

THE PERFORMATIVE BYRON:
THEATRICAL PRODUCTIONS IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND

by

LIRIM NEZIROSKI

(Under the Direction of Nelson Hilton)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents a study of Lord Byron's historical dramas (*Marino Faliero*, *The Two Foscari*, *Sardanapalus*, and *Werner*) alongside the performative aesthetics of *Don Juan*, and it uses performance theory as a hermeneutic for examining this relationship. It provides a literary analysis of some neglected works and important issues in Byron's writings, it explores the legacy of Byron in the nineteenth-century theater, and it tests the limits of current scholarship on Romantic drama. The dissertation brings together a large amount of scholarship and provides a new perspective on Byron, Romantic drama, and the Victorian theater.

INDEX WORDS: Lord Byron, Romanticism, Romantic drama, nineteenth-century theater, *Don Juan*, *Marino Faliero*, *Sardanapalus*, *The Two Foscari*, *Werner*, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, *Beppo*, *Manfred*, performance, Percy Shelley, William Charles Macready, Helen Faucit, Charles Kean, Samuel Phelps.

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LIRIM NEZIROSKI

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LIRIM NEZIROSKI

Major Professor: Nelson Hilton
Committee: Roxanne Eberle
Richard Menke

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE PERFORMATIVE BYRON

Reviews of Lord Byron's poetry and drama have always sounded somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, they speak of his sincerity in self-expression, while, on the other, they speak of his consciously stylized and marketed presentation of self. Particularly in the nineteenth century, the predominant element of Byron's writing was said to be his lyrical sincerity. For example, in the Preface to Algernon Swinburne's 1866 *A Selection from the Works of Lord Byron*, one can read of Byron's "excellence of sincerity and strength ... [which] in effect lie at the root of all his good works" (vi). In a similar collection in 1881, Matthew Arnold also spoke of Byron's sincerity in writing, arguing that even though Byron "posed all his life" when in public and at parties, when he "betook himself to poetry, ... then he became another man; then the theatrical personage passed away" (xxvii). But nineteenth-century reviewers also spoke of Byron's sincere self-expression when he was not writing lyrically. Even in reviews of the historical dramas, they criticized Byron's inability to portray characters, arguing that his lyrical sincerity encroached upon his dramatic writing. In a review of *Sardanapalus, Cain, and The Two Foscari*, Francis Jeffrey writes in the *Edinburgh Review* that "The very intensity of his feelings – the loftiness of his views – the pride of his nature or his genius, withhold him from [identifying with his characters]; so that in personating the heroes of the scene, he does little but repeat himself" (Rutherford, *Critical Heritage* 230). And in *The Spirit of the Age*, William Hazlitt similarly reviews the same collection of dramas, arguing that "Lord Byron's tragedies ... abound in speeches and descriptions, such as he himself might make either to himself or others,

lolling on his couch of a morning, but do not carry the reader out of the poet's mind to the scenes and events recorded" (279). These reviews suggest that Byron was essentially writing about himself even in the non-lyrical works of the tales and the dramas.

This focus on Byron's sincere self-expression continued into the twentieth century, with Jerome McGann as its major proponent. Throughout his scholarship, McGann has maintained that Byron wrote sincerely but in disguise – in “masquerade.” Like Jeffrey and Hazlitt, McGann argues that Byron is always writing about himself, particularly after his failed marriage, even as he writes about historical figures such as Sardanapalus and fictional characters such as Don Juan. In “Private Poetry, Public Deception,” for example, McGann argues that Byron's storytelling about a “harmless game of billiards” between Don Juan and Lady Adeline is actually “a private recollection of just such a game once played in 1813 by Lady Francis Wedderburn Webster and Byron” (*Byron and Romanticism* 131). Similarly, McGann argues in “Hero with a Thousand Faces” that the scene in *Sardanapalus* between the Assyrian king and queen is Byron's “critical commentary” on Lady Byron's unwillingness to forgive him during the separation scandal (*Byron and Romanticism* 144-45). Both of these examples assume Byron's sincere biographical approach to the writing of *Don Juan* and the dramas.

On the other hand, reviewers have also spoken of Byron's consciously stylized and marketed presentation of self, arguing that Byron did not write sincerely because he was continually adopting alternate points of view and thus only exploring rhetorical possibilities. In contrast to Jeffrey's accusation that Byron's “Childe Harold, his Giaour, Conrad, Lara, Manfred, Cain, and Lucifer, – are all one individual” (Rutherford, *Critical Heritage* 230), Henry Taylor argues that Byron's writing “consists of little more than a poetical diction, an arrangement of words implying a sensitive state of mind, and therefore more or less calculated to excite

corresponding associations” (Rutherford, *Critical Heritage* 329). More recently, Philip Martin has argued that Byron’s poetry can be seen “as a consciously produced artefact designed for the appeasement of a particular audience, a performance conducted under special conditions” (*Byron* 4). Similarly, Jerome Christensen has argued in *Lord Byron’s Strength* that Byron’s works can be understood best as a series of publication and marketing techniques that created the brand we call “Byron.”

This contradiction has sometimes manifested itself within the writings of a single scholar and even within a single study. Thus, while McGann espouses Byron’s sincerity of writing through masquerade, he also argues for a consciously stylized self through the use of rhetoric. In “Byron and the Anonymous Lyric,” for example, he argues that “Byron’s poetry constructs an artifice of the living poet” by creating “illusory and theatrical selves” (*Byron and Romanticism* 97), and he associates Byron’s lyricism with that of Baudelaire in arguing that it is “mannered and theatrical” (99). This rhetorical view of Byron seems to contradict McGann’s view of sincerity through masquerade. Another highly influential study, Robert Gleckner’s *Byron and the Ruins of Paradise*, also speaks of both Byron’s sincerity and his stylized self-presentation. Particularly for the early poetry, Gleckner argues that “Byron’s essential self [is] conveyed indirectly, quasi-dramatically, rather than directly, lyrically” (16) in that Byron writes in a role that Gleckner calls a “private-public voice” which “effectively camouflage[s] or overlay[s] the emotion and force[s] it into all too familiar patterns and contours ... enabl[ing Byron] to speak out more sincerely and less vulnerably” (1-2). Thus, rather than “an ebullition ... we have, paradoxically, a sincerity and conviction Byron seemed unable or unwilling to convey in his own voice” (4). Like McGann, Gleckner speaks paradoxically of both camouflaged and sincere writing in Byron’s poetry.

Seeing Byron's work as a mixture of sincere but stylized writing has also led Gleckner and others to look for lyrical elements in the typically non-lyrical genres of the tales and the dramas. Consequently, much of the work on Byron has taken a biographical or psychoanalytical approach, and the plays have been treated as closet dramas and even as dramatic lyrics in verse. One can thus see Jeffrey trying to decide if he should review *Sardanapalus*, *Cain*, and *The Two Foscari* as poetry or as drama. He ultimately criticizes the works as a mixture of both and as unfit for either genre, arguing that "As Poems, they appear to us to be rather heavy, verbose, and inelegant," while as plays they "are wanting in interest, character, and action" (Rutherford, *Critical Heritage* 229). This unsatisfactory response to the plays as poetry has been echoed more recently as well. In *The Dramas of Lord Byron*, Samuel Chew argues that Byron's plays were "hampered by that devotion to introspection and philosophy" which is characteristic of Romantic poetry (30), while Timothy Webb similarly argues that even as the work of most of the canonical Romantic poets shows "strong and unmistakable tendencies towards the dramatic[,] ... its central energies were derived from an engagement not so much with the external world as with the rich diversities and complexities of self" (11-13). As can be seen, both Chew and Webb point out the poetic engagement with consciousness, treating the dramas more like poetry than performance scripts.

This dissertation argues that a performance-theory approach to Byron would help resolve this contradiction. Thus, one of the major goals of the dissertation is to test the usability of performance theory as a hermeneutic for reading both the poetry and the drama, for analyzing the performative aspects of the poetry, and for taking into account the stage history of the plays. A promising attempt at such an approach can be seen in the recognition of Peter Manning's *Byron and His Fictions* that "Drama lay at the center of the imagination for an author who self-

consciously elevated his public image to mythic proportions, whose poetry derives its energy from the tensions between dispersed, multiple aspects of the self, and who was fascinated with the enhancing (as well as hypocritical) possibilities of role playing” (107). Unfortunately, Manning’s text-based and psychoanalytic approach, particularly in the chapters on the dramas, hinders his analysis of Byronic performances from being successful.

Several other studies have focused on Byron’s performative writing, but they typically do not include analyses of both his poetry and his drama within the same study. Recent performance-studies approaches, including Angela Esterhammer’s *Romanticism and Improvisation*, Nicole Frey Büchel’s *Perpetual Performance*, Frederick Garber’s *Self, Text, and Romantic Irony*, and Anne Mellor’s *English Romantic Irony*, focus exclusively on the major poetic works. Meanwhile, studies on the dramas, including Samuel Chew’s *The Dramas of Lord Byron*, Richard Lansdown’s *Byron’s Historical Dramas*, Michael Simpson’s *Closet Performances*, and Daniel P. Watkins’s *A Materialist Critique of English Romantic Drama*, ignore the plays’ stage history and fail to treat the texts as performance scripts. Thus, previous studies on the plays have primarily only explored literary themes, such as Byron’s depiction of the Orient, the development of the Byronic hero, his use of irony, and his commentary on poetry, nature, and Regency society. This thematic textual approach is true as well for the major studies on Byron, which include Jerome McGann’s *Fiery Dust* and *Don Juan in Context*, Leslie Marchand’s *Byron’s Poetry*, Andrew Rutherford’s *Byron: A Critical Study*, Robert Gleckner’s *Byron and the Ruins of Paradise*, Peter Manning’s *Byron and His Fictions*, Philip W. Martin’s *Byron: A Poet Before his Public*, and Jerome Christensen’s more recent *Lord Byron’s Strength*. Other studies on Byron’s dramas, such as Boleslaw Taborski’s *Byron and the Theatre* and Margaret J. Howell’s *Byron Tonight*, focus exclusively on the stage history and provide little

commentary on either the dramas themselves or the reception of Byron during the Victorian period. Similarly, Andrew Elfenbein's *Byron and the Victorians* and the articles of Timothy Wandling and Kristen Guest in *Nervous Reactions* explore how major Victorian writers responded to Byron, but they too only limit their studies to the poetry and to popular representations of Byron in Victorian culture with no commentary on the portrayal of Byron in the Victorian theater.

This dissertation means to redress this lack of synthesis in three ways. First, it juxtaposes the historical dramas alongside the performative aesthetics of *Don Juan* and uses performance theory as a hermeneutic for examining this relationship. As will be explained below, Byron discovered a performative aesthetic while writing *Manfred* and *Childe Harold IV*, and he tried to put that creative spirit on display in *Don Juan*. Thus, performance theory promises to help explain the connection between *Don Juan* and the dramas that has always been recognized but never adequately articulated. Second, the dissertation provides a literary analysis of neglected works and issues in Byron's *oeuvre*. While some elements of *Don Juan*, *Marino Faliero*, and *Sardanapalus* need little commentary because of their considerable critical heritage, others have received little scholarly recognition; *The Two Foscari* and *Werner*, in particular, continue to remain drastically neglected even in the recent surge of Romantic theater studies. Finally, a section of each chapter turns to the drama's nineteenth-century production history and aims to examine the limits of current scholarship on Romantic drama. While much of what we know about Romantic drama and the Victorian theater remains true, an examination of how Byron's works were adapted for the Victorian theater provides informed considerations about Romantic drama and nineteenth-century theater practitioners that is well worth the effort.

Romanticism, Romantic Drama, and Performance Theory

Performance theory in literature, until recently, has largely remained the domain of Renaissance drama and Shakespeare studies. This should not be surprising, as throughout the centuries Shakespeare has been the focal point of discussion about the nature of theater, dramatic convention, textuality, and writing about acting and stage performance. This was true even during the nineteenth century, for it was in their writings on Shakespeare that Coleridge, William Hazlitt, and Charles Lamb wrote their most influential works on theater. Consequently, some have even argued that performance theory is a particularly Shakespeare-driven domain, leading J. L. Styan to call the turn to performance studies a “Shakespearean revolution” (to use the title of his book). Another reason performance theory has not been widely appropriated for the study of Romantic literature is because the nineteenth century’s anti-theatrical prejudice has continued to marginalize the study of Romantic drama. The distinction between lyric and drama, of course, goes back to Aristotle, who portrayed lyric poetry and drama as incongruent modes of writing in his *Poetics*, but even with the example of Elizabethan and Jacobean verse dramas, nineteenth-century theorists such as Hazlitt continued to portray poetry and drama as mutually exclusive genres. In “The Drama: No. IV,” for example, Hazlitt famously said that the Romantic age is “romantic [meaning lyrical], but it is not dramatic” (302), and he relied on this dichotomy to argue that Byron and Wordsworth were not capable of writing drama because they were too committed to their own poetic visions. Meanwhile, others have cited societal changes – particularly the loss of religious faith and the collapse of a pervading political order after the French Revolution – as reasons for the decline of theater during the Romantic era. George Steiner’s influential *The Death of Tragedy*, for example, argued that nineteenth-century society

was so different from the ancient Greeks and Elizabethans that dramatists were no longer able to rely on the shared values that make tragedy possible.

Nevertheless, many scholars have appropriated performance theory for the nineteenth century with great success, and performance studies – which can be defined as the analysis of plays and stage performances and the examination of how theater and the concepts of performance and presentation influence writers – promises to be a major trend in the study of Romanticism. Performance theory has already begun to reshape definitions of Romanticism; the work of Angela Esterhammer and Judith Pascoe, in particular, has demonstrated Romantic poetry's reliance on performance and theatricality. Esterhammer's *Romanticism and Improvisation* argues that writers during the early Romantic period embraced improvisational performance, particularly its unpremeditated spontaneity, as a symbol of the Romantic genius. Although improvisation eventually came to be portrayed as unstable, manipulative, and “threatening to the stability of the bourgeois or gendered subject” (7) as Romanticism separated itself from Della Cruscan verse, the concept of improvisation has been useful for recent revisionist understandings of Romanticism as an ideology that participated in the nineteenth century's questioning of identity and the nature of written poetry. Pascoe's *Romantic Theatricality*, meanwhile, argues that the period's “attraction to and appropriation of performative modes of self-representation” in writing, commissioned portraits, and public personas of Romantic poets created a “torrent of poetry predicated on a fabrication” that sometimes “is directly at odds with Wordsworth's advocacy of plain style ... [because its] Fascination with dramatic modes of self-representation ... is frequently coupled with stylistic excess” (3). Such scholarship demonstrates that canonical Romantic poetry, which is frequently

seen in opposition to the stage and to everything that is worldly, was not free from the influence of theatricality and performance.

While the application of performance theory to Romantic poetry is still new, there is a considerable amount of scholarship on Romantic drama. Allardyce Nicoll's multivolume *A History of English Drama*, Joseph Donohue's *Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age*, and Jane Moody's *Illegitimate Theatre in London* have provided invaluable descriptions of nineteenth-century theater. Moody, in particular, has demonstrated the extent to which the theater was a cultural context in which many Romantic writers participated, further challenging the centrality of lyrical poetry to the study of Romantic era writing. Several other studies have also provided invaluable analyses of Romantic dramas. Alan Richardson's *A Mental Theater*, Jeffrey Cox's *In the Shadows of Romance*, Terence Hoagwood and Daniel Watkin's collection *British Romantic Drama*, Terry Otten's *The Deserted Stage*, and Marjean Purinton's *Romantic Ideology Unmasked* limit their commentary on Romantic drama to an analysis of the texts; nevertheless, such scholarship has made useful connections between the poetry and the drama. Richardson, especially, has identified how Romantic poets explored consciousness in the closet dramas, arguing that the dramas are another site in which Romantic writers dealt with the concerns of their poetry. Likewise, Cox has argued that Romantic drama explores the limit of the imaginative idealism expressed in the poetry; he argues that the dramas explore what happens when imagination and love fail to transform the world. Each of these studies presents a complex understanding of Romanticism as a movement that was shaped not only by the writing of poetry but also by the writing and performance of drama.

Meanwhile, a number of recent studies on Romantic drama have provided a resurgence of feminist scholarship and have displayed the importance of the theater as a vehicle for women's

writing. For Mary Robinson, Joanna Baillie, Elizabeth Inchbald, and others, the theater was just as important as the development of the nineteenth-century novel was for Jane Austen or the Brontë sisters. Julie Carlson's *In the Theatre of Romanticism*, Catherine Burroughs's *Closet Stages* and *Women in British Romantic Theatre*, Betsy Bolton's *Women, Nationalism and the British Stage*, and Ellen Donkin's *Getting into the Act* all display the centrality of women in the Romantic theater and provide sustained analyses of dramas written by women alongside dramas written by the male Romantic poets. These studies break down the boundaries between Romantic poets and nineteenth-century dramatists, demonstrating that the big six participated in the same literary and theatrical marketplace as the more marginalized writers.

As these texts demonstrate, several important nineteenth-century writers, including all of the male Romantic poets, wrote at least some of their works with the issues of performance and theater in mind. Many of them also wrote plays and had more plans on either writing for the stage or reforming it. Wordsworth wrote *The Borderers*, a drama that in many ways set the terms of analysis for much of Romantic era closet drama, particularly in its concern for the corruption of social life and in its promotion of a reclusive personal life. Coleridge wrote *Osorio*, which was renamed *Remorse* upon revision, and planned several other dramas and adaptations. Keats completed *Otho the Great*, wrote part of *King Stephen*, and briefly served as theater critic for the *Champion*. He also famously declared in his August 14, 1819 letter to Benjamin Bailey that "One of my Ambitions is to make as great a revolution in modern dramatic writing as Kean has done in acting" (*Major Works* 487), and in a November 17, 1819 letter to John Taylor, he wrote that he considered "Two or three ... Poems" including "The Eve of St. Agnes" as "mere apprentice work" (Cox, *In the Shadows* ix) which "would nerve me up to the

writing of a few fine plays” – a project that Keats called “my greatest ambition” (*Major Works* 520).

Likewise, Shelley wrote *The Cenci*, one of the most important contributions in all of Romantic drama. He also used dramatic form for *Prometheus Unbound*, *Hellas*, and *Julian and Maddalo*, and he planned to write several other dramas, including *Charles the First* and *Swellfoot Tyrant*. Shelley’s use of dramatic form, in fact, is unique in the Romantic era. Unlike all of the other Romantic poets who used tragic drama to show the dark side of imagination and consciousness, Shelley alone used dramatic form – rather than epic – in *Prometheus Unbound* to present his Romantic vision (Cox, *In the Shadows* 15-16). Consequently, his dramas hold a much more central position for his Romantic vision than they do for, say, Wordsworth or Coleridge. Moreover, Shelley’s terminology for drama, as defined in *A Defense of Poetry* and in the Preface to *The Cenci*, has helped generations since the Romantics define not only drama but epic and poetry as well; in his Dedication to *The Cenci*, for example, he distinguishes between his Romantic poetry, which he calls a vision “of the beautiful and the just” and “dreams of what ought to be” (*Cenci* 140), and his tragic drama, which he calls “a sad reality” (140).

Aside from the writing of drama, the theater and the concept of performance heavily influenced many other central ideas about poetry and the imagination. For Coleridge, “the willing suspension of disbelief,” that essential requirement during a live theatrical performance where the audience “chuse to be deceived” about what they see on stage (*Coleridge’s Poetry and Prose* 338), “constitutes poetic faith” (*Biographia Literaria* 490). According to such terms, the writing of poetry is equated with a theatrical performance in that they both make demands on a reader/viewer that violate common experience and sense perceptions. Coleridge eventually uses his writing on the suspension of disbelief as a gateway for disagreeing with Wordsworth’s

Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, but even Wordsworth's writing was at times essentially dramatic. According Stephen Parrish, Wordsworth's early poems were "experiments in dramatic form" (83); consequently, it was "by adopting the dramatic form ... that Wordsworth endeavored to carry out the aims of *Lyrical Ballads*" (139). Wordsworth himself also spoke of dramatic elements in his poetry; in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, he criticizes contemporary poets for mixing the language of the speaker with that of the poet, arguing that "the dramatic parts of composition are defective ... [when] they deviate from the real language" of the character and "are coloured by a diction of the Poet's own" (*Major Works* 607). Such commentary helps portray Wordsworth's poetry as an early model of the dramatic lyric/monologue where the poet depicts the psychology of another person. Similarly, Keats's ideas of "negative capability" and the "chameleon poet" also owe much to theater. With a heavy reliance on the work of Woodruff and Bate, Harry Beaudry argues in *The English Theatre and John Keats* that Keats's central ideas about poetry were worked out amid intense studies of Shakespeare and that they resulted from frequent discussions about theater with Hazlitt, Hunt, and John Hamilton Reynolds. Consequently, many of Keats's poetic terms, such as the distinction between the "egotistical sublime" and the "chameleon poet," relate to the theatrical ideas of embodiment.

A number of other Romantic-era writers wrote influential and sometimes successfully staged plays, including Matthew Lewis, Robert Southey, Elizabeth Inchbald, and Hannah Cowley. Of these, Joanna Baillie can be considered as one of the most important for the study of Romantic closet drama. She wrote 26 plays – three times as many as Byron – and, during her time, was considered the next Shakespeare. Catherine Burroughs even considers Baillie "Romantic drama's 'mother'" since her first drama preceded Wordsworth's (*Closet Stages* 14). Moreover, her most popular plays – *De Monfort* and *Count Basil* – engage with public life and

performance in a way that *The Borderers* and other Romantic closet dramas do not; her plays comment on the rise of the bourgeois class and investigate socially acceptable norms of performance. Prefaces to her plays, moreover, highlight the difficult position of a female dramatist and expose the male-centered ideology surrounding theater and cultural representations of performance (Burroughs, *Closet Stages* 80). Such investigations on the nature of theater and performance have allowed Catherine Burroughs, Jeffrey Cox, Daniel Watkins, and others to see Baillie as one of the most important writers of closet drama during the Romantic era.

But not all of these dramatists provide as promising of an opportunity to examine the connection between Romantic poetry and theater as does Lord Byron. Not only did Byron coin the term “a mental theatre,” which has led to the contemporary understanding of closet drama, but he also wrote in a wide range of dramatic forms – traditional forms such as neoclassical tragedy and gothic drama, intellectual mysteries such as *Cain*, and experimental pieces such as *The Deformed Transformed* – that allow for the study of central terms in performance theory, including “text,” “drama,” “script,” and “performance.” And, in contrast to the plays of many Romantic dramatists, including Baillie, Byron’s plays have a long legacy of performance on the nineteenth-century stage, particularly through the careers of William Charles Macready, Samuel Phelps, Charles Kean, and Charles Calvert. Meanwhile, dramatic texts such as *Manfred* and *Cain* are considered canonical nineteenth-century literature in a way equaled only by Shelley. But the most important justification for studying Byron’s dramas alongside his poetry is Byron’s own. He himself pointed to both *Don Juan* and the historical dramas when he explained how he would counter the popular taste for the sort of writing popularized by Wordsworth, Southey, and his own verse tales. *Don Juan* would show the illusion of Romantic and Regency ideology and recommend a return to Pope and common sense, while the historical dramas would promote a

return to neoclassical dramatic form – in opposition to the popular Gothic drama – and a return to Whig political ideology, in opposition to the Tories. Both *Don Juan* and the historical dramas, thus, share Byron’s mission of critiquing his society and of promoting alternate ideologies in politics and literature. Even more, *Don Juan* and the dramas themselves represent the means by which Byron attempted to reform society; they did not only mean to analyze and to comment on society but artistically to bring about the changes they recommend. Consequently, they can be considered both authorial performances (actions) and instances of the performative speech act (acts of locution that lead to consequences).

Byron’s Early Performative Writing

This dissertation limits its discussion to Byron’s major late works, specifically to *Don Juan*, the three historical dramas (*Marino Faliero*, *Sardanapalus*, and *The Two Foscari*), and *Werner*. But, in doing so, it does not mean to suggest that Byron was not concerned about the issue of a presentational front in his other works as well. *Manfred* and *Cain*, particularly, may have much more justifiable claims for being studied alongside the poetry because both of them have a much closer affinity to a psychological poem than to a performance script – *Manfred*, after all, is subtitled “A Dramatic Poem.”¹ Consequently, both dramas can more accurately be considered closet dramas in a way that the historical dramas cannot be. However, focusing on such obvious closet dramas would perpetuate the text-bound focus of previous studies and undermine the dissertation’s goal of incorporating theater history and filling the gap on studies of Byron in the Victorian era.

¹ Byron himself said as much as well in an April 9, 1817 letter to John Murray. He writes: “You must call it ‘a poem,’ for it is *no drama* ... – a ‘poem in dialogue’ or – a pantomime if you will” (*BLJ* V.209).

The issue of self-representation was a major theme from the very beginning of Byron's writing. It was Byron's presentation of self in *Hours of Idleness*, in fact, that prompted the hostile reviews to which Byron responded in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. In the *Edinburgh Review*, for example, Henry Brougham responded that Byron violated "a sort of privilege of poets to be egotists" (Rutherford, *Critical Heritage* 31) and wrote in a manner "which neither gods nor men are said to permit" (Rutherford, *Critical Heritage* 27). And *The Eclectic Review* directly stated that "The notice we take of this publication ... regards the author rather than the book" (qtd. in McGann, *Fiery Dust* 5). As these comments demonstrate, reviewers were more focused on Byron's presentation of himself as a young lord than on the merits of his poetry.

Byron also struggled with the issue of a presentational front in the first volume of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* as well. Although *Childe Harold* has been traditionally read as a ruminative Romantic travelogue,² the irony, self-distance, burlesque, and flippant writing that are so prevalent in *Don Juan* were also characteristic of parts of *Childe Harold* I and II, even after much of it was removed from the manuscript. As Philip Martin points out, parts of *Childe Harold* I include "an exaggerated amount of stylized flair" (Byron 27) – an ironic distance between poet and narrator (27), "sudden shifts of tone" (24), a "deliberate abandonment of decorum[,] an exhibition of whimsy" (26), and the discovery of a "repertoire of dramatic

² Although I agree with Nicole Frey Büchel's assertion that "Performance is thus one of the most comprehensive features of Byron's writing and serves as an essential key to understanding the literary concepts of identity" in that "performative elements in Byron's texts can even be observed on the levels of theme, form, style and narrative technique" (8), I disagree with her characterization of *Childe Harold* as a "metaphysical" Romantic text which presents "a firm belief in a unified self" (1). As the pilgrimage metaphor throughout *Childe Harold* and Büchel's own statements demonstrate, Harold/Byron eventually recognizes that there is no end to his pilgrimage; his search for a stable self will always elude him and "he will have to repeatedly construct his self in order to approximate his authentic identity" (Büchel 11). This was one of Byron's most important realizations about identity, and it led to a different form of writing in *Don Juan*, one in which he celebrates rather than mourns mobility. But, despite Büchel's recognition of the evasiveness of a stable identity in *Childe Harold*, she continues to assert that "the impossibility of locating an essential, metaphysical self" is only "hinted at" in *Childe Harold*. I assert that mobility was always a part of *Childe Harold*; however, Byron did not learn to celebrate it until he started writing *Beppo* and *Don Juan*.

gestures” that allowed Byron to “assum[e] ... the role of a social outcast” (29). Elizabeth Boyd similarly points out a style of writing that she calls an “early effusion of Don Juanism” (7) in which Byron wrote satire and burlesque and imitated Ariosto.³ The presence of such writing, even if less apparent in the published version, has led Boyd, Gleckner, and others to argue that it is difficult to sustain the idea of a split in Byron’s career (which divides his writings into the early Romantic style of *Childe Harold* and the tales and the later anti-Romantic style of *Don Juan*, the satires, and the dramas). Consequently, they see Byron’s best work – *Don Juan* – not as a refutation of his earlier poetic style but as a synthesis of his early poetic and letter writing styles. Throughout their work, Boyd and Gleckner suggest essentialist notions of Byron’s “real” voice and style, while Martin argues that the variety of styles makes readers doubt the existence of an essentialist self because “we are only too aware that it is acting still” (*Byron* 27).

This study takes the performance aspect of *Childe Harold*, which Martin identifies, as a premise of all literary texts. This assumption, which I believe is the heart of performance theory, suggests that every performance (whether through a written document or in a theatrical production) displays a conscious or unconscious decision about how the self is to be presented. Thus, I understand the stylistic analyses of Boyd, Gleckner, and others as essentially an analysis of Byron’s *ethos*. Altogether, the analyses provided in each chapter will try, like so many other studies of Byron before mine, to identify a small amount of recurring but essentialist self-presentations. These touchstones are a belief in variation and mobility, Whig political ideology, a distrust of those who hold power and those who aim to obtain it, and a concern for the condition of the marginalized.

³ M. K. Joseph also uses the same term to refer to Byron’s early use of satire and burlesque in *Childe Harold*; he argues that “the burlesque tone of the omitted stanzas begins to look forward to the later Juanesque mode” (15). At another point, he calculates that “the baffooning stanzas” may have made up a tenth of the original manuscript of Canto I (21).

Even though I accept as a premise that all of Byron's major writings display a concern with the presentation of self, I do recognize that his major works – *Childe Harold*, the tales, *Don Juan*, the metaphysical dramas, and the historical dramas – have different stylistic features; they obviously conform to different generic and formal conventions (Spenserian travelogue, verse narrative in couplets, etc.) and imitate previous models to different extents. But an important difference for me is how Byron responds to mobility or change in these works; he comes to accept mobility as a fact of life in his later works. Thus, while he initially mourned in *Childe Harold* the changes he saw in Europe, particularly in Greece, he comes to celebrate mobility in *Don Juan*; by the English cantos, in fact, *Don Juan* becomes increasingly concerned with putting mobility on display in that the poem increasingly narrates not what happens to Juan but what happens in the mind of the narrator. Byron's conscious display of mobility in *Don Juan* and his awareness of the artifice of the neoclassical historical dramas makes the use of performance theory an appropriate interpretive tool.

The hundreds of studies on *Childe Harold* and the tales have by now quite convincingly argued that these poems are obsessed with searching for a permanence that cannot be found. *Childe Harold* I and II, particularly, elegize the fallen condition of Greece and of humankind, and they begin with the assumption that something redeeming lies outside Harold's native land. Thus, Harold's journey to Europe is not only an escape from the people and customs that have "sated" him but a restorative pilgrimage as well. However, in traveling across Portugal, Spain, and eventually Greece, Harold discovers barbaric human practices from which he wants to flee even further. Consequently, much of the first two cantos come across as a disturbing description of the human condition as Byron saw it throughout Europe during the Napoleonic wars. And, by the end of Canto II, all assumptions about the modern world are challenged. Western European

societies which, to Byron's readers, should have embodied the highest notions of morality turn out to be barbaric, while Oriental societies, such as the court of Ali Pasha in Albania, seem more civilized and ordered in comparison. Nevertheless, even this dichotomy is investigated. Ali Pasha's kindness is only secured by the violence and oppression he enacts on others; Byron's realization of this leads him to ruminate on the condition of western Europe and implicitly to equate the self-serving barbarism of the two regions. Thus, Harold's attempt to redeem his sense of western civilization proves unsatisfactory; in stepping out of civilization into Albania, he finds more of the same. His pilgrimage to Greece, therefore, uncovers that Athenian society was not the beginning of an enlightened civilization that spread throughout Europe but only "the wonder of an hour!" (*CHP* II.2) which, like *Sardanapalus's* "golden reign," only existed temporarily (Martin, "Heroism and History" 86).

After much repetition of this theme of the fall of civilization in the tales (though on a more limited scale), Byron renews the search for redemptive possibilities in *Childe Harold* III.⁴ With the help of Percy Shelley in Geneva, Byron turns to the model of Wordsworthian nature writing, and, like Wordsworth, he attempts to find a way out of his own personal memories and out of Europe's collective memories of the Napoleonic wars. Byron specifically imitates Wordsworth in his rejection of the city in III.72: "High mountains are a feeling, but the hum | Of human cities torture." As in "Tintern Abbey," Byron privileges a harmony with nature and an escape from the city. In fact, a section of writing (III.72-75) is pervaded by assertions of an out-of-body transcendental experience where the poet's soul mingles with nature. These assertions

⁴ Jerome Christensen's phrasing of this renewed activity does well to highlight the essentially performative aspect of Byron's search. According to *Lord Byron's Strength*, the canto can be read as a remaking of the commercial brand called 'Byron' in that Byron is "the masterful speculator [who] makes a kind of living from the manipulation of the readymade [i.e., Wordsworthian nature writing] as a commodity in the market" (158-59). As with the stylistic analyses of Byron's writing, Christensen's hermeneutic of economic speculation also focuses on the presentation of Byron's *ethos*.

include: “I become | Portion of that around me” (III.72), “the soul can flee, | And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain | Of ocean, or the stars, mingle” (III.72), “thus I am absorb’d” (III.73), “the mind shall all free | From what it hates” (III.74), and “Are not the mountains, waves, and skies, a part | Of me and of my soul, as I of them?” (III.75).

At other times, Byron echoes Wordsworth in his rumination of place. While Cantos I and II also feature a narrator who meditates on the legacy of a place, much of the focus in the first two cantos goes to considerations of foreign people and foreign cultural and historical events (such as the Maid of Saragosa, the Spanish bullfight, and the Ablanian warrior dance). But in Canto III, Byron’s ruminations are almost entirely on nature – Lake Lemán (III.68-70 and III.85-91), the banks along the Rhine River (III.56-61), the Drachenfels (III.54-55), the thunderstorm on top of Mt. Jura and the reflections on Mt. Clarens (III.92-104).⁵ Even when he reflects on Napoleon, Rousseau, and his cousin Howard, he does so because they are directly connected to the field of Waterloo. It is the ground itself – “an Empire’s dust!” (III.17) – that sparks the chain of thought from location, to war, to Howard, and finally to Napoleon and Rousseau. Such considerations of place align Byron’s writing with Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads* poems such as “Heart-leap Well” and “Michael,” where “Beside the brook | Appears a straggling heap of unhewn stones! | And to that simple object appertains | A story” (16-19). Like Wordsworth, Byron comes to terms with the importance of a location by remembering its story.

