
 And so divine, that I must deem them real:— (XVI.900-904)²⁷⁹

The loss or hardening of 'some feelings' can be taken as a reference to life after his separation from Haidée. Other than his tenderness towards the child Leila in the Ismail Cantos, Juan has not encountered a lover since his sale into slavery that can compete

²⁷⁹ See also:

'Don Juan, who was real, or ideal,—
 For both are much the same, since what men think
 Exists when the once thinkers are less real
 Than what they thought, for mind can never sink' (X.153-156)

with his Island paramour. The above stanza inverts the rhyming couplet of the second Canto; rather than idolatry being a substitute for unobtainable perfection, the ideal is of such divine clarity that its existence cannot be doubted.

Further connection is observable between the two heroines earlier in the second Canto, with the first usage of ‘Aurora’, the Roman Goddess of the Dawn, in a description of Haidée:

And down the cliff the island virgin came,
 And near the cave her quick light footsteps drew,
 While the sun smiled on her with his first flame,
 And young Aurora kiss'd her lips with dew,
 Taking her for a sister; just the same
 Mistake you would have made on seeing the two,
 Although the mortal, quite as fresh and fair,
 Had all the advantage too of not being air. (II.1129-1136)

The sororal resemblance between the airy Goddess and the Island heroine prepares the reader for the similitude between Haidée and the English Aurora that is suggested in the English Cantos. There is, however, little physical semblance between the corporeal English Aurora and the Island heroine Haidée, rather, the identification of the two is owing to Juan’s emotional response:

Juan knew nought of such a character—
 High, yet resembling not his lost Haidée;
 Yet each was radiant in her proper sphere:
 The Island girl, bred up by the lone sea,
 More warm, as lovely, and not less sincere,
 Was Nature’s all: Aurora could not be,
 Nor would be thus;—the difference in them
 Was such as lies between a flower and gem. (XV.457-464)

Franklin, who explores Aurora’s social rather than existential significance, argues that this moment in the poem supports the notion that Aurora ‘represents Byron’s attempt to create a heroine comparable to Haidée in idealization, yet appropriate to an advanced European civilization.’²⁸⁰ The comparative simile of the ‘flower and Gem’ has generally been applied according to a straightforward syntactical reading: Haidée is the flower to Aurora’s gem. Beatty, who stresses the heroines’ existential significance,

²⁸⁰ Franklin, 157.

contemplates the religious symbolism of the gem and flower: ‘The traditional alternative to a garden paradise, whose attempted recovery renews the warm poignancy of loss, is a celestial, jeweled city which cannot be imagined.’²⁸¹ To extend Beatty’s reasoning, if we are to consider *Don Juan* alongside Christian scripture, then we can read the Haidée Cantos of the poem as the *Genesis* phase, with all the poignant tragedy of the loss of paradise; by contrast, the English Cantos, or more specifically Aurora’s presence can be regarded as suggestive of the clarity of *Revelation*. Haidée’s naturalistic intensity, ‘More warm, as lovely, and not less sincere’, is transient, fated like the flower that symbolizes her to fade; Aurora’s gem, symbolizing similar qualities of exoticism and beauty, exhibits a more enduring social polish. Beatty explains that ‘It is not that flowers are rejected but their celebration is linked too closely with poignancy and loss, ‘sweet-bitter thoughts’, for comedy’s comfort’,²⁸² whereas the durability of the gem is more compatible with the comedic tenor of the poem.²⁸³

The flower/gem simile does not, however, indicate as clear a division between Haidée and Aurora as has been previously suggested. An understanding of the significant connection between the two enables a greater understanding of the heroines’ epic significance. The two supposedly competing images of flower and gem are further complicated by Byron’s reference to them in relation to other heroines; Adeline is likened to ‘a diamond richly set’ (XV.52), with more negative associations of material riches and glittering social display; the lost child Leila, though not compared to a precious stone, is described as ‘a pure and living pearl’ (X.408), a comparison that is later reinforced in the image of her reaction to Canterbury Cathedral: ‘her infant brow / Was bent with grief, that Mahomet should resign / A mosque so noble, flung like pearls

²⁸¹ Beatty, 185.

²⁸² Beatty, 186.

