

A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY IN *THE TUNNEL*

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In the first English edition of *The Tunnel* (1919), its heroine, Miriam Henderson, listening to Mr Tremayne's stories with growing outrage, begins to speculate on what he might expect from a wife:

a woman in a home, nicely dressed in a quiet drawing-room, lit by softly screened clear fresh garden daylight. . . . "Business is business." . . . "Man's love is of man's life a thing apart —'tis woman's whole existence." Tennyson did not know what he was saying when he wrote it in his calm patronizing way. Mr Tremayne would admire it as a "great truth"—thinking it like a man in the way Tennyson thought it. What a hopeless thing a man's consciousness was. How awful to have nothing but a man's consciousness.¹

This quotation comes from the first edition of the *The Tunnel*, published in London by Duckworth. In an extant copy of this text that is occasionally marked up in Richardson's own hand, the two instances of Tennyson's name are struck through with pencil and corrected in the margin to 'Byron' (see Fig.1). This correction is taken forward in the American first edition, and all subsequent editions follow suit.² Editors have tended not to gloss Richardson's initial misattribution, presumably believing it to be a simple case of mistaken identity. The recent Broadview edition of the text follows the 1938 Collected Edition's example in simply glossing the allusion as 'A line from English Romantic poet Lord Byron's (1788-1824) long poem "Don Juan"'.³

¹ Dorothy Richardson, *The Tunnel* (London: Duckworth, 1919), p.18.

² See, for example, Dorothy Richardson, *The Tunnel* (New York: Knopf, 1919), p.29, and Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage* Vol.2. (London: Dent & the Cresset Press, 1938), p.27. In the 1967 and the 1979 Virago editions, *The Tunnel* has the same page numbers.

³ Dorothy Richardson, *The Tunnel*, Stephen Ross and Tara Thomson (eds) (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Editions, 2014), p.71.

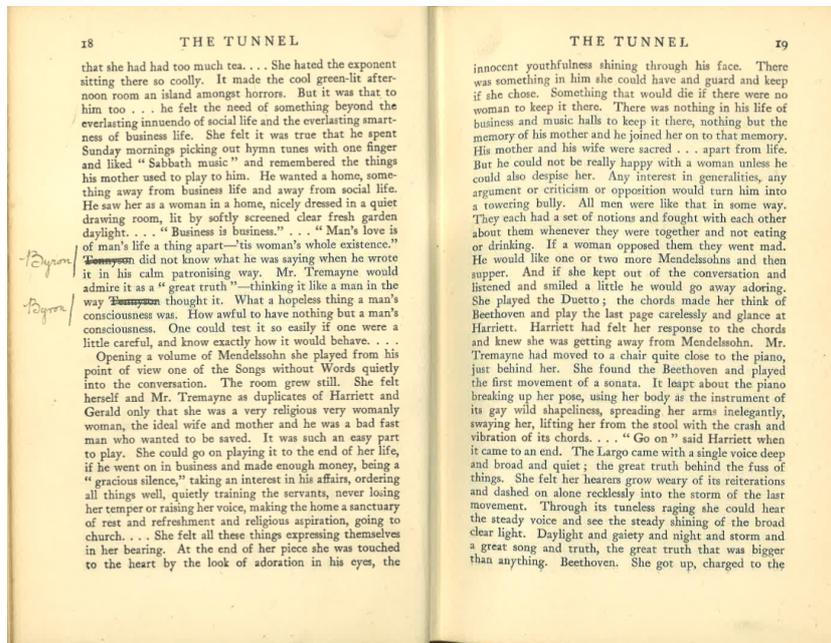


Fig 1.

This lack of editorial interest in Richardson's initial misattribution is partly because, as George Thomson notes, 'Dorothy Richardson was notably deficient in proof-reading her own work'.⁴ He identifies forty-one misprints or errors between the first English edition and later editions of *The Tunnel*. The Tennyson/Byron slip, however, is not listed as one of them. Yet Richardson's mistake is a rich one. Closer consideration yields valuable insight as to her allusive strategies, particularly in relation to gender. Not only does Richardson misattribute the allusion, but she also mistakes the sex of the speaker. As Thomson rightly notes, the line is not uttered as a platitude by Byron himself, but is rather spoken as a lament by the poem's first heroine Donna Julia.⁵ The stanza in its entirety lends valuable context to the citation:

Man's love is of his life a thing apart,
 'Tis woman's whole existence; man may range

⁴ George H. Thomson, *Notes on Pilgrimage: Dorothy Richardson Annotated* (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 1999), p.276.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.76.