When not focusing on nature, Canto III focuses on the act of imaginative writing. In fact, the beginning of Canto III is where Byron makes his famous commitment “to cling” to imaginative activity “so it fling | Forgetfulness around me” (III.4). The imagination promises to provide Byron with forgetfulness and it promises to give him a renewed sense of life because, as

⁵ I thus agree with M. K. Joseph that Byron relies much more heavily on the eighteenth-century tradition of topographical poetry in Canto III by engaging with the landscape than in the first two cantos (75).

he states two stanzas further, “’Tis to create, and in creating live | A being more intense, that we endow | With form our fancy, gaining as we give | The life we imagine” (III.6). But the transformation of self – the gain of a life – through imaginative writing and a close observation of nature does not work. By the end of the canto, it is clear that Byron is still searching for something he is not sure he can find, even though a few statements sound as if he is convinced. In the passage on Mt. Clarens, for example, he asserts that “He who hath loved not, here would learn that lore, | And make his heart a spirit” (III.103). However, such assertions are sometimes followed by questions. For example, immediately after the thunderstorm, he asserts that “the far roll | Of your departing voices, is the knoll | Of what in me is sleepless” (III.96), but he then follows with three questions on where the thunder eventually rests. Such questioning demonstrates that Byron has not yet found the stability he seeks in nature; he instead projects onto the thunder the restlessness he feels within himself. Unlike Wordsworth, who sees nature as a teacher and guide that can “impress | With quietness and beauty” (“Tintern Abbey” ll. 126-27), Byron sees in nature the representation of his own misery.

At other times, such seemingly confident assertions about the transformative power of nature sound like desperate attempts to convince himself that what he asserts is indeed true. In stanza 190, for example, he states that he “must pierce [scenes of nature], and survey whate’er | May be permitted,” but his use of indefinite language – “whate’er” – demonstrates he is not sure what he will find. A few stanzas later, he again asserts his belief “that there may be | Words which are things, – hopes which will not deceive” (III.114), but the indefinite language – “may” – again suggests an uncertainty that undermines his confidence even as he states it. And, with all he has contemplated throughout Canto III, it is not encouraging that such words and hopes will

be found. If he has not been “impressed” by nature so far, he will probably not be impressed in the remaining four stanzas.

It is no coincidence that much of this questioning about the transformative power of nature comes near the end of the canto. If nature did have the transformative power he says it has, surely he would have felt something by now. But even the most Wordsworthian section of the canto, stanzas 72-75, is pervaded with the irony that the poet does not feel the communion with nature he says he is feeling. Thus, after all his assertions that “I become | Portion of that around me” (III.72), that his soul mingles with nature (III.72), and that he is “absorb’d” (III.73), the section still ends with a question that challenges his certainty: “Are not the mountains, waves, and skies, a part | Of me and of my soul, as I of them?” (III.75). If such writing was an attempt – an experiment – to forget about his past by distracting himself with both imaginative writing and an attentiveness to nature, as Alan Rawes has suggested, clearly it did not work. By stanza 97, he is still left searching for that “*one* word” through which he could “wreak | My thoughts upon expression” (III.97). The only conclusion he can reach is merely one which reaffirms what he has tried to redress all along – his recognition that “We are not what we have been” and that “We are not what we should be” (III.111).

Transformations in *Manfred* and *Childe Harold IV*

Childe Harold III ends very negatively in Byron’s response to historical change because, in attempting to lighten his spirit by engaging in the imaginative activity of Wordsworthian nature writing, Byron failed to be “impressed” by nature. He instead made empty declamations⁶

⁶ Though seemingly “sincere,” such empty declamations have led some Romanticists to argue that Byron has been celebrating artifice all along. Like Christensen, Philip Martin argues that Canto III provides Byron with a space in which he can search “for the kind of emotional excitement that he thinks a poet of his age should offer” (*Byron* 29), and he sees Canto III as an “indulgence of certain gestures” (28) rather than as an expression of sentiment. Robert

about the harmony he felt and then stopped to ask if that was the rest for which he had been searching. Ultimately, Canto III ends with the recognition of a failure; whatever the poet felt, if at all, was only temporary, and it did not leave him in a better mental state. Experiences of harmony with nature continually gave way to a desire for new experiences. Byron's search for something final, however, was not abandoned; he took it up again in *Manfred* and in *Childe Harold IV*. In these works, he realizes that mobility is not to be mourned but rather celebrated.

Manfred begins, like *Childe Harold*, with a search for permanent redemption. The drama begins on a low point, with Manfred soliloquizing that "My slumbers ... are not sleep, | But a continuance of enduring thought" (I.i.3-4). He reviews a list of activities that have failed to appease his conscience – studying philosophy and science, performing good deeds, vanquishing foes. Afterwards, he calls on the "Spirits of earth and air" to give him "Forgetfulness." But this too fails; the spirits reply that they do not have the power to grant him forgetfulness. Instead, he must overcome his pain by facing it. Consequently, when a spirit takes the form of "a beautiful female figure" (which we are to believe is Astarte), Manfred tries literally to embrace it, but it vanishes, making Manfred faint. Later, he soliloquizes that "The remedy I reck'd of tortured me" (I.ii.3), and he looks for resolution in death by attempting to commit suicide. But, before the Chamois Hunter saves him, Manfred discovers "a power upon me which withholds | And makes it my fatality to live" (I.ii.23-24). At this point, however, Manfred does not understand this unconscious "power;" he misinterprets it as a curse to live out his life in torture as a kind of

Gleckner, meanwhile, does see Byron's message of despair in Canto III as a sincere expression, but he emphasizes that the expression of despair is itself a creative exercise and, as a creative exercise, it "becomes the imaginative device by which its author remains sane and strong" (230). Thus, for Gleckner, Canto III fulfills its own wish for the "one word" which would give Byron the ability to express his thoughts. In other words, Canto III fulfills its own wish through a performative utterance – the utterance of the wish for expression itself becomes the expression that fulfills the wish.

Wandering Jew figure. When it returns again, however, Manfred realizes that this power is what could save him.

Act II, scene ii, begins with another soliloquy, in which Manfred reviews his past failures at finding rest, and with another raising of the spirits. His list of failures includes his alienation from family and community and the inability of learning to appease his spirit. It also includes the *Childe Harold* III activities of turning to nature and engaging the imagination. On nature, he speaks about the landscape's "sight of loveliness" (II.ii.9) and suggests that it should have the power to transform. But, as he tells the Witch of the Alps, "The face of the earth hath madden'd me, and I | Take refuge in her mysteries, and pierce | To the abodes of those who govern her – | But they can nothing aid me" (II.ii.39-42). The imagination has similarly failed him as well. As he tells the Witch, "In phantasy, imagination, all | The affluence of my soul – which one day was | A Croesus in creation – I plunged deep, | But, like an ebbing wave, it dash'd me back | Into the gulf of my unfathom'd thought" (II.ii.140-44). As in Canto III, Byron suggests in the first two Acts of *Manfred* that neither nature nor the imagination can distract the mind and prevent painful memories from returning.

But Manfred does feel some ease when he confronts the image of Astarte, the representation of what troubles him. As he explains at the beginning of Act III, "There is a calm upon me – | [An] Inexplicable stillness! which till now | Did not belong to what I knew of life" (III.i.6-8). Further, he calls this calmness "The golden secret, the sought 'Kalon'" (III.i.13). Though he doubts that the feeling will last, he is glad to have experienced it at least once because "It hath enlarged my thoughts with a new sense" (III.i.16). And he is particularly surprised (and skeptical) that he found this calmness "seated in my soul" (III.i.14). But his reflection on this discovery of hope within himself is interrupted by Herman and the Abbot.

Nevertheless, Manfred again encounters this feeling during his address to the moon in Act III, scene iv. He begins with a description of what he sees – “The stars are forth, the moon above to the tops | Of the snow-shining mountains” (III.iv.1-2) – and then gives way to a chain of memories about the Coliseum. Afterwards, he reflects on how “strange” it is that he “recall[ed] these memories] at this time” (III.iv.42). Unfortunately, he is again interrupted by the Abbot, so we do not witness his further rumination, but it is clear that his mind continues to interpret the significance of this discovery because when the spirit of death comes to take his soul, he argues that “The mind which is immortal makes itself | Requit[al] for its good or evil thoughts – | Is its own origin of ill” (III.iv.129-31) and that it “derives | No colour from the fleeting things without, | But is absorb’d in sufferance or in joy, | Born from the knowledge of its own desert” (III.iv.133-36). This discovery⁷ of the unconscious signifies the transformation that allows Byron to celebrate rather than mourn the condition of humankind in *Don Juan* and future works. It is the realization that life is an artwork, that life takes the shape one gives to it.

With this realization in *Manfred*, Byron turns to *Childe Harold* one more time to declare that his “pilgrim’s shrine is won” (IV.175). In Canto IV, Byron lays out his hard-learned discovery that even though life is not what it should be, it is what one makes it. Canto IV is, thus, largely a celebration of artifice and a philosophical justification for such a celebration. But Canto IV is no *Beppo* or *Don Juan*, so much of it is still pervaded by the despair seen in Cantos I and II. It is in Canto IV, after all, that Byron presents the famous image of him “meditat[ing]

⁷ Byron had, of course, already suggested similar ideas in earlier works. As *Childe Harold* III pointed out, imaginative activity gives meaning to life (III.4-6). In *The Prisoner of Chillon*, likewise, the speaker tells of an unknown mental strength that sustains him in captivity. Initially, he responds as Manfred with surprise at his unconscious will for life, saying “I know not why | I could not die” (227-28). Afterwards, the song of a bird brings back “A light” (251) and restores him to consciousness. Eventually, his peaceful resignation gives him freedom within his dungeon and an ability to look outside; such sights, in turn, bring him more peace and eventually a communion with the spiders in his cell. Finally, he becomes so resigned to his condition – he learns “to love despair” (374) and states that “My very chains and I grew friends” (391) – that he even suggests ambivalence and disappointment when he is set free. As in *Manfred*, the speaker’s attitude towards his captivity demonstrates that Byron had begun to accept the centrality of the mind even before *Manfred* and *Childe Harold* IV.

among decay, and stand[ing] | A ruin amidst ruins” (IV.25), an image which encapsulates his approach for much of *Childe Harold*. At the beginning of the canto, Byron particularly laments the fall of Venice, commenting, as he had done on Greece in the first two cantos, that Venice’s “lot | Is shameful” (IV.17) because it had fallen into Austrian control and because it continued to neglect poets like Tasso who had the ability to “cut the knot | Which ties [Venice] to [its] tyrants” (IV.17). Moreover, as in the previous cantos, the political and social fall of Venice also represents a personal crisis. Byron’s conception of Venice, as he had read about it from Shakespeare and others, did not coincide with the reality of a decayed Venice that everywhere made itself apparent to him. Like Cantos I and II, Canto IV begins to search for a way to redeem the lost vision of Venice.

This crisis is laid out in the first few stanzas. Venice itself has decayed, but “she hath a spell beyond | Her name in story” (IV.4), and, thus, what has been lost can be “repeopled” (IV.4) because the creative imagination is “Essentially immortal” and can “create | And multiply in us a brighter ray | And more beloved existence” (IV.5). Furthermore, this creative experience “replaces what we hate” and waters the heart, “replenishing the void” (IV.5). However, these Canto III-like assertions of creating “A being more intense” and giving back a life are challenged by the problem that previous creative acts have failed to bring about lasting effects. As stanza seven explains, “They came like truth, and disappeared like dreams.” Plus, reason and reality interfere and call “Such over-weening [f]antasies unsound” (IV.7). The beginning of Canto IV thus sets up the question of how one can be redeemed by the imaginative activity discovered in Canto III when the fruit of imagination is impermanent and challenged by reality and reason.

Much of Canto IV tries to come to terms with this rise and fall. Byron visits monuments, impressive natural scenery, and sculptures, and he makes assertions about art’s defiance of time,

but he relapses into despair again and again. For example, he asserts that he can “repeople [Venice] with the past” (IV.19) and he turns to nature for examples that illustrate that “There are some feelings Time can not benumb” (IV.19); he asserts specifically that the tannen will grow despite “the Alpine shocks | Of eddying storms,” the camel will labor with the heaviest load, the wolf will die in silence (IV.20-21). All of these examples of endurance, he argues, display how “the mind may grow” (IV.20). However, such endurance is “but for a day” (IV.22), and the canto returns to examples of suffering and destruction, explaining that “There comes a token like a scorpion’s sting” which brings “fresh bitterness” (IV.23).

Byron takes this lesson from several other examples as well, but they too collapse. When he sees the Venus de Medici, he exults of what the “Mind can make, when Nature’s self would fail” (IV.49), and he suggests that Santa Croce, though decayed, “Is still impregnate with divinity” (IV.55). He also feels inspired by Metella’s tomb to “buil[d] me a little bark of hope, [and] once more | To battle with the Ocean and the shocks” (IV.105). But he pauses and questions “where should I steer?” recognizing that “There woos no home, nor hope, nor life, save what is here” (IV.105). Afterwards, he reflects on the decay of all monuments and reaches the famous despairing “moral of all human tales”: “First Freedom, and then Glory – when that fails, | Wealth, vice, corruption, – barbarism at last” (IV.108). It is a conclusion that makes one “Admire, exult – despise – laugh, weep” (IV.109) – a conclusion that sounds similar to the despair at the end of Canto II.

Byron finally identifies a way out of despair when he begins to appreciate the value of each positive feeling, no matter how insignificant or problematic it may seem. At one point, he reflects on the idea of divinity while observing Egeria’s spring. This too leads him to the pessimistic conclusion that “our young affections run to waste” and create “weeds of dark

luxuriance ... | Rank at the core, though tempting to the eyes" (IV.120). However, like Manfred, he finally realizes that such pessimistic despair is created by himself. As he famously asserts, "Of its own beauty is the mind diseased, | And fevers into false creation" (IV.122). The mind itself creates the "unreach'd Paradise of our despair" (IV.122) and "Some phantom" that "lures" and causes people to "wither from our youth" (IV.124). Nevertheless, he asserts the importance of such imaginative activity, even if it gives "heart-arches ever new" (IV.126), because "'tis a base | Abandonment of reason to resign | Our right of thought – our last and only place | Of refuge" (IV.127). Finally, he asserts that even if imaginative activity brings despair, it also brings revitalizing beams of light (IV.127).

As in *Manfred*, the critical realization comes while observing the Coliseum in the moonlight. The Coliseum is initially presented as another victim of time's destroying hand, but the ruin looks artistic in the moonlight, and Byron can no longer mourn the decay. Consequently, he speaks positively of time, calling it a "beautifier of the dead," an "Adorner of the ruin," and a "comforter | And only healer" (IV.130). Afterwards, he presents his own despair to time and asks that time modify and beautify it as well (IV.131). Finally, he echoes Shelley's Prometheus by presenting his forgiveness (IV.135) and suggesting that he will no longer hold a grudge against the changes brought by time. As in *Manfred*, the speaker discovers something within by meditating on the Coliseum. For Byron, the discovery is of "that within me which shall tire | Torture and Time, and breathe when I expire" (IV.137). And like Manfred, Byron eventually suggests that "It is enough ... that *once* we bore | These fardels of the heart" (IV.166).

Near the end of Canto IV, Byron declares that "My pilgrim's shrine is won" (IV.175) because he has finally accepted the process of creation, decay, and renewal. Even though he has not discovered a way to make his imagination coincide with reality or for a way to revitalize

Greece and Italy – though he vaguely suggests that poetic voices such as Tasso’s (and implicitly his) can inspire a nation – he has learned to value gifts of nature while they last. As he states in stanza 176, his “reward” is that “we can yet feel gladden’d by the sun, | And reap from earth, sea, joy.” Canto IV lays out this idea philosophically, but Byron did not yet know how he was going to embody this revitalizing spirit in the future. In fact, much of his writings, especially the dramas, continue to focus on despair by presenting histories of oppression and of failed political reform. Nevertheless, *Beppo* and *Don Juan* embody this new aesthetic by abandoning elegy for a spirit of carnival, burlesque, and the celebration of what is positive – mainly love and creativity – even while recognizing that there is also despair. Together, *Don Juan* and the dramas also avoid “false creation” by focusing on fact – on history and on what Byron has experienced. So, while the writings analyzed in this dissertation are not always cheerful, they do work together to avoid alluring fantasies that lead to despair. More specifically, *Don Juan* and the dramas are committed to deconstructing the false notions that others have created – the chastity of women, the morality of Regency England, the virtue of warfare, the republican ideal of medieval Venice, the rebirth of aristocracy after the Thirty Years’ War.

An Outline

The aim of this dissertation is to bring together the now-disparate research on Byron’s dramas and performative poetry and to contribute original analyses of neglected works. Specifically, the study argues that performance theory can be used as a hermeneutic for examining the relationship between *Don Juan*, Byron’s most performative poem, and the historical dramas. As mentioned above, performance theory promises to find commonalities between the works that other interpretive tools, such as biographical criticism and new

historicism, have not been able to highlight. Secondly, the dissertation provides a literary analysis of important but less studied works in Byron's *oeuvre*, particularly *The Two Foscari* and *Werner*, which have remained drastically neglected in comparison to the more famous works of *Manfred*, *Sardanapalus*, and *Don Juan*. Finally, a section of each chapter turns to the dramas' nineteenth-century production history and aims to examine the legacy of Byron in the Victorian era and to test the limit of current scholarship on Romantic drama. For example, while great work has been done in the last two decades on the importance of drama on women's writing in the Romantic era, some of the findings about the progressivism of the nineteenth-century theater are contradicted by the theater history of Byron's plays.

The study begins with a chapter on *Don Juan*, a poem that is always central to any discussion of Byron and one that portrays his performative and improvisational aesthetic more clearly than any other text. The chapter specifically tries to define this aesthetic by continuing to explore how Byron handles the reviving force of "mobility." It begins with an analysis in *Beppo* of Byron's new poetic technique, which I define as an alteration of repetition and variation. The technique is explored more fully in the much longer section on *Don Juan*. I argue that Byron uses repetition – through imitation, allusion, and repetition of a poetic device – but with some form of variation – through irony or a change in the history or literature he is imitating – in order that he may parody, criticize, satirize, or subvert. But this style of writing is not without limit. In the final section, I turn to Byron's criticism of Lady Adeline and of Robert Southey to examine the extent of Byron's willingness to endorse his new-found mobility.

Chapter 3, on *Marino Faliero*, argues that Byron promotes a Whig political theory in response to the radical political activities of the 1820's, particularly in response to the Cato Street Conspiracy. While this argument is not new, I point out several studies that incorrectly see the

drama as a promotion of such radical politics and counter with analyses of Byron's letters and journals. The chapter also focuses on the Doge's ambivalent response to the revolution he is asked to lead; he agrees with the plebeian rebels that a change in Venice is needed, frequently deploying animal imagery to demonstrate the city's corruption, but he disapproves of the violence the radicals promote. The chapter also looks at several other characters who serve as foils to the Doge and provide reasons for breaking the reader's sympathy with him. Ultimately, Byron demonstrates that radicals such as the Cato Street conspirators in England compromise the reforms of the Whig party, and he advocates the Whig political ideology of reform through parliamentary rather than revolutionary change. Meanwhile, an examination of the drama's theater history demonstrates the play was considered too political for Drury Lane. Robert Elliston and William Charles Macready depoliticized the drama and transformed it into a jealous husband's response to the accusation of his wife's adultery. I conclude that such a depoliticization of the drama demonstrates that the nineteenth-century London theater was not as politically progressive as some recent scholars have portrayed it to be.

Chapter 4, on *The Two Foscari*, focuses on the marginalized character of Marina, the only female character in the play. She is both marginalized in the drama and has been greatly overlooked in the admittedly slim scholarship on this important text. Marina holds many of the same patrician values as the Doge, but, because of her gender, she holds no political authority in Venice; consequently, her critique of the government is rendered powerless. Marina specifically criticizes the men's use of the discourse of chivalry for political ends, arguing that the ties of family and nature should be more influential than one's commitment to the State. With this analysis of Marina, I affirm Byron's critique of the separate spheres ideology and promote a feminist reading of the drama that some Romanticists have seen as doubtful on account of

Byron's "gynophobia." Meanwhile, in the section on the play's performance history, I comment on how the 1838-39 production of the play (the only nineteenth-century London production) served as a star vehicle for the upcoming actress Helen Faucit, despite William Charles Macready's attempt to transform the drama into another *Marino Faliero*. I conclude that the centrality of Marina makes the play an important text for understanding the condition of women in Regency England and that the behind-the-scenes bickering of Faucit and Macready demonstrates that the Victorian-era theater was an institution still dominated by male ego and control.

Unlike the Venetian plays, *Sardanapalus*, the focus of Chapter 5, has been a popular Byron work both on stage and in scholarly criticism. The drama enjoyed several very successful nineteenth-century stage productions in London theaters by the leading actors of the time, and its rich critical heritage puts it on par with *Don Juan*, *Childe Harold*, and *Manfred*. However, the drama has been frequently used for personal critical agendas both on stage and in literary scholarship; consequently, rifts and contradictions exist within its legacy. Chapter 5 explores one of these contradictions: the association of *Sardanapalus* with both Byron and Percy Shelley. On the one hand, *Sardanapalus* is frequently associated with Byron himself because of his skepticism, effeminacy, and self-critical irony, while, on the other, he is associated with Percy Shelley because of his opposition to oppression and violence. I attempt to merge these readings by arguing that Byron ironically associates *Sardanapalus* with Shelleyan heroes such as Laon and Prometheus so that he can criticize Shelley's idealism and promotion of non-violent activism. Although Byron does not promote violence, he does demonstrate that inaction is not an appropriate response, and the drama displays that *Sardanapalus*'s indulgent life of peace, sexuality, and lax governance makes him vulnerable to mischaracterizations which threaten his

empire and pacifist vision. Much of my reading, therefore, applies the imitation-variation technique of *Don Juan* to Byron's skeptical response of Shelley's idealism. Unfortunately, a review of *Sardanapalus*'s theater history demonstrates that the play was successful only because it was drastically shortened and simplified. The script was cut to nearly half and the plot and characterization were reduced to the portrayal of how an effeminate, slothful hedonist turned into an admirable warrior. Moreover, the production was infused with ballets and elaborate set and scenery, reaffirming the familiar cultural narrative that the Victorian-era theater had transformed tragic theater into a popular spectacle.

Chapter 6 considers Byron's late drama, *Werner*. The play was very popular during the Victorian era, remaining in repertoire for over thirty years, but it has been criticized relentlessly since its publication. Nineteenth-century reviewers criticized Byron for his poor development of plot and character and awkward line breaks, and they went to great lengths to demonstrate his plagiarism of Harriet Lee's *The German's Tale*, which Byron himself admitted in the Preface. Twentieth-century scholars have also criticized Byron for compromising his neoclassical dramatic values, arguing that Byron returned to the method of composition used in the tales and that he included elements of the Gothic and the melodrama simply so he could appeal to popular taste. But, despite this low critical esteem, the play enjoyed tremendous success on stage. To explain this paradox, I once again take recourse to Byron's imitation-variation technique and argue that Byron included elements of the popular theater, not to appeal to popular taste, but to once again criticize the Regency theater which upheld sentimentality and the domestic as a source of proper moral instruction. Byron does this by demonstrating that the happy ending of a melodrama depends on violence. The play starts with the problems of disinheritance and alienation, but, by Act V, all seems ready for a happy ending: Werner has reclaimed his nobility,

the Siegendorf family has been reunited, Siegendorf's son Ulric is engaged, and peace has been declared with the end of the Thirty Years' War. However, Byron dredges up the repressed memories of the play and reminds readers that all of this prosperity was made possible by a murder. Consequently, the happy ending quickly turns to tragedy as moral order is reestablished and the major characters are punished for their immorality. For the most part, nineteenth-century theater practitioners followed this turn to tragedy on stage. William Charles Macready shortened much of the drama, primarily streamlining it so that it could present the family's tragic ending much more forcefully and with a greater sense of surprise. Ulric, however, was not allowed to escape, and subsequent productions criminalized Ulric even further by staging the murder scene. Consequently, Victorian law and morality were reestablished and the play ended with the reaffirmation of Victorian religious and social ideology.

The final chapter ends the dissertation with a brief consideration of Byron's theatrical legacy. Byron may have objected to how his dramas were staged during the nineteenth century, but I believe it is important to recognize how the dramas, like *Don Juan*, paradoxically became vehicles for creating and reaffirming the conservative Victorian ideology that many of his works would have criticized.

CHAPTER 2

PERFORMATIVE AESTHETICS IN *DON JUAN*

The critical heritage of *Don Juan*, as of most major canonical works, stands as a microcosm of the history of literary theory. Throughout the decades, readers have attempted to characterize the elusive nature of the poem by turning to whatever interpretive theory was then in vogue. Thus, a quick review of the major criticism of the poem may best be presented by discussing what some of the most prominent Byron scholars have done with the interpretive theory of the day. During the nineteenth-century, readers commented on the poem by the standards of sincerity and middle-class Victorian morality. In 1866, for example, Swinburne argued in the introduction to his edition of Byron's works that even if Byron's poetry does not display technical mastery, it has "the excellence of sincerity and strength" (vi). And, as Jerome McGann and Andrew Elfenbein have demonstrated, nineteenth-century readers considered Byron's poetry sincere because they could reaffirm its verity with an appeal to Byron's life.⁸ Meanwhile, the poem was condemned as blasphemous and improper for young ladies from the very beginning because of Byron's parody of the Ten Commandments in Canto I and his allusion to the flood of Noah in the shipwreck and cannibalism scenes of Canto II. Even Byron's closest friend, John Cam Hobhouse, wrote in his diary – and eventually in a letter to Byron – that he had his "doubts about *Don Juan*; the blasphemy and bawdry and the domestic facts [i.e., critical

⁸ Even though Elfenbein suggests "how strange this phenomenon was," the push to biography was not exactly discouraged by Byron. As Elfenbein himself demonstrates, Byron continually included biographical elements in his poetry which allowed for such a reading; Victorian-era editors of Byron's works promoted the biographical reading even more by preceding the poetry with Byron's letters and journals, thus intermixing biography and poetry. See also McGann's article "Lord Byron and 'The Truth in Masquerade'" in *Rereading Byron* and "Lord Byron's Twin Opposites of Truth" in *Towards a Literature of Knowledge*.

allusions to Annabella Milbanke] overpower even the great genius it displays” (Rutherford, *Critical Heritage* 159). Hobhouse disapproved so strongly, in fact, that in his letter to Byron he advised against publication.

While the biographical approach continued throughout the Victorian period and early part of the twentieth century, the focus on sincerity shifted to considerations of style, voice, and persona in the heyday of new criticism, with the variorum edition and Steffan’s introductory volume, *The Making of a Masterpiece*, as the pinnacle of such an approach. At the time, George Ridenour, M. K. Joseph, William Marshall, and Andrew Rutherford also wrote of the poem’s style, literary devices, and persona in their attempts to defend Byron’s mastery of poetic skill. Of particular importance was Byron’s use of the metaphorical conceit (for Robert Gleckner and George Ridenour), the multiple simile (for M. K. Joseph), and irony (for Anne Mellor, Frederick Garber, and Jerome McGann). But, as the biographical and rhetorical approaches merged, Romanticists argued paradoxically that Byron wrote sincerely even as he wrote rhetorically or with ironic detachment. Elizabeth Boyd set the trend in the twentieth century, arguing that “The poem is an expression of the essential Byron” (3) even as it imitates Ariosto, Thomson, Frere, Pulci, and others by incorporating both satire and the burlesque. At some point, all other twentieth-century studies have also affirmed that the poem presents the “essential,” “real,” or “genuine” Byron even as they admit that he writes in a more rhetorical than self-expressive mode.⁹ Among the most influential of these have been Robert Gleckner’s *Byron and the Ruins*

⁹ M. K. Joseph argues that the voice of the *ottava rima* poetry, while “not exactly [that of] Byron himself,” “is that of Byron in the letters” (136); afterwards, he also admits that “although [Byron] begins the poem with a completely fictitious narrator, ... by the end of Canto I, the narrator ... is clearly Byron himself” (203). Similarly, Andrew Rutherford speaks paradoxically of how Byron both imitated the *ottava rima* form of Frere and discovered the poetic form that would allow him to “express himself in verse with the same freedom, wit, urbanity and ease as he did in his letters and conversation” (110). Further on, he repeats that the *ottava rima* form allowed Byron not only to present his style of speech but also to include the “ideas and feelings hitherto found only in his letters or his talk” (112). Finally, despite Philip Martin’s argument that much of Byron’s work advances rhetorical poses and that it relies on “an unimaginative dependence upon a stock model” (*Byron* 193), he nevertheless argues that *Beppo*

of *Paradise* and Jerome McGann's several books and articles on *Don Juan*. Gleckner writes of the early poetry that "Byron's essential self [is] conveyed indirectly, quasi-dramatically, rather than directly, lyrically" (16) in a role Gleckner calls a "private-public voice" which "effectively camouflage[s] or overlay[s] the emotion ... enabl[ing Byron] to speak out more sincerely and less vulnerably" (1-2). Thus, he argues, rather than "an ebullition ... we have, paradoxically, a sincerity and conviction Byron seemed unable or unwilling to convey in his own voice" (4). But in *Don Juan*, Gleckner argues, Byron learned to combine the emotional sincerity of his letters and journals with the public voice of his poetry. Similarly, Jerome McGann, Byron's most prolific recent defender, has been the most insistent proponent for characterizing Byron's writing as a form of "masquerade," a sincere but partially fictionalized biographical form of expression which denies a biographical connection even as it advances it. In "Private Poetry, Public Deception," for example, McGann argues that Byron's storytelling about a "harmless game of billiards" between Don Juan and Lady Adeline is actually "a private recollection of just such a game once played in 1813 by Lady Francis Wedderburn Webster and Byron" (*Byron and Romanticism* 131). Like Boyd, Gleckner and McGann advance the myth of Byronic sincerity even as they recognize that he writes in imitation and through the cover of a mask that hides a direct biographical connection.

Newer literary theories, particularly new historicist and gender studies, have also had their say about *Don Juan*. Jerome McGann's *Don Juan in Context*, Jerome Christensen's *Lord Byron's Strength*, Jane Stabler's *Byron, Poetics and History*, and, to some extent, James

represents "an unmasking rather than the adoption of a disguise" (*Byron* 184) and concludes that "*Don Juan* is not merely a deployment of the limited technical abilities of an uncommitted poet" (*Byron* 217) but is rather the display of the rank and privilege of a noble and educated aristocrat (*Byron* 186). As all of these examples demonstrate, twentieth-century scholars have been particularly concerned with showing that the rhetorical poses Byron imitated made the writing more sincere and expressive in that it aligned the poetry with Byron's private writing and conversational speech.

Chandler's *England in 1819* provide a wealth of literary and sociopolitical context for Byron's writing or attempted modernization of the epic. Meanwhile, Susan Wolfson, Alan Richardson, and Caroline Franklin have argued that Byron writes in the feminist tradition of Mary Wollstonecraft by investigating nineteenth-century gender differences. In *Borderlines*, Wolfson even expands Byron's feminist tradition by associating *Don Juan* anachronistically not only with Wollstonecraft but with twentieth-century feminists such as Luce Irigaray, Gloria Steinem, and Judith Butler as well. But, while these influential studies represent the most important scholarship on *Don Juan*, many of them are grounded on a study of Byron the man rather than on the poem itself. Consequently, views expressed in his letters and journals are used to frame discussions of his poetry. On the opposite extreme, some scholarship advances a critical agenda with no grounding at all on Byron's other works.

Lately, Romanticists have been able to separate Byron's biography from his poetry by focusing on his appropriation of alternate forms of expression – by analyzing the manner of his poetic performance without taking recourse to his biography. To some extent, readers have always recognized Byron's rhetorical poses. As Jerome McGann points out in *Fiery Dust* and elsewhere, it was Byron's flaunting of his aristocratic social identity in *Hours of Idleness* that prompted Henry Brougham to issue such a scathing review. Brougham's criticism was so harsh because he saw sincerity and rhetorical posturing as mutually exclusive; he argued that Byron was not sincere because of the fact that he was striking a rhetorical pose – several rhetorical poses, actually. McGann's work has done much to defend Byron from such charges. In doing so, he has – perhaps unintentionally at times – argued for a performative understanding both of Byron's poetry and of Romantic poetry more broadly. In "Lord Byron's Twin Opposites of Truth," for example, he argues for "the provisional and rhetorical character" of *Don Juan*, and he

reminds readers that even Romantic sincerity is a rhetorical technique, “an illusion generated by the way certain forms of language have been deployed” (*Towards a Literature* 40). As can be seen, McGann’s terms promote the ideas of illusion and ephemerality – qualities of a literary production which, as I argued in the previous chapter, are at the heart of performance theory.

Performance theory has been useful for analyzing *Don Juan* in a few other ways as well. One of these includes the use of the Italian improvvisatore as a metaphor for Byron’s writing. *Don Juan* itself explicitly speaks of its improvisational nature,¹⁰ and the connection has been commented on by M. K. Joseph (188-94), George Ridenour (162-66), and more recently by Angela Esterhammer, who argues in *Romanticism and Improvisation* that Byron’s writing parallels the improvisatory performance of Italian singer Tommaso Sgricci whom Byron saw perform and knew well personally. Esterhammer argues that Byron capitalized on the interest in improvisational performers that was sweeping across Europe by speaking about his own writing as an unpremeditated literary event, one that highlights the author’s poetic talent and provides an opportunity for audience feedback through its serial publication. Another line of commentary that engages with the issues of performance theory stems from the work of Elizabeth Boyd, Robert Gleckner, and even T. S. Eliot¹¹ in the twentieth-century which centers on the analysis of Byron’s rhetorical poses or masks. Since the metaphor of posing or of speaking through a mask does not rely on an expressive theory of literature, it has proven particularly useful for commenting on Byron’s literary influence. McGann and Ridenour use the metaphor to speak of Byron’s imitation of “the urbane and highly civilized mode” of Horace (Ridenour 10) and of Augustan poets. Meanwhile, Peter Vassallo and Philip Martin speak of “the Italian literary

¹⁰ Byron writes of the improvvisatore most explicitly in Canto XV, where he comments that he writes in a “conversational facility” of “what’s uppermost . . . | Just as I feel the ‘Improvvisatore’” (st. 20).

¹¹ In his 1937 article on Byron, Eliot argues that “[Byron] was an actor who devoted immense trouble to *becoming* a role that he adopted” (*On Poetry* 238). In identifying Byron with a stage actor, Eliot characterizes Byron’s writing as a form of Stanislavski-like acting in which the actor psychologically becomes the character.

influence” (to quote the title of Vassallo book) and demonstrate Byron’s, at times quite literal, imitation of Casti and Pulci. To some extent, historicist readings of *Don Juan*, particularly Stabler’s *Byron, Poetics and History* and Paul Magnuson’s *Reading Public Romanticism*, also continue this metaphor of speaking through a mask in that they identify non-lyrical forms of poetic expression. To this list can also be added Jerome Christensen’s *Lord Byron’s Strength* since he analyzes the series of publication and marketing practices that led to the creation of “Byron” as a cultural commodity. While, admittedly, his study does not directly comment on Byron’s presentation of self in the poetry, it nevertheless engages with forms of self-presentation by reading “Byron” in the production and marketing level of the poetry.