²⁸³ In Frye’s ‘The Archetypes of Literature’ precious stones are associated with the comic vision of the mineral world (*The Kenyon Review* 13.1 (Winter, 1951): 109).

to swine.’ (X.598-600).²⁸⁴ More importantly, the word ‘gem’ is also associated with Haidée:

Haidée and Juan thought not of the dead.
 The heavens and earth, and air, seem’d made for them:
 They found no fault with Time, save that he fled;
 They saw not in themselves aught to condemn:
 Each was the other’s mirror, and but read
 Joy sparkling in their dark eyes like a gem,
 And knew such brightness was but the reflection
 Of their exchanging glances of affection. (IV.97-104)

These lines are the first instance of Byron’s use of the gem simile in the poem, encouraging the reader to strengthen the retrospective connection between Haidée and Aurora, a connection that is further emphasised by Aurora’s comparison to the flower which becomes Haidée’s emblem. Aurora is twice associated with flowers; the first example I cite above in relation to Aurora’s innocence: ‘A lovely being, scarcely form’d or moulded, / A Rose with all its sweetest leaves yet folded’ (XV.343-344).

Byron repeats the comparison in the same Canto:

She gazed upon a world she scarcely knew
 As seeking not to know it; silent, lone,
 As grows a flower, thus quietly she grew,
 And kept her heart serene within its zone (XV.369-372)

As with the lion simile explored earlier in the chapter, the image of the flower and gem evolves throughout the poem. It is in Aurora that the symbolic significance of each of these images is realized; through the evolving use of each simile, Aurora is connected to central heroines throughout the poem, referring us back to each; her connection to Haidée, whose episode Gleckner has argued is ‘the fulcrum as well as the symbolic core of the entire poem’,²⁸⁵ is the most significant link and further reinforces her own central significance for our understanding of *Don Juan* by providing a new heroic reference point around which previous examples orbit.

²⁸⁴ Byron here alludes to *Matthew 7:6*: ‘Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.’

²⁸⁵ Gleckner, 337.

From her state of splendid isolation, from which she has no desire to descend, Aurora's serene gaze 'upon a World she scarcely knew' recalls her Roman namesake. Implied in the sense of the world's novelty and freshness, of being 'scarcely' known, is the symbolic meaning of the goddess Aurora—the dawning of new knowledge and the emergence of understanding. Like the dawn, Aurora's emergence in the final Cantos of *Don Juan* is 'used to indicate relief after a time of trouble', signifying new possibilities for Juan, both emotionally and existentially.²⁸⁶ Aurora is associated with light and its literal and figurative properties throughout the poem, being described as 'a young star who shone / O'er life, too sweet an image for such glass,' (XV.341-342) which in turn connects her with the poem's contemplation of life in the closing stanza of the same Canto:

Between two worlds life hovers like a star,
 'Twixt night and morn, upon the horizon's verge:
 How little do we know that which we are!
 How less what we may be! The eternal surge
 Of time and tide rolls on, and bears afar
 Our bubbles; as the old burst, new emerge,
 Lash'd from the foam of ages; while the graves
 Of Empires heave but like some passing waves. (XV.785-792)

In its liminal state 'Twixt Night and Morn' life resembles the temporal quality of the dawn, whilst the eternal renewal of life's 'bubbles' echoes the sentiment of regenerative possibility that the introduction of Aurora brings. Aurora's role in the poem is not that of the corporal sensuality of Haidée before her, but the more metaphysical prompting of the contemplation of contradictions, both existential and poetical.

It is in Aurora the contradictions of Byron's poem concentrate: the religious and the secular, the past and the present, the ideal and the real. Aurora's ability to embody existential and poetical contradictions is of crucial importance, and, as Cooper has argued, 'The comic result of her presence in the poem is less resolution than boundless

²⁸⁶ "dawn, n." OED Online. June 2011. Oxford University Press. 2 September 2011
 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/47515?rskey=K4KaWU&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>

containment'.²⁸⁷ It is her pseudo-paradoxical 'boundless containment' that is key to our reading of the poem itself:

The worlds beyond this world's perplexing waste
 Had more of her existence, for in her
 There was a depth of feeling to embrace
 Thoughts, boundless, deep, but silent too as Space. (XVI.429-432)