The court, camp, church, the vessel, and the mart,
Sword, gown, gain, glory, offer in exchange
Pride, fame, ambition, to fill up his heart,
And few there are whom these can not estrange;
Man has all these resources, we but one,
To love again, and be again undone.⁶

Julia writes these lines in a letter to her lover Juan, not from a quiet drawing room, but from a nunnery where she has been banished by her cuckolded husband. The tone of Julia's epistle is far from 'calm' and 'patronising' and is, of course, not 'thinking it like a man in the way Tennyson Byron thought it' but thinking it like a woman. As Byron (writing as Julia) states in the very next stanza, 'My brain is feminine' (1.195) – and in so doing offers readers the first glimpse of poetic androgyny in a poem that consistently returns to the theme of cross-dressing and mistaken gender identity. Given *The Tunnel's* preoccupation with boundary-crossing (the title itself suggests something in-between) Byron's *Don Juan* is not a wholly incongruous source. Had Richardson been alert to the androgynous nature of the allusion, we might assume it would have been no less appealing, particularly given Miriam's own cross-dressed consciousness, 'something between a man and a woman; looking both ways'.⁷

That Richardson mistakes Byron for Tennyson tells us two things: first, that she is not writing with *Don Juan* to hand, and the true source of the quotation is likely unknown to her; and second that Tennyson more readily conjures for Richardson the kind of implacable masculinity of which Miriam despairs. Certainly, Tennyson does not spring readily to mind when we think of nineteenth-century gender bending. Critical recognition of Byron's playful treatment of gender identity has, however, only recently been attended to.⁸ Virginia Woolf, one of Byron's most astute early

⁶ George Gordon Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto I, Stanza 194: Jerome J. McGann (ed.), *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, Vol.5 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p.71.

⁷ Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage* Vol.2. (London: Virago, 1979) p.187.
Henceforth page references in text.

⁸ See in particular Susan J. Wolfson, *Borderlines: the Shiftings of Gender in British Romanticism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

twentieth-century readers confidently spoke of his ‘thoroughly masculine nature’.⁹ Given this, it may well be fair to assert that Richardson merely thinks of the two poets as interchangeably masculinist. Close inspection of Richardson’s allusions to the two poets would, however, suggest otherwise.

While Richardson almost always deploys both Tennyson and Byron in discussions or contemplations of gender difference, the two poets are deployed very differently. For Richardson, Tennyson embodies a frustratingly conventional perspective on gender binaries; as she writes in her essay on ‘Women and the Future’, Tennyson ‘crowns woman, elaborately, and withal a little irritably [...] But he never escapes patronage, and leaves her leaning heavily, albeit most elegantly, upon the arm of a man’.¹⁰ In *Interim*, likewise, his presence resonates with the strictures of tradition: ‘Perhaps in Canada there were old-fashioned women who *were* objects of romantic veneration all their lives, living all the time as if they were Maud or some other woman from Tennyson’ (II 389).¹¹ By contrast, the only other reference to Byron in *The Tunnel* occurs when Miriam relays to Miss Dear that she purchased her copy of *Villette* alongside a volume of Byron: ‘I didn’t care for the Byron; but it was a jolly edition’ (II 259). More telling, perhaps, are the final lines of *Interim* (1919), where Byron’s ‘She Walks in Beauty’ is mixed with an as yet unidentified line: “She walks in *Beauty*. I saw her sandalled feet; upon the *Hills*.’ Thomson suggests similarity to the ante-penultimate line of Oscar Wilde’s ‘The Harlot’s House’ (1882): ‘The dawn, with silver-sandaled feet . . .’.¹² It would appear, however, that the opening lines of Augusta Cooper Bristol’s ‘Night’ (published in *Poems*) offers a similarly close approximation:

⁹ Virginia Woolf, ‘Friday 8th August, 1918’, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, Vol.1 (London: Hogarth Press, 1977), p.180.

¹⁰ Dorothy Richardson, ‘Women and the Future: A Trembling of the Veil Before the Eternal Mystery of “La Gioconda”’, *Vanity Fair* [New York], 22 (April 1924): 39-40, p.39.

¹¹ See also Miriam’s citation of Tennyson’s *The Princess*, vii, ll. 259-260: ‘Woman is not undeveloped man but diverse’, which Miriam appropriates to vent her frustration at women’s limited educational opportunities: ‘Woman *is* undeveloped man’ (emphasis added; II 220).

¹² Thomson, p.137.

I stood and watched the still, mysterious Night,
Steal from her shadowy caverns in the East,
To work her deep enchantments on the world.
Her black veil floated down the silent glens,
While her dark sandalled feet, with noiseless tread,
Moved to a secret harmony.¹³

Moreover, these lines would be rather more readily confused with Byron's:

She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes:¹⁴

If Richardson does indeed have Bristol rather than Wilde in mind, then Byron's androgynous appeal becomes more explicit still.