While such scholarship has focused on Byron’s use of a dominant rhetorical pose, recent scholarship has also used performance theory to comment on Byron’s continual change of rhetorical poses. Most prominently, Philip Martin sees Byron’s *oeuvre* as a collection of mannerisms: imitations of Ariosto and Thomson in *Childe Harold* I and II, of Wordsworth in *Childe Harold* III, of Pulci and Casti and of his own letters in *Beppo* and *Don Juan*. Because of such a detached, non-lyrical approach, Martin argues, Byron treated his writing as mere “poetic doodling” (*Byron* 48); consequently, he suggests, Byron’s handling of verse aligns him with postmodern writers who revel in the free play of linguistic signifiers (*Byron* 49). While I hesitate to apply such a postmodern consciousness onto Byron, such an analysis of Byron’s ironic detachment has been used to promote other critical agendas as well. In *English Romantic Irony*, for example, Anne Mellor argues that Byron’s alteration of rhetorical poses aligns him with Schlegel’s concept of Romantic irony; she argues that the poem’s “never-ending process of self-creation, self-destruction, and self-transcendence” (44) makes *Don Juan* “the most masterful artistic exampl[e] of romantic irony in English” (31) and “that *locus classicus* of English

romantic irony” (31) in that it “defies reduction to a rational, comprehensible system or explanation” (44). Finally, Nicole Frey Büchel’s *Perpetual Performance* expands Mellor’s reading of irony to argue that Byron’s poetry criticizes the Romantic notion of selfhood by promoting the postmodern (i.e., Judith Butler’s) notion of a performative social identity, where a predefined selfhood is not described or explained in writing but rather is continually (re)defined or (re)created through acts of speech.

While I do not adopt all of these conclusions, this chapter means to contribute to both Byron studies and performance theory by analyzing how Byron defines his poetic voice – what has been called his “poetics of performance.” Specifically, the chapter will demonstrate that Byron changed his response to “mobility” between the writing of *Childe Harold IV* and the *ottava rima* poetry. As I argued in the previous chapter, rather than mourn the absence of a fixed identity and worldview as *Childe Harold* and the tales do, *Beppo* and *Don Juan* celebrate the reviving force of mobility. In *Beppo*, mobility is celebrated by the narrator’s acceptance of moral relativity; through the setting of the Carnival, Byron demonstrates that English moral principles are not universal but rather local and particular, a realization which is meant to display a new system of judgment. In *Don Juan*, however, the presentation of mobility is much more complex and is manifested in several forms. On the level of plot, the narrative continually restarts with a new love interest, and the narrator continually starts, interrupts, and returns to his story through his digressions. This pattern is also replicated on the local level through a tactic that relies on repetition through imitation but ends in some kind of variation. Byron repeats a rhetorical device (such as a simile) or uses imitation but does so with variation in order that he may parody, criticize, satirize, or subvert. Ultimately, such writing is supposed to display and celebrate the discovery of the creative spirit in *Manfred*. *Don Juan* is thus a performance –

something akin to a monodrama – of the narrator’s creative temperament, and it is performative in that it saves the narrator from relapsing into the misery of *Childe Harold*; it transforms his misery into laughter and prevents him from settling down into *Childe Harold*’s depressing reflections. But this performance is not without limit. In the final section, I turn to Byron’s critique of Southey in parts of *Don Juan* and in *The Vision of Judgment* where he is portrayed as an opportunist and criticized for changing his political and aesthetic values for personal gain. Through such criticism, Byron asserts that there are some values which should not be compromised.

Beppo

Even a quick glance at *Beppo* demonstrates that Byron writes differently from the dark ruminative form of *Childe Harold* and the tales. *Beppo* is much more light-hearted in tone and subject matter; John Jump has even suggested that it is “one of the most cheerful poems in the English language” (95). The rhythm and rhyme, for example, are more sprightly; lines also end in feminine rhyme and they include several syntactical tricks to achieve it, such as rhyming two monosyllabic words or a non-English word with a polysyllabic one. The poem itself also depends on rumor or gossip – forms of marginal discourse¹² that subvert authority – and on observation rather than on reflection. From the very beginning, the topic of discussion is clearly centered on the “recreation” – and the “fiddling, feasting, dancing, drinking, masquing” (st. 1) – of the Carnival rather than on the more serious affairs of Greek and Italian liberation, Europe after Napoleon, Renaissance art, and the speaker’s heart and psychic stability. Thus, when

¹² See Cheryl Fallon Giuliano’s article “Marginal Discourse: The Authority of Gossip in *Beppo*” in *Rereading Byron* for a fuller explanation.

compared to *Childe Harold*, *Beppo* lacks gravitas. But this is precisely what the poem celebrates.

The difference between *Childe Harold* and *Beppo* can be seen particularly in the narrator's handling of Laura's sexuality and in the return of Beppo. Unlike in the tales, infidelity and matters of the heart are handled lightly. In *The Giaour*, for example, the Giaour famously asserts that he would have acted like Hassan if Leila had "been false to more than one" (1062-63), and the poem treats the idea of love heroically, with the Giaour, at one point, stating that "love will find its way | Through paths where wolves would fear to prey" (1048-49). But love is not such a serious affair in *Beppo*. Unlike the life-long commitment that is required of lovers in the tales, in *Beppo* – at least during the Carnival – it "may be had for asking" (st. 1). Further on, in fact, love is defined as a less-passionate and temporary connection; thus, when one tires of a lover, he or she simply "takes ... another, or another's" (st. 18). Consequently, unlike in the tales, Laura is not punished for her sexual transgression even though she is just as guilty of infidelity as Leila. Instead, when Beppo returns and confronts Laura's lover, they "discuss" his claim to her over coffee (st. 90-91). This resolution is much more civil than that of Hassan and the Giaour, but it is not for a lack of heroism; Beppo has just as much potential to be a Byronic hero as Conrad. As the narrator explains, when Beppo was freed from slavery by a group of pirates, he joined their plunder and "grew rich" (st. 94-95). His livelihood and rugged toughness – he is described as "a man as dusky as a Spaniard, | Sunburnt with travel" (st. 26) – allude to the piracy of Conrad. Afterwards, Beppo is depicted even more heroically as, like Odysseus, he returns home after an extended sea journey "to reclaim | His wife, religion, house, and Christian name" (st. 97). But Byron refuses to narrate this Oriental tale; he literally marginalizes it to "the bottom of a page" (st. 99) and summarizes the story of this Byronic hero in only five stanzas.

Instead of narrating another tragic Oriental tale, Byron describes Italian culture. He particularly describes the morally-relaxed social practices that underlie Beppo's non-violent response to the discovery of his wife's marital infidelity. Specifically, he describes the Carnival, the city of Venice, Venetian women and men, and, most importantly, the role of the cavalier servente. Description in itself is of course not new to Byron's poetry. Much of *Childe Harold* can be considered descriptive, and it is descriptive of the same topics: of the Maid of Saragoza and of Spanish girls in Canto I and of Venice in Canto IV. However, Byron handles the description differently in *Beppo* because he writes with emotional detachment. Broadly speaking, description in *Childe Harold* leads outward to considerations of a (typically oppressed) nation or even more broadly to the movement of history; this, in turn, leads to mourning as every description reaffirms Byron's preconceived idea of the fall of humanity from civil society. But the narrator of *Beppo* does not become as emotionally absorbed in what he observes. Instead, Italian culture is presented as a visual curiosity, as something to be enjoyed but not condemned. Between stanzas 11 and 15, for example, Byron describes Venetian girls as "from out a picture by Giorgione" (st. 11). The observation leads to a digression on another Italian painting and to the conclusion that lovely forms seen "at times ... | In momentary gliding" during youth may not be seen again; they are "Like the lost Pleiad seen no more" (st. 14). In *Childe Harold*, this realization would have led to a moment of despair, and it would have colored the narrator's response to the loveliness of Venetian girls at the balcony. But this approach is avoided in *Beppo*. Rather than portraying Venetian girls as symbols of unattainable loveliness, Byron abandons that line of thinking and only stresses the positive connection between Venetian girls and Giorgione's paintings.

In describing Venetian culture, Byron also portrays the Venetian morality that sees Laura's marital infidelity as acceptable. He does this by presenting a reinterpretation of Shakespeare's *Othello*, a rhetorical move that also represents Byron's revision of *Childe Harold* IV. In Canto IV, Byron includes Shakespeare's depiction of Venice alongside depictions by Otway, Radcliffe, and Schiller (IV.18), and he presents their portraits of Venice as examples of the former glory from which it has fallen and of ideal possibilities to which it can return. Consequently, Byron's unquestioning acceptance of the literary portrait of Venice in Canto IV becomes a source of misery; he accepts these fictional depictions as ideal portraits of what Venice should be, and he blames Venetians for not attaining this high imaginative ideal. In *Beppo*, however, he abandons his imaginative ideal – at this point he would consider it his imaginative fabrication – in favor of a more realistic understanding of Venetian culture. Thus, in stanzas 17 and 18, he points out Shakespeare's exaggerated characterization of Iago by arguing that "since those times [there] was never known a | Husband whom mere suspicion could inflame | To suffocate a wife" (st. 17), and he explains that, rather than murder, a jealous husband would simply have an affair. Basically, Byron changes which party he holds responsible for the incongruity between real Venice and imaginative Venice. In *Childe Harold*, he blamed the Venetians, while in *Beppo* he criticizes writers for their inaccurate portrayal, and he attempts to set the record straight.

In describing and reinterpreting Venetian culture, Byron also reinterprets English morality, ultimately displacing it from its normative center. Between stanzas 41 and 49, specifically, Byron aligns Italian culture with everything pleasant, warm, and sunny – calling Italy, at one point, "the land which still is Paradise!" (st. 46) – while he aligns England with bad weather and political oppression (taxes, the suspension of Habeas Corpus, monarchy). Having

given negative attributes to England, Byron makes a digression on how the English distinguish themselves at public parties. He argues that the English consider everyone but their friends “a vulgar set” and “mixed company” (st. 59). And he implies that their criteria for such judgment are not based on universal principles; instead, the English judge others – and come across as snobs – because of their self-centered value system, a system which the quality of a person on the basis of recognition and familiarity. The digression that follows in stanzas 60-62 makes the point explicit in two ways. First, Byron parodies the snobbery of the English by lamenting the fall of “the dynasty of Dandies;” more specifically, he parodies the class-based discrimination of the English by lamenting how “some other class | Of imitated Imitators” have now “succeeded” to the rank of the Dandies (st. 60). Secondly, Byron makes a direct address to Fortune but stops himself short of swearing at her, stating “I dare not d–n her” (st. 61), implying that he would not do so because, unlike the English, he does not want praise or criticize Fortune on the self-centered basis of how much wealth she has brought rather than on the basis of her divinity. Byron implies that the English ignore the fact of Fortune’s divinity and instead rely on the relative basis of one’s personal wealth when paying tribute. As these examples show, Byron demonstrates through a parodic performance that the English morality which chastises Laura is based not on moral superiority but on moral snobbery. Consequently, the poem implies that the prohibitive morality of the English leads to the despair of *Childe Harold*, and it demonstrates – through the narrator’s use of a parodic imitation and light verse – how adopting a different value system could lead to a more positive mindset.

Repetition and Variation in *Don Juan*

While *Beppo* cannot match the mastery of *Don Juan*, it does provide an opportunity to analyze the poetic technique that *Don Juan* copies and expands. As the analysis of *Beppo* showed, Byron replicates familiar rhetorical modes, such as describing the girls of a city or imitating English snobbery, but he then distances himself from that expression, evaluates what such a pose implies, and changes the conclusion he reaches. Thus, in describing the girls of Venice, Byron does not indulge in the misery-inducing realization that the ideal beauties of youth have been lost; similarly, although he sometimes replicates judgmental moral discourse – as in the lines “prudery flings aside her fetter” (st. 2) and “unlawful love” (st. 54) – he ends up criticizing the moral system that sanctions such snobbery rather than the sinful indulgences of the Carnival or Laura’s infidelity. *Don Juan* replicates this technique of imitation and variation in both its overall structure and its level of the stanza.

While others have recognized that *Don Juan* imitates and alludes to other written documents and that it parodies, inverts, or subverts them, much of this discussion has focused on particular themes, scenes, or group of cantos. In *Byron, Poetics and History*, for example, Jane Stabler argues that the war cantos continually allude to Shakespearean imagery, particularly to *Othello* and *Henry V*, and she argues that much of the information Byron includes about England can be traced back to *Galighani’s Messenger*. But, while Stabler tracks down several allusions, including the famous image of the liquid glassful within a bottle of frozen champagne, she does not always show how Byron changes the image to suit his purpose; instead, she limits her commentary to an assertion that readers who are familiar with the original context of the image will experience a different reading than those who encounter it for the first time in Byron’s poem. Similarly, Elizabeth Boyd, M. K. Joseph, and Peter Vassallo speak of influence through

Byron's appropriation of the Italian burlesque style without commenting in any significant way on Byron's departure from it. Moreover, M. K. Joseph and Philip Martin, like Stabler, also speak of Byron's versifying imitation of contemporary newspaper accounts in the shipwreck and Siege of Ismail scenes, while Shoshana Felman, Charles Donelan, and Moyra Haslett focus on Byron's appropriation of the Don Juan legend of seduction. While all of these sources focus on imitation and appropriation – at times speaking vaguely only of “influence” – not all of them also focus on variation.

Others, meanwhile, limit the poem's repetition-and-variation structure to only a few instances. M. K. Joseph, for example, only sees a pattern of repetition and variation in Byron's use of the multiple simile; even here, however, he speaks of Byron's accumulation of images (212) rather than of his parody or subversion of them. Similarly, Jerome McGann speaks of Byron's “unmistakable” “both/and manoeuvre” in “Lord Byron's Twin Opposites of Truth” (58); like Joseph, however, McGann sees Byron's technique as only additive, arguing that “the terms ... are neither idealistically transcended nor nihilistically cancelled out. They simply remain in contradiction” (56). While such stasis accurately portrays Byron's use of paradox, McGann's “both/and manoeuvre” inhibits any movement and makes Byron's mobility, “process” poetics,¹³ and ironic detachment difficult to achieve. This technique, therefore, is useful for understanding Byronic paradox, but it cannot account for Byron's mobility or represent his writing more broadly.

The only notable exceptions may be James Chandler's *England in 1819* and T. G. Steffan's *The Making of a Masterpiece*, his introductory and analytical volume to the poem's variorum edition. Steffan does recognize a pattern of “recurrence and variation” (10), “a

¹³ I allude to Anne Mellor's reading of *Don Juan* in *English Romantic Irony* as an example of “poetic language as action, as process” (72).

continuous variation and novel application of old ideas” (249), and a “determined but ever-shifting recurrence” (278), but, like Christensen, he speaks broadly of Byron’s technique in writing and publishing – an initial spurt of drafting, followed by accretions, then by editing and polishing, and finally by negotiations with John Murray. Or, he contextualizes Byron’s use of “variety” within a list of other rhetorical techniques which include “paradox, incongruity, surprise, bathos, and irony” (291). Chandler, meanwhile, also recognizes a pattern of imitation in Byron’s writing – mainly of Wordsworth’s “The Thorn” and Sir Walter Scott’s Waverly novels – and he attributes to Byron an explicit awareness of the constancy-variation issue by arguing that Byron questions what should remain constant and what should be varied in his investigation of “what counts as ‘a society’” (382) and what counts as a “cause” for writing (388). In this section, I contribute to the ongoing analysis of Byron’s mobility by arguing that the technique of repetition and variation is a defining characteristic of the poem. Byron uses the technique to structure the whole poem – as an epic but not quite – and to draw attention to his own writing by creating irony and presenting himself as a detached, bored observer of his own, at times failing, verse.

Byron began writing the first volume of *Don Juan* in much the same way he wrote *Beppo*. Aside from the obvious formal and stylistic similarities of the two poems – they both are written in *ottava rima*, imitate Italian burlesque poetry, and are written by “a nameless sort of person, | (A broken Dandy lately on my travels)” (*Beppo* st.52) – they began as gossip Byron overheard in Italy. As he tells Hobhouse in a January 25, 1818 letter, “the *Julian* adventure was none of mine – but one of an acquaintance of mine – ... which happened some years ago at Bassano with the Prefect’s wife when he was a boy” (*BLJ* VI.96). Such a “Venetian anecdote – which amused me” (*BLJ* V.267) was also the germ of *Beppo*; the story of Beppo, Laura, and her

cavalier servente was originally a bit of gossip told to Byron by Pietro Segati, the husband of Byron's Italian mistress at the time. But even though he repeats this poetic approach in *Don Juan*, Byron puts his technique to a different use. He undermines the seriousness of the epic poem by privileging a different kind of cultural text – gossip rather than history, political mythology, or scripture.¹⁴

Byron's subversion of the epic happens in several other ways as well. Most obviously, he begins his narration at "the beginning" (*DJ* I.7) rather than in *medias res*, and he frowns upon the glorification of war, fame, and the heroic male figure. Byron's subversion of the epic also serves as a tool for criticizing the English Regency society which consumes stories of heroism and glory but is not itself heroic. The criticism comes about from the narrator's complaint that contemporary English society – the "knights and dames" of which he "sing[s]" (XV.25) in the English cantos – does not provide him with an epic hero for his poem. Unlike Achilles or Hector, who embodied the values of their cultures, nineteenth-century English nobles have been emasculated by rules of social decorum that "now make men – | Pinned like a flock, and fleeced too in their fold" (XV.26). Specifically, the dinner parties, fox hunts, and games of courtship the English nobility engage in are too unique; they prevent the narrator from accomplishing his poetic task of identifying universal themes out of the particulars. As he explains in Canto XV, "The difficulty lies in colouring | ... With Nature manners which are artificial, | And rend'ring general that which is especial" (25). The extreme artificiality of English society has so thoroughly disconnected its members from anything natural and recognizable that it makes it

¹⁴ For a more thorough discussion of the politics of gossip in *Beppo*, and by extension in *Don Juan*, see Cheryl Fallon Giuliano's "Marginal Discourse: The Authority of Gossip in *Beppo*" in *Rereading Byron*. See also Jane Stabler's *Byron, Poetics and History* for her argument of how Byron's digressions in *Don Juan* are feminized and thus act against epic conventions, and see Philip Martin's "Reading *Don Juan* with Bakhtin" for his argument of how the poem's polyphony and bricolage – its subversion of poetic form and gender definitions and its privileging of marginal discourse – aligns *Don Juan* with Bakhtin's concept of the carnival.

difficult for the narrator to write his epic poem. Compared to “the days of old,” nineteenth-century English society “render[s] cold | Your writers” (XV.26). As a result, writers must “draw again” the past (XV.26), which means they must either draw on the past by writing history or draw the past again by imitating a literary form that is no longer based on reality, essentially writing fiction. Alternatively, writers can “assume | The present with their common-place costume” (XV.26), meaning they can take nineteenth-century English society as it is. This last option is the one Byron has chosen, determining that “We’ll do our best to make the best on’t” (XV.27). Consequently, Byron’s reliance on the “common” – on gossip, contemporary literature, and newspapers – symbolizes both his subversion of the epic genre and the decay of English heroism. Byron is forced to write about such “common” material not for lack of poetic skill but for lack of epic material. His epic has thus become an “Epic Satire” on the pretensions of English nobility (XIV.99).

While Byron’s assault on nineteenth-century English society is fully realized only in the English cantos, epic pretensions and hypocrisy are criticized as early as the first volume. Each of the major narrative sequences of the volume – the education of Juan, the Juan-Julia relationship, the shipwreck-cannibalism scene, and the island idyll with Haidée – depicts the hypocrisy and absurdity of English social practices and beliefs. Byron’s satire of Inez’s and Julia’s hypocrisy in Canto I is well known. He focuses specifically on the hypocrisy of married women. The criticism is seen in Inez’s overly-protective education of Juan and her criticism of Don Jose’s every action despite her own plans to attract Don Alfonso; it is also seen in Julia’s self-deception of being free from immoral sexual impulses, even as she pursues them with Juan, and in her belief that she could argue her way out of trouble when caught with Juan in the bedroom. Such criticism is also aimed at Annabella and her supporters. Byron suggests that, like Inez and Julia,

Annabella was determined to ruin him and to deny responsibility as a willing participant in the separation scandal.

While Canto I exposes the hypocrisy of married women, Canto II's shipwreck-cannibalism scene means to expose the absurdity of English social and religious beliefs. One instance of such criticism is in the bird of hope stanzas, 94-95. The stanzas follow a few memorable tableaux: the death of a son and father and the rainbow, "bursting through | The scattering clouds," which "shone" and "wav[ed], like a banner free" (II.91). The rainbow asserts a sign of hope by alluding to God's covenant with Noah and by symbolizing that the dead are now with God, especially if the chronological sequence – first death then rainbow – is given a causal connection. So, when the men see "a beautiful white bird, | Webfooted, not unlike a dove" (II.94), they take the events as symbols of "a good omen" (II.93). But these religious symbols turn out to deceive them. The rainbow "changed ... and then | Forsook the dim eyes of these shipwreck'd men" (II.91), while their reliance on scripture to read the appearance of the bird as a symbolic dove of peace makes them disillusioned and ultimately willing to jump overboard when they mistakenly believe they see land. As M. G. Cooke aptly argues, Byron criticizes "errors of expectation" by demonstrating that "fantasies of faith" create "errors of perception" (148). In other words, Byron demonstrates that one's commitment to a "system" – in this case, a religion – makes one misunderstand the facts.

Interestingly, Byron criticizes such an ideologically-based reading in a passage where he himself avoids the trap of such a reading. Byron alludes to or imitates several sources – the flood of Noah in *Genesis*, Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner," Sir John Dalyell's *Shipwrecks and Disasters at Sea* (the source he follows most closely), Savigny and Corréard's *Narrative of a Voyage to Senegal*, and Homer's *Odyssey* – but, as Peter Cochran's edition of Canto II for the

International Byron Society website demonstrates, Byron avoids following the sources that are most heavily invested in religious or historical mythology. Instead, he primarily follows Dalyell's fact-based modern account to suggest that one should rely on what is certain rather than on what is illusion or delusion. But even with Dalyell, Byron creates enough of a pastiche from other sources and changes enough information – such as referring to sharks rather than the whales of Savigny and Corréard's *Narrative* – to be able to claim that he is not plagiarizing any one source.

The preceding cannibalism scene also presents an opportunity to expose and criticize the absurd beliefs the English hold as true. Byron does this in stanzas 78 and 79 by dramatizing the belief that cannibalism leads to madness. Stanza 78 is narrated quite matter-of-factly; it only reports that “That the sailors ate [Pedrillo]” and then pauses to explain why Juan, who had refused to eat his spaniel, would not eat his master. But stanza 79 describes the effect of cannibalism in quite Gothic terms. Like a scene out of today's horror movies, the narrator explains that the cannibalism turned the sailors into something like werewolves; they were “rack'd” “with strange convulsions” and started “Tearing, and grinning, howling, screeching, swearing, | And, with hyena laughter, died despairing.” As Philip Martin aptly comments, such exaggeration allows Byron to emphasize how distant the world of Juan's shipwreck is from reality (*Byron* 201). As he explains, the 1816 wreck of the *Medusa*, upon which Byron based his narrative, was well known by the time he wrote Canto II, so readers would have been aware that Byron was alluding to and deviating from that historical incident. But, while Martin does well to point out Byron's expression “Lord! how they did blaspheme!” (II.79), I believe his interpretation is off. Martin argues that, in alluding to the wreck of the *Medusa*, Byron means to comment on “the reactionary censorship” which pervaded newspaper accounts of the shipwreck

(Byron 210-12). Specifically, Martin argues that selections of the *Medusa* narrative published in English newspapers were “presented as an example of the chaotic consequences of French republicanism and political discontinuity” (Byron 211), and they attempted to suppress the reading of the shipwrecked sailors as exemplars of “a new democratic morality” in which “a group of men equalized by circumstances, determin[ed] and organiz[ed] their own survival with no regard for conventional autocratic ethics” (Byron 212). While this political reading of the men’s self-governance is suggestive, it ignores Byron’s obvious criticism of a religious reading which leads to the response that Juan’s shipmates “blaspheme[d].” Once one ostracizes them through such a locution, I believe Byron suggests, it becomes easier to accept their deaths and to lose sympathy for everyone but Juan. Such a reading reflects back on the inhumanity of Byron’s English readers; it is they who have become inhuman through a scene of cannibalism by withholding their sympathy, not the fictional characters involved in it.

As this commentary of volume one has shown, Byron exposes hypocrisy and absurdity by juxtaposing erroneous beliefs alongside common wisdom (that cannibalism does not make one go mad) and reliable facts (that cannibalism aboard the *Medusa* did not lead to such consequences). Another method the narrator relies upon to criticize the English is through a comparison of what he, the poem’s representative of classical values, considers proper. He does this by appealing to his own experience and to his own beliefs as touchstones upon which to evaluate contemporary society. Much of these appeals happen through asides or critical comments the narrator makes. In Canto I, stanza 52, for example, the narrator voices his criticism of Inez’s system of education, stating “if I had an only son to put | To school ... | ’Tis not with Donna Inez I would shut | Him up to learn.” He makes a similar assertion at the bottom of the next stanza, stating, “I know | That sons should not be educated so” (I.53). Instead, the

narrator appeals to his own experience as a college student and suggests that his form of education would best suit Juan as well; thus, at the end of stanza 52, he states, “I’d send him out betimes to college, | For there it was I pick’d up my own knowledge.” As can be seen, the narrator presents his own experience as a model from which to criticize Juan’s education.

But stanza 53 also performs an open-minded contrast to Inez’s systematized control of Juan. The narrator begins to assert what “one learns” in college, but he then withholds that information by interrupting the line with Byron’s characteristic dash and an excuse for why he should not share that information – “’tis not for me to boast.” Byron repeats this pattern three more times in the stanza, refusing to tell the reader what he “acquired” at college, why one should go to college, and, finally, what “Knowledge” he “pick’d up.” In each instance, Byron not only interrupts the line with a dash, but he also includes the conjunction “but” and some form of verbal ellipses, such as “I pass over *that*” or “no matter *what*.” The immediate effect of such writing is a Byronic contradiction. The narrator criticizes Inez for deviating from the normal method of instruction, but it is clear that his own method has not been any more successful either; he refuses to tell what he has learned, one could argue, because he has not learned anything at all. Consequently, Byron compromises the credibility of his narrator and makes him seem just as proud of his own system as Inez is of hers; the narrator recommends that Juan be sent to college out of personal preference and vanity not of out a fair comparison of the two methods. However, while the narrator does lose credibility on this local level, Byron’s recurrent refusal to commit to a methodology contrasts him from the systematizing Inez and from the English more broadly. Consequently, stanza 53 criticizes Inez in two ways. It does so explicitly through Byron’s locution – “sons should not be educated so” – and it does so through a performative contrast – unlike Inez, Byron shows that he is not committed to any one system of

education, so while he recommends that Juan should go to college, he does not expect Juan to repeat his own experience exactly.

Mobility with Performance Theory

Byron's unwillingness to settle into any one system ultimately brings one to a discussion of his "mobility." While much has been made of Byron's own mobility¹⁵ and of mobility as a metaphor for the poem,¹⁶ I want to argue that Byron criticizes and sets limits on mobility even as he frequently performs it. The term is used only once in the poem, and once again in a note, in Canto XVI where Byron tries to explain Adeline's skillful performance as party hostess during Lord Henry's electioneering dinner. In stanzas 96 and 97, he equates mobility with Adeline's ability to respond to each guest without effort but with full sympathy. As the narrator explains in stanza 96, Adeline was both "playing her grand role" and fully identifying with it, which leads to the famous paradoxical explanation in stanza 97 that mobility is both performative and real – "false – though true." But in the note, Byron writes negatively of mobility, calling it "a most painful and unhappy attribute." The issue, as Steffan convincingly argues, is that Adeline is not merely playing a part. Instead, she fully embodies her role as a hostess because it is her "social necessity or determinism" to do so (276). In other words, she does not merely play the part of a hostess; she really is a hostess and must be a good one to maintain her current social status. There is thus a sense of desperation to Adeline's performance, and, I suspect, Byron asserts a patrician prejudice against mixing with the plebeian company which Adeline must please for

¹⁵ Discussions of Byron's mobility inevitably focus on Countess Blessington's observation in her *Conversations of Lord Byron*: "Byron is a perfect chameleon, possessing the fabulous qualities attributed to that animal, of taking the colour of whatever touches him. He is conscious of this, and says it is owing to the extreme *mobilité* of his nature, which yields to present impressions" (110).

¹⁶ Byron himself explicitly speaks of his poem as "A non-descript and ever varying rhyme, | A versified Aurora Borealis" in Canto VII (st. 2). As Ridenour aptly comments, the poem draws a parallel between the aurora borealis, which presents a pleasant alternative to the "waste and icy clime," and Byron's poem, which "attempt[s] to give color, form, warmth to a world naturally colorless, indefinite, and chill" (33).

votes. Indeed, Byron suggests that Lord Henry is prostituting his wife to earn him votes; it is Adeline who does all of the electioneering with the townspeople while Henry enjoys his position without mixing with such company.

Canto XVI depicts Adeline's mobility negatively by exposing that she has no essential self. She is all surface and passivity and is thus victim to the whims of those around her – an uncomfortable notion for a Romantic poet. But Romanticists have recently celebrated this lack of a controlling center. They point to the poem's sophisticated understanding of identity as a series of performances that do not ultimately refer back to an essentialist self, and they hail Byron as a visionary postmodernist who criticized Romantic selfhood more than a century before his time. Such is the conclusion of Nichole Frey Büchel's recent *Perpetual Performance* which argues that "the narrator of *Don Juan* ultimately promotes a self which is completely made up of performance" (191), that "*Don Juan* presents ... an alternate conception of selfhood" (191), and that this "performative concept of the self – that is[,] the idea that the self is created in a series of provisional performative acts which call for constant refiguration – becomes so predominant that eventually the notion of the essential, ideal self is ... fully obliterated in *Don Juan*" (191). Consequently, Büchel continues, the poem exposes the final ideologically-driven belief – that language holds meaning – by asserting the post-structuralist idea that linguistic signs refer to nothing but themselves. She states: "the original references of the signs we encounter in *Don Juan* are no longer traceable. Self-referential language is ultimately all there is" (195), "language in *Don Juan* no longer points to an extratextual reality functioning as a referent but instead constantly refers back to itself" (195), and "there is nothing other than [a] permanently ongoing textual performance which only points back to itself" (195).

Joanna Rapf and Philip Martin make similar assertions as well. Martin argues that Byron's ironic detachment from the world he criticizes "suggests that Byron had found himself involved in a process wherein words have been reduced to the compositional elements of a poetic game" (*Byron* 49), and, like Büchel, he suggests that Byron "appears to be more interested in the possibilities of verbal manipulations than in the progress of his plot" (*Byron* 49). Meanwhile, in "Poetic Performance," Rapf argues that Byron's continual "debunking" of previously-accepted conventions and his inability to create a sustainable vision of the future leaves one only with "an affirmation of the *now*" (62). However, Rapf follows her observation of Byron's "debunking" to its logical conclusion, and she asserts that the poem's celebration of the present endorses some disturbing consequences. She argues that the poem's "immediacy of the *now* ... in its grimmest embodiment can lead to a nihilistic indulgence in ... forms of self-destruction" (64). Interestingly, this was exactly why Francis Jeffrey criticized the poem in 1822 as well. In his review of *Sardanapalus, The Two Foscari, and Cain*, he argues that Byron's "writing[s] have a tendency to destroy all belief in the reality of virtue" (Rutherford, *Critical Heritage* 201). It is a charge that has survived through the twentieth century as well. In *Byron and the Spoiler's Art*, for example, Paul West charges Byron with the belief that he was "a performer [who] could assail with impunity" (14).

Such readings that project Adeline's mobility onto Byron himself suggest a destructive impulse that I am not willing to endorse. I thus disagree with Büchel and others because their readings overlook Byron's criticism of Adeline's – and at other moments of Southey's – mobility. As M. K. Joseph and Andrew Rutherford speculate, Adeline's extremely repressed sexuality, the condition which makes it difficult for Juan to see the "real" Adeline behind her social performance, will ultimately lead Adeline, like Julia, to have an uncontrollable affair with

Juan which will lead to her ruin. In other words, Byron criticizes Adeline's mobility because he sees it as the byproduct – so to speak – of her repressed sexuality; she performs, in Juan's eyes, with such seeming sympathy because her “real” self is repressed so deeply inside that Juan can only see her superficially. It is, after all, for the idea of Adeline's repressed sexuality that Byron uses his famous metaphor of “a bottle of champagne ... | Frozen into a very vinous ice” (XIII.37). To draw out the metaphor, he explains that “in the very centre ... | About a liquid glassful will remain; | And this is stronger than the strongest grape” (XIII.37); it is “the whole spirit brought to a quintessence” (XIII.38). But, as the rejected volcano imagery beforehand, and other images of withheld natural forces in the next canto, suggest, Adeline's repressed libido threatens to burst, and with considerable violence. As Canto XIV explains, her “Firmness” (XIV.89) and “*obstinacy*” (XIV.89) “are a dangerous matter” because her passions have “gather'd ... like growing water” (XIV.88). The image – of a flooding dam – suggests the water will reach a critical point and the barrier will burst. As M. K. Joseph and Rutherford correctly observe, Byron has set up Adeline for a fall because her *hamartia*, her “one defect,” has already started “work[ing] its own undoing” (XIV.85).

In addition to Byron's criticism of Adeline, his criticism of Southey should also warn against directly appropriating mobility as a catchall term for Byron's poetic technique. As George Ridenour, Jerome McGann, Jerome Christensen, Paul Magnuson, and Peter Cochran have demonstrated, Southey is “a figure of all that is hateful and despicable” (McGann, *Towards a Literature* 55). Their observations of this fact lead to an important question: if Southey shares Adeline's and Byron's mobility, why is he criticized so sternly? The question can be answered biographically and politically, as McGann, Cochran, and others have done.¹⁷ Such answers

¹⁷ For a discussion of the Byron-Southey antagonism, see specifically: Peter Cochran's article “Why did Byron Hate Southey?” and his book *Byron and Bob*, McGann's article “Byron, Mobility, and the Poetics of Historical

argue that Byron attacked Southey because he held him responsible for the “league of incest” rumors that were spread about Byron and Percy Shelley in Geneva; additionally, Byron may have attacked Southey because he was simply on the wrong (i.e., Tory) side of the political spectrum.