In the above lines, Byron broaches 'The overpowering mysteries of space' (*Cain*, III.i.179), begun in his contemplation of 'Space and eternity—and consciousness' (II.i.47) in *Manfred* and continued in his metaphysical dramas of 1821, *Cain* and *Heaven and Earth*. Beatty comments upon the connection between Aurora's 'intimacy with space'²⁸⁸ and *Cain* and *Manfred* via the existential contemplation of universe; of equal significance is the linguistic echoing of a word imperative to our reading of *Don Juan*: 'boundless'. It is through the concept of boundlessness that Byron connects the existential and the poetical. Though Byron does not employ the word in *Manfred*, it plays a central role in *Cain*:

CAIN. [. . .] yon immeasurable liquid space
 Of glorious azure which floats on beyond us,
 Which looks like water, and which I should deem
 The river which flows out of Paradise
 Past my own dwelling, but that it is bankless
 And boundless, and of an ethereal hue— (II.ii.178-183)

Cain's struggle to conceptualise 'the phantasm of an ocean' (II.ii.186) recalls Juan's contemplation of 'the many bars / To perfect knowledge of the boundless skies' (I.734-735), though Cain is prompted by Lucifer, rather than a heroine.²⁸⁹ Such boundlessness is not only central to Byron's exploration of the human condition, but also to his epic process, as I argued earlier in the chapter. It is through such existential reflection that Byron reveals the relation between the empirical and poetical realms; Aurora serves in her connective function to bridge the two. Paralleling *Don Juan* in 'form and feature'

²⁸⁷ Cooper, 25.

²⁸⁸ Beatty, 'Fiction's Limit', 27.

²⁸⁹ Beatty compares Aurora with Aholibamah, the former possessing 'seraphic knowledge but of a somewhat different kind' ('Fiction's Limit', 27).

(XV.412), Aurora is the key to our understanding of the poem. If *Don Juan* is, as the poet suggests, ‘A versified Aurora Borealis, / Which flashes o’er a waste and icy clime’ (VII.11-12), then Aurora can be considered the personification of this ‘non-descript and ever varying rhyme’ (VII.10). Though it is Adeline that is described as ‘‘half a poetess’’ (XVI.306) it is Aurora that enacts a poetic heroism of epic proportions.

IV. CUNNING POETICS

The following coda is intended to articulate two major conclusions. Firstly, I make explicit the connection between the two major portions of the thesis to advance our understanding of the central ways in which female heroism is manifest in Byron's poetry. Secondly, I suggest one further way in which Byron's experimentation gender and heroism can elucidate a deeper comprehension of his poetic process.

As I established early in the thesis, one of the major preclusions of women from heroic exploit was the contemporary understanding of spheres of action. Women remained in the domestic sphere where heroism could only ever be of a household variety and little resembled the heroic qualities of 'exalted courage, intrepidity, or boldness'.¹ In order to reconceptualise such behavioural norms, female characters required relocating in an alternative space that would enable an alternative mode of behaviour. Both the opening chapter on 'Orientalism', and the second chapter on 'Epic' are centrally concerned with how Byron makes room for heroic heroines through his engagement with and reinvention of generic norms.

As the first half of the thesis demonstrates, Byron's interpretation of the East as both a geographic and an imaginative setting prompts a remapping of the potentialities of otherness to articulate an alternative model of gendered behaviour. The examination of Byron's experimentation with Oriental literature provided in my first chapter enables two major conclusions to be drawn: (i) that the fluidity of geographical binaries observable in the *Tales* suggests Byron's radical interpretation of space, enabling the poet to challenge contemporary assumptions concerning the proper spheres of female action; (ii) that it was Byron's experience of Western 'translations' of Eastern literature

¹ "heroism, n.". OED Online. June 2012. Oxford University Press. 8 July 2012
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/86312?redirectedFrom=heroism>>.

which encouraged him to read the East as a space where gender transgresses established norms. Consequently, Byron's reading of pseudo-Oriental literature—and of Sale's *Koran* and Scott's *Arabian Nights* in particular—is central to our understanding of his construction of heroines who demonstrate his determination to challenge Western preconceptions of gendered patterns of behaviour. The second half of the thesis extends the comprehension of space offered in the opening chapter by arguing that Byron's engagement with epic convention invites the inclusion of active female participants. The significant roles played by feminine figures in the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Aeneid* are translated into Byron's contemporary version of epic. Unlike the superhuman and often supernatural instances of female heroism in classical epic, Byron's heroic heroines are unmistakably human, though latent in every remarkable action is the heritage of their epic predecessors. Like the East, epic provides Byron with the necessary space to reconstruct contemporary notions of the correct behavioural spheres of female characters.