All this leads to a speculation: Richardson's misattribution of the line from *Don Juan* is more than a momentary slip of the pen. She genuinely believes it to have been written by Tennyson. Certainly, Byron is an odd presence in a novel preoccupied by Victorian Realism and German Romanticism. While there are recurrent references throughout *The Tunnel* to Goethe, Mendelssohn, and Chopin, there is no mention of Coleridge, Keats, or Shelley, and only one (brief) allusion to Wordsworth (p. 186).¹⁵ The closest we come to a Byronic presence beyond Miriam's dismissal of him in favour of Charlotte Brontë is in the mention of Albemarle Street: 'Albemarle Street It all went on in *Albemarle Street*' (p. 143). As the Broadview editors indicate, Albemarle Street is home to the Royal Institution towards which Miriam is headed. It is also the

¹³ Augusta Cooper Bristol, 'Night', in *Poems* (Boston: Adams & Co, 1868), p.82.

¹⁴ Byron, 'She Walks in Beauty', ll.1-4 in McGann (ed.), *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, Vol.3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p.288.

¹⁵ This does not hold true for subsequent chapter-volumes of *Pilgrimage*, which refer to Blake (IV 492), Hemans (III 50), Keats (IV 618-619), and Shelley (III 68, 272). Each of these are annotated by Thomson at pp.256, 146, 269, 149, and 176 respectively. For commentary on the allusion to Wordsworth in *The Tunnel* see Thomson, p.95.

location of the most significant publishing house of the nineteenth century, John Murray, whose most famous author after Walter Scott was Byron.¹⁶ This is, however, rather a tenuous connection, and not one Richardson herself was necessarily aware of.

While the presence of Byron is somewhat incongruous, Tennyson's presence, woven as it is through Miriam's consciousness, is much more in line with how literary patterns emerge in the novel's texture, whereby an allusion or citation becomes a memory or haunting. The first explicit reference to Tennyson in *The Tunnel* is Miriam's description of the contents of the recently erected bookshelf in her rented room, where 'the Pernes' memorial edition' of Tennyson sits alongside 'the calf-bound Shakespeare' (II 79).¹⁷ From this point onwards, Tennyson becomes a lingering presence.¹⁸ The pairing of Tennyson with Shakespeare is one that offers further evidence to Richardson's conviction in the correctness of her misattributed citation. Miriam is prompted to repeat 'Man's love is of man's life a thing apart' once more in the novel: after seeing a Shakespeare play (II 187). Although on this occasion she omits mention of the quotation's source, it has been prompted by contemplation of the unreality of Shakespeare's heroines specifically, and women's limited role in fiction more generally – something we know Miriam associates with Tennyson. Miriam's early observation of the two authors' physical proximity, side by side on her bookshelf, is translated into an internal association.

My consideration of Richardson's mistake yields two major conclusions. First, that the misattribution offers further insight as to how the modernist woman writer regarded the gender politics of the male Victorian poet, inevitably associated as he was with

¹⁶ The Broadview editors note a probable allusion in *The Tunnel* to Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), although the work is a ballad and not a novel as they suggest; see Ross and Thomson (eds), p.293.

¹⁷ Miriam appears to recall the Pernes' edition when she remembers the rather un-Tennysonian Miss Jenny Perne: 'There were little straggles about the fine hair—Miss Jenny Perne—the Pernes' (II 267).

¹⁸ See for example the citation of 'The Higher Pantheism' (1869) (II 94). Also the allusion to *Maud*, 'Oh let the solid ground not fail beneath my feet' (II 256).

Coventry Patmore's 'Angel in the House'. Richardson anticipates, for example, Woolf's deployment of Tennyson in *A Room of One's Own* where the poet is employed in the demarcation of the sound of male and female conversation; while the men hum in tune with the anguished narrator of *Maud* 'There has fallen a splendid tear/ From the passion-flower at the gate', the women hum the opening lines of Christina Rossetti's 'A Birthday': 'My heart is like a singing bird'.¹⁹ Second, that Byron's – or rather, *Julia's* line is an unexpectedly apposite one given *The Tunnel's* concern with the separation of spheres generally, and the limitations of woman's sphere in particular.

¹⁹ Virginia Woolf, 'An Excerpt from *A Room of One's Own*', in Stuart N. Clarke (ed.), *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Vol. 5: 1929 to 1932* (London: Hogarth Press, 2009), pp.125-126.