While these answers are helpful, an analysis of Byron’s response to Southey in his *The Vision of Judgment* is also suggestive. Byron wrote the poem in the second half of 1821 when he took a hiatus from *Don Juan* to work on the dramas. Specifically, he wrote the poem because Southey challenged him to respond in verse after Byron responded in the prose Appendix of *The Two Foscari* to an attack Southey had made against him which charged Byron with leading the “Satanic school” of poetry. As Andrew Rutherford and John Jump observe, Byron considered Southey’s *A Vision of Judgment*, his elegy of King George III, blasphemous, egotistical, and lacking in common sense and poetic skill – Byron famously called Southey’s unrhymed hexameters “spavined Dactyls” (st. 91). Byron also criticized Southey for using poetry to whitewash King George III’s political legacy of war and aggression and for attributing religious sanctity to an erring political party and to his own biased judgment. In contrast to Southey’s partisan vision, Byron bases his own vision on a sense of charity, and he refuses to give religious sanctity to any one system of belief. As he points out in the Preface, “no doctrinal tenets are insisted upon or discussed” and “the person of the Deity is carefully withheld from sight.” Byron’s refusal to privilege a single ideology contrasts dramatically with Southey’s refusal to step outside his system. As Byron suggests in a May 17, 1817 letter to John Murray, Southey closes himself off to the possibility of intellectual growth by refusing to expose himself to the dialectal process which leads to enlightenment (*BJL* V.220-21). Essentially, Byron means to

Ventriloquism” in *Byron and Romanticism* and his book *Don Juan in Context*, George Ridenour’s chapter on the Dedication in *The Style of Don Juan*, Magnuson’s chapter on the Dedication in *Reading Public Romanticism*, and Christensen’s *Lord Byron’s Strength* (pp. 161-62).

expose the smugness of Southey's poetry, as he had done of England in *Beppo*. He charges that Southey assumes a religious authority as compensation for the fact that he has no base in the real world upon which to stand. As a result, he implies that Southey's poetry is all rhetoric with no truth to ground it – an empty locution that does not describe the world as it really is. Southey's *Vision*, in other words, is that post-structuralist collection of locutions which refers back only to itself; the poem itself invents the grounds upon which it relies to advance its judgment.

Keeping in mind Byron's response to Adeline's and Southey's mobility, I would like to conclude with a few remarks on Byron's own mobility in *Don Juan*. Clearly, Byron's mobility should not be equated with that of Adeline or Southey. While Adeline's fully equates what is real with what is show (remember: Juan has difficulty distinguishing between Adeline's performance and sincerity), Southey's is all rhetorical flourish. Byron's happy medium may be a mobility which refuses to settle – through a continual use of irony – but which does not deviate too far from truth and common sense. The *Don Juan* narrator can thus be seen to have enough mobility to distinguish him from the socially-constricted English nobles he criticizes but not so much deviation that, like Southey, he loses touch with reality. Consequently, his writing of *Don Juan* can be seen as a continual play of touch-and-go. He alludes to a historic or current event (typically covered in newspapers), to a genre or work of literature (particularly to Shakespeare, the epics, the Lake School poets, or to the Don Juan legend), or to a well-known personal experience (Byron's swimming of the Hellespont, for example) only to digress from it; but, having digressed, he once again returns to something familiar.

Only Chapters 1 and 2 of the dissertation treat Byron's poetry in depth. The next four chapters focus on the historical tragedies. But the overall methodology remains the same. I look

for places where Byron engages with something that is already familiar and well-established – Venetian history, Whig political ideology, Shelley’s poetry, dramatic form, a famous novel – and I consider how he replicates the imitation-and-variation technique to promote consistent but sometimes counter-intuitive readings.

CHAPTER 3

THE PROMISE OF MARINO FALIERO

In a September 29, 1820 letter to John Murray, Byron insists that *Marino Faliero*, his first historical drama, “is *not* a *political* play” (*BLJ* VII.184). The play’s Preface, likewise, explains that Byron participates in an act of history by “transferr[ing] into our language an historical fact worthy of commemoration” (304). Such language suggests that the play presents an unbiased dramatization of the historical event rather than the politicization of it. Byron’s claims to adhere to the history of Marin Falier also go hand in hand with claims of following neoclassical dramatic form,¹⁸ a form Jones and Nicol suggest was inherently associated with the issues of authority and truth. Thus, in claiming to have “given [the drama] a more historical form” (304), Byron argues that he has both accurately followed the history of Falier and that he has written in the form of the Greeks rather than in the ‘irregular’ dramatic form of the English.

Nevertheless, Byron did make interpretive decisions that suggest a creative interpretation of the conspiracy rather than a faithful transmission of the facts. Some of these alterations he himself admits in the Preface, arguing they are a consequence of the neoclassical unities. One of the most significant is “represent[ing] the conspiracy as already formed” (306) and the Doge as

¹⁸ Byron insisted that he was writing a neoclassical drama, even though he did not follow French neoclassical form, because he saw himself in the tradition of Ben Jonson – a tradition he discovered in Dryden’s *Essay of Dramatick Poesie* where Dryden identified four types of drama: Greek, French neoclassical, Shakespearean or irregular English drama, and Ben Jonson’s regular/neoclassical English drama. Byron replicated these categories by speaking against the Shakespearean form, explaining that he “admire[d] the old English dramatists” but that his writing is in “quite another field – & and has nothing to do with theirs” (*BLJ* VIII.186). He similarly spoke against French neoclassicism, explaining that *Marino Faliero* is “a different style of the drama – neither a servile following of the old drama ... nor yet *too French*” (*BLJ* VIII.78). He also claimed to avoid the French neoclassical spirit of imitation, explaining that his drama will be a “*regular* traged[y] like the *Greeks* – but not in *imitation*” (*BLJ* VIII.57). Byron emphasized his claim to English neoclassical drama in an August 23, 1821 letter to Murray by merging Dryden’s categories of Greek and Jonsonian dramatic form, explaining that his “dramatic Simplicity is *studiously* Greek” and that he “want[s] to make a *regular* English drama” (*BLJ* VIII.186-87).

its recruit rather than the organizer and lead conspirator that Falier actually was (Lane 181-82). Other alterations include moving the setting outside the Palace and changing the identity of historical figures and their function within the conspiracy so they could more easily represent philosophical and religious ideas about revolution, retribution, and forgiveness. Thus, despite Byron's insistence on the "strictly historical" nature of the play (306), characters and plot are transformed in a way that neoclassical drama theorists such as Corneille would not have recommended.¹⁹ Israel Bertuccio, for example, becomes the unnamed admiral mentioned in Byron's original source, Sanuto's *Chronicle*, and two other original conspirators, Calendaro and Bertuccio, are transformed into spokesmen for fanaticism and Christian morality, respectively.

Although seemingly inconsequential, these deviations from the historical record have been correctly taken to suggest Byron's engagement in radical politics, though interpretations of his allegiance have varied. For Samuel Chew, the creative dramatization of Falier's conspiracy demonstrates that "Byron is thoroughly in sympathy with the conspirators" (*Dramas* 91). More recently, Michael Simpson has argued that Byron uses *Marino Faliero* as a "script" for future political action, where radical-minded readers would make a "directly political materialization of [the play's political] imperatives" by trying to succeed where the Doge's conspiracy fails (*Closet Performances* 2). Daniel Watkins similarly argues that the drama demonstrates how a growing nineteenth-century class consciousness realized that "the ruling class value system does not serve the Venetian citizenry at large" (159). Meanwhile, for E. D. H. Johnson, the drama expresses Byron's critique of radicalism by demonstrating his frustration over the Italian Carbonari, his concern for Hobhouse's involvement in radical English politics, and his response to the Cato

¹⁹ French neoclassical drama theorists such as Corneille did allow the playwright to break with the convention of the unities, but they only did so to achieve a greater logical cohesion between plot elements, to maintain decorum, and to present a higher truth (Jones and Nicol 49-94). In Byron's case, he alters the truth of the historical record only to maintain the unities.

Street Conspiracy. For William Jewett, likewise, the drama critiques Whig political ideology by “casting doubt on seventeenth-century Whig utopias spun from the Venetian myth ... [by suggesting] that any effort to model a reformed British constitution after the Venetian commonwealth will be a search for redress that chases after a ‘non-entity’” (187). Such criticism, he continues, “shakes the myth that Venice’s stability had been maintained solely by checks and balances” (188) and “depict[s] Whig pieties as historical fantasies” (189).

Political readings of the play are supported by Byron’s letters around the time of composition which frequently feature his comments on English and Italian radicalism. However, the letters demonstrate that Byron was not the political radical Chew, Simpson, and others have made him out to be. Byron’s response to the Cato Street Conspiracy, which prompted the writing of the drama,²⁰ reproduces the kind of class-based judgment of the group that pervaded news reports at the time. The Cato Street Conspiracy was a failed attempt by the revolutionary British group known as the Spenceans to assassinate leading government members (including the Duke of Wellington and Castlereagh) who would be gathered for dinner on February 22, 1820 at Lord Harrowby’s London house. Through the assassination, the group believed it could incite a general rebellion which would overthrow the government, decentralize political power, and redistribute wealth and land. Reports from the time depict the conspirators, Arthur Thistlewood (the leader, an ex-soldier) and a dozen or so shoemakers, carpenters, butchers, and others, as a loose collection of dissatisfied and unprofessional low-class men who took out their frustrations on the government. As John Stanhope has explained, criticism of the conspirators frequently

²⁰ The play’s conspiracy is of course also modeled on a number of literary texts, particularly Otway’s *Venice Preserved* and Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. See Barry Weller’s commentary for a detailed explanation of the parallels between Shakespeare’s plays (including *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, *Othello*, and *Coriolanus*) and *Marino Faliero* (524-25). See also G. Wilson Knight’s *Byron and Shakespeare* and Richard Lansdown’s *Byron’s Historical Dramas*. For parallels to *Venice Preserved*, see John Jump’s “A Comparison of *Marino Faliero* with Otway’s *Venice Preserved*” (*Byron Journal* 5 (1977): 20-37).

focused on their low social status. The butcher James Ings, for example, was especially believed to be villainous because of his profession and his stout appearance, while William Davidson's race and reports of him as a sexual predator and pedophile made it easier to portray him as an enemy of the State. In his study, Stanhope depicts the conspiracy as something planned by Fagin of *Oliver Twist*. He presents the plot as "hatched in miserable human rat-holes here and there in the extensive underworld of the London of those days" (8), and he speaks of conspirators with a mix of judgment and condemnation. "They were so ignorant," he explains, "that they imagined they could make themselves masters of London ... [But] They had been too browbeaten by life to become anything but jetsam at the bottom of the stagnant, poisonous pool which was England in 1820" (11).

A similar use of language condemning and criticizing Cato Street conspirators can be found throughout Byron's letters of 1820. Like much of the British who saw Thistlewood as "the symbol of the horrible power of the swinish multitude" and who "blew up this ridiculous personality ... into an avenging and sinister apocalyptic beast" (Stanhope 53-54), Byron was horrified that common "ruffians" were behind the conspiracy and threatened members of his peerage. Byron expressed his contempt for them in a March 29, 1820 letter to his friend Cam Hobhouse:

[I]f these sort of awkward butchers are to get the upper hand – *I* for one will declare *off*, I have always been ... a well-wisher to and voter for reform in Parliament – but "such fellows as these will never go to the Gallows with any credit" ... [T]he whole gang ... disgust and make one doubt of the virtue of any principle or politics which can be embraced by similar ragamuffins. — I know that revolutions are not to be made with rose-water, but ... the Radicals seem to

be no better than ... Wat Tyler – and are to be dealt with accordingly. (*BLJ* VII.62-63)

Byron uses similar language in the February 21, 1820 letter to John Murray: “I am out of patience to see my friends sacrifice themselves for a pack of blackguards – who disgust one with their Cause – although I have always been a friend to and a Voter for reform” (*BLJ* VII.44).

Within the same paragraph, he tells Murray, “if the time comes when a part must be taken one way or the other – I shall pause before I lend myself to the views of such ruffians.” The invectives “butchers,” “ragamuffins,” “blackguards,” and “ruffians” in both letters effectively illustrate Byron’s class-based objections to the conspirators. Byron even promotes an act of violence against the leaders, arguing that they should be rounded up and killed, as the allusion to Wat Tyler suggests. Similar reactions pervade other letters. If there were to be a revolution, he argues, “let us fall by the axe and not by the butcher’s cleaver” (*BLJ* VII.44). Such class-based terminology suggests that Byron objects to the credibility of the conspirators rather than to their political mission.²¹ Indeed, Byron seems to be on their side politically; like the conspirators, he also promotes reform.

Byron’s March and April letters to Hobhouse also clarify his objection to revolutionaries more generally. He warns Hobhouse against working with revolutionaries, particularly the radical orator Henry Hunt and journalist William Cobbett. On March 3rd he writes, “though I approve the object ... I dislike the companions of your labors” (*BLJ* VII.49), and he questions

²¹ In arguing that Byron’s response was based on class, I disagree with Daniel Watkins, who argues that Byron criticized rebels because they were not revolutionary enough. In *A Materialist Critique of English Romantic Drama*, he argues that Byron “supported reform just as they did, but he had come to believe that [parliamentary reform] alone was incapable of producing substantial and lasting change” (139). Instead, he argues, “while the radicals were concerned ... with political change, Byron saw the larger need for a full social revolution” (139). I believe my analysis of Byron’s commitment to Whig political ideology shows that this image of a revolutionary Byron is incorrect, at least for British politics.

“why lend yourself to Hunt and Cobbett – and the bones of Tom Paine?” (*BLJ* VII.50).²² Again on March 29, he tells Hobhouse to “get in to Parliament – and out of the company of these fellows” (*BLJ* VII.62). His most sustained denunciation of Hunt and Cobbett, though, comes in his April 22nd letter where he tells Hobhouse “I am glad to hear you have nothing to do with those scoundrels” (*BLJ* VII.80), and he argues that “our classical education alone – should teach us to trample on such unredeemed dirt as the *dishonest* bluntness – the ignorant brutality, the unblushing baseness of these two miscreants; – and all who believe in them” (*BLJ* VII.81). But these are not Byron’s only verbal acts of violence. He tells Hobhouse “if to praise such fellows be the price of popularity – I spit upon it, as I would in their faces” (*BLJ* VII.81). Such ad hominem contradict many contemporary views of Byron as a rebel committed to revolutionary change.

The turn to the drama similarly displays a less radical Byron than the one many Victorian readers and twentieth-century scholars have portrayed. This chapter will thus read the drama as Byron’s response to radicalism by arguing that the drama perpetuates a class-based revulsion of radical politics and condemns the Cato Street Conspiracy and radical English politics more broadly. I will specifically rely on the conservative Whig political philosophy of Edmund Burke as a hermeneutic for examining how the play’s *dramatis personae* advance patrician political

²² Despite Byron’s commitment to liberation and his admiration of the United States, he sides against Tom Paine and the revolutionary spirit in this letter. His opposition to Paine makes sense, though, given his party affiliation to Edmund Burke. Nevertheless, Burke’s criticism of anti-reform members of government at times parallels Paine’s criticism of “the right or the power of binding and controlling posterity to the ‘end of time’” (Paine 28). In the 1780 “Speech on Economical Reform,” for example, Burke criticizes “These gentlemen [who] argue against every desire of reformation,” adhere “to a pernicious system ... that it is an inheritance of absurdity,” “make out a long and unbroken pedigree of mismanagers that have gone before them[,] ... are proud of the antiquity of their house[,] ... defend their errors as if they were defending their inheritance, afraid of derogating from their nobility, and carefully avoiding a sort of blot in their scutcheon, which they think would degrade them forever” (*Portable* 159). Such parallels between Burke and Paine went long unnoticed as Romanticists placed the two writers on opposite sides of “the pamphlet war” and called it the Burke-Paine Debate.

values as the normative political ideology of the play – an ideology that warns against revolution because it paradoxically gives the State new justification for more oppression.

While the text of Byron's drama explicitly critiques the value of radicalism, the turn to the play's theatrical afterlife will demonstrate that Victorian theater practitioners continued to (mis)represent Byron as a social and political radical who must be contained. Thus, the legacy of *Marino Faliero* on the Victorian stage is one of distortion and containment as Robert Elliston and William Charles Macready transformed Byron's political response into the narrative of a husband's failed quest for personal vengeance. This depoliticization of Byron's response not only informs us about the reception of Byron in Victorian England, but it also questions the recent trend in Romantic-era theater studies – most prominent in the work of Betsy Bolton, Daniel Watkins, and Julie Carlson – that depicts the early- and mid-nineteenth century theater as an inherently political social institution that subverted both gender norms and the political status quo. This chapter will show that not only did Byron's drama itself question the potential of radicalism but theatrical productions also furthered a conservative ideology that many Byron scholars have incorrectly argued the drama meant to subvert.

Byron, Burke, and *Marino Faliero*

Byron's 1820 letters to Hobhouse and Murray continually bring up keywords of Burkean and Whig political theory. They continually affirm his desire for reform, calling himself a "friend," "well-wisher," and "voter" of reform and emphasize that he is not against reform and liberty. They also favor the political reforms of Parliament²³ rather than the revolution and

²³ Parliamentary reform through a slow, studied examination of inherited laws rather than through a sweeping revolution was the staple philosophy of Edmund Burke who argued in his 1780 "Speech on Economical Reform" that leaders should always try to improve the established political institution because "it is right to leave room for a further improvement. It is right to consider, to look about us, to examine the effect of what we have done" (*Portable*

violence of non-aristocratic radicals, such as Hunt and Cobbett. The February 21, 1820 letter to Murray is particularly telling of how Byron would rather be tyrannized by “a gentleman who has been bred to the business, and ... [would rather] fall by the axe [than] by the butcher’s cleaver” (*BLJ* VII.44). Although Byron wrote this letter one day before the Cato Street Conspiracy, it is unimaginable that his response would have differed once he heard that a butcher, Ings, really was part of the conspiracy. As subsequent letters to Hobhouse show, in fact, his distrust of such radicals only intensified. In writing against Hunt and Cobbett, Byron also surprisingly pointed to Thomas Paine as an enemy of his political ideology. Villainizing Paine along with Hunt, Cobbett, and the French revolutionaries Robespierre and Marat – as he does in the April 22, 1820 letter – suggests a less radical view of Byron than the one presented in *Don Juan*, *The Vision of Judgment*, *Sardanapalus*, and throughout much of the literary scholarship on these works. It is with this Burkean political ideology in mind that *Marino Faliero* should be read, for the Doge parallels Byron’s response even as he becomes the voice of reform and opposition.

Byron was influenced by Edmund Burke and Whig political philosophy well before the Cato Street Conspiracy. Byron’s mentor in the House of Lords was Lord Holland, one of the most prominent Whigs of the time, who set up the Holland House as one of the leading centers for Whig and aristocratic social life. It was with Lord Holland’s close guidance that Byron delivered his famous speech against the Frame-Breaking Bill in 1812 (Kelsall, *Byron’s* 38-42). The speech itself also owes some of its rhetoric to Edmund Burke, as Byron quoted from Burke’s *Reflections* and closely modeled his language on Burke’s oratorical style (Marchand, *Biography* 320). Although Byron’s years in the Lords were ultimately ineffective, and perhaps more

160). Burke did denounce the French Revolution for its violence and wholesale undoing of political institutions, but, as W. T. Jones argues, “his chief difference with the revolutionists was not so much on the question of *aims* as on the question of *means*” (333). See also Bredvold and Ross’s *The Philosophy of Edmund Burke* for a further discussion of Burke’s reform-not-revolution ideology.

theatrical than practical, he continually focused on classical Whig issues of reform and the constitution (Kelsall, *Byron's* 35). Ten years later, in the Appendix to *The Two Foscari*, Byron continued the Whig ideology explaining, "I wish to see the English constitution restored not destroyed. Born an aristocrat, and naturally one by temper, with the greater part of my present property in the funds, what have *I* to gain by a revolution[?] Perhaps I have more to lose" (223-24).

Byron's status as an aristocratic Whig also led him to respond to Rousseau and to the French Revolution in ways similar to Burke. *Childe Harold III*, for example, presents Byron's most sustained criticism of Rousseau and the French Revolution, despite the poem's constant allusions to Rousseau's *Julie* and the *Confessions*. In an October 15, 1821 journal entry, moreover, one of the longest entries in his Ravenna journal, Byron emphatically distances his aristocratic persona from Rousseau's lower social status (*BLJ IX.11*), and in a May 1, 1821 entry he called "My Dictionary," he explains that democracy is "the worst" form of government in that it is "an Aristocracy of Blackguards" (*BLJ VIII.107*). Byron's response to Rousseau is in line with Burke's, who particularly wrote against Rousseau's theory of the "general will." In the *Reflections*, Burke argues that the general will is often wrong because "The will of the many, and their interest, must very often differ" even amongst itself (141), leading Burke to argue that the role of government is to control the "appetites" of the majority and to set a moral voice for the people, lest the minority be overruled and oppressed. As he explains in the *Reflections*, "Society requires [that] ... the inclinations of men should frequently be thwarted, their will controlled, and their passions brought into subjection" (151). Unlike Rousseau, Burke and Byron feared the actions of low-class citizens in a democracy and believed that an aristocrat should guide and mitigate the extremity of their actions.

Such a distrust of plebeian rebels characterizes the political world of *Marino Faliero*. The play's setting in medieval Venice represents Europe's golden age of a patrician republic. For Whigs, Venice stood as a republican alternative to the Holy Alliance, and it represented an institution that could guard against an unchecked monarch and an oppressed peasantry. The Doge himself, at times a political stand-in for Byron, demonstrates this understanding of Venice's historical importance and is unwilling to turn political power to his social inferiors. Both of these attitudes are presented particularly clearly in the Doge's Act III soliloquy, where he reflects on the heroic deeds of his ancestors and tries to convince himself that his actions continue their efforts to save the city from oppressors. He reasons that "my cause | Is yours" (III.i.41-42) and that "Your fame, your name [are] all mingled up in mine" (III.i.43). But the Doge's patrician status prevents him from taking pride in the empowerment of his inferiors. In Act I, for example, he explains that he feels ashamed to "to hold a council in the dark | With common ruffians leagued to ruin states" (I.ii.581-82). And after his Act III soliloquy, the Doge views his own shame from the perspective of his ancestors, asking Israel whether he believes "the souls of such a race as mine | Can rest, when he [the Doge] ... | Stands plotting on the brink of their pure graves | With stung plebeians" (III.i.99-102). Like Byron, the Doge distances himself from the plebeian conspirators through name-calling and social rank.

The Doge's patrician politics stand as the normative ideology of the play because they so closely align with Byron's and Burke's political views. The Doge – and Burke and Byron – opposes the revolutionary intentions of the rebels, but he does not oppose all reform. Throughout the play, in fact, he recognizes the deteriorated condition of Venice and at various times speaks of the State as an organic infection, a many-headed hydra, or even a vampire that

must be reformed.²⁴ During his Act III soliloquy, for example, the Doge speaks of Venice's need to "be cleansed of the black blood which makes [it] | A lazar-house of tyranny" (III.i.8-9). He also speaks of the "Patrician pestilence [which] spread[s] on and on" (III.i.12) and of how he is now "tainted, and must wash away | The plague-spots in the healing wave" (III.i.14). Although the terms "black blood," "pestilence," and "plague-spots" strongly denounce Venice, the words "cleanse," "wash," and "healing" present positive assertions that the city can be reformed. The Doge's self-assurance culminates in his speech to the conspirators where he claims "We will renew the times of truth and justice" (III.ii.168).

The Doge's reformist zeal, however, meets its limit when he considers the rebels' plan to grasp political power. Like Burke, the Doge's notion of proper governance depends on an appropriate proportion of liberty rather than on an equal access to it. Unlike Rousseau, who argues in the *Social Contract* that "citizens [have] such an equality that they all pledge themselves under the same conditions and ought all to enjoy the same rights" (51), Burke's *Reflections* asserts that "Everything ought to be open; but not indifferently to every man" (139) and that "all men have equal rights; but not to equal things" (150). Burkean understandings of "free" and "equal" pervade the Doge's speech as he claims that Venice must maintain a clear division between aristocratic leaders and the people. Unlike the rebels who speak of regaining power as Rousseau does, the Doge denies their revolutionary rhetoric by maintaining class distinctions, emphasizing that he "cannot call it commonwealth | Nor kingdom, which hath neither prince nor people" (III.ii.155-56). In his speech before the troops, moreover, the Doge lays out his mission to improve the government *for* the rebels without giving it *to* them, arguing

²⁴ Specifically, the Doge calls the state and the aristocratic senators "this o'ergrown aristocratic Hydra" (I.ii.421), "this scorpion nest of vice" (II.i.300), "these unmanly creeping things" (II.ii.117), "this monster of a state" (III.ii.165), "This mockery of a government" (III.ii.166), and "hoary vampires" (III.ii.482). See B. G. Tandon's *The Imagery of Lord Byron's Plays* for a further analysis of the animal imagery in *Marino Faliero*.

that “We will renew the times of truth and justice, | Condensing in a fair free commonwealth | *Not rash equality but equal rights*” (III.ii.168-70, my italics). The Doge’s recognition of trouble in Venice and his promotion of reform may at times sound revolutionary, since it echoes the revolutionary discourse of the Romantic era, but these statements against leveling more accurately align his political principles with the Whigs than with the French Jacobins.

In the patrician world of republican Venice, Bertram, Angiolina, and Lioni also oppose revolution. Bertram particularly stands up against the most violent conspirators in Act III when he asks whether any of the senators could be saved because “even amongst these wicked men | There might be some, whose age and qualities | Might mark them out for pity” (III.ii.24-26). Such reasoning stands as a foil for the Doge in that, even though they are both nervous at the plan for the conspiracy, only Bertram follows through with his opposition to it. As a result, the Doge can be criticized for abandoning his patrician ideology and for embodying the behavior of plebeian conspirators. The contrast between the Doge and Bertram is clearest when the Doge sides with Calendaro’s argument for the collective judgment and punishment of all senators. During their meeting, Calendaro groups senators into “one mass, one breath, one body; | They eat, and drink, and live, and breed together, | Revel, and lie, oppress, and kill in concert, – | So let them die as *one!*” (III.ii.34-36). Calendaro speaks in broad categories of guilt and innocence, overlooks senators that may have been part of the minority, and resorts to violence – “So let them die” – without appealing to a judicial process. Such language aligns Calendaro with what Burke calls a fanatic who is motivated by abstract rationalism rather than analytical thinking. Burke criticized abstract thinking because he believed it ignores complexity and leads to fanaticism. As he explained in a May 26, 1795 letter to William Elliot, fanatics in power fail to monitor their own actions, arguing that “power rarely reforms itself” (*Portable* 570). Burke

presents the same argument again in the *Reflections*, arguing that “those who attempt to level, never equalize” (138). For him, power could not be dispersed; it could only be adopted by a new group. Burke’s suspicion of fanatical reformers makes us question the conspirators,’ and the Doge’s, discourse for reform. According to Burke, such so-called reformers only mean to take power for themselves.

Bertram’s and Calendaro’s opposing arguments present contrasting options for the Doge. On the one hand, he could side with Bertram and live up to his patrician principles. On the other, he could side with Calendaro and act against his own political ideology. Martyn Corbett is right in arguing that this decisive moment serves as the tragic peripeteia of the play in that the two characters embody the Doge’s internal struggle (*Byron* 65). The scene presents an opportunity for the Doge to reflect on his actions, but he sides with Calendaro, emphatically deciding to “let them perish!” (III.ii.312). Through such locutions, the Doge performs political actions that undermine his position as the ruler of an idealized Whig republic.

The Doge also abandons the Whig opposition to violence. In Whig ideology, revolution and violence should be the last resort for political change. In the *Reflections*, for example, Burke’s comments on violence show a measured hesitancy even to approach the subject. He claims at one point that “The speculative line of demarcation, where obedience ought to end, and resistance must begin, is faint, obscure, and not easily definable. It is not a single act, or a single event, which determines it” (116). His use of vague terms and the three consecutive adjectives blur any clear pronouncement that would make violence acceptable. Such measured carefulness also characterizes his discussion of violence in an October 1789 letter to Monsieur Dupont: “A positively vicious and abusive government ought to be changed, – and, if necessary, by violence, – if it cannot be (as sometimes is the case) reformed” (*Portable* 173). Again, the many commas,

conditional dashes, parentheses, and ifs mark a carefully measured and hesitant statement, syntactically showing how nervous Burke is at the thought of making revolutionary violence acceptable, even under these very strict circumstances. Reading the Doge's acceptance of violence through this lens shows him to be acting against his patrician ideology and provides justification for criticizing the Doge's actions.

The kind of response the Doge should have taken is represented by Lioni, a Venetian senator who displays the proper Whig response to the plebeians' secret conspiracy and serves as a second foil for the Doge. Lioni has been unfairly depicted by Marxist critics as a mere tool of Venice's oppressive State.²⁵ However, unlike Benintende, who clearly represents the State, Lioni embodies much of Byron's, Burke's, and the Doge's positive notions of reform. And, in his dialogue with Bertram, his compassionate nature comes out clearly; he tells Bertram that he is "ever ready to assist thee | In all fair objects of advancement, which | ... I would promise | Ere thy request was heard" (IV.i.135-38). Lioni is also compassionate toward dissatisfied plebeians; he is willing to allow them the freedom to denounce the government verbally. Thus, when Bertram first explains the conspiracy, Lioni dismisses Bertram's threat by portraying the conspirators as drunken "ruffians" and dissidents who pose no real challenge to the political establishment, believing that Bertram speaks merely of "some rash and sudden broil[,] | A cup too much, a scuffle, and a stab [as] | Mere things of every day" (IV.i.142-44). In dismissing the gravity of the conspiracy, Lioni implies that the discontent are free to "walk out | ... [and] whisper curses to the night" (IV.i.225-26) as long as their behavior is confined to the political

²⁵ Daniel Watkins, for example, argues that Lioni uses Bertram to "extort" information that will be used against him by persuading Bertram "to compromise his personal integrity to save the patricians" (159). Watkins, moreover, sees Lioni as part of the aristocracy who "are morally blamable because they manipulate the power system to benefit only their own class, without concern for the larger body of individuals who comprise the state. As rulers they disseminate and uphold values which ostensibly represent the best interests of everyone, but which in reality do not recognize the needs or the integrity of private citizens" (158). Watkins's judgment of Lioni, however, unfairly replicates Calendaro's class-based pronouncement of guilt. Like Calendaro, Watkins only sees Lioni as a member of the ruling class and fails to see how critical Lioni is of the State he is supposed to control.

free-play space of the tavern – that is, a place that has no real political threat. Watkins incorrectly concludes that such language “disguise[s the aristocracy’s] selfish motives” and that such “hollow rhetoric” merely “serves as an outward show of sincerity, dignity, and humility” (158). I disagree with Watkins’s interpretation of Lioni’s rhetoric because I do not believe that Lioni puts on a self-interested front merely to trick Bertram into betraying the conspirators. Instead, Lioni dismisses the threat of revolution, and needs to be persuaded first of its severity, because he doubts its effectiveness. I believe he discovers the truth accidentally through skepticism, not through a disguised performance of sincerity.

Lioni perhaps so willingly dismisses Bertram’s claims of revolution because he himself would like to see reform in Venice. Like the Doge, Lioni exposes the deteriorated condition of Venice in his Act IV soliloquy, a monologue which deplores the superficiality of the Venetian aristocracy at the masquerade, describing the “dazzling mass of artificial light, | Which show’d all things, but nothing as they were” (IV.i.33-34). Lioni’s critique of artificiality particularly denounces women’s makeup. He speaks critically of women who try to “recall the past” and strive “for the hues of youth | At the sad labour of the toilet” (IV.i.35-37).²⁶ Worse, this “pride of ornament” (IV.i.39) and “false mirage” (IV.i.66) develops into a simulation, a presentational front that becomes a new reality because the original or suppressed real “Believed itself [to be] forgotten, and was fool’d” (IV.i.42). Such illusion characterizes the whole of Venice, as the city’s many civic statues and markers of honorable deeds do not reflect its oppressive leaders and self-involved aristocrats (Lansdown 130-33). They are instead false external façades that cover the political and moral debasement of the aristocracy.

²⁶ Barry Weller’s note on the soliloquy suggests that Lioni’s monologue owes much to Ann Radcliffe’s *Mysteries of Udolpho*. But Lioni’s condescending tone towards makeup seems to allude more directly to Jonathan Swift’s “The Lady’s Dressing Room.”

Nevertheless, by the end of the soliloquy, Lioni discovers that Venice has a redeeming quality that should be preserved. Behind the artificiality and façade, he identifies a spirit of romance and innocence which would be destroyed by the Doge's revolution. With his rediscovered sense of Venice, and his realization of the scope of the revolution, Lioni confidently explains to Bertram that the proper patrician response to the political and moral apostasy of the aristocracy should be "to save [rather] than slay, and slay i' the dark too" (IV.i.283). His argument sounds similar to Burke's 1795 letter to William Elliot in which he argues that "the true republican spirit ... would reform, not by destroying, but by saving, the great, the rich, and the powerful" (*Portable* 572). Lioni also tries to dissuade Bertram from violence by evoking an emotional response. At one point, he asks, "How would it look to see upon a spear | The head of him whose heart was open to thee, | Borne by thy hand before the shuddering people?" (IV.i.285-87). Such emotional appeals sound very much like Burke's criticism of French revolutionaries who cut off the hand that feeds them – "their blow was aimed at an hand holding out graces, favours, and immunities" (*Reflections* 126-7) – and the allude to Burke's famous image of a reformer who should "approach to the faults of the state as to the wounds of a father, with pious awe and trembling solicitude" (*Reflections* 194). The foils of Bertram and Lioni thus suggest that *Marino Faliero* is a tragedy not because the Doge fails to lead a glorious revolution that would have liberated the oppressed people of Venice but because, for all his sophisticated understanding of his own and Venice's condition, he decides to act against his own political ideology.

Marino Faliero's Promise

As seen, the normative Whig ideology of the drama critiques the Doge's actions and, by extension, London's failed Cato Street Conspiracy. The drama also laments the collapse of republican governments in the post-Napoleonic era and criticizes the (re)instituting of the Holy Alliance. But the drama also serves as Byron's site for reflecting on his own political activism; it represents Byron's meditation on the ability of language to change the world.

Such a biographical reading of the drama risks perpetuating the biographical approach that has plagued Byron scholarship throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries;²⁷ nevertheless, this approach has raised the useful question of why Byron wrote a drama he did not want to see staged. Incapable actors, unsympathetic audiences, a fear of failure or of losing control of his words have all traditionally been cited as reasons. David Erdman's important "Byron's Stage Fright," which is frequently cited as the authority on Byron's theater ambition, interprets Byron's protest²⁸ against staging his plays as a disguised paradoxical desire to see

²⁷ Some influential biographical readings include William Hazlitt's characterization of all three historical dramas in *The Spirit of the Age* as Byron's self-expressive projections in which characters make speeches "such as [Byron] himself might make either to himself or others, lolling on his couch of a morning" (279). Leslie Marchand also argues that "the characters and many of the circumstances are inevitable creations of a very Byronic sort, and should be judged ... as products of the literary imagination" (*Byron's Poetry* 99). Peter Manning, meanwhile, laments the absence of Byron's controlling poetic voice in the play, arguing that "Byron provides little evidence in *Marino Faliero* from which it can be decided whether the revolution Faliero embarks upon is justified" (110), even though he sees the play as a continuation of Byron's concern with the Oedipal complex that, he argues, pervades Byron's poetry. Jerome McGann similarly emphasizes a biographical reading of the dramas in *Fiery Dust*, asserting that the plays "deserve a close rereading which will test traditional opinions against the texts themselves and the relevant biographical documents which shed light upon Byron's intentions" (230). He makes a similar assertion in his introduction to the Oxford *Major Works* edition, arguing that "All of his heroes ... are surrogates of himself, more or less displaced" (xii).