Both halves of the thesis are fundamentally concerned with articulating the significance of Byron's interaction with genre for his presentations of gender. Whilst the chapter on 'Orientalism' is primarily interested in the ways in which Byron renovates narrative space, the chapter on 'Epic' is interested in how he restores the possibility of heroic action by manipulating the semantics of heroism. Such a shift in analytic focus is reflective of Byron's own shift in poetic process as he moves from the narrative poetics of the *Tales* to a reinvention of epic in *Don Juan*: a poem which is less concerned with the 'and then' of story than with the manner of telling. The stories of Eastern tales are governed by a narrative that reinscribes heterosexual norms, being dominated by the interaction between two central protagonists of opposite gender who adhere to 'masculine' and 'feminine' behaviours. Byron's *Tales* elaborate upon the

confusion of gender binaries presented within the genre by manipulating the space of the harem, which is at once demonstrative of excessive masculinity—being overtly patriarchal—and excessive femininity—the female inhabitants exhibiting extreme sexual and social passivity. The close proximity of such gendered extremes suggest to Byron the possibility of mistaken identity and inverted behavioural patterns. Byron’s experimentation with the genre of epic extends such experimentation with extremes of gendered behaviour. Epic—the genre of heroism—is a genre that traditionally represents definitive masculinity. Byron’s hero, however, is a hero in the newer, novelistic sense of the word, being the poem’s central protagonist, but rarely exhibiting classical heroism.² Byron’s alertness to the shifting semantics of contemporary understandings of ‘heroism’ are manifest in his simultaneous engagement with a traditional heroism of action in the less traditional form of heroic heroines such as the Maid of Saragossa and Myrrha, and a new, more cerebral heroism, no less indebted to the language of epic exploit, articulated most clearly by the boundless Aurora Raby.

So far I have employed both ‘gender’ and ‘heroism’, as expressions of physicality: gender has operated in relation to biology and aesthetics, and heroism in relation to deed and exploit. For the final portion of the thesis, the governing concerns of the study shall undergo a further semantic reassignment to be considered as central to our understanding of Byron’s poetics. *Don Juan* emerges as the clearest formal manifestation of the epicene imagination of its poet-hero. To return to the terms of Bentley’s gendered assessment of Homeric epic cited in the previous chapter, *Don Juan*, like the *Odyssey*, was made with the other sex in mind. It is not my intention to discuss the significance of Byron’s feminine readership, but rather of his own feminized poetic consciousness. Julia’s declaration to Juan that ‘My brain is feminine’ (I.1557)

² Juan’s rescue of the child Leila during the Siege of Ismail provides one notable exception (see canto VIII, stanzas 90-94).

speaks of the poet as much as the heroine. In the close attention awarded to the machinations of the feminine brain, Byron reveals his own distinctive feminine poetics that are reflective of a versified *métis*-like heroism that I previously explored as embodied by his late heroine Neuha. Donna Julia's contemplation of the possibility of her husband's death is an apposite example:

Never could she survive that common loss;
But just suppose that moment should betide,
I only say suppose it—*inter nos*—
(This should be *entre nous*, for Julia thought
In French, but then the rhyme would go for nought.) (l.668-672)

Byron admits he is forced to adopt the Latin '*inter nos*' ('between us') for the sound, admitting that it damages the sense—Julia, rather romantically would of course be thinking in the language of love rather than the chaste dialect of scholars and clergymen. These lines illustrate the illusory quality of the polymorphic features of the poem, which are at once dependent upon and intensifying of the shifting nature of language. Byron's linguistic accomplishments reach a pinnacle in *Don Juan*, most transparently owing to his adoption of a new verse vehicle. The foreign form of the *ottava rima* is less suited to the unyielding masculine rhymes of the English language that dominate Augustan verse, than to the levities of the feminine rhymes of the Italian language in which the form first emerged. As such, any successful rendition of the form requires a new approach to the English language; *Don Juan* provides exactly this, discovering in the English a language a malleability that imbues the language with the kind of freshness that one might expect from 'an accomplished foreigner writing English.'³

The poet-hero fulfils the acoustic demands of the *ottava rima* through a poetic sleight of hand, manipulating the relationship between language and form to suggest that the elasticity of the form enables him complete linguistic liberty:

³ Eliot 201.