²⁸ Byron's letters of protest include his two January 22, 1821 letters to John Murray in which Byron asks Murray's help in "preventing this cursed attempt at representation" (*BLJ* VIII.66); in the postscript he adds, "I have nothing more at heart ... than to prevent this drama from going upon the Stage; – in short – rather than permit it – it must be *suppressed altogether*" (*BLJ* VIII.66-67). In his second letter, Byron writes, "I do reiterate – and desire that every thing may be done to prevent [*Marino Faliero*] from coming out in *any theatre* for which it was never designed" and that he "cannot conceive how Harris or Elliston can be so insane as to think of acting *M[arino] F[aliero]*" (*BLJ* VIII.67). He makes a similar request of Douglas Kinnaird in his January 11, 1821 letter: "I beg leave that you will protest publicly in my name against any attempt to bring the tragedy on the Stage. – *It never was written for the Stage* – I make it my particular request that it be NOT brought forward on any theatre ... it is against my most positive wish – & Consent" (*BLJ* VIII.63).

them succeed, arguing that the protests are rooted in a desire for “superiority or a position of maximum attention . . . as compensation for an intense feeling of inferiority and insecurity” (221). Samuel Chew, meanwhile, identifies a Romantic spirit²⁹ within the play which is “obviously in the sentiments more than in the plot” (*Dramas* 30), and he suggests that Byron – like Romantic poets in general – failed to write an actable play because of his undeveloped dramatic skill, arguing that Byron was “hampered by that devotion to introspection and philosophy” which is characteristic of Romantic poetry (*Dramas* 30).

Lioni’s Act IV soliloquy provides a useful focal point for testing some of these views. The soliloquy was cut by Robert Elliston in his adaptation of the drama in 1821, the only production of any Byron play during his lifetime. But, according to Medwin’s *Conversations of Lord Byron*, Byron, believing the soliloquy had not been cut, responded with the criticism that the production was “shameful” because he believed “All the declamatory parts were left, [while] all the dramatic ones struck out” (Medwin 143). “Lioni’s soliloquy,” Byron added, “ought to have been omitted altogether, or at all events much curtailed” (Medwin 143). And he asks, “What audience will listen with any patience to a mere tirade of poetry, which stops the march of the actor?” (Medwin 143). Byron does well to recognize the problem of staging Lioni’s soliloquy. As B. G. Tandon argues, Lioni’s speech, “though rich in description, clog[s] the action” (69). But if Byron himself realized that Lioni’s soliloquy was so problematic for staging the play, why did he write it in the first place? And why did he make such extravagant claims about reforming the drama knowing that such language would undermine the production?

²⁹ William Hazlitt identified the same Romantic spirit in the nineteenth century, arguing that the Romantic age is “romantic, but it is not dramatic” (“The Drama: No. IV” 302). He particularly sees drama as inherently social, polyphonic, and connected with the concerns of daily life, arguing that it engages with “the ‘daily intercourse of all this unintelligible world,’ its cares, its crimes, its noise, love, war, ambition” which a poet considers “mere vanity and vexation of spirit” because he “cannot condescend to disturb the bright, serene, and solemn current of his thoughts” (“The Drama: No. IV” 308). Such purist conceptions of the two genres have been questioned by Patricia Ball’s *The Central Self*, Judith Pascoe’s *Romantic Theatricality*, Jane Moody’s *Illegitimate Theatre in London*, and more recently by Angela Esterhammer’s studies of performance in Romantic poetry and political discourse.

Erdman's answer does not work. He speculates that Byron abandoned *Faliero* – by blocking Elliston's production and by refusing to revise the drama to make it more stage-worthy – because he instead wanted to perfect *Sardanapalus* and to see that play produced first (238). Erdman thus suggests that Byron's eggs were in another basket. But if *Faliero* is an abandoned play, Byron's protest against staging *Faliero* would seem more genuine than Erdman suggests. I argue, instead, that Byron included the speech because he was not concerned about writing an actable play. Despite his insistence in the Preface that he wished to avoid “monotonously placing [the Doge] always in dialogue with the same individuals” (306), this is exactly what Byron does, since all of the physical action happens off-stage and the drama leaves readers with only excessive speeches. I argue that Byron includes such long speeches not because of an inability to write actable drama but because they allow him to reflect on the power of language and on his own position as a writer.

From the very beginning, the play is saturated by discussions about speech acts and the power of language. The play begins with servants commenting on the off-stage action of Michel Steno's sentencing trial. They explain that the city is engaged in evaluating the offensive slur³⁰ Steno has written on the Doge's throne while characters on stage await the Senate's judgment, itself a speech act. The message that comes, however, falls short of the Doge's expectation. Where he expects a death sentence, the Senate only declares a one-month house arrest. The difference in the two judgments arises out of a disagreement in the power of Steno's words. The Doge believes Steno's slur convinces others of Angiolina's stained virtue; he attributes to the writing the power of undoing the Falieros' noble rank. In the terminology of speech act

³⁰ The exact phrase is never mentioned in the play, but the dominant view is that it reads: “Marino Faliero of the fair wife: others enjoy her, while he keeps her.” For a brief discussion on the history of this passage, see Barry Weller's commentary in *Marino Faliero* (550 n62). See also Sanuto in Byron's Appendix (528, 532) and Norwich for a historical perspective (225).

theorists, the Doge believes that Steno's graffito has what J. L. Austin calls a strong "audience uptake," or a strong likelihood that the words will successfully perform the "illocutionary point(s)" (or intentions) they set out to accomplish. Steno's illocutionary points in this case could be to: insult the Doge and Angiolina, undermine the power of the Doge, brag about his access to Angiolina, and perhaps appropriate some of the Doge's political power for himself. Steno's words have apparently achieved their intended effect, at least in the Doge, as he tells his nephew that Steno's words have made him "Insulted on his very throne, and made | A mockery to the men who should obey me[;] | ... scorned[,] ... | reviled, degraded" (I.ii.193-96). He, furthermore, believes that the graffito's power of destroying reputations multiplies as it "pass[es] from mouth to mouth | Of loose mechanics, with all coarse foul comments, | And villainous jests, and blasphemies obscene; | While sneering nobles, in more polish'd guise, | Whisper'd the tale, and smiled upon the lie | Which made me look like them" (I.ii.160-65).³¹ Michael Walzer's argument about the performative power of monarchy can help explain why the Doge feels his authority has been diminished: "Monarchy depends upon an ideology of personal rule. ... Subjects must feel some awe in the royal presence; they must sustain some faith in the king's sanctity, power, and wisdom" (1). Although the Doge is technically not a monarch, his leadership nevertheless depends upon a postmodern performance-based understanding of "royal identity [as] no more than a communal performance" (Petrey 90) – a notion Byron would explore more fully in *Werner*.

The Doge also takes personal offense because he feels the Senate has passed judgment on him as well. As he explains in Act I, the Senate has weighed "The rights of place and choice, of

³¹ William Jewett's commentary on the performative power of Steno's slur is absolutely right: "The doge needs to suppress the wording because the slur seems, almost magically, to affirm a truth simply by virtue of its having been written ... He rightly sees the inscription not as a statement persuading his subjects of something that is not true, but as a performance that *produces* the condition of disempowerment it claims to reveal" (180).

birth and service, | Honours and years, these scars, these hoary hairs, | The travel, toil, the perils, the fatigues, | The blood and sweat of almost eighty years” against Steno’s slur, and it has found them “wanting!” (I.ii.118-24). The Doge thus believes, perhaps mistakenly, that the Senate perpetuates Steno’s slur by both turning a blind eye to Steno’s graffito and underrating the value of the Doge’s sacrifices.

For the Doge, such logic suggests that the spoken or written word has a much stronger effect than any embodied action. And his belief seems to be the predominant logic of the play. After the Doge’s disappointment, it is not the murder of Steno that the Doge’s nephew tries to discourage; he in fact repeatedly urges the deed, assuring the Doge that Steno “shall not live till sunset” (I.ii.203). Bertuccio instead asks the Doge not to *speak* of anything immoral. When the Doge at one point threatens the city with a curse, Bertuccio responds that “’Tis not well | In Venice’[s] Duke to say so” (I.ii.93-94). At other times throughout the scene, Bertuccio tells the Doge: “Cheer up, be calm; this transport is uncall’d for” (I.ii.73), “curb this passion” (I.ii.98), “you are too much moved” (I.ii.133), “This fury doth exceed the provocation” (I.ii.136) and “O’ersweep all bounds, and foam itself to air” (I.ii.147), “resume what you have spurned” (I.ii.253), that he “wish’d [the Doge] to repress such gusts of passion” (I.ii.225), and that he “wonder’d to perceive [him] so forget | All prudence in [his] fury” (I.ii.241-42). Bertuccio’s insistence that the Doge censor himself suggests that the real danger comes from what the Doge verbally threatens to do.

This force of words is what makes the conspirator Israel Bertuccio turn to the Doge for help. Although the Doge denies his own authority, presenting himself as someone without agency by claiming that he is a “poor puppet, who must play | Its part” (I.ii.415-46) and that Israel “overrate[s his] power” (I.ii.411), Israel is convinced that the revolution “rests but on your

word | To punish and avenge” (I.ii.406-07). And he explains that “many thousands more ... wait but for a signal” from the Doge (I.ii.455-56). During this first meeting, moreover, Israel means to secure a particularly J. L. Austin kind of speech act; he means to make the Doge promise his allegiance to the militia. As Israel explains, the meeting with the chiefs “shall be done upon your formal pledge | To keep the faith that we will pledge to you” (I.ii.548-49). Upon reflection, however, the Doge realizes that his promise sounds particularly dangerous. As illustrated above, the Doge immediately feels ashamed that he will “repair – | ... to hold a council in the dark” (I.ii.580-81) and that his voice will be used to benefit what he calls “common ruffians leagued to ruin states” (I.ii.582).

Only one character remains unconvinced of language’s destructive power. The Doge’s young wife, Angiolina, argues that the Doge should not seek revenge because Steno’s slur does not warrant it. Unlike the Doge, who seeks “blood for blood” (II.i.244), “blood for honour” (II.i.248), and “blood for treason” (II.i.250), Angiolina argues that he should forgive Steno because “Heaven bids us to forgive our enemies” (II.i.260) and because the Doge acts out of wounded “pride, not patriotism” (II.i.205).³² Angiolina promotes such compassion because she denies the consequences of Steno’s writing. As she tells Benintende in Act V, Steno’s words “Ne’er weigh’d in mind ... | Further than to create a moment’s pity” (V.i.409-10). She adds,

³² Charles Robinson sees the contrasting views of the Doge and Angiolina as parallel to Byron’s disagreement with Percy Shelley’s Preface to *The Cenci*, in which Shelley argues that Beatrice should forgive her father because her virtue is not compromised by his immoral act. Robinson’s view, however, mistakenly reads the Doge’s argument for revenge as Byron’s. I argue, instead, that the similarity between the Doge and Byron only extends so far. Byron, too, ultimately criticizes the Doge’s action, even though he does not hold Angiolina’s view either. I return to this argument in my chapter on *Sardanapalus*, where I examine Byron’s response to Shelley’s pacifism and demonstrate that Byron was not siding with Angiolina.

A reading of the Doge and Angiolina’s dialectic power struggle can help explain why Byron opposes her Shelley-like alternative here. Angiolina’s character can be seen as a Hegelian antithesis that leads to future empowerment (of the Doge). Like Sophocles’s Antigone, whose opposition to Creon threatens to undermine the state’s authority, Angiolina’s moral alternative threatens to undermine the patriarchal order and the Doge’s sense of masculinity. Like Antigone (in Hegel’s logic of the dialectic), Angiolina’s opposition (first to the Doge, then to the Venetian State) must be overcome to preserve the status quo. I return to this idea in my discussion of Marina in the next chapter as well.

moreover, that “the scorner’s words were as the wind | Unto the rock” (V.i.419-20). Steno’s words are so ineffective, she explains, because he does not have credibility: “Men whose vice is to start at vice’s scoffing | ... are feeble” (V.i.425-27). In terms of speech act theory, Angiolina does not believe Steno’s slur can perform everything the Doge believes it can because she does not believe Steno has the social standing to convince others. Like language theorist Pierre Bourdieu, Angiolina believes that “the use of language ... depends on the social position of the speaker” (109) and that “A performative utterance is destined to fail each time that it is not pronounced by a person who has the ‘power’ to pronounce it” (111).

Angiolina uses the same logic to defend the Doge at his trial. She argues that the Doge should be honored for his past services because “One day of baffled crime must not efface | Near sixteen lustres crowded with brave acts” (V.i.356-57). Nevertheless, the Giunta, the group responsible for judging the conspirators, takes drastic measures to ensure that all memory of the Doge be effaced and that the conspirators’ final words are censored. As Benintende explains, “lest they should essay | To stir up the distracted multitude – | ... let their mouths be gagged, even in the act | Of execution” (V.i.99-102). Calendaro correctly interprets this gag order as a continuation of the oppression he has always felt, explaining that “I knew that we were gagg’d in life ... but still I deem’d | That ... the same idle | Freedom of speech accorded to the dying, | Would not now be denied to us” (V.i.107-13). Israel also correctly comments that “They tremble at our voices” (V.i.121). But, while Calendaro is disheartened by the denial of his right to speech, Israel argues that their blood will compensate in that it will “more readily arise | To heaven against them, and more testify | To their atrocities, than could a volume | Spoken or written of our dying words” (V.i.117-20). Nevertheless, Benintende explains that all of the conspirators should be executed to prevent the spread of their radicalism. Even the Doge is told

“not to speak unto the people” (V.i.549). Like the Doge, what Benintende fears is not the conspirators’ final actions but their final words; thus, he orders that “None will escape to utter in strange lands | His libellous [sic] tale of treasons ’gainst the senate” (V.i.148-49).

In addition to having their existence effaced, conspirators incite a new form of oppression as senators pass new emergency laws to deal with them. As Benintende tells the Doge, “Your sin hath made us make a law which will | Become a precedent ’gainst such haughty traitors” (V.i.193-94). The Doge responds by again accusing senators of being traitors to the people, but Benintende rightly concludes that “the great Doge of Venice ... allow[ed] | His fury ... to master | All feeling, wisdom, faith, and fear” (V.i.238-42). As a result, the Doge’s failure has given the State even more authority to prosecute its opponents. The scene can be interpreted as Byron’s direct criticism of revolutionaries such as the Cato Street conspirators. As with the Doge, he explains, their hasty and extreme measures have compromised the work of real Whig reformers in Parliament, whose efforts for reform can now more easily be criminalized by the State.

Byron’s criticism of radicals continues in Angiolina’s final attempt to save the Doge. By this time, Angiolina has adopted the Doge’s language and accuses the Giunta of having “cruelty in their cold eyes” and a “heartless wrath within” (V.i.388-89). But in criticizing them, Angiolina indirectly criticizes the Doge. In arguing that “Steno’s lie ... Hath decimated Venice, put in peril | A senate which hath stood eight hundred years, | Discrown’d a prince, cut off his crownless head, | And forged new fetters for a groaning people” (V.i.443-47), Angiolina actually lists the consequences of the conspiracy. It is the Doge, not Steno, which threatened the Senate and paradoxically brought on more oppression. Despite her rhetoric, however, her failure to save the Doge incidentally demonstrates the need for political reform, denounces radicals, and undermines her moral alternative. By the end of the play, Byron has shown that neither violent

radicalism nor humanitarian idealism is a realistic option for political reform, even though such reform is clearly needed.

This reading of *Marino Faliero* runs counter to the current scholarship on Romanticism which sees closet dramas as culturally subversive and politically revolutionary. Daniel Watkins, for example, has argued that in contrast to Renaissance drama, which “articulate[d] the consciousness of an aristocratic worldview[,] ... Romantic drama is inextricably and peculiarly entangled in the radical, disruptive changes of the period” (6, 8). Between the two periods, Watkins suggests, drama shifted from a voice of cultural authority to one of cultural rebellion. Similarly, Michael Simpson suggests in *Closet Performances* that Romantic closet drama “worked specifically to rehabilitate the discourse that had generated [the radical] culture [of] the 1790s” (3). Likewise, Julie Carlson identifies a progressive potential in Romantic drama in *In the Theatre of Romanticism*, even though she claims that *Marino Faliero* and Shelley’s *The Cenci*³³ criticize female performance (188-204), by arguing that Romantic dramas portray how “commanding women” influence the public sphere (19, 181-88). But as my discussion has demonstrated, *Marino Faliero* critiques such progressivism. The drama instead asserts the more conservative Whig ideology as an alternative to revolutionary reform, and it demonstrates that “the moral force” of female characters like Angiolina “cannot move the [politically invested male] powers-that-be to act on their behalf” (Carlson 195).

³³ Carlson, in fact, equates Byron with Count Cenci at one point calling him “‘Count’ Byron” (201). At other times, she speaks of Byron’s “scorn” for theater audiences and female actresses, claiming that “Lord Byron appears like Count Cenci in his need to subdue women who assume command over men” because “Byron’s plays never feature a woman in a starring role” and because they demonstrate “Concern over women’s weapons” and “Anxiety over the private sphere” (200).

From *Marino Faliero* to *The Doge of Venice*

This chapter has been making a case for *Marino Faliero* as a drama that displays the paradoxical consequences of radicalism. It is a view of *Faliero* that challenges current understandings of both Byron and Romantic drama. But how far did this view of *Faliero* extend in the nineteenth century? The play was performed over fifty times in London's Drury Lane theater during the Victorian period, but was it still the same play? In asking this question, I do not mean simply to compare theatrical productions to the text of Byron's published play. Instead, I would like to examine what view of Byron and of *Faliero* develops when one turns to the play's nineteenth-century performance history. As will be shown, the three major nineteenth-century theatrical productions of *Marino Faliero* drastically altered Byron's dramatization of Marin Falier's conspiracy, transforming it into the story of an innocent woman's wounded virtue and of the failed attempt of her infuriated husband to find justice.

The first major staging, Robert Elliston's 1821 production, cut the most important parts. The script for his adaptation particularly cut long speeches, such as Lioni's Act IV soliloquy and the Doge's final speech in which he appeals to Time and Eternity, a speech that stands as Byron's statement of disappointment for the republican city. Elliston also cut references to oppressive governments by cutting the imagery of patricians as scorpions and snakes, and he cut much of the dialogue between the Doge and Israel in Act I, discussions among the conspirators in Act II, about two thirds of the Doge's Act III soliloquy in which he explains his rationale and uncertainty for the revolution, and about half of the Doge's speech to the conspirators. In Act I, for example, Elliston cut Bertuccio's line that Steno's "sentence is too light for the offense" (I.ii.76); he also cut the Doge's lines in scene ii that explain how his ducal cap, a symbol of his authority, has been "trampled" (74) and "degraded" (76) and how he himself has been "reviled,

degraded, as a Prince” (196). Without such complaints, it becomes difficult to understand the Doge’s fury in political terms. These cuts, however, were not well taken by contemporary viewers. Elliston’s cuts, in fact, account for the primary reason contemporary reviewers criticized the play. *The Courier*, for example, said that “An act of gross injustice has been committed towards the noble poet by ... dragging on the stage ... a drama mutilated and disfigured” (qtd. in Taborski 166-67). *The Times* similarly called Elliston’s script a collection of “Fragments, violently torn from that noble work” (qtd. in Taborski 167) and argued that the production has “irreverently lopped and disfigured the body of the *Doge of Venice* to fit him for the narrow bed of torture at Drury Lane” (qtd. in Taborski 167).

The two other productions achieved more success, but they too cut much of the play and transformed it to something Byron did not intend. William Macready, the great Shakespearean actor, used the 1842 production at Drury Lane as a vehicle for stardom and profit. He too cut passages critical of patricians, but for the most part, he only shortened lengthy speeches and streamlined dialogue (Howell 36). Some of the more dramatic alterations include moving passages to different scenes, shortening the Doge’s soliloquy in Act III by half (Howell 38), dramatically shortening the Lioni and Bertram scene in Act IV (one of the scenes that explicitly criticizes conspirators), cutting the final scene with the citizens, shortening the Doge’s Time and Eternity speech by half, and ending with his on-stage execution and Angiolina’s faint. Although Macready’s production was generally well-praised, and stands as the most serious attempt to stage *Faliero*, it did not become as successful as his productions of *Werner* or *Sardanapalus*. The production closed after only four nights.

But the third major nineteenth-century production, W. Bayle Bernard’s 1867 spectacle, with Samuel Phelps as Doge, was staged more frequently. Phelps’s acting in the 41

performances was energetic and appropriately melodramatic, but the main attraction was definitely the scenery and the large cast interactions that transformed the tragedy into a theatrical spectacle.³⁴ Bernard's new script, a combination of Byron's text and French dramatist Casimir Delavigne's, followed only the most basic plot outline. While Bernard preserved some of Byron's poetry and the Doge's conspiracy, he also included Delavigne's incestuous relationship between Angiolina and Fernando, the Doge's son. Overall, the play, renamed to *Doge of Venice*, mostly served as a chance to present musical selections from popular operas as well as "a shipwright's yard with a view of Venice at sunset," a banquet, a carnival, a ballet, a dance, gondolas, Harlequins, and stilt-walkers – "a tableau representing the allegory of Venice" (Taborski 174, 176). In essence, Bernard staged Lioni's Act IV celebration of Venice by turning the soliloquy into a theatrical spectacle. The large cast, elaborate scenery, and expensive costumes, however, eventually bankrupted the production, leaving *Marino Faliero* one of Byron's least performed and least financially successful dramas.

Although these productions tell us more about nineteenth-century theater conventions than about Byron's drama, they do highlight some features of the text that typically go unnoticed in literary criticism. All three productions showed that the poetic elements make the play unfit for the stage. The play is too long, there is too little on-stage action and no real conflict, and minor characters are not engaged in the plot – characters such as Lioni and Benintende, for example, appear only once. The productions also demonstrate that the theater was an institution that worked against subversive agendas; Elliston and Macready both cut the Doge's legitimate complaint against the Venetian government in attempts to depoliticize the play. Consequently, without the political justification for his rebellion, the Doge was presented as a threatening figure

³⁴ The November 7, 1867 review in *The Times*, for example, stated that "the spectacle' is the main feature of the performance" (10).

that projected his anger at the State, a tragic figure whose “frightful consequences” (*The Times*, 21 May 1842: 8) the theater-goer should be horrified to imitate.

The nineteenth-century productions also demonstrate that Byron had become a symbol of radicalism. As shown, the play itself does not support a radical reading of Byron. But nineteenth-century theater practitioners turned Byron into a radical by omission. By cutting the Doge’s critique of Venetian patricians, they signaled that Byron himself held such views about England and that theater-goers must be protected from him, lest the noble poet inspire them to radicalism. By cutting Byron’s drama, even if for practical reasons such as controlling run time or cutting obscure references, theater practitioners aligned Byron with the subversive radical. These cuts came across as culturally subversive or politically radical simply because they were not allowed in the legitimate, patented theater. Even if Elliston or Macready did not personally believe that Byron could inspire others to radicalism, the cuts nevertheless suggest that Byron had the cultural power to do so. Unlike Steno, who Angiolina argued did not have the cultural standing to convince others, nineteenth-century theater practitioners and the Lord Chamberlain’s Office, which allowed or censored plays, suggested that *Marino Faliero* was too hot to handle unedited.

CHAPTER 4

EMPOWERING A MARGINALIZED VOICE IN *THE TWO FOSCARI*

In an April 2, 1817 letter to John Murray, Lord Byron discloses his belief in the gendered nature of the dramatic imagination. Like many nineteenth-century writers, he asserted that a dramatic imagination comes from experiencing the world. Thus, he writes the following of Voltaire and Joanna Baillie: “When Voltaire was asked why no woman has ever written even a tolerable tragedy? ‘Ah (said the Patriarch) the composition of a tragedy requires *testicles*.’ – If this be true[,] Lord knows what Joanna Baillie does – I suppose she borrows them” (*BLJ* V.203). While this letter alludes to Byron’s own extensive travels, and hence to his justification for writing drama, it also comes across as a sexist statement. Even worse, Byron’s letters suggest that he held this view for quite some time. Two years earlier, a letter to his friend Thomas Moore drew the connection between dramatic talent and gender in explicit terms: “Women (saving Joanna Baillie) cannot write tragedy; they have not seen enough nor felt enough for it” (*BLJ* IV.290). But Byron does assert that “Semiramis or Catherine II might have written ... a rare play” (*BLJ* IV.290). It is certainly unusual that Byron associates Baillie, a writer whose works he highly admired and may have even imitated,³⁵ with figures about whom he writes so negatively elsewhere. As William Brewer observes in “Joanna Baillie and Lord Byron,” the association makes Baillie “strangely androgynous” and “threatening” because of her suggested masculinity (171).

³⁵ See Brewer’s “Joanna Baillie and Lord Byron” for a convincing comparison of Baillie’s and Byron’s similar use of a governing passion in *Plays on the Passions* and *Manfred* and *Marino Faliero* (173-75). See also Malcolm Kelsall’s “Byron and Baillie’s Balls” in *Byron and the Theatre*.

Regretfully, Byron's comments on the gender of a female writer are not limited to Baillie. In his summer and fall 1820 letters to Murray, he calls Felicia Hemans "Mrs. Hewoman" (*BLJ* VII.158) and a "feminine *He-man*" (*BLJ* VII.183), and he suggests that she give up writing and conform to the traditional female role of "knit[ing] blue stockings instead of wearing them" (*BLJ* VII.182). As Peter Cochran aptly observes, Byron's jokes and criticisms of female writers participated in "re-sexing, de-sexing or trans-sexing" rival poets such as Hemans ("Byron the Vampire" 16). Moreover, in an 1811 letter to Hobhouse, he simply resorts to name calling, saying that "Of all Bitches dead or alive a scribbling woman is the most canine" (*BLJ* II.132).³⁶ Such critical comments about female writers have obviously not favored Byron's critical legacy. Not surprisingly, late twentieth-century scholarship has criticized Byron for an anti-feminist agenda. Romanticists have specifically argued that many of his heroines simply mirror the Byronic hero and fail to portray real women. In *Fiery Dust*, for example, Jerome McGann argues that the heroines of Byron's tales are "allegorical figures" and that "none of them are truly 'persons'" (189). Charles Clancy has likewise asserted that even Aurora Raby, whom he and others consider Byron's most complex female character, "is in many respects ... the typical Byronic hero transmuted into feminine form" (28). Such scholarship perpetuates the long-held notion that Byron is more interested in writing about the Byronic hero, that mysterious alter ego of biography and fiction, than in portraying realistic female characters.

³⁶ Such personal invective and association of bad writing with aberrant gender and sexuality is not limited to female rivals. In *Don Juan*, for example, Byron blames the Lake Poets' abstruse metaphysics on their aberrant sexuality, and he "articulates a suspicion about the soundness of Castlereagh's grammar as a suspicion about the soundness of both his sexual parts and intellectual parts as well" (Chandler 373). At other moments, he relies on what Jerome McGann has called "games of language, rhetorical flourishes" (*Byron and Romanticism* 174), calling Wordsworth "Turdsworth" in his letters and associating Robert Southey with blackbirds and fish out of water in the Dedication to *Don Juan*.

Recently, however, a number of Romantic scholars have used feminist and gender-studies approaches to defend Byron. The most influential work has been that of Susan Wolfson³⁷ and Caroline Franklin. In “Their she Condition,” Wolfson examines Byron’s treatment of gender in *Don Juan*, arguing that the poem exposes the social and political investments of gender definitions (591) and that important scenes “break down, invert, and radically call into question the categories designed to discriminate ‘masculine’ from ‘feminine’” (585). The article, moreover, gives Byron a self-critical feminist consciousness, suggesting that he understood his “‘he’ complicity in the ‘she condition’” of women (599), and, at one point, Wolfson places Byron so firmly within the feminist tradition of Wollstonecraft that she comments “Wollstonecraft could have written the next stanza” (598).³⁸ In another highly influential article, “A Problem Few Dare Imitate,” Wolfson identifies a similar feminist consciousness in *Sardanapalus*. She argues that the drama interrogates how gender definitions are implicated in social and political concerns and that it challenges “essentialist formulations ... of how the categories of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ themselves can become sites of conflict” (870). Although Wolfson admits that *Don Juan* and *Sardanapalus* ultimately reaffirm conventional notions of gender, she attributes a feminist consciousness to Byron that was rare before the

³⁷ A number of feminist studies have followed the path set by Wolfson. In “The Slave-Woman in the Harem,” Malcolm Kelsall reads *Sardanapalus* in the context of the Godwin-Wollstonecraft-Shelley circle, arguing that Myrrha’s “confinement to the harem dramatically symbolizes both the historic enslavement of woman to man as ‘slave’ to ‘tyrant,’ and the enslavement of Greece as a type of all colonial oppression” (315). Kelsall, however, identifies Byron’s departure from and criticism of the Godwin-Wollstonecraft-Shelley influence, arguing that Byron disapproved of the implications of such discourse because it legitimized the idea that victimized women should rebel against oppressive men as an oppressed class would “oppose, overthrow, or even kill tyrants” (318). Daniela Garofalo and Barbara Judson, meanwhile, have expanded Wolfson’s argument that Byron interrogates gender definitions. In “Political Seductions,” Garofalo argues that *Sardanapalus* uses performance to “bankrupt the traditional notion of martial virility by feminizing it” (58), while in “Tragicomedy, Bisexuality, and Byronism,” Judson argues that Byron uses humor and an illegitimate dramatic form to “mercilessly flay tragedy” (248) and to infuse politics with a sexual-pleasure-seeking principle which Edmund Burke argues is sublimated into a duty towards family and State (257).

³⁸ Wolfson expands this feminist tradition in her rewriting of the article for her 2006 book *Borderlines* in that she not only aligns Byron with other nineteenth-century feminist writers such as Barbauld (183) but anachronistically with twentieth-century feminists such as Luce Irigaray, Gloria Steinem, and Judith Butler as well, at one point stating that “Byron had intuited the master-trope of feminist critique” (189).

1980s. Meanwhile, Caroline Franklin argues in *Byron's Heroines* that Byron opposed the Regency cult of femininity and domesticity by showing the consequences of the separate spheres ideology. In the tales, she argues, Byron demonstrates that Regency society can be just as oppressive as Turkish feudalism in that it limits women to the home and polarizes gender definitions. The dramas, meanwhile, demonstrate how the absence of women from public life can corrupt and dehumanize political men even in the ideal Whig republic of medieval Venice. Throughout her study, moreover, Franklin also places Byron's poetry and dramas alongside Wollstonecraft, arguing that Byron challenged Rousseau's separate spheres ideology not by attributing masculine reason to women, as Wollstonecraft did, but by showing that both men and women are driven by a disguised or repressed sexual impulse.

Despite this positive feminist commentary on Byron's dramas, one of the most influential studies on Romantic drama, Julie Carlson's *In the Theatre of Romanticism*, speaks of Byron's "gynophobia" towards female characters (203). Carlson argues that "Lord Byron appears like Count Cenci in his need to subdue women who assume command over men" (200). And she points to Angiolina of *Marino Faliero* as a prime example of a female character who embodies society's morals but is ultimately ignored (203). I generally agree with Carlson's characterization of Angiolina; as the previous chapter demonstrated, Doge Faliero ignores Angiolina's moral principles and, as a result, trivializes her character. But the same cannot be said of Marina Foscari. As Leslie Marchand observes, "Unlike the passive Angiolina ..., [Marina] is the voice of rebellion that is never silenced by timidity or considerations of policy" (*Byron's Poetry* 102). She forces her way into private senatorial meetings, intrudes in confidential civic affairs, and vocally criticizes leading political figures, including the Doge, Loredano, and even her husband, Jacopo. In short, Marina criticizes the Regency cult of

femininity by displaying the oppressive nature of masculine political governance and by disregarding the feminine sentimentality that deprives her of a political voice.

As can be seen, *The Two Foscari* offers an excellent opportunity to examine Byron's treatment of powerful female figures. Unfortunately, many prominent Byron scholars have dismissed the drama with little or no comment. Andrew Rutherford and Robert Gleckner, for example, say nothing of *The Two Foscari* in their otherwise insightful analyses of Byron's writing. Leslie Marchand, meanwhile, only focuses on the drama long enough to catalogue a list of negative attributes, arguing that "Byron has succeeded even less well than in *Marino Faliero*" (*Byron's Poetry* 102) and that "there is little to redeem the play in either dramatic force or language" (102). He argues that the irredemptive qualities of the drama include inauthentic historical events and characters, a "lack of subtlety," and an "artificial rhetoric of [characters'] speeches" (102), which demonstrate "Byron's failure when he venture[s] far outside his own experience and feelings" (102). Moreover, studies that have commented on *The Two Foscari* have only focused on the literary qualities of plot,³⁹ theme,⁴⁰ and dramatic form.⁴¹ However, these approaches neglect to examine Byron's criticism of the Regency cult of femininity, and

³⁹ Samuel Chew calls *The Two Foscari* "a failure" in its construction of plot and climax because, rather than having the typical structure of background, increasing action, climax, falling action, and resolution, the play presents only the resolution of an action that has begun much earlier (*Dramas* 54). Chew argues that "Byron hurls his reader not merely *in medias res* but into the very conclusion of the whole matter" (43); consequently, the drama "is hardly tragic, for there is no resistance; it is not dramatic; for the conflict is one-sided, that is, it is brute force against impotence, which is no true conflict at all" (52).

⁴⁰ In *Fiery Dust*, Jerome McGann argues that the drama's themes include "civic pollution, the vision of governors as slaves to a mysterious and nonhuman force, and the unresolvable conflict between patriotism and personality" (215), even though he also concedes that the drama "does not have the metaphoric thickness of *Marino Faliero*" (215). Among the important dramatic symbols of the drama, McGann identifies "Loredano's account book, the goblet of Venetian crystal . . . , and the dungeon of the younger Foscari" (216). Richard Lansdown, meanwhile, convincingly identifies the themes of "exile, imprisonment, banishment, eviction, and isolation . . . [and] a powerful sense of spatial – and . . . moral and ethical – confinement" (182).

⁴¹ Richard Lansdown argues that "*The Two Foscari* is the most overtly neo-classical of Byron's three historical plays" (173), even as he argues that it is by "no means the most regular of Byron's historical dramas" (183). The difference for Lansdown is the manner in which neo-classical plays present their themes and "are themselves molded by, or reflect the pressures of, that form" (184). He also argues that, because of *The Two Foscari*'s neo-classical form, the drama easily presents the "political, ethical, and moral constriction which is invariably associated with the triumph of the status quo" (198).

they fail to consider the limit of Byron's criticism of the governing aristocracy. As in *Faliero*, Byron criticizes the tyrannical aristocracy but not so that he may promote a rebellion against monarchies and republics. Instead, the drama criticizes political leaders for their lack of 'feminine' sentimental qualities, which are best embodied by Marina.

This chapter thus means to contribute to the feminist scholarship on the drama by identifying the critical power of the female voice and by examining the paradoxically conservative ends which nineteenth-century stage performances of the play implicitly supported. I argue that Marina's insistence not to be silenced demonstrates Byron's criticism of the separate spheres ideology and his commitment to a public, political life that begins with the values of the home and the blood ties of the family. Like Marino Faliero, Marina, his namesake, portrays the Venetian Senate as inhuman and monstrous and criticizes the Doge and Jacopo Foscari for their undying commitment to an oppressive State. She argues that rather than blindly accept the illusions of Venice, the Doge and Jacopo should try first to serve and save their own family. Their refusal to heed Marina's advice, however, demonstrates the paradoxically tragic position of women within the State. Without political authority, Marina can criticize and denounce to no effect. But rather than serve as an example of Byron's desire to subdue opinionated women, Marina's failed critique demonstrates the need for an influential female voice within the political process.

Ironically, it is this revolutionary potential of *The Two Foscari* that nineteenth-century London productions curtailed. Actor-producer William Charles Macready drastically cut Marina's role during his 1838-39 production of the play at Covent Garden. He also cast Helen Faucit, an upcoming actress known for her performance of "young tragic heroines" such as Juliet, Desdemona, and Cordelia (qtd. in Martin, *Helena Faucit* 42), to downplay Marina's

controlling stage presence. And, as in stage productions of *Marino Faliero*, Macready removed much of the political material and turned the drama into a familial tragedy that best suited his acting style. Consequently, a character Byron may have empowered to reflect on the Queen Caroline affair was all but silenced during the 1838-39 production season. This stage history also demonstrates that the nineteenth-century London theater was not as politically progressive as recent studies on Romantic drama have suggested. Thus, in contrast to Betsy Bolton's argument that "women were far more active participants" (4) – and thus more engaged in the political issues of the time than theater historians have previously admitted – the stage history of *The Two Foscari* demonstrates much gender discrimination and less opportunity for female actors to influence the public.

Marina's Critique

Like *Marino Faliero*, who portrays Venetian senators as hydra and vampires, Marina similarly characterizes Venetian senators as monstrous and inhuman. At one point, she depicts them as beyond the age of human emotion, calling them "old human fiends" and "demons"

With one foot in the grave ...
[who] put men's lives out, as if life
Were no more than the feelings long extinguish'd
In their accursed bosoms. (II.i.108-17)

As in *Marino Faliero*, such language effectively criticizes senators by demonizing them. Marina reasons that these senators could not have been "of women born and suckled" (II.i.118) because their familial relationships would have taught them compassion. But while the critique in *Marino Faliero* is used in service of a violent revolution, which Byron ultimately denounces, the

demonizing language in *The Two Foscari* criticizes the mechanical operation of the Venetian government and aims to reform not by a call to arms but by a promotion of natural and familial sentiment.

As in *Marino Faliero*, much of the demonizing language is leveled against powerful senators who have turned Venice into an oppressive State. Like Faliero, Marina calls senators “assassins” (I.i.276), “beings of another and worse world” (II.i.311), “traitors” (II.i.167), “tyrants” (V.i.86), and “murderers” (V.i.353). She particularly heaps much of this demonizing invective against Loredano, whom she at times calls “the devil” (IV.i.218), “Incarnate Lucifer!” (IV.i.219), an “assassin” (IV.i.242), and a “cowardly murderer” (IV.i.243). Moreover, she also speaks in broad generalizations, vilifying the whole Senate as if she were engaging in class warfare. Like Doge Faliero and the conspirator Calendaro, Marina argues that senators “are one | In wickedness” (I.i.222-23) because they have “exiled, persecuted, mangled [her] husband, | [and] Oppress’d but not disgraced” him (II.i.159-60). She also speaks in broad generalizations throughout much of Acts II and III, depicting not only senators but the whole city as tyrannical and unnatural, arguing that the city’s laws “Would stifle nature’s!” (II.i.420), that “Venice is dishonour’d” (II.i.164), that “The country is the traitress” (II.i.386), that the land is an “ungrateful and tyrannic soil” (III.i.143), and that “tyrannous injustice” pervades the realm (III.i.203).

Marina’s criticism of Venetian senators ultimately culminates in her Act V denouncement of the senators’ desire for State pageantry at the Doge’s funeral. In response to the senators’ decision to “let [the Doge’s] funeral rites be princely” by being “such as befits his name and nation, | His rank and his devotion to the duties | Of the realm” (V.i.310-17), Marina argues that such State pageantry would be “mockery” (V.i.319), “idle and superfluous pomp”

(V.i.328), and “hypocrisy” (V.i.355). She also argues that the State funeral will be a sign of their “relentless coldness” (V.i.325), dishonor (V.i.330), and a continuation of their oppression of the Doge, since she believes that they have murdered him. Ironically, the senators give the Doge the respect Angiolina argues should be shown to Marino Faliero for his lifetime of service. At the end of *The Two Foscari*, however, the pageantry is less a recognition of the Doge’s dedication to the State than a cover for the continued secrecy of Loredano and the Ten.

In having Marina oppose the senators, Byron much more fully aligns his leading female character with Sophocles’s Antigone in this play than in *Marino Faliero*. As Chapter 3 suggested, Angiolina can be seen as an Antigone figure only if she is understood to be in a (losing) dialectical relationship with the Doge and the Venetian State. According to Hegel’s theorizing of the dialectic in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Angiolina’s opposition to these sources of authority must be defeated so that the Doge’s masculinity and the State’s authority can prevail. As Tricia Lootens aptly comments on Hegel’s theory, the sacred law of the feminine “must be remembered and revered, but for safety’s sake it cannot be obeyed” (242). In *The Two Foscari*, however, Marina symbolizes what Hegel calls the “divine law” and the role of the ideal public female (271, 287-88). Unlike Angiolina, whose femininity directly threatens the patriarchal State or “masculine law” (Hegel 287-88), Marina embodies the ideal female role through her observation of the burial ritual in that, like Sophocles’s Antigone, she claims sole ownership of her family members’ dead bodies. As she tells the senators after the Doge’s death, they should “Leave him to me; ...| It is my last of duties” (V.i.337-39). In Act IV, likewise, she tells Jacopo’s officers to “Leave his remains | To those who know [how] to honour them” (IV.i.200-01) and not to touch his dead body because their “base office | Ends with his life”

(IV.i.198-99). However, as Tricia Lootens argues, Hegel's ideal public female can also undermine the State's authority if the State acts against a higher moral authority.

Marina's higher moral authority comes from the natural human emotions of compassion for family, which she, like Edmund Burke, makes the foundation of her political philosophy. According to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, "The true lawgiver ought to have an heart full of sensibility" (281) because, as he explains of the French Revolution, horrific events produce emotions that, like an ancient Greek tragedy, purify the mind and soul through catharsis. He argues that

it is *natural* ... to be affected at such spectacles with melancholy sentiments ... because in those natural feelings we learn great lessons; because in events like these our passions instruct our reason ... We are alarmed into reflexion; our minds ... are purified by terror and pity; our weak unthinking pride is humbled[.] (175)

For Burke, this political sentiment begins in the home, where one first learns love, dignity, and submission. He argues: "to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed toward a love to our country and to mankind" (*Reflections* 135). Although Burke does not explicitly define "the little platoon" as the family in this instance, he does make the connection further on when he insists that "We begin our public affections in our families" (*Reflections* 315), and he speaks of the family and neighborhood attachments as "a sort of elemental training"

to proper political sentiment (*Reflections* 315). It is on this interconnection of family and politics that Marina relies to criticize the masculine political governance in Venice.⁴²

However, unlike in *Marino Faliero*, *The Two Foscari* levels criticism directly at the Doge himself. Marina particularly denounces the Doge's lack of compassion for his tortured and dying son. In Act II, for example, she tells the Doge that "You have seen your son's blood flow, and your flesh shook not" (129). And when the Doge responds that he pities Marina for her grief, she again doubts the Doge's ability to feel, saying "pity! – 'tis a word | Strange to thy heart" (II.i.135-36). She adds, moreover, that his pity is "not upon thy brow, | Nor in thine eyes, nor in thine acts, – where then | Should I behold this sympathy?" (II.i.139-41). In *Closet Performances*, Michael Simpson argues that Marina's denouncement of the Doge carries political implications. He reasons that Marina critiques the Doge's actions as head executor of an oppressive State, citing as an example her statement that the Doge violates the people's trust – that "The prince who | Neglects or violates his trust is more | A brigand than the robber-chief" (II.i.389-91). And he projects Marina's political discourse onto Byron, arguing that Byron revives the radical political discourse of the 1790s through Marina to rehabilitate the democratic and leveling agenda of that decade against England (3). Simpson's argument, however, ignores the context of Marina's words. She certainly appropriates political rhetoric in that she criticizes public figures, but her criticism stems not from a political but from a personal grievance. Marina particularly criticizes the Doge because she believes he disrespects her husband. Thus, Marina criticizes the Doge for having lost his natural ability to feel sympathy, and she suggests that it would not be unmanly to show emotion "In circumstances which would call forth tears | Of blood from Spartans!" (II.i.73-74).

⁴² In "Tragicomedy, Bisexuality, and Byronism," Barbara Judson makes an appealing argument about "the family platoon," asserting that Byron "derides" Burke's sublimation of libido into citizenship in *Sardanapalus* (257). Nevertheless, Marina clearly seems to rely on the values of sentiment and family in this drama.

Marina's criticism relies on the Doge's extreme embodiment of the separate spheres ideology. As a man in a public position, the Doge has distanced himself so far away from the private, the feminine, and the sentimental that he can no longer feel sympathy even for his own family. Marina makes this point explicitly, telling the Doge that he is "more a Doge than a father" (II.i.414). And she is not off the mark. The Doge himself admits "I cannot weep" (II.i.78), and, at another point, he tells Jacopo to do the same, saying to him, "Boy! no tears" (III.i.415). The Doge's suppression of emotion understandably displeases Marina, who instead believes that the Doge should "fling [him]self before him, and implore | His grace for your enormous guilt" (II.i. 171-72). Thus, while the Doge measures himself by his military and political achievements, reminding a senator that Venice has added Bescia, Ravenna, Crema, and Bergamo to its territorial control under his command (II.i.17-23), Marina only speaks of his ability to sympathize with the victim and the oppressed.

Marina also denounces the Doge's chivalric view of Venice. As Caroline Franklin observes, the Doge speaks of his public duties in matrimonial terms (198). He literally wears a ducal ring on his finger, symbolizing the oath of office that will last until he dies, and he announces that "The Adriatic 's free to wed another" when he finally takes it off (V.i.192). His use of feminine pronouns for the city, moreover, continually reaffirms the male-female bond between him and Venice, and he sees his relationship with her as the providing and enabling half of the pair, explaining that he "would have given ... all | ... to fulfill her wishes, | ... or whatsoever worse | She might decree" (II.i.421-27). However, he sets up himself for criticism by relying on this notion of chivalry to describe his duty to the State. Although it is true that Burke was one of the last proponents of chivalry in England, famously lamenting that "the age of chivalry is gone" and that people no longer revere political institutions (*Reflections* 170), Marina

argues that, in following the laws of Venice, the Doge violates the higher laws of family and nature upon which the code of chivalry is based. In fact, she explicitly states that Venice's laws "stifle Nature's!" (II.i.420) and that obeying them "seems the worst barbarity" rather than an act of patriotism (II.i.427-8). Instead, she suggests a less politicized notion of chivalry, recommending that the Doge be stern against the inhuman demands of the State and that he express compassion for those she considers truly oppressed, specifically for Jacopo.

But Marina is not the only Whig in the family. The Doge betrays a respect for tradition and for the State's authority that surpasses even Burke himself. As he tells Loredano in Act II, he has "observed with veneration, like | A priest's[,] ... The health, the pride, and welfare of the state" (II.i.255-59). Likewise, he tells Marina that he "never | Would change ... the charter | Left by our fathers" (II.i.397-99). Such veneration certainly embodies a desire "to secure the religion, laws, and liberties, that had been long possessed," as Edmund Burke argues one should do when he commemorates William and Mary for their actions during the Glorious Revolution (*Reflections* 118-19). However, the Doge's obedience of Venetian law contrasts with that of William and Mary's in that his obedience violates his responsibility to family, State, and humanity. As Marina comments, his obedience to "such laws ... make old Draco's | A code of mercy by comparison" (II.i.393-94). In fact, his speedy and unquestioning obedience to the will of the oppressive Ten hastens and intensifies Jacopo's suffering. If it were not for the Doge's insistence that, for example, he sign the Senate's report "Now" at the very beginning of Act II, Jacopo may not have been exiled so immediately. And, immediately after, he tells a senator that he is willing to meet the council "now, even at this moment" for fear of "caus[ing] | The loss of an hour's time unto the state" (II.i.37, 40-41), even though the senator informs him that the council "would accord some time for [his] repose" (II.i.39). Through such haste, the Doge

betrays a willingness to perform the duties of State that seems more cruel than professional. This is nowhere more true than in Act IV where, immediately after Jacopo dies, he tells Loredano and Barbarigo “Sirs, I am ready” (IV.i.228) and “I can | Only repeat – I am ready” (IV.i.229-30), even though Barbarigo assures him that “We will not interrupt | A parent’s sorrows” (IV.i.226-27), “No – not now” (IV.i.228), and “It shall not be | Just now” (IV.i.230-31). The Doge’s unhesitating willingness to continue State duties under such circumstances seems unconscionable, and it affirms Marina’s criticism of him. Not only does he act against natural human impulses by utterly suppressing any personal feeling, but he also acts against the standard Whig political theory of checks and balances.⁴³ As executor of the State, he has thrown away his veto option and reduced his office to that of a mechanical signature grantor, enslaving himself to the will of the Ten.

To plead the Doge’s defense, however, he so willingly performs his duties of State because he feels there is more at stake than the exile of Jacopo. The Doge sees the exile as a relief for Jacopo (as does Marina), not understanding his extreme love of Venice. Moreover, in so willingly returning to his duties, the Doge means to preserve his family’s good name and his own dukedom by overseeing that the truth of Jacopo’s innocence bears out and that Loredano’s portrayal of him as an assassin (of Loredano’s father and uncle) does not prevail in the Senate. He means to accomplish this through a stoical performance during senatorial meetings. Nevertheless, such self-interestedness undermines the Doge’s effort because it is paradoxically through his involvement in these affairs that the family tragedy is hastened. His desire to prevent

⁴³ For an example of Burke’s idea of checks and balances, see his statement in the *Reflections* that the Senate “holds a sort of middle place between the supreme power exercised by the people ... and the mere executive” (316). This play demonstrates that the balance of power is skewed; the power of the Senate is nearly supreme, while that of the people and the doge is completely subservient.

the exposure of his family's secrets implicates him even more fully into the mysterious, secretive, and oppressive tyranny of Venice that Marina has all along been criticizing.

For all her compassion, however, Marina also criticizes her imprisoned husband, Jacopo. Like the Doge, he too harbors a naïve chivalric view of Venice that compromises his safety and that of his family.⁴⁴ But while the Doge portrays his relationship to Venice in matrimonial terms, Jacopo portrays his in maternal ones. While in prison, for example, he speaks of the city's life-sustaining fresh air as if from a nurturing mother, explaining that the "very winds feel native to my veins, | And cool them into calmness!" (I.i.126-27) and that "there was something | In my native air that buoy'd my spirits up" (III.i.128-29). And when this air is denied to him through exile, Jacopo literally feels faint and dies. Far from tragedy, though, Jacopo's death fulfills his wish for "a Venetian grave" in which the child is reunited with the mother, explaining that "my native earth | Will take me as a mother to her arms" (I.i.142-43). Shortly before he dies, moreover, he calls on the sea, wind, and saints of Venice to create such a storm that will "dash me back on my own shore | ... Where I may mingle with the sands which skirt | The land I love" (IV.i.126-34). But Marina criticizes Jacopo's love of Venice by suggesting that his idealism blinds him to the harsh reality everywhere apparent. In the Act III dungeon scene, she specifically tells him that his "love ... | For an ungrateful and tyrannic soil | Is passion, and not patriotism" (III.i.141-43). Further on, she challenges his masculinity and suggests he needs "to be less a child" (III.i.199) and more of a responsible husband and father who overcomes naïve notions of his childhood city.

Throughout the dungeon scene, Marina tries, unsuccessfully, to convince Jacopo that Venice "is not | A paradise" (III.i.147-48). She points to his own circumstance as evidence of

⁴⁴ I fully agree with Richard Lansdown's judgment that Jacopo displays an inability to "rescind the values by which he lives, even though those values are destroying him" (197-98).

oppression and encourages Jacopo to see his latest exile as an act of “mercy” (III.i.206) which would give them a new opportunity for happiness and romance elsewhere. She speaks specifically of the founding of Venice as an example of what is possible, reminding Jacopo that the city’s original inhabitants, wretched Roman exiles, carried their memories of Rome until they “Created by degrees an ocean-Rome” in Venice (III.i.148-56). Implicit in the background of this scene is a long tradition of exodus stories, including the expulsion from Eden in Genesis and *Paradise Lost* (Byron’s *Cain* had not yet been written), the Biblical exodus to the promise land, the fall of Troy in Homer’s epics, and the founding of Rome in Virgil’s *Aeneid*. Marina relies on this literary tradition and makes a final effort to convince Jacopo that they should leave together to make a “new home and fresh state” (III.i.165) through a *Prisoner of Chillon*-like statement that “The mind should make its own” liberty (III.i.84). But Jacopo remains unconvinced. He cites an inability to live without Venetian friends as his excuse, and he disagrees with Marina’s faith in the power of the mind to overcome the harsh conditions of exile.

The Performance of Marina

Marina certainly holds “the privileged discourse of the play” (Franklin 193). She sees through the Doge’s and Jacopo’s rhetoric of chivalry, she understands Loredano’s grip on the Senate and the Doge’s willing submission to him, she espouses the Whig political ideals which Byron always valued, and she speaks for the acceptance of both masculine and feminine attributes. Despite all of these traits, however, Marina remains powerless. Her promotion of a political system based on humanitarian values is not accepted by any character, and, since she has no political status, her words count for nothing in the political realm. Romanticists have done well to recognize this lack of influence. Caroline Franklin admits that “Though she is the

most vocal and eloquent character in the play, Marina is also the most obviously disregarded” (193). Likewise, Malcolm Kelsall recognizes that Marina “represents no specific force within the orders of the State. It is only a voice, its helplessness emphasized by her sex” (*Byron’s Politics* 115). Meanwhile, Jerome McGann asserts that Marina’s “passion is ... excessive and useless” (*Fiery Dust* 225). Such scholarship essentially asserts what speech act theorists such as J. L. Austin and Pierre Bourdieu have argued for a long time – namely, that only a person in position of authority and credibility can make things happen through the power of speech.

But while the position of Marina is clear in this literary scholarship, no one has commented on her character as performed on the nineteenth-century London stage in any serious analytical way. Unfortunately, *The Two Foscari* was produced only one season in the London theaters during the nineteenth century, though it was also produced in Manchester by Charles Calvert in 1865 and at least three times in the United States by three different companies (Howell 138; Cochran, *Byron at the Theatre* 205). However, not much is known about any of these performances. The London production was staged at Covent Garden⁴⁵ by William Charles Macready, with Helen Faucit as Marina, on April 7, 18, and 25, 1838 and once again on May 27, 1839. Of opening night Macready’s diary simply states that he “Acted Foscari very well” and that Charles Dickens, Robert Browning, and others visited him in his room after the performance (I.450). Meanwhile, much of the performance review from *The Times* only focuses on the character of the Doge rather than on Macready’s acting, though it found no fault with any of the actors. It stated that Marina’s role, “the most energetic part in the whole, was clever, and showed a careful attention to the points which might be made” (“Covent Garden” 5). The

⁴⁵ Besides the lack of information about the play’s production history, there is also a considerable amount of misinformation. For example, E. H. Coleridge’s edition of Byron’s works and Samuel Chew’s 1965 *Byron in England* mistakenly place the performance at Drury Lane rather than at Covent Garden. Meanwhile, Carol Jones Carlisle’s biography of Helen Faucit mistakenly states that Faucit performed Marina in a production of *Marino Faliero* – rather than *The Two Foscari* – during the 1838-39 season.

performance itself ended “amidst loud approbation” from the audience, but *The Times* admitted that “the good fortune of the piece is but transient” (5). Without much more specific information, theater historians are left to speculate what the production must have been like given what is known about the 1838-39 season at Covent Garden and Macready’s management, acting style, and relationship with Helen Faucit.

Faucit’s early acting career was dominated by performances of Shakespeare roles she called “young tragic heroines” (qtd. in Martin, *Helena Faucit* 42), with Juliet as her most celebrated performance. Trained by a family of actors and mentored by Charles Kemble, Faucit was groomed to be the next Sarah Siddons. However, Faucit’s acting brought a sense of meekness, tenderness, and femininity to the stage that drastically contrasted with the dominating acting styles of the elder actress. Siddons was revered for a powerful acting style that created a wave of the “Siddons’s fever” in London, which “was declared an official malady ... because [of] ‘faintings’ and ‘hysterics’” at her performances (Carlson 172), a style which Julie Carlson argues “disrupt[ed] the gender identifications that her roles meant to solidify” and “feminize[d her] audiences” by bringing them to tears (171-72). Nevertheless, Faucit’s ability to portray a submissive persona eventually earned the esteem of Macready, who quickly learned that he could profit from her meekness and increase his own star power by producing plays with strong male leads and weak female supporting roles. Her shy, quiet portrayal of “young tragic heroines,” in fact, greatly shaped Macready’s plans to revive Shakespeare, particularly the original tragic ending of *King Lear*.

Macready also dominated Faucit off-stage as well. She personally feared Macready’s “freezing and proud coldness” (qtd. in Carlisle 46), and she conceded her own professional interests as an artist to advance Macready’s. In 1837, for example, she accepted a fifty percent

pay cut as a way of reducing Macready's operating expenses for Covent Garden (Carlisle 53), and she frequently accepted roles that displeased her family. The demanding schedule, moreover, jeopardized Faucit's already weak health; she rehearsed for more days and for longer hours than during the previous season and, through what Macready called "drilling," she gave Macready control of all elements of staging, character interpretation, and vocal delivery (Carlisle 57).⁴⁶ And, unlike Charles Kemble's supportive coaching, Macready's comments were very critical and harsh; as Faucit comments, he was "merciless to the feelings ... a surgeon, who 'cuts beyond the wound to make the cure more certain'" (qtd. in Carlisle 57-58).

However, despite Faucit's typecasting into young tragic Shakespeare heroines, many of her roles actually undermined Macready's star acting, even with his conscious attempt for the opposite. For example, when she performed Desdemona in *Othello*, her strong stage presence "restored the balance of the play by giving her character its due weight in the action" (Martin, *Shakespeare's* 50). In fact, Macready, her *Othello*, commented that she made herself "so difficult to kill" (Martin, *Shakespeare's* 50) because Faucit fought "in that last scene as if it were a very struggle for [her] own life" (Martin, *Shakespeare's* 50). Such productions paradoxically advanced Faucit's career more than Macready's. As with Desdemona, Faucit also gave memorable performances in her demanding portrayals of Constance⁴⁷ in Shakespeare's *Sir John* and of Pauline in Bulwer Lytton's *The Lady of Lyons*, a play specifically written for Macready. But, as Carlisle argues, Lytton had "clearly underrated the theatrical potentialities of his heroine.

⁴⁶ Under the spirit of giving the production unity, Macready at one point commented that he "thought for ... every character and supernumerary figure, and taught them to act as I would have done had I been cast in their places" (qtd. in Downer 238).

⁴⁷ Faucit's performance of Constance has become a particular favorite talking-point with her biographers; Sir Martin and Carol Jones Carlisle mark her success in *King John* as one of the most important turning points in her career. Contemporary reviewers expected Faucit to fail in such a demanding role – one even "laughed at the idea of a raw girl ... attempting such a character" (Carlisle 48) – but she succeeded. The reviewer comments that Faucit "mastered the high feeling of the character," and he considered her performance "one of Miss Faucit's greatest triumphs" (qtd. in Martin, *Helena* 41).

... The arrogant beauty of Lyons ... was very different from Helen's soft-spoken" Shakespeare heroines (61). Faucit's acting made the production an instant success; it ran for thirty one nights during the season, and Pauline became one of Faucit's most celebrated roles.

Eventually, the relationship turned to one of envy and resentment. Even as early as May 18, 1837 – one year before the production of *The Two Foscari* – Macready refused to appear alongside Faucit at the end of the show even though the production was put on for her benefit. As he explains in his *Diaries*, he “acted in a most discreditable manner, undigested, unstudied” (I. 394), and he accuses the audience of “not [knowing] what they did” when “they called for me with Miss Faucit” (I. 394). (It is appealing to believe that Macready acted so poorly out of an unconscious desire to sabotage Faucit's benefit night.) Years after the production of *The Two Foscari*, Macready even resorted to the cheap stage antics of spreading his cape to block the audience's view of Faucit during their famous 1844-45 acting tour in Paris (Carlisle 138). But this behavior did not go unnoticed. Faucit herself recognized that Macready “‘desire[d] to keep everything and everybody down' accept himself” (Carlisle 138), and Paris audiences developed a clique against Macready, hissing during his death scene in *Hamlet* (Carlisle 138) and leaving after Faucit's last on-stage appearance in *Othello* (Carlisle 133).

Although this brief history tells more about the temperament of two famous nineteenth-century actors than it does about *The Two Foscari*, the information can nevertheless help explain what Macready must have thought when he adapted the script for performance. As with many of Faucit's roles, the dominating role of Marina was heavily curtailed by Macready, who again attempted to use the character of the Doge as a star vehicle. In fact, he used the opening night of April 7, 1838 as a benefit performance for himself, banking on the Doge's familial tragedy as his *forte* in acting. Macready did not cut as much of *Foscari* as he did of *Faliero – Fascari* is

already about half as short as *Faliero* – but more than a third of what he did cut belonged to Marina (Howell 128). He particularly cut Marina’s most critical speeches which define her character as the moral authority of the drama. Specifically, Macready cut much of Marina’s criticism of the Doge, minimizing the damage to his own character, and he cut Marina’s quarrels with other senators – her quarrel with Loredano and her Act V denouncement of the State funeral – minimizing her combative nature and her criticism of the patriarchal Venetian government (Howell 133). In short, Macready attempted as much as possible to transform Faucit’s *Lady of Lyons*-like acting to that of another Shakespeare heroine.

Additionally, this analysis provides a useful point of reflection on recent studies of nineteenth-century theater. Although I agree with Julie Carlson’s argument that Romantic texts “dramatize contemporary reformulations of action, sovereignty, and the proper relation between the sexes” (2), the theatrical legacy of *The Two Foscari* helps refine this broad argument. Specifically, Romanticists need to distinguish between the subversive potential of the dramatic text and the conformist nature of the theatrical production. Byron composed *The Two Foscari* in 1821 amid strong support for England’s abandoned Queen Caroline, but Romanticists should not automatically assume that Byron promoted revolution in England simply because he sympathized for Queen Caroline – whose position would have reminded Byron of his own treatment during the separation scandal. Thus, I disagree with Michael Simpson’s argument that Byron promotes radicalism and revolution in this drama by writing amidst the Caroline affair and England’s on-going repression of dissent. Like *Marino Faliero*, *The Two Foscari* has never been used as a rallying cry for political reform. As the previous chapter showed, in fact, Byron critiqued such a revolutionary spirit, arguing that radicalism only advances a cycle of oppression in which roles of the victim and the persecutor become reversed. If anything, *The Two Foscari*

demonstrates a concern for the political status of women in a republic. If the play were to send out a rallying cry for revolution and reform, it would do so not by rehabilitating the radical discourse of the 1790s – as Michael Simpson has suggested – but by engaging with the more recent political fervor caused by the Queen Caroline affair, which very nearly did bring Britain to the brink of revolution. But even if the text does promote such a subversive political agenda, theatrical conventions and the Licensing Act prohibited such material from being staged. Consequently, Macready's cuts to Marina's lines demonstrate not only the inherent sexism of the nineteenth-century theater – and thus provide a check to the recent scholarship of Betsy Bolton and others that see Romantic drama as a female-driven literary institution – but they also demonstrate the complicity of such Romantic drama to advance a non-political or conservative agenda on the Victorian stage.

CHAPTER 5

PARODY AND CRITIQUE IN *SARDANAPALUS*

In *Byron: A Poet Before his Public*, Philip Martin argues that Byron's historical dramas display "a new programme" of writing that "must be considered as the only fully serious works that Byron wrote that involved him in a reassessment of his poetic abilities and ambitions in which Shelley played no part" (135). Byron certainly reassessed his writing and his commitment to political activism through his dramas – as Chapter 3 demonstrated, Byron examined the value of radicalism and the power of speech in *Marino Faliero*. But his purposes for doing so were not entirely independent of Shelley's influence. Both Byron and Shelley were busily writing poetry and drama between 1818 and 1822, and they were all the while inspiring, reading, and responding to each other's work, as the work of Charles Robinson, William Brewer, and others has shown.⁴⁸ Byron, for example, showed a manuscript copy of Coleridge's *Christabel* to Shelley, while Shelley famously shaped the writing of *Childe Harold* III by helping Byron understand Wordsworth. Moreover, Shelley may have borrowed *Childe Harold*'s Spenserian stanza for *The Revolt of Islam*, *Don Juan*'s *ottava rima* for *The Witch of Atlas*, and Byron's conversational style for *Julian and Maddalo*. Meanwhile, Shelley's translation of Goethe's *Faust* influenced Byron's *Deformed Transformed* and some, including Shelley himself, have suggested that the idea for *Don Juan* initially belonged to Shelley's influence.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ See also John Buxton's *Byron and Shelley*, Jane Blumberg's *Byron and the Shelleys*, and Peter Cochran's *Romanticism on the Net* article "Byron and Shelley."

⁴⁹ According to Trelawny, Shelley claimed that he "urged Byron to come out of the dismal 'wood of error' into the sun, to write something cheerful. 'Don Juan' is the result" (118).

While Byron's and Shelley's influences on each other's poetry are generally well known, few studies have accounted for how Byron was influenced by and responded to Shelley in *Sardanapalus*. Most studies have instead seen the drama as a primarily self-expressive and biographical work independent of Shelley's influence. For example, Samuel Chew states that "With the exception of *Manfred* the biographical element enters more largely into *Sardanapalus* than into any of the dramas" (*Dramas* 106), and he calls the drama "almost an *apologia pro sua vita*" (106). Martyn Corbett has similarly called the Assyrian king "another of Byron's self-projections, ... a projection of those amiable qualities of his own personality" (*Byron* 115). Others, meanwhile, have essentially treated *Sardanapalus* as a stand-in for Byron. For example, although Jerome McGann warns against the strict autobiographical reading of "Byron = *Sardanapalus*, Zarina = Annabella [Lady Byron], and Myrrha = Teresa" in "Hero with a Thousand Faces" (*Byron and Romanticism* 142), his theory of masquerade nevertheless implies that one needs to understand the biography of Byron to understand the drama. He thus argues that "Byron puts on the mask of *Sardanapalus* in order to tell certain truths about the life he has known and lived" (*Byron and Romanticism* 148).⁵⁰ Richard Lansdown similarly warns against a biographical reading of *Sardanapalus* (150-51); nevertheless, he too argues that "it is in works like *Sardanapalus* that clear distinctions between 'poetry' and 'life' begin to crumble" (142). This biographical focus has even led some Romanticists to see the drama, incorrectly, as another self-expressive poem. Leslie Marchand, for example, argues that "in *Sardanapalus* Byron ... abandoned the ambition to write an objective historical tragedy" by "abandon[ing] both the notion that he was writing a 'regular' tragedy ... and the conception of historical accuracy"

⁵⁰ This biographical approach is so central to McGann that he repeats the idea of masquerade within a few pages: "Byron puts on a mask and is able to tell the truth about himself" (*Byron and Romanticism* 146).

(*Byron's Poetry* 102-105). Instead, Marchand argues, Byron wrote “a self-revelatory romantic poem” in “the familiar vein of the poetry which is ‘the lava of the imagination’” (105).

Ironically, perhaps because of the biographical interest, the drama has long been considered one of Byron's most important and best works. It has been called “the greatest” of Byron's regular tragedies in terms of its construction as a drama (Chew, *Dramas* 105), “the most rigorously constructed of Byron's three historical plays” in its adherence to the unity of place (Lansdown 152), “the best constructed, most moving of Byron's dramas” (Taborski 183), “the high point of Byron's attempts at classical form” (Joseph 111), and “unquestionably Byron's finest tragedy and a dramatic masterpiece” (Corbett, *Byron* 114). The play also had a very long run on the nineteenth-century stage. It was staged over a hundred times by Macready and Charles Kean in London and over two thousand times by Charles Calvert in London, the provinces, and New York (Taborski 153-54). Of Byron's works, only heavily adapted productions of *Manfred* and *Werner* come close to the 186 nights *Sardanapalus* was produced in London.

Although the biographical interest has dominated scholarship on the drama, William Brewer's study of *Sardanapalus* in *The Shelley-Byron Conversation* does well to examine Shelley's influence. He is right to notice that “Sardanapalus seems in some ways much more Shelleyan than Byronic” in that he is “a meliorist and [an] optimist[,] ... desire[s] to create a secluded paradise[, and] ... wants to be man's benefactor, to create a golden age for mankind” (80). Shelleyan elements have also been seen in the character of Sardanapalus by Corbett and McGann in that they speak of him as a tragic visionary character who promotes peace and

humanity.⁵¹ But all of these studies fail to separate the tragic Assyrian king from Byron, the master of Romantic irony.

I argue that in *Sardanapalus* Byron responds to Shelley's idealism with irony and criticism to demonstrate that Shelley's claims of humanitarian pacifism, in works such as *The Revolt of Islam* and *The Cenci*, are insufficient for the real world. Byron particularly shows the impossibility of reforming society through peaceful means. The king's Shelleyan adherence to a pacifist ideology, through a form of *laissez-faire* governance, leaves his subjects neglected and prone to foreign attack. Consequently, as in *Marino Faliero*, the king's (in)action results in the failure of any reform and in the destruction of thousands of years of cultural heritage. In order to rule peacefully, the drama demonstrates, Sardanapalus would first need a populace that understands the value of peace. Without this understanding, peaceful governance is (mis)interpreted as weakness and neglect.