I ne'er decide what I shall say, and this I call
 Much too poetical. Men should know why
 They write, and for what end; but, note or text,
 I never know the word which will come next. (IX.325-328)

Byron's insistence on the freedom which the form allows him is qualified by occasional reminders of the demands rhyme places on the poet. Throughout *Don Juan*, Byron attends to the polyglot capacity of English poetry, often yoking foreign languages with English words, and discovering much in the sound and sense of both.⁴ The forced mispronunciation of Juan's Spanish name, retrospectively rhymed with 'new one' (I.2) and 'true one' (I.4) provides one example, his hero's name having to be 'adapted' to his rhymes, unlike Mirabeau, La Fayette, and Moreau⁵ (I.17-24), all of which retain their French pronunciation to demonstrate Byron's education in foreign languages, whilst purportedly offering further justification for his choice of hero. It is not only modern European languages that Byron invokes; he rhymes just as fluently in Latin: 'In short, the maxim for the amorous tribe is / Horatian, 'Medio tu tutissimus ibis'' (VI.135-136).

The following stanza provides a gloss:

The 'tu' 's *too* much,—but let it stand—the verse
 Requires it, that's to say, the English rhyme,
 And not the pink of old Hexameters;
 But, after all, there's neither tune nor time
 In the last line, which cannot well be worse,
 And was thrust in to close the octave's chime:
 I own no prosody can ever rate it
 As a rule, but *Truth* may, if you translate it. (VI.137-144)

As with the stanza concerning Donna Julia, cited above, Byron justifies his word choice by the requirements of the form—though the preposition 'tu' is indeed superfluous for the sense, it is metrically necessary. Though Byron admits the failings of the final line, he is insistent upon the formal importance of the 'chime'; the above stanza also further

⁴ Eliot 201: 'he discovered nothing in the sounds, and developed nothing in the meaning, of individual words.'

⁵ Referring to Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, Comte de Mirabeau (1749-1791), or potentially his more wayward brother, Andre Boniface Louis Riqueti, Vicomte de Mirabeau (1754-1792); Marquis de La Fayette (1757-1834); and Jean Victor Marie Moreau (1763-1813) respectively. By preferring Don Juan, Byron exercises a preference for the literary rather than the historical.

demonstrates his cunning poetics in seizing the opportunity to spin a further stanza on the subject; as we are told in *Cunning Intelligence*: ‘*Mêtis* is swift, as prompt as the opportunity that it must seize on the wing, not allowing it to pass.’⁶

Byron’s epic finds its impulsion in the tension between linguistic adherence to formal parameters and the liberation of language from the anticipated restrictions of the governing schemas of rhythm and rhyme. Writing on the ideal compositional qualities of an epic poem, Schiller identifies in the *ottava rima* a malleability that a contemporary version of the genre requires:

As for the sort of metre I would choose, this I think you will hardly guess: no other than *ottave rime*. All the rest, except iambic, are become insufferable to me. And how beautifully might the earnest and the lofty be made to play in these light fetters! What attractions might the epic *substance* gain by the soft yielding *form* of this fine rhyme!⁷

It is the soft yielding form—curiously feminine features—of the *ottava rima* that grants Byron the ability to give the illusion of an overarching formal structure that fetters language, whilst constantly breaking free. As I argued earlier, Byron delights in the linguistic features of the form, which gives all the appearance of a virtuoso performance. The *ottava rima* is central to Byron’s dialogic epic process, enabling him to work in multiple directions to present a more conversational, more intricate and complex brand of heroic composition. In this way, Byron complicates the heroic methodology that underlies the traditional epic process; rather than stemming outwards from hero to poet, *Don Juan* exhibits a less evident teleological focus for heroic identity, so that instead of the identity of the poet being symptomatic of the heroic features peculiar to the hero, *Don Juan* is more clearly informed by the heroic interests of its author. As I have explored in previous pages, Byron’s heroic interests find their more nuanced expression in feminine rather than masculine heroism.

⁶ Detienne 15.

⁷ Carlyle, *Schiller* 103-104.