Shelley and *Sardanapalus*

Nineteenth-century writers frequently commented on the 'masculine' nature of Byron's writing. Algernon Swinburne, for example, famously wrote of Byron's "strength" in the preface to his 1866 collection of Byron's works, an attribute Matthew Arnold agreed with in his own 1881 collection of Byron's poetry. Likewise, William Hazlitt stated in *Table Talk* that "Lord Byron is a pampered and aristocratic writer, but he is not effeminate," in contrast to Keats whose poetry he believed displays "a deficiency in masculine energy of style" (254). This interest in Byron's strength, however, has given way recently to an interest in Byron's sexuality.

⁵¹ In "Byron, Teresa, and *Sardanapalus*," McGann links the defeat of Sardanapalus with "the permanent loss of the earthly paradise" (14). Corbett similarly sees "the true value of Sardanapalus's rule [as] ... a brief heart-easing glimpse of a Paradise which could have been" (*Byron* 110-11), and he points out John P. Farrell's interpretation of Sardanapalus as "a humanistic Messiah" who promotes a "utopian majesty" (109).

Consequently, Romanticists have equated the effeminate Sardanapalus with the always sexually-transgressive Lord Byron. As noted above, Jerome McGann, Leslie Marchand, and others have seen the Assyrian king as another of Byron's self-projections. Samuel Chew has perhaps stated the connection between Byron and Sardanapalus the most explicitly, arguing that Sardanapalus is "the idealization of Byron's conception of his own character" (*Dramas* 106) and that "*Sardanapalus* is an autobiographic revelation" (113). Elsewhere, in the work of Susan Wolfson, Marilyn Butler, Daniela Garofalo, and Barbara Judson, the king has been said to embody Byron's critique of politics and of nineteenth-century social ideology.⁵² But such scholarship perpetuates the biographical reading of the drama by associating Sardanapalus's effeminate performance with Byron's sexuality and liberalism. However, despite this strong association of Sardanapalus with Byron, the king also shares many ideological attributes with Percy Shelley, particularly Shelley's belief in non-violence and his vision of an ideal society.

Shelley's promotion of non-violence and his vision of a harmonious state are displayed throughout his major work. Even in his early "An Address to the Irish People," Shelley tells the Irish to "resist oppression, not by force of arms, but by power of mind and reliance on truth and justice" (*Shelley's Prose* 47).⁵³ His vision of harmony can also be seen in *Queen Mab* and

⁵² On the political side, Marilyn Butler argues in "John Bull's Other Kingdom" that *Sardanapalus* critiques England's desire for empire; in "Political Seductions," Daniela Garofalo argues that Byron critiques the public images of Kings George III and George IV; and in "Tragicomedy, Bisexuality, and Byronism," Barbara Judson argues that Byron evaluates the legitimacy of verse tragedy as a mode of self- and national-presentation. On the side of cultural criticism, Susan Wolfson's important "A Problem Few Dare Imitate" demonstrates that Byron does not go far enough in the drama to destabilize normative definitions of "masculine" and "feminine" because Sardanapalus's effeminacy "cannot function as a capable principle of reform" (877), while Daniela Garofalo similarly faults the king's effeminate performance, arguing that "the attempt to bankrupt the traditional notion of martial virility by feminizing it does not have the power of reifying a new political position of a new virility" (58).

⁵³ Shelley continually repeats his recommendation that the Irish renounce violence throughout the "Address," telling his readers to "depend not upon force of arms or violence" (*Shelley's Prose* 48), "Have nothing to do with force or violence" (48), "disclaim all manner of alliance with violence" (49), and "In no case employ violence" (57). And he reminds them that he "cannot too often or too vividly endeavor to impress upon your minds that [violent] methods will produce nothing but wretchedness and slavery ... and deliver you over to a tyranny" (57). Instead of adopting a violent methodology, Shelley recommends relying on temperance, charity, education and critical thinking, mildness, sobriety, and virtue. But while he is clear that force and violence will compromise the goal of

Prometheus Unbound, works which Byron highly admired and knew well by the time he began *Sardanapalus*. In *Queen Mab*, the Fairy describes the future as a “paradise of peace” (VIII.238) and as a “haven of perpetual peace” (IX.20) “Where care and sorrow, impotence and crime, | Langour, disease, and ignorance dare not come” (IX.9-10). It is a future that is good to nature as well; the earth will be “strengthened in all excellence, and grow | Fairer and nobler with each passing year” (IX.134-37). *Prometheus Unbound* promotes a similar vision of peace and harmony. In Act III, the Spirit of the Earth describes how “Those ugly human shapes and visages” change into “mild and lovely forms” (III.iv.64-71), “thrones [become] kingless” (III.iv.131), and “hate, disdain or fear, | Self-love or self-contempt on human brows | [are] No more inscribed” (III.iv.133-35) after Prometheus’s benign act.

Parallels to these works can be seen in Sardanapalus’s desire to establish his own “era of sweet peace” and “golden reign.” As he explains to Myrrha in Act IV, he wanted to establish

An era of sweet peace ’midst bloody annals,
A green spot amidst desert centuries,
On which the future would turn back and smile,
And cultivate, or sigh when it could not
Recal[l] Sardanapalus’ golden reign. (IV.513-17)

Like Shelley’s characters, Sardanapalus speaks of a political peace through the imagery of a garden. The “era of sweet peace” for him is not only the absence of war but something organic, something which can grow and influence future generations.

But Sardanapalus attempts to establish such a society by mistakenly believing that a *laissez-faire* form of governance will establish peace. Thus, despite Sardanapalus’s use of organic

Irish emancipation (46, 52), he perhaps overstates the possibilities of what a non-violent methodology can do, promising that “No lover would then be false to his mistress[;] no mistress could desert her lover” and that “Vice and misery, pomp and poverty, power and obedience would then be banished altogether” (52).

imagery, he acts as if goodness will prevail simply because he does not oppress his people. Within the same speech in Act IV, he defines his governance as an absence of oppression, calling it “mine inoffensive rule” (IV.512). Throughout the early parts of the drama, moreover, he explains that the absence of government is a good thing and that his life’s work is to remove the oppression of government from people’s daily lives. In Act I, scene ii, for example, he tells Salemenes that it is “enough | For me, if I can make my subjects feel | The weight of human misery less” (I.ii.262-64) and that he wants to “lessen, | By mild reciprocal alleviation, | The fatal penalties imposed on life” (I.ii.352-54). As Salemenes and Myrrha rightly respond, however, Sardanapalus actually neglects his people by refusing to take any action whatsoever. For all his free market ideology, Sardanapalus simply abandons his people to a barbaric survival of the fittest, and his harmonious ideal too frequently comes across as a hedonistic philosophy of love, pleasure, and enjoyment for those who have the means and security, with the drinking party at the beginning of Act III as the pinnacle of “as it should be” (III.1).

Sardanapalus’s do-nothing governance may be Byron’s exaggerated imitation or even parody of what he took to be Shelley’s policy of non-violence. Strictly speaking, Shelley’s promotion of non-violence is not the same as pacifism. While pacifism is defined as an avoidance of all conflict, non-violence is a general term for conflict resolution through unarmed confrontation, which may include passive resistance, non-cooperation, and civil disobedience (Young 15). Shelley’s discourse of non-violence opposes armed resistance, but it does not oppose confrontation or conflict; sometimes, in fact, it incites violence so that it can speak of unity and harmony afterwards. This is especially the case in *The Mask of Anarchy* where the speaker essentially wants to incite oppressors to “Slash, and stab, and maim, and hew” (342) non-violent demonstrators so that they will criminalize themselves in front of a morally

authoritative audience. The poem thus suggests that violence is necessary for “the blood ... [to] speak” (350) and “steam up like inspiration” (361) so that it will “shame” the tyrants (348) and “become | ... oppression’s thundered doom” (363-64).

Even in the epic *The Revolt of Islam*, where Shelley promotes non-violence as a tactical method for confronting and defeating much larger militant forces, Laon’s language frequently relies on battle metaphors and on the imagery of violence. In Canto II, for example, Laon states that he will “arise and waken | The multitude, and like a sulphurous hill ... it shall burst, and fill | The world with cleansing fire” (II.24). Such language demonstrates that Shelley could not separate Laon’s non-violent tactics from a discourse of militant heroism (Tetreault 114). Consequently, by standing up against oppressive forces, Laon’s force of words unintentionally incites his troops to violence and retribution and, at one point, to a widespread and meaningless self-sacrifice. At other times, he simply takes advantage of his leadership and (mis)uses speech to place himself in a position of personal aggrandizement.⁵⁴ Like conspirators in *Marino Faliero*, Laon at times seems more interested in fame and power than in establishing a harmonious state.

The paradox of using violence to promote harmony is, however, avoided in *Prometheus Unbound* and in the Preface to *The Cenci*. These dramas were not only written simultaneously, but they also function as a pair which displays the benefits and consequences of non-violence. The difference between these and other texts is that they present a different Romantic hero than the man of action seen in *The Revolt* and in Byron’s verse tales. Shelley’s heroes are not like Byron’s Giaour or his Conrad; rather, they have reached a higher understanding because of their suffering and are willing to become martyrs for a cause. Thus, Prometheus promotes peace with

⁵⁴ In Canto V, for example, Laon is more pleased about the treatment he is given as a hero than about the establishment of peace in the Golden City; he takes particular pride that “all in one loud symphony | My name with liberty commingling lifted, ... and fair eyes ... round me shone” (V.18).

Jupiter because he has realized that hate and revenge only bring more self-punishment. Consequently, rather than trying to defeat his enemy through a contest of wills, Prometheus now projects pity and explains that he “hate[s] no more” and “would recall” his curse (I.56-59) because, he later explains, “I wish no living thing to suffer pain” (I.305).⁵⁵ Demogorgon’s final speech also promotes a similar non-violent methodology for reform, stating that “Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom and Endurance, – | ... are the seals ... | Which bars [sic] the pit over Destruction’s strength” (IV.562-64), and he finishes with a memorable list of infinitives which promote peace and forgiveness even if it involves opposition: “To suffer,” “To forgive wrongs,” “To defy Power,” “To love, and bear,” and “to hope, till Hope creates | ... the thing it contemplates” (IV.570-74). Prometheus’s new-found love for Jupiter is cause for celebration as is reflected in the drama’s incorporation of operatic conventions (Tetreault 169-96), but, according to Shelley’s Preface to *The Cenci*, *The Cenci* is a tragedy precisely because Beatrice fails to see beyond her heroic pride and desire for revenge. Shelley reasons that, since “no person can be truly dishonored by the act of another[,] ... the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love. Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are pernicious mistakes” (142). Beatrice’s act of revenge makes her just as cold-hearted as the Count and displays that she is trapped in an ideology that blames her for her rape and offers no positive alternative between victim and oppressor.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ See Art Young’s useful reading of the non-violence in *Prometheus* in chapter five of *Shelley and Nonviolence*.

⁵⁶ For useful readings of *The Cenci*, see Marjean Purinton’s *Romantic Ideology Unmasked*, Stuart Curran’s *Shelley’s “Cenci,”* Brewer pp. 56-76, Tetreault pp. 128-42, and Young pp. 118-28.

Byron's Critical Response

Shelley's non-violent conflicts ultimately aim to bring about a change in the oppressor's consciousness. As *The Mask of Anarchy* displays, however, the change in consciousness is ironically accomplished by inciting tyrannical groups to use violence so they can shame themselves to guilt and surrender. Obviously, this method puts considerable faith on the ability of tyrants to feel shame, an assumption Byron did not accept; as he shows with Julia in Canto I of *Don Juan*, anyone could rationalize the justice of his or her own actions. Moreover, recent political history, such as the French Revolution and the campaigns of Napoleon, made Byron and Shelley concerned about the consequences of revolution; nevertheless, they both believed that some form of action was necessary. Shelley found his solution by promoting the idea of the harmonious state in which rebels and tyrants work together for the good of mankind. But Byron aimed at more immediate goals. Unlike Shelley, he doubted that men could keep a steady eye on the future harmonious state – as the Venetian dramas and *Don Juan* show, one power merely replaces another without advancing towards an ideal. Nevertheless, it was important for Byron to insist on the oppressed people's initial act of rebellion, not for the sake of disobedience, but because it constituted an act of self-definition.

Sardanapalus critiques Shelley's pacifism by presenting a world in which non-violence is an ineffective means of promoting peace and peace is compromised by opportunistic characters who use violence for personal aggrandizement. Indeed, one of the clearest ironies of the drama is that characters, even Sardanapalus, continually rely on violence and on the threat of violence to promote peace. In Act II, for example, Salemenes recommends that the king execute Arbaces and Beleses to quell the rebellion, while Sardanapalus himself threatens to "cleav[e his own men] in twain" for not refraining from brawling with the conspirators (II.179). Moreover,

Sardanapalus's hedonism depends on the ability of his army to provide security for the royal palace. Peter Manning may be right to suggest that *Sardanapalus* demonstrates an innate violent impulse in all humans (129). If this is so, Byron may be critiquing Shelley's idealism of peace by arguing that such idealism will always fail because it denies the existence of dangerous but innate human drives. To govern the kingdom by adhering to a philosophy of peace would thus confine humans to an unnatural behavior and create one more form of oppression.

In addition to these compromises to peace, Sardanapalus loses his visionary kingdom because he fails to take control of his message. Too many characters advance opposing interpretations of his governance, compromising his life's work. He fails, or does not even try, to convince Salemenes, Myrrha, and the rebels that his pacifism is not weakness, sloth, negligence, or even a sign of femininity.⁵⁷ Such criticism is introduced early into the play, and it threatens to dominate the reader's mindset as well. In Act I, Salemenes lists several vices that result from Sardanapalus's abhorrence of violence, including "The despotism of vice – | The weakness and the wickedness of luxury – | The negligence – the apathy – the evils | Of sensual sloth" (I.ii.67-70), which "produce ten thousand tyrants" and "Corrupt no less than they oppress" (I.ii.70, 75), and he disagrees that Sardanapalus's *laissez-faire* governance attributes to Assyria's peace and well-being. Likewise, Myrrha tries to explain the consequences of letting the populace believe there is no immediate danger. During times of peace, she claims, men give in to "their own passions" (I.ii.541) and war with their own brethren (I.ii.528). It is thus necessary, she concludes, to keep the populace "in awe and law, | Yet not oppress'd" (I.ii.538-39) through a "show of war" that convinces the populace that government protection is necessary (I.ii.532).⁵⁸

⁵⁷ I thus agree with Anne Barton who argues that Sardanapalus "will not provide [his people] with any myths of war and conquest to compensate for these long-standing injustices and make their lives seem worthwhile" (157).

⁵⁸ Martyn Corbett equates Myrrha's ideal of "awe and law," which she at one point calls "civic, popular love" (I.ii.537), with Byron's own desire for "the universal republic," and he sees, I believe incorrectly, Sardanapalus's

Much of this Act I criticism goes without rebuttal. Even Sardanapalus realizes that, ironically, the peace and freedom of speech he has given his people have led to a critique of the monarch. As he tells Salemenes in Act I, “The populace of all the nations seize | Each calumny they can to sink their sovereigns” (I.ii.331-32) because “Now they have peace and pastime, and the license | To revel and to rail” (I.ii.336-37). And during his own Act I soliloquy, he again accepts some of the blame for the people’s criticism and rebellion, explaining that “If then they hate me, ’tis because I hate not; | If they rebel, it is because I oppress not” (I.ii.412-13). Like Myrrha, moreover, who believes that the government must “ward off ... [people’s] own passions” (I.ii.542), Sardanapalus realizes that it may be necessary to enforce obedience and respect through violence by “turn[ing] these realms | To one wide desert chase of brutes” (I.ii.374-75) because the populace would rather “be ruled with scythes ... | And mow’d down like the grass” (I.ii.414-15). Afterwards, he again suggests that it may be necessary to use violence because otherwise “all we reap | Is rank abundance, and a rotten harvest | Of discontents infecting the fair soil” (I.ii.415-17). Through such criticism and through Sardanapalus’s admission, Byron effectively demonstrates that peace is neither long-lasting nor a viable form of governance.

Nevertheless, Sardanapalus continues to play the Shelleyan hero by promoting his vision of peace. He particularly deflects criticism and blames the people for their own unhappiness. First, Sardanapalus sets up himself as an irreproachable leader by explaining that he is “the lawful King, descended from | A race of Kings who knew no predecessors” (I.ii.203-04) and as a

inability “to comprehend, ... [and] to execute, Myrrha’s regime of ‘civic popular love’” as the tragedy of the drama because, like Beatrice Cenci, Sardanapalus cannot escape his society’s dichotomy of seeing the “government as presenting rigid alternatives of peace or war, pleasure or oppression, latitude or tyranny. He is incapable of the balance which is the cultural heritage of Ionian Myrrha” (*Byron* 93). Corbett’s reading of the drama, however, fails to credit Sardanapalus’s understanding of peace as an alternative vision of a government that does not need to rely on Salemenes’s army or on Myrrha’s theatricality. Sardanapalus presents an alternative to both characters; unfortunately, he is not able to control the terms of understanding that would allow him to convince Salemenes and Myrrha of his vision.

visionary who gives peace without asking for blood or coin in return (I.ii.408-11). Then, he limits his duties as a monarch by refusing to take responsibility for the economic hardship of his kingdom. In his response to Salemenes's concern that people have peace but not "plenty," Sardanapalus blames others by asking "Whose then is the crime, | But the false satraps, who provide no better?" (I.ii.107-08). His question suggests that the monarch is only responsible in matters of war and peace, while local leaders set the economic and cultural conditions of the people's daily lives. Like Shelley's Laon, Sardanapalus presents himself as a hero undermined by outside forces that are interested in their own gain.

The extent of Sardanapalus's failure to convince his kingdom that it is better off with his peace than with his ancestors' wars is displayed in the Act II dialogue of the conspirators. As Salemenes and Myrrha warned, the rebels interpret Sardanapalus's reign of peace as a sign of weakness and as an opportunity for them to gain the upper hand. Not only do the rebels see Sardanapalus as inexperienced in battle but they also see his pacifism as an odd behavior⁵⁹ that unmans him and makes him an even easier target. Arbaces particularly defines the king's weakness through gendered terms, associating Sardanapalus with the feminine. Throughout the beginning of Act II, he calls Sardanapalus "The she-king, | That less than woman" (II.48-49), "this silkworm" (II.87), and "the effeminate thing that governs" (II.95). He also speaks of the approaching fight⁶⁰ as "This woman's warfare [which] | Degrades the very conqueror" (II.82-83)

⁵⁹ In addition to misunderstanding Sardanapalus's effeminacy as a form of weakness, the rebels also give a cynical interpretation to Sardanapalus's compromised decision to expel them, calling their exile "The very policy of orient monarchs – | Pardon and poison – favours and a sword – | A distant voyage, and an eternal sleep" (II.430-32). Interestingly, Salemenes has the same interpretation; he too calls the exile a "half-indulgence ... [which] serves | But to provoke" (II.504-05).

⁶⁰ Technically, the fight Arbaces and Beleses have planned is apparently only a poisoning since they explain that "The first cup which [Sardanapalus] drains will be the last" (II.52). Thus, Arbaces sees their "fight" as "woman's warfare" because poison, as opposed to "clashing steel with steel" (II.85), has historically been the weapon of women. But Sardanapalus's drink could also be interpreted more loosely as the signal for the rebels' attack; rather than actually poison him, they could attack when the king is distracted by drink. In this case, Arbaces could be

because he imagines Sardanapalus giving in to hysterics by “whin[ing]” (II.88) rather than “clashing steel with steel” (II.85). But such expressions only display the relativity of the gendered language the rebels use. Arbaces and Beleses refer to Sardanapalus as feminine and effeminate only when he shows what they consider to be negligence and cowardice. Such characteristics, though, are only temporary, at least for Beleses, because the rebels suggest that the king could throw off his femininity/effeminacy⁶¹ at any point and re-man himself simply by taking up arms. As Beleses tells his partner, Sardanapalus “has that in him which may make you strife” (II.89), suggesting, as Salemenes does in his opening soliloquy in Act I,⁶² that masculinity can be disguised but never completely vanquished (Wolfson, “A Problem” 871).

The re-manning of the king takes place in Act III when Sardanapalus takes up arms against the conspirators as a means of regaining the language that defines him. The act largely works, at least for Myrrha and Salamenes who now believe that the king has undermined the rebels’ complaints about his inaction and effeminacy. For Myrrha, specifically, his participation in the fight represents the fulfillment of her wish to “free him from his vices” (I.ii.662) and his hope that he “make [himself] worthier of [her] love” (III.171-72). It is a sign, she believes, that she should not feel dishonored in loving him because his action displays that he can live up to her Greek ideal of masculine prowess. As she explains in a brief soliloquy,

’Tis no dishonour to have loved this man.

... surely

He, who springs up a Hercules at once,

complaining about “woman’s warfare” not because they use poison but because they catch the king off-guard, making him an easy kill.

⁶¹ I equate these two terms here, though they mean different things, because, according to Wolfson and Garofalo, they are both used by characters in the play to suggest something other than masculinity. Thus, it does not matter whether the rebels refer to Sardanapalus’s effeminacy or femininity; they essentially suggest that he is no longer (or at least temporarily not) acting in a masculine manner.

⁶² Salemenes states that the king’s “latent [masculine] energies [have been] | Repress’d by circumstance, but not destroy’d – | Steep’d, but not drown’d, in deep voluptuousness” (I.i.11-13).

Nurs'd in effeminate arts from youth to manhood,
And rushes from the banquet to the battle,
As though it were a bed of love, deserves
That a Greek girl should be his paramour,
And a Greek bard his minstrel, a Greek tomb
His monument. (III.216-27)

Though Sardanapalus's performance convinces Myrrha and Salamenes that the king is capable of heroism, Sardanapalus uses theatricality and parody to critique and undermine such beliefs. Through a conscious parody of the warrior code, he performs the actions of a commander-in-chief half-heartedly and ironically, suggesting that it is no great effort to wield a sword and command an army.⁶³ Without any alteration in his effeminate character, he improvises the actions of a commander, giving orders for the protection of the innocent,⁶⁴ inquiring about communication lines,⁶⁵ and directing battle formation.⁶⁶ He also adapts his speech by adopting the formal first person plural⁶⁷ and the rough vocabulary of a soldier.⁶⁸ His actions, no less than his commanding speech, also perform the part of a valiant warrior. As messengers from the battle announce, the king fights "Like a king" (III.200) and he "fights as he revels!" (III.213) – that is, with full passion. He even performs like the future Alexander the Great: he contemplates

⁶³ I thus agree with Daniela Garofalo's argument that the king "only performs [the battle], like an amateur actor in a play, eminently conscious that his performance is false" (44), that his role as a soldier, at least in this scene, "remains external, an actor's performance, rather than a manifestation of the self" (44), and that "[he] performs in the theater of war but refuses to recognize in that performance anything more than a theatrical act" (44). But, although I agree that the king remains detached from his role in this scene, his performance eventually has an effect on his understanding of himself and his pacifist ideology.

⁶⁴ He orders men to "See that the women are bestow'd in safety | In the remote apartments: let a guard | Be set before them, with strict charge to quit | The post but with their lives" (III.121-24).

⁶⁵ He asks, "Is | The path still open, and communication | Left 'twixt the palace and the phalanx?" (III.111-13).

⁶⁶ He tells the men, "Serry your ranks – stand firm" (III.259).

⁶⁷ He, for example, uses the formal "our" instead "my" when he tells a soldier that "Your post is near our person" (III.126).

⁶⁸ The king replaces his typically poetic and free-flowing language with the paternalistic criticism of a foot soldier's independent thinking: "You deem'd! Are you too turn'd a rebel? Fellow! | Your part is to obey" (III.135-36).

which helmet will make him the most easily-recognizable target and ultimately decides to ride into battle without one (III.143-44). Consequently, such parody and improvisation of battle language and tactics makes it difficult to accept Myrrha's assertion of his transformation. Throughout the scene Sardanapalus complains about the weight and comfort of his helmet (III.129, III.138-39), focuses on the appearance of his armor rather than on its usefulness or its symbolic, hereditary value (III.146-47), and, before he charges into battle, he stops to admire himself in a mirror (III.145, 163-65). Such actions continually undermine Myrrha's belief in his transformation.

Despite Sardanapalus's disbelief in his own heroism – because to him it is just a show – the experience has real consequences for him as it suggests the failure of his pacifist vision and forces him to realize his inability to establish lasting peace during his lifetime. The change he undergoes is depicted in the king's Act IV dream. As Sardanapalus explains, he previously thought of himself as superior to his predecessors, literally dreaming that he stood above them, but he feels now that he has betrayed his principles of non-violence and he sees himself being dragged down to their level (IV.175-76). His communion with them, therefore, feels like a symbolic death, which he presents at two moments in his dream – once when he first meets his ancestors⁶⁹ and again when his body is buried, eaten, and incinerated.⁷⁰ As can be seen, his dream suggests that Sardanapalus has trouble believing in his heroism; he interprets the battle as the death, and literally the decomposition, of his identity. He also realizes that his performance in the battle failed to carry out his criticism of violence. Myrrha, Salemenes, and others were too ready to enfold his actions within their own interpretive framework. If Sardanapalus meant to

⁶⁹ He says, “there was a horrid kind | Of sympathy between us, as if they | Had lost a part of death to come to me, | And I the half of life to sit by them” (IV.124-27).

⁷⁰ As he tells Myrrha, “I was dead ... | Buried, and raised again – consumed by worms, | Purged by the flames, and wither'd in the air” (IV.160-62).

perform the role of warrior ironically to show that there is no honor in war, he has failed; instead, his actions undermine his idealism and mark the end of his peaceful reign.

Before giving up, however, Sardanapalus attempts to regain the language that defines him in an act that serves as Byron's final critique of Shelley in the play: martyrdom through self-sacrifice. Sardanapalus's immolation is certainly a part of the historical record that was available to Byron, but Byron gives the scene a performative quality that is not found in the original. In the record of Diodorus of Sicily, the death of Sardanapalus is presented as a Roman suicide which the king commits to preserve his honor. Diodorus's record certainly portrays an effeminate Sardanapalus, explaining that that he "exceeded all his predecessors in sloth and luxury" and that he "wallow[ed] in pleasure and wanton dalliances, he clothed himself in women's attire, ... painted likewise his face, and ... imitated, likewise, a woman's voice" (I.119). But Sardanapalus also comes across as a fierce warrior and commander who defeated the Medes in three separate battles – at their first engagement, he defeated Arbaces's army of four hundred thousand (I.120) – and held back the Medes for an additional three years after Saïmenus had been killed and most of his allies had deserted him. Sardanapalus held out until the flooding Euphrates damaged the city walls; at that point, he burned all of his royal possessions, his servants, and concubines so that "he might not fall into the hands of his enemies" (I.123). The death of Sardanapalus in Diodorus's record is of a military commander who realizes he has lost the war but wants to maintain to his honor.

In Byron's play, however, Sardanapalus's death is invested with more symbolism. With the death of Sardanapalus comes the loss of the terrestrial paradise he was trying to achieve. It also suggests the possibility that he could have been wrong all along. In Act IV, Sardanapalus already begins to accept some responsibility for the failure of peace by asserting that he could

have done more as its advocate. During his scene with Zarina, the king initially reasserts his belief that his people's inability to comprehend his mission led to his overthrow, explaining that

These slaves, whom I have nurtured, pamper'd, fed,
And swoln with peace, and gorged with plenty, till
They reign themselves – all monarchs in their mansions –
Now swarm forth in rebellion, and demand
His death, who made their lives a jubilee[.] (IV.312-16)

But he also takes responsibility for their incompetence by suggesting that he could have done more to advocate peace, and, for the first time, he begins to express regret for the negligent and self-involved life he has lived. He speaks of “Hav[ing] wasted down my royalty” (IV.276), of feeling “misplaced in life” and “not what I should be” (IV.332-34), and of having “sins ... of the softer order” (IV.397-98). His immolation can thus be seen as a form of penance that provides punishment and purification for his failed political agenda. The scene is also anachronistically invested with religious symbolism hundreds of years before the Christian era. The king asks for “frankincense and myrrh,” and he specifically speaks about “a great sacrifice” (V.280-81). Near the moment of death, Sardanapalus explains that he will be “purified by death from some | Of the gross stains of too material being” (V.424-25), and throughout the scene he speaks of meeting his ancestors and the gods.

Sardanapalus's sacrifice can also be seen as a parody of Laon's martyrdom in Shelley's *The Revolt of Islam*. Loan's martyrdom, an execution by fire at the hands of an enemy whom, like Sardanapalus, Laon had earlier refused to kill, is a solemn, serious affair in which everyone is attentive and emotionally affected. Shelley's account of the execution, however, is deceptively biased, since the event is narrated by Laon himself. Laon tells the reader of his own

death from The Temple of the Spirit in the afterlife, explaining that the injustice of his and Cythna's death left men in such "high despair" (XII.28) that it made them realize they lived in a world "grown too void and cold" (XII.30). Consequently, their death led to a "deep and mighty change which suddenly befell" (XII.30). But Laon's narration can be seen as another sign of his desire for personal aggrandizement since much of the narrative is focused on making him the hero of the story. Laon's admittance into The Temple of the Spirit – where he is "exempted now from mortal fear or pain" (XII.24) – is suggestive of the vindication he believes his legacy promotes. Laon's narrative raises other serious issues as well. In Canto XI, he sacrificed his life for the safe release of Cythna to America. However, in Canto XII Cythna literally rides into the scene – with the aura of the angel of death bringing the Day of Judgment (XII.9) – and volunteers to be executed with Laon. This turn of events is troubling because it means that Laon's sacrifice has counted for nothing. Furthermore, their martyrdom is not explicitly tied to an ideology of peace. Laon's narration suggests that there is a direct connection between their death and the "deep and mighty change" that follows, but he takes ownership of an event that happens after the fact; he gives a causal connection to a chronological sequence of events. This logic is obviously a self-deception because Laon is being executed not because he is making a stand for peace but because he has been captured by his enemy.

The trouble with Laon's martyrdom can be seen in Sardanapalus's last failure to control the language of his legacy. Like Laon, Sardanapalus believes that his act of self-sacrifice will send a message to future generations. As he tells Myrrha,

the light of this

Most royal of funereal pyres shall be

Not a mere pillar form'd of cloud and flame,

A beacon in the horizon for a day,
And then a mount of ashes, but a light
To lesson ages, rebel nations, and
Voluptuous princes. (V.436-42)

As can be seen, Sardanapalus believes – like Laon – that his suicide is an act invested with meaning and that this meaning will be spared by the passage of time (V.445-46). One of his final points – that he “leave[s] a nobler monument than Egypt[’s]” pyramids (V.482) – displays his logic clearly. Unlike the pyramids, he asserts, the lesson of his death will always be remembered because his death will not lose the contextual grounding which gives it meaning.

But, as Anne Barton argues, the interpretation of his performance is not easy to identify. And, given his past failures, it is unwise of Sardanapalus to assume that this last performance will be interpreted according to his logic. His immolation, in fact, is open to several interpretations. On the one hand, his death stands as another accusation of his country’s misunderstanding of him. His final words can thus come across bitterly, as he points out the ingratitude of his country: “I satiated thee with peace and joys; and this | Is my reward!” (V.495-96). On the other hand, after Act IV, Sardanapalus speaks of his sins and, at times, he suggests that the lesson he wants to leave is actually a warning to “avoid the life | Which led to such a consummation” (V.448-49). To parse the argument even more finely, the warning could refer to two possible events. On the one hand, it could warn future leaders not to aim for peace because it leads to dissatisfaction and to an overthrow of the monarch. On the other hand, it could warn them not to give up on peace because, as Act II showed, Sardanapalus’s original kind treatment of Arbaces and Beleses worked; it was when he adopted the sterner punishment of exile that they became convinced of his cruelty. Like Laon, Sardanapalus fails to control the interpretive tools

that will privilege his own narrative. His performance will certainly be remembered, but like all other performances in Sardanapalus's life, it will be defined by misunderstanding viewers who are not ready for his message.

***Sardanapalus* on the London Stage**

My argument so far has been that Byron disagreed with Shelley on the value of a performance, whether it be through writing or through political action, because one cannot guarantee the successful transmission of its message. As the play demonstrates, Sardanapalus believed he was successfully presenting a system of government in opposition to Salemenes's conquest and Myrrha's political theatricality. Unfortunately, his enemies and his people misunderstood his lax governance and saw it as a sign of his weakness and as a warrant for his overthrow. And when Sardanapalus decided to criticize their expectations by performing the role of a military commander ironically, he only reaffirmed Salemenes's and Myrrha's expectation of him. The same can be said of his immolation as well; in staging a self-sacrifice, he failed to set the terms of its interpretation. I personally find this concern for interpretation intriguing given that Byron asserts this claim in a drama, a form of writing that necessarily depends on interpretation by the many people involved in the play's production. Interestingly, while all of the major nineteenth-century London productions gave the play a consistent interpretation, none of them highlighted Byron's irony or the king's criticism of violence. Instead, with heavy cuts to the text, they transformed *Sardanapalus* into the spectacle of a king who transitions from sloth to military hero.

As a text, *Sardanapalus* was generally praised by nineteenth-century reviewers. In *The Edinburgh Review*, for example, Jeffrey stated that *Sardanapalus* is "a work beyond all question

of great beauty and power” (*Contributions* II.346); likewise, the April 12, 1834 issue of *The Literary Gazette* argued that the drama “belongs to the most inspired hour of [Lord Byron’s] genius” (268). When considered as a performance script, however, the reviews were not so positive. *The Literary Gazette* concluded that “*Sardanapalus* can never be a good acting play” because, like Byron’s other historical dramas, “its peculiar merit is in thought, not action” (268).⁷¹ Nevertheless, the play was immensely popular throughout the nineteenth century, and it was an important star vehicle for actor-managers such as Charles Kean. The play enjoyed three productions in the nineteenth-century London theaters. It was staged 23 times by William Macready during the 1833-34 season at Drury Lane, 93 times by Charles Kean during the 1853-54 season at The Princess’s, 70 times by Charles Calvert during the 1877-78 season at Duke’s, over 2,000 times in the provinces, and 113 times in New York (Taborski 153-54). Thus, *Sardanapalus* carries the distinction of being Byron’s most frequently staged drama.

Despite the high praise for the drama, the success of the productions, particularly Kean’s, was largely due to the scenery and to the transformation of the tragedy into an entertainment spectacle. Since Kean believed that scenery and historical accuracy made a tragedy successful, he borrowed elements of stage design and costume from the recent archeological record of Austen Henry Layard’s excavation of Nineveh. And the effort generally paid off. The June 14, 1853 review in *The Times*, for instance, praised Kean’s recreation of Assyria on stage, complimenting Mr. Kean for having “plunged the London public into the very heart of Assyrian life” (qtd. in Taborski 199). Thirty-five years later, John Coleman remarked that “For novelty, beauty, authenticity and splendor, nothing, in my time at least, can compare with [Kean’s]

⁷¹ Such negative reviews about the play’s performability are based on acting scripts of nineteenth-century theater practitioners, such as Macready, Kean, and Calvert. The 1991 production of *Sardanapalus* at Yale University, however, a production that relied on no spectacle and on a fuller version of the script, disproved this conclusion. According to Martyn Corbett, “the Yale production revealed that, not only is *Sardanapalus* a masterpiece of literary drama, it is also a masterpiece for the stage” (“Lugging” 362).