The freedom the *ottava rima* grants Byron on a local, linguistic level, equally informs the structural interplay of substance and form on a grander scale. The poet-hero's own digressive odysseys simultaneously expand the poetic horizons of the poem, and cause the competing impulsions of plot and subject matter to come into focus. Byron's declaration in the opening canto that 'The regularity of my design / Forbids all wandering as the worst of sinning' (I.51-52) is not as specious as it may appear; though he digresses often, he does not 'move hither and thither without fixed course or certain aim', neither is he '(in motion) without control or direction',⁸ rather demonstrating a highly wrought digressive art that is only purportedly without clear purpose. *Tristram Shandy* provides a useful gloss to this technique:

For in this long digression which I accidentally led into, as in all my digressions (one only excepted) there is a master-stroke of digressive skill, the merit of which has all along, I fear, been overlooked by my reader,—not for want of penetration in him,—but because 'tis an excellence seldom looked for, or expected indeed, in a digression;—and it is this: That tho' my digressions are all fair, as you observe,—and that I fly off from what I am about, as far and as often too as any writer in *Great Britain*; yet I constantly take care to order affairs so, that my main business does not stand still in my absence. (I.xxii.80)

Don Juan's digressive moments too reveal 'a master-stroke of digressive skill'—a cunning intelligence—whereby the poet-hero is equally careful to set his affairs in order so that he might leave his 'people to proceed alone' (III.859). Byron's apology for digression in the twelfth canto discloses the deliberate and controlled nature of Byron's digressive art:

Oh, pardon me digression—or at least
 Peruse! 'Tis always with a moral end
 That I dissert, like Grace before a feast:
 For like an aged aunt, or tiresome friend,
 A rigid guardian, or a zealous priest,
 My Muse by exhortation means to mend
 All people, at all times and in most places;
 Which puts my Pegasus to these grave paces. (XII.305-312)

Returning to the equestrian conceit that emerges throughout the poem, Byron here counters the more effortless and impulsive gentle canter of the main body of the poem

⁸ "wander, v.". OED Online. September 2011. Oxford University Press. 27 September 2011
 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/225437?rskey=SkOhb1&result=2&isAdvanced=false>>.

against the solemn ménage of digression. Such contrast comically inverts the standard reading of textual deviation as a liberation from the controlling demands of the central narrative; instead, Byron suggests that such lateral movements are not only central to his display, but that the restraint exerted demands an even higher level of poetic proficiency than moments ostensibly more crucial to the plot.

The complexity that underlies Byron's grasp of epic form and substance is in no way specious, he skirts the epic parameters he establishes for himself in the opening cantos: rather than offering three episodes (I.1597) told over 'twelve books' (I.1594), or even 'two dozen / Cantos' (XII.437-438), he instead suggests he might continue up to 'a hundred' (XII.440). Byron's elusion of numerical measurement is hinted at alongside the early epic quantities outlined in the first canto, in his announcement that 'All these things will be specified in time' (I.1601), enabling endless deferrals of any indication of the poem's anticipated size. By resisting precise measurement and exact calculations, the poem evades rigorous knowledge, returning us to an earlier citation from Detienne's and Vernant's study that defines *mêtis* as:

a type of intelligence and of thought, a way of knowing; it implies a complex but very coherent body of mental attitudes and intellectual behaviour which combine flair, wisdom, forethought, subtlety of mind, deception, resourcefulness, vigilance, opportunism, various skills, and experience acquired over the years. It is applied to situations which are transient, shifting, disconcerting and ambiguous, situations which do not lend themselves to precise measurement, exact calculation or rigorous logic.⁹

Suggestive in his manner of composition is Byron's adoption of *mêtis* as the basis of an entire epic mode. His method of epic composition is reliant on 'experience acquired over the years'; as Byron writes to Kinnaird in 1818:

As to "Don Juan"—confess—confess—you dog—and be candid—that it is the sublime of *that there* sort of writing—it may be bawdy—but is it not good English?—it may be profligate—but is it not *life*, is it not *the thing*?—Could any man have written it—who has not lived in the world? (*BLJ* VI.232)

Though *Don Juan* is clearly a poem which emerged from social life, it is a poem conscious of its status as an *objet d'art*, and its poet consistently alludes to the poem's

⁹ Detienne 3-4.

formal qualities as speech in metrical form. For Byron, however, the linguistic raw materials with which he assembles his poem are vital rather than inert; indeed, Byron's self-characterisation of his compositional process suggests a further way in which his *mêtis* defines him against more traditional epic forerunners. Though both the levity of its form and in its cunning negotiation of language, *Don Juan* provides the poet's most distinguished example of gendered heroism.

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