Sardanapalus” (I.94). The focus on stage effects, however, left George Henry Lewes to complain in *The Leader* that Kean’s stage effects in the immolation scene transformed the drama into “nothing more than a Magic Lantern on a large scale” (250) and that his overall “subordina[tion] of drama to spectacle” made the production look like “a Layardian picture” of the Assyrian city (250-52). The final major nineteenth-century production of *Sardanapalus* in London, Charles Calvert’s 1877-78 production at Duke’s, pushed the spectacle to an extreme. Like Kean, Calvert relied heavily on historical scenery,⁷² but he also added a scene between Zarina and Myrrha and two ballet scenes, leaving one reviewer from the *Post* to comment “How much Byron there is in the play as now given, with its unending scenes of pageantry, its ballets, and its processions of women and of warriors, it is perhaps not well to ask” (qtd. in Taborski 204).

As new elements of spectacle went into the show, existing parts of the play went out, but not without effect. Charles Kean cut 1500 lines, more than half of the play for his 1853 acting script. Macready likewise cut major scenes, including the portion of Act III where Sardanapalus admires his military uniform in a mirror. Moreover, both Macready and Kean suppressed much of Sardanapalus’s effeminacy, and they struggled to stage his hedonism. As Macready’s diary demonstrates, he struggled through much of the production on a regular basis,⁷³ perhaps because he cut the very lines that develop the king’s character. But contemporary reviewers particularly

⁷² In the Preface to an acting script used at New York’s Booth Theatre, for example, Calvert argues philosophically that “the Theatre is put to no ignoble use, when, in addition to the vivid representation, by accomplished performers, ... it becomes an arena where its cognate arts – painting, music, history, archaeology – combine harmoniously to show us the ‘very age and body of a time’” (vi). His script, moreover, includes a long description of the king’s “grad procession” in his Act I entrance (10), another longer description of the Act III banquet scene (25), and a note by Layard which explains that “[the] scene [Act II] is a restoration from actual remains from fragments discovered in the ruins” (22). As with Kean, Calvert’s New York production suggests he was more concerned with theatricality than with faithfully portraying Byron’s vision.

⁷³ On April 16, 1834, for example, he complained in his diary that he “cannot work [him]self into reality in this part [because he believed he did not have ...] freedom enough to satisfy [him]self” (I.315). He complained again of not satisfying himself on the next night as well, explaining that “[his] manner was too constrained” and that he “wanted reality” (I.315). And on May 3rd, he wrote that he “Acted Sardanapalus as if a millstone were about my neck” (I.316).

faulted him for his performance during the early part of the play (Taborski 189).⁷⁴ Kean's performance similarly suppressed Sardanapalus's effeminacy, even to the effect of cutting the irony and humor out of the battle scene.⁷⁵ Instead, both actors transformed the effeminate and hedonistic Sardanapalus into a hero in disguise. Such alterations in character had necessarily significant effects on the play itself; it transformed the king to a warrior-hero. Consequently, the production celebrates the king's masculinity and violence and, ironically, links the two concepts that Byron's drama criticizes. The immolation scene, likewise, is reduced to one clear interpretation – a denouncement of the effeminacy and pacifism that led to the king's political downfall. Such changes suggest that anything besides a warrior masculinity is aberrant and tragic.

For a long time, Byron's readers, including Romantic scholars, have equated Sardanapalus with Byron. But, as this chapter has demonstrated, the character of Sardanapalus is open to a much more complex understanding. Sardanapalus is certainly Byronic in that he does not live up to his full political and military potential; like Byron in Ravenna and Venice, Sardanapalus wallows in sexuality and luxury to the avoidance of nearly everything else. But this association of Sardanapalus with Byron only goes so far. In his *laissez-faire* attitude, Sardanapalus also comes across like Shelley in that he has a vision of peace and abhors violence when used for the sake of oppression. Nevertheless, *Sardanapalus* demonstrates that Shelley's pacifism is insufficient for the real world. Not only does pacifism deny the innate violence of a human heart, but the drama argues that to be non-violent is to willingly dehumanize yourself and

⁷⁴ See, for example, the 1834 review of Macready's acting in *Frazer's Magazine*, p. 707.

⁷⁵ As George Henry Lewes comments, Kean's tone in the arming of the hero scene in Act III was more matter of fact than squeamish and complaining (252). Sardanapalus's statement that the sword is too heavy, consequently, comes across not as a performance of his weakness but as an objective description of the sword.

accept oppression and victimization. The drama thus demonstrates that if a leader does not convincingly create a mythology of himself or willingly follow his culture's meta-narratives, his people will nevertheless interpret his actions by those narratives. Thus, when Sardanapalus fails to interpret his effeminacy for his people in terms they understand, and when he refuses to embody his people's expectation of him, he exposes himself to the accusation that he has become aberrant. Consequently, his refusal to act like an oppressor leads his people to rebel, for they believe the king is now defenseless.

The drama thus critiques Shelley's idealism and promotes participation in the real world. But Sardanapalus's only available option for action, self-glorification through conquest and oppression, proves dissatisfying. By exiling the rebels and by participating in the battle, Sardanapalus compromises his vision of peace and believes he is no longer different from his violent, murderous ancestors. This compromise of self is also demonstrated in the drama's nineteenth-century productions. The transformation of the king from hedonist and improviser to adept warrior-in-hiding defamiliarizes Sardanapalus and reaffirms the status quo gender definition that equates masculinity with violence – an equation Byron likely meant to criticize. The on-stage suppression of Sardanapalus's effeminacy, sensitivity, and skepticism about his own heroism transforms the king into another warrior hero that reaffirms the status quo.

CHAPTER 6

THE CRITIQUE OF MELODRAMA IN *WERNER*

In the January 12, 1821 entry to his Ravenna journal, Byron makes a case for why he believes Robert Elliston will have difficulty staging *Marino Faliero* in London. He writes that the drama is “too regular – the time, twenty-four hours – the change of place not frequent – nothing *melodramatic* – no surprises, no starts, no trap-doors” (*BLJ* VIII.23). In short, he explains that the drama is unfit for the stage because its neoclassical form and its avoidance of love do not pander to audience expectations of romance and theatrical spectacle. Byron reiterates the same points throughout his letters of that month to John Murray and Douglas Kinnaird. Given Byron’s admiration for Pope, his criticism of Romanticism, and his long justifications for neoclassical dramatic form in the prefaces to his three historical dramas, his insistence on *Marino Faliero*’s form is also a point of pride. As he writes Kinnaird on September 27, 1821, love and the conventions of popular theater “were contrary to all my principles” when he wrote the drama (*BLJ* VIII.223). Whether or not Byron really did object to having his play staged, Elliston’s production gave Byron another opportunity to criticize theatrical conventions and to reform the stage through his responses.

Byron was consistent in his criticism of London theaters and in his promotion of neoclassical unities throughout the 1820s. At least, he was consistent until he wrote *Werner*. As everyone who has written on the drama has observed, *Werner* stands apart in Byron’s dramatic *oeuvre*. Its cast of characters does not correspond with the Biblical and spiritual characters of the metaphysical dramas, *Manfred*, *Cain*, and *Heaven and Earth*, and its change in location and long

passage of time between Acts III and IV violate the neoclassical unities. Moreover, its Gothicism – a decayed palace, hidden identities, a murder, a secret passageway, the themes of inheritance, guilt, and sins of the father visited on the children – seems to pander to the contemporary theatrical conventions against which Byron wrote his historical dramas. This reading of compromise was particularly promoted by T. H. Vail Motter’s important 1935 article “Byron’s *Werner* Re-Estimated” which argues that Byron “patently surrendered his ideals in favor of a theatrical taste which he despised, in order to woo a public for which he felt contempt” (275). Similarly, Terry Otten argues that *Werner* “is as derivative and trite as anything Byron wrote in his last years” (46) and that it is “Byron’s one play composed for ‘the Millions’” (46), while Andrew Rutherford argues that *Werner* “can only be accounted for by a desire on [Byron’s] part to win interest and approval by writing plays of a more popular or more sensational variety” (136).

When not condemning the play, others have simply ignored it. Jerome McGann’s *Fiery Dust*, Jerome Christensen’s *Lord Byron’s Strength*, and Robert Gleckner’s *Byron and the Ruins of Paradise* pass over *Werner* without comment. Leslie Marchand, Byron’s most important twentieth-century biographer, argues that “Little need be said about *Werner*” (*Byron’s Poetry* 105), while Richard Lansdown comments only briefly on *Werner* in *Byron’s Historical Dramas*. Likewise, Samuel Chew identifies *Werner* as the only one of Byron’s dramas that does not “deserve careful perusal ... [because it] is about as complete a failure as anything in literature” (*Dramas* v), and he admits that the play is one he “would willingly pass over in silence” (*Dramas* 143), as he does except for two pages of criticism.

This is an unfortunate critical legacy for one of the most important plays of the nineteenth century. Among adaptations of Byron’s plays, *Werner* became one of the most popular, and it

remained in the repertoire of London theaters for over thirty years. Macready performed in the play nearly eighty times in London, and he carried it on tour to the Provinces and to the United States, making *Werner* his seventh most frequent role out of a repertoire of over sixty (Taborski 229-30). Some critics even rank *Werner* above Macready's performances of *Iago*, *King Lear*, or *Hamlet* (Taborski 229-30). The play was also staged over fifty times by Samuel Phelps; as with Macready, it remained in his repertoire for much of the mid-Victorian period (Taborski 153-54). With over thirty years of performance, the play must have been well-known by Victorian audiences. Consequently, any study of Byron during the Victorian period should include a production history of *Werner* alongside studies of the poetry. More people saw, and were thus more likely to be influenced by, productions of *Werner* than productions of *Cain* or *Marino Faliero*, notwithstanding the centrality of these two dramas in Byron scholarship.

The play also held an important position for Byron as well. He finalized the drama in January 1822, but he had been working on it for much of his life, having first become interested in writing the play when he read Harriet Lee's *The German's Tale* at age fourteen. As he says in the Preface to the play, Lee's novel "made a deep impression upon me" (384). Consequently, he may have turned to the novel when he began writing his first play, *Ulric and Ilvina*. He "had enough sense to burn" the manuscript of this play (*Werner* 384), so we cannot be sure whether it was a rewriting of *The German's Tale*, but many Byron scholars agree that it was.⁷⁶ Byron himself also suggests that he has been trying to write the story of *Ulric* all along by including a character named *Ulric* in both *Werner* and *Ulric and Ilvina* and by mentioning the destroyed play in the Preface to *Werner*. Nevertheless, Byron did seriously attempt to dramatize the novel in 1815 when he was searching for a viable play for production at Drury Lane as part of his work

⁷⁶ Among these, see Paulino Lim's *The Style of Lord Byron's Plays*, B. G. Tandon's *The Imagery of Lord Byron's Plays*, and Chew's *The Dramas of Lord Byron*.

on the theater's subcommittee. He completed Act I and a few other parts, but he left the manuscript in England, so he had to start again from the beginning – possibly for the third time – in 1821. Consequently, *Werner* is “at once the first and last of Byron’s finished plays” (Manning 159), and Byron himself speaks of the primacy of the drama, calling both *Ulric and Ilvina* and *Werner* “the first [drama] I ever attempted” (384) and Lee’s story “the germ of much that I have since written” (384).⁷⁷

Given the drama’s importance during the nineteenth century and its importance to Byron’s development of the Byronic hero, it is odd that readers would see Byron’s use of the Gothic in *Werner* as a compromise of his principles. Byron is, after all, one of the great names of the nineteenth-century Gothic tradition. As Anne Williams has argued, it was Byron’s *The Giaour* that introduced “the first important vampire in English literature” (Introduction 4). It was also his challenge to the Shelleys that led to the writing of *Frankenstein*, a Gothic novel that is partially a criticism of Byron himself. Byron also relied heavily on the work of Gothic novelists such as Walpole, Radcliffe, and Lewis; he transformed the Gothic villain into the Byronic hero, at times borrowing character names – such as Manfred from *The Castle of Otranto* – and even metaphors and imagery for his poetry. As Peter Cochran has observed in “Byron Reads and Rewrites Gothic,” even Byron’s central image of “a ruin amidst ruins” in *Childe Harold* was “a standard Gothic *topos*” which could be seen in Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* (58). The Byronic hero also influenced the Gothic in return during the Victorian period,

⁷⁷ Byron makes a similar claim in his December 12, 1822 letter to Augusta Leigh, where he says, “The Story of ‘the German’s tale’ from which I took it [ha]d a strange effect upon me when I read it as a boy – and it has haunted me ever since – from some singular conformity between it & my ideas” (BLJ X.55). By attributing *The German’s Tale* with the “germ” of what Byron has written, the Preface raises interesting questions about the originality of the Byronic hero. Typically, a straight line is drawn from Byron to *Childe Harold* through the tales and *Manfred* and onto *Werner*. But the Preface complicates this linear approach. It suggests that Byron has been returning to *Werner* throughout his career. He began with the idea for the play when reading Lee’s story, wrote *Childe Harold* and most of the tales, returned to *Werner* in 1815, wrote the remaining tales and *Manfred*, dropped the Byronic hero in *Don Juan*, and picked him up again in late 1821 while continuing to work on *Don Juan*. This continual return to *Werner*, I believe, demonstrates that it is no marginal concern.

as can be seen most prominently in the work of the Brontë sisters. In some circles, moreover, it was even believed that Byron himself was a vampire, and images of his persona and manner of dress continue to live on even in today's vampire novels and film.

But Byron did not always use the Gothic to instill horror or terror. His use of the vampire curse in *The Giaour* and his fragment of a vampire novel, *Augustus Darvell*, may be the most obvious exceptions. Instead, Byron inverts the Gothic, using it to create suspense only to dismiss it away with laughter and irony, particularly in *Don Juan*. At the end of Canto XVI, for example, Byron has Juan finally confront the ghost of Norman Abbey, the Black Friar, after several stanzas of building suspense, only to dismiss the Gothic plot with a turn to romance. The scene creates suspense through descriptions of a Gothic atmosphere. The time is, of course, the middle of the night, "When deep sleep fell on men, and the world wore | The starry darkness round her" (XVI.113), and readers follow along as Juan becomes more and more terrified by the mysterious outside noise – "awful footsteps," "a slight clatter," and "A noise like ... wet fingers drawn on glass" (XVI.113-14) – until finally "the monk made [Juan's] blood curdle" (XVI.113). Suspense is also created through connotative language. Not only does Byron repeat words that suggest terror and darkness throughout stanzas 113 and 114 – "awful," "throbbled," "shadows," "night," "darkness," and "midnight" – but he also uses words such as "supernatural," "immaterialism," and "souls immortal" to suggest the idea of ghosts. This descriptive language climaxes in stanza 120 when Juan catches up to the Black Friar and decides to investigate what the Friar is by touching him. However, Byron continues to heighten the suspense by commenting on events before he narrates them. "Juan put forth one arm," he tells in stanza 120, but before disclosing what Juan found, the narrator exclaims "Eternal Powers!" and only afterwards tells readers that Juan "touched no soul, nor body." But the stanza turns out to be a

false climax. Rather than touching the Black Friar – whether ghost or person – Juan somehow misdirected his hand and touched “but the wall.” Consequently, the mystery remains – readers still do not know what the Black Friar is – but Byron has already dispelled the suspense and he begins to give shape to the woman behind the costume, disclosing her “blue eyes,” “remarkably sweet breath,” a “stragglng curl,” and a “red lip” (XVI.121), so that Juan’s second attempt to grab the Friar (the flirtatious Duchess of Fitz-Fulke) is no longer an attempt to discover a mystery but a gesture towards romance. As can be seen, Byron relies on the conventions of the Gothic in this instance only to transform Juan’s terror into another romantic encounter. Like Radcliffe, he explains the mystery behind the terror, sometimes undermining the Gothic mood through comical rhymes even as he creates it. Consequently, as with much of *Don Juan*, the Gothic becomes another form of seduction which Byron uses to pull in the reader through imitation of a recognized mode of writing only to violate expectations once again with an ironic twist and to lead him or her to a new emotional climax.

This use of the Gothic in *Don Juan* has lately been interpreted in some promising ways. Unlike the scholarship on Byron’s use of the Gothic in *Werner*, which argues that Byron compromised the principles of *Don Juan* and the historical dramas, scholarship on *Don Juan* has argued that Byron’s use of the Gothic is consistent with the poem’s aims of analysis and criticism through Byron’s imitation-and-variation writing technique. In “The Machinery of Faux Catholicism,” for example, Bernard Beatty argues that Byron exposes the simplistic definitions of the Gothic – particularly for novels which portrayed the Gothic either as a distortion of Catholicism (one based on miracles and performances) or as a referent to a medieval architectural style (81-83) – and he provides an alternative which is based on a respect for and a better understanding of the daily occurrences in Italian Catholic churches (86). Meanwhile, in

“The Gothic Ghost,” Malcolm Kelsall argues that Byron uses the Gothic to expose the repressed political guilt of upper class English society which goes all the way back to the Norman conquest. He argues that the ghost in *Don Juan* – even if not real – “is nonetheless a manifestation of repressed inner guilt which subconsciously preys upon the mind of the ruling order” for benefitting from the “usurpation of Saxon democracy” (123-25). Furthermore, Kelsall aligns the ghost of *Don Juan* with the ghost of *Hamlet* and argues that the ghost “makes explicit what is only implicit in the Gothic ghost: overthrow the present political order” (127). Although I question how far Kelsall has pushed “Byron’s own discomfort with his role as territorial ruler” (126) – his discussion of Marx in the article alongside Byron is surprising given Kelsall’s commentary on Byron’s commitment to Whig political ideology in his important *Byron’s Politics* – it is nevertheless encouraging that Kelsall has tried to read Byron’s use of the Gothic within the context of Byron’s opposition to Regency society.

Likewise, the stylistic analysis of Paulino Lim, G. B. Tandon, and Monika Coghen has demonstrated that Byron used Gothic imagery throughout all of his dramas. As Coghen observes in “The Gothic in Byron’s Dramas,” central thematic preoccupations of the Gothic, particularly the “stranglehold of the past upon the present,” recur throughout *Werner* and the historical dramas (98). In particular, Coghen points out that the language used to portray senators as inhuman oppressors in the Venetian plays relies on the discourse of Gothic monstrosity, and she analyzes the similarities between the dream of Sardanapalus and that of Osmond from Lewis’s Gothic play *The Castle Spectre* where the image of a woman from the past – Semiramis or Evalina – is “replaced by the vision of a lustful ghost” (105-07). All of these studies – much of which are found in a single book, Peter Cochran’s *The Gothic Byron* – present promising

readings of Byron's use of the Gothic, one that sees the Gothic as one of many rhetorical tools Byron used throughout his career.

In this chapter, I propose that *Werner* be investigated within the context of *Don Juan* and the historical dramas. Rather than dismissing *Werner* by jumping to the conclusion that Byron compromised his principles with a return to the Byronic hero and to the Gothic – something that too many Romanticists have seemed willing to do – I would like to argue that Byron included elements of the popular theater, particularly the Gothic and melodrama, to once again critique sentimentality and the Romantic idolization of nature and freedom. I believe this reading of the Gothic and melodramatic elements promises to display how much the drama participates in Byron's critique of Regency society as seen in the historical dramas and *Don Juan*. As I have argued throughout the dissertation, they all mean to expose the ideologies of Regency society to which Byron objected.

The Return of the Byronic Hero

Along with criticizing Byron for using the Gothic, Romanticists throughout the twentieth century have also argued that Byron returned to the formulaic writing of the tales because he characterizes *Werner* as another Byronic hero. That Byron did so is partially true. For example, as with the *Giaour* and *Manfred*, *Werner* was “born to wealth, and rank, and power” (I.i.77),⁷⁸ and like *Sardanapalus* he considers himself to be “the son of a long line” (I.i.115), “the heir of princely lands” (I.i.116), “the lord of halls, | Which daily feast a thousand” (I.i.119-20), and “The last sole scion of a thousand sires” (I.i.159). And, like the heroes of the tales, he speaks of a

⁷⁸ *Werner* most closely echoes the friar's description of the *Giaour*'s “spirit yet unquell'd and high, | That claims and keeps ascendancy” (840-41), “mind not all degraded” (864), and “noble soul, and lineage high” (869), and the *Chamois Hunter*'s description of *Manfred* as one whose “garb | Is goodly, his mien manly, and his air | Proud as a free-born peasant's” (I.ii.62-64) and whose “garb and gait bespeak ... of high lineage – | One of the many chiefs, whose castled crags | Look o'er the lower valleys” (II.i.7-9).

mysterious past event and of an “untoward sickness” (I.i.49), a dark character trait that has caused him to rebel against authority and leave him and his wife, like Cain and Adah, to wander as outcasts. However, the argument for the return to the past fails when one considers *how* and *why* Byron repeats such rhetoric. I argue that this is another example of Byron’s imitation-variation technique.

First, Byron considerably reduced Werner’s brooding between the 1815 draft and the finalized play. In the 1815 draft, Werner is much more disturbed, and as can be seen in the amount of detail he gives of his inner suffering. He speaks about the “pride & passion’s war within | Which give my breast vitality to suffer” (I.i.15-16). The word “vitality” is particularly telling as it aligns Werner’s pain with the continual suffering of the early Byronic heroes such as the Giaour’s “lingering woes” (1003) and “The searching throes of ceaseless pain” (1005). This self-inflicted mental pain is missing in the finalized play. Instead, Werner complains about external problems, such as the weather, his lack of money, the poor condition of his clothing, his inability to find Ulric, and his exhaustion from evading Stralenheim. Likewise, while the 1822 Werner still has some hope – his father’s wrath did not extend to Ulric and he himself has a chance to reclaim his nobility – the 1815 Werner faces dead ends at all turns. Werner’s father has disinherited both him and Ulric, and his estate has been usurped already by Stralenheim, leaving Werner with nothing but perpetual pain, regret, and envy: “long remorse[,] ... consciousness, | The curse of living on regretting life | Mispent [sic] in miserably gazing upward | While others soared” (I.i.109-12). As can be seen, Byron did not portray the 1822 Werner as the gloomy, brooding Byronic hero he depicted in 1815. The 1822 Werner faces problems, but he is not like the heroes of the tales or as gloomy as in 1815.

Instead, Byron transforms the suffering of early Byronic heroes into figures of speech. Specifically, instead of describing his own suffering, Werner uses the language of suffering to portray Stralenheim as his oppressor and nemesis. Thus, instead of replicating the imagery of self-inflicted wounds – as with the image of a “Scorpion girt by fire,” which depicts how “writhe[s] the mind Remorse hath riven, | Unfit for earth, undoomed for heaven, | Darkness above, despair beneath, | Around it flame, within it death!” (*Giaour* 434-38) – Werner speaks of pain metaphorically, and he uses the term as an invective. In Act I, for example, he calls Stralenheim a disease – “this fatal sickness, | More fatal than a mortal malady, | Because it takes not life, but life’s sole solace” (I.i.101-03) – and explains that he “feel[s] my spirit girt about | By the snares of this avaricious fiend” (I.i.104-05). The repetition of “girt” is, I believe, more than coincidental; the image of the trapped scorpion has become a signature of Byronic writing, yet no one has commented on how Byron inverts the image here. Instead of using the image of the scorpion to describe self-inflicted torment, Byron inverts the metaphor to describe oppression. Indeed, as G. B. Tandon has pointed out, depictions of Stralenheim as a snake or hound and of Werner as his prey are among the most prominent images of the play (216-18).

Werner also uses images of self-imposed suffering when he speaks about himself, but he inverts the imagery again by using the past tense. As he tells Josephine in Act I, “then | My passions were all living serpents, and | Twined like the gorgon’s round me” (I.i.163-65). The past tense is used here to distance Werner’s former self-imposed suffering, which was caused by his reckless behavior, from the hope he now has. He tells Josephine he has “now, | Chasten’d, subdued, out-worn” the rebellion of the past (I.i.154-55), and he looks forward to being reunited with Ulric and to reclaiming his land. As can be seen, the Werner of 1822 is much more calm, mature, and hopeful than the brooding and disheartened Werner of 1815. I believe this suggests

that Byron was not merely replicating his writing style of the past. Instead, he subordinates such writing for alternative motives.

Compromising Melodrama

Portions of Act I rely on the rhetoric of the Byronic hero, but Byron does not set up Werner as the hero of the play. Werner is old, ill, poor, and an outcast. Consequently, he is overshadowed by his son, Ulric, who is described as a heroic and redeeming figure. As early as Act I, Werner and Josephine speak of a son whose rediscovery has the power to undo Werner's punishment for marrying Josephine. As Werner explains, their rediscovery of Ulric "could bring compensation for past sorrow" (I.i.74) because he would be able to inherit the Siegendorf estate and re-legitimize Werner's position within the family. In Act II, Josephine explicitly states that she considers him "not only as a son but [as a] saviour" (II.ii.8). Gabor, the Hungarian, also speaks of Ulric as a super-human figure. In Act V, he describes Ulric as a "man | Of wonderful endowments: – birth and fortune, | Youth, strength and beauty, almost superhuman" (V.i.243-45) and says that Ulric is "One of those beings to whom Fortune bends" (V.i.270). Even Stralenheim, Werner's enemy, speaks of Ulric's bravery, portraying him as a model soldier. In Act II, he says Ulric is "of | That mould which throws out heroes; fair in favour; | Brave, ... | And, ... with such a form and heart, | Would look into the fiery eyes of war, | As ardently for glory" (II.i.156-61). And he continues his praise in his own soliloquy, speaking of Ulric as "A stalwart, active, soldier-looking stripling, | Handsome as Hercules" (II.i.254-55).

Through such descriptions, Byron characterizes Ulric as the hero of a classical tragedy. According to Jeffrey Cox, the tragic hero is initially presented as "Sitting at the summit of society" (*In the Shadows* 8), "above or beyond the bounds recognized by ordinary men" (9), and

“capable of granting a new significance to his world” (10). This certainly seems true of Ulric; his heroism and strength are unmatched in the play, and he promises to bring peace and stability to the Siegendorf estate. Through his accomplishments and integrity, moreover, the tragic hero has the potential to establish a new world order. He represents the frontier of human potential – whether mentally such as Oedipus or Faust or physically such as Ajax – and promises to break through human limitations and to redefine what is possible (Cox, *In the Shadows* 8-10). In attempting to do so, however, the hero sets up himself for a fall; consequently, it is easy to vilify him as mad with power, an immoral over-reacher, and a danger to the established order (Cox, *In the Shadows* 11). However, while in a traditional tragedy the plot focuses on the hero’s fall, in *Werner* Byron mixes together two plot lines. On the one hand, he stages a melodrama where Stralenheim is defeated, the Seigendorf family is reunited, political authority is reestablished, and Ulric is engaged. But, on the other hand, Byron follows through with the tragic fall of Ulric. More specifically, Byron exposes the consequences of the Seigendorf family’s delusion about Ulric; instead of being the family’s savior, Ulric turns out to be a lawless Romantic hero.⁷⁹ In doing so, Byron undermines the melodramatic happy ending by exposing the violence which the melodrama would have sanctioned.

Byron begins to set up the family’s misinterpretation of Ulric in Act II through the use of dramatic irony. After witnessing Werner and Josephine’s hopes for Ulric in Act I, readers hear of rumors that undermine Ulric’s integrity. In Act II, Fritz and Idenstein unknowingly speak of Ulric as a lost heir who went wayward in the lawlessness of the Thirty Years’ War. As Fritz explains, “there was something strange and mystic in him, | That in the wild exuberance of his

⁷⁹ In speaking about the Romantic hero, I rely on the definition provided by Northrop Frye as a person who “is placed outside the structure of civilization and therefore represents the force of physical nature, amoral or ruthless, yet with a sense of power, and often of leadership, that society has impoverished itself by rejecting” (41). The Romantic hero, furthermore, is self-sufficient in that he defines his own principles and judges his actions according to those principles.

nature, | He had join'd the black bands, who lay waste [to] Lasatia, | The mountains of Bohemia and Silesia" (II.i.122-25). And he compares Ulric unfavorably to a wild tiger and to the legendary war heroes Wallenstein, Tilly, and Gustavus whose "human natures [have been] so allied | Unto the savage love of enterprize, | That they will seek for peril as a pleasure" (II.i.133-41). Along with depicting him as "savage," Fritz also suggests that Ulric may have inherited the darker traits of his family. He explains that Ulric "forms a happy mixture of his sire | And grandsire's qualities, – impetuous as | The former, and deep as the latter" (II.i.105-07). Rumors of Ulric's criminality had also reached Gabor even before the two met. He tells Werner in Act V that he had heard of one whose skills were "attributed to witchcraft" (V.i.249) and that in meeting him for the first time he "could discern ... the assassin's eye | And gladiator's heart" (V.i.267-68). Though comparisons to a gladiator, a tiger, and famous war heroes can sound like terms of praise, Fritz and Gabor allude to their less appealing characteristics; Byron would have been critical particularly of the massacres that resulted from the generals' ambition during the Thirty Years' War.

But Ulric manages to hide this dark side of himself. He plays all parts to all people and benefits from their misunderstanding of his character. In Act II, he gains the confidence of Stralenheim and uses it to help his parents escape. Even after Ulric learns from Werner that Stralenheim is "The serpent who will sting" (II.ii.60) and "One who claims our fathers' lands: | Our distant kinsman, and our nearest foe" (II.ii.62-63), he continues to pledge himself to Stralenheim's service, at one point sword-fighting with Gabor in defense of Stralenheim's honor, an action which leads Stralenheim to consider him as a trusty servant and bodyguard. Consequently, Stralenheim discloses his suspicions about Werner and makes Ulric responsible for keeping track of him.

In deceiving and ultimately killing Stralenheim, Ulric also plays the part of a dutiful son. Following the adage, he keeps his enemy close and takes advantage of an opportunity for his parents to escape. It is a role he continues to perform into Acts IV and V, promising to “obey” his father’s wishes even if it means sacrificing his own desires. In Act IV, particularly, he continually reaffirms that he will obey Siegendorf, promising “I will obey your orders” (IV.i.345), “I am ready to | Obey you” (IV.i.368-69), “I obey” (IV.i.404), and “I obey at once” (IV.i.256).⁸⁰ As part of acting like a dutiful son, Ulric also agrees to marry Ida, Stralenheim’s orphaned teenage daughter whom Siegendorf has adopted. Again, he assures his father that he will marry Ida (IV.i.384, 392), even though he also admits that “Just now I am not violently transported | In favor of such unions” (IV.i.385-86).⁸¹ At one point, he makes the point explicit, telling his father that he would marry whomever his father chooses even if it were Hecate, adding “can a son say more?” (IV.i.345-46). He also stresses his obedience at the end of their conversation when he tells Siegendorf “to please you | I will now pay my duty to my mother” (IV.i.399-400), and, before leaving, he repeats “What can a son or man do more?” (IV.i.411). Throughout the conversation, Ulric draws attention to his performance of the role of a dutiful son – emphasizing words such as “obey,” “duty,” and “son” – and hoping to perpetuate his parents’ positive image of him.

But Siegendorf is not satisfied with Ulric’s dutiful submission. In fact, by continually flaunting his obedience, Ulric only leads Siegendorf to see him as both cold and calculating. Siegendorf particularly criticizes Ulric for not acting with passion. In Act IV, he tells Ulric that

⁸⁰ It could be argued that Ulric stresses his obedience to Siegendorf so that he can perpetuate Siegendorf’s positive image of him and keep him from suspecting Ulric for the murder of Stralenheim. But Ulric stresses his obedience to his parents even before he murders Stralenheim. In Act II, he tells Josephine “I obey you, ... | Although reluctantly” (II.ii.155-56) and that his “first act shall not | Be one of disobedience” (II.ii.156-57).

⁸¹ Ulric says the same thing to Rodolph at the beginning of Act IV. He says that he loves Ida, but “it follows not ... that | I would bind in my youth and glorious years | ... with a lady’s zone, | Although ’twere that of Venus” (IV.i.119-22).

“It is not | The nature of thine age, nor of thy blood, | Nor of thy temperament, to talk so coolly” (IV.i.347-49), and, during his soliloquy, he complains that Ulric acts with “Too much of duty and too little love!” (IV.i.412), that he is “obedient, but with coldness; duteous | In my sight, but with carelessness” (IV.i.419-20). At one point, he even considers the possibility of a demonic influence, suggesting that “Some master fiend is in [Ulric’s] service to | Misrule the mortal who believes him slave, | And makes his every thought subservient” (IV.i.354-56). Siegendorf’s language is harsh; in arguing that Ulric does not act as his nature ought to be, he suggests that Ulric is not natural or even possessed. But he is not off the mark. Ulric himself eventually confesses his immorality, at one point arguing that “We have done | With right and wrong” (V.i.453-54), and he displays the cold logic of Stralenheim’s murder without remorse. During his confession in Act V, he tells Siegendorf that Stralenheim “Was a rock in our way which I cut through | As doth the bolt, because it stood between us | And our true destination” (V.i.459-61), and he adds that “I preserved him, and he *owed me* | His *life*; when due, I but resumed the debt” (V.i.462-63). Such language shows that Ulric had no emotions in performing his actions; he acted with no more emotion than the sky does when it throws a thunderbolt or an accountant does when balancing the record books. The imagery of the accounting book is particularly interesting, for Byron had used the same idea of debt to show the cold logic behind Loredano’s revenge in *The Two Foscari*.

Ulric’s cold but dutiful performance is also criticized by Ida. Like Sardanapalus, she criticizes her lover for not using a term of endearment. He actually does call her “my sweet cousin” (IV.i.151) and later offers to call her “sister” (IV.i.162), “Dearest Ida” (IV.i.165), and “Dear Ida” (IV.i.172), but Ida responds that the address “sounds so cold, as if you thought upon | Our pedigree” (IV.i.155-56), and she objects that Ulric merely “echo [her] own wish” (IV.i.166).

But although Ulric promises to speak well, he still does not perform the courtship of a lover. For example, when Ida asks him to act as her “true knight” by yielding to her request that he forego the hunt (IV.i.212-13), Ulric refuses, arguing that “your feasts | In castle halls, and social banquets, nurse not | My spirit” (IV.i.220-22), that he “live[s] but on the atmosphere” (IV.i.220), and that he is “a forester and breather | Of the steep mountain-tops, where I love all | The eagle loves” (IV.i.222-24). The association of himself with the eagle is particularly telling as the eagle typically symbolizes strength and independence, two attributes Ulric wishes Ida would recognize in him.

Count Siegendorf also criticizes Ulric for his cold behavior towards Ida. Like Ida, he recognizes that his son’s heart “is cold” (IV.i.325), and he criticizes Ulric’s loveless relationship with Ida, accusing him of acting “Against [his] age and nature” (IV.i.364) and reminding him that “’tis your office | To woo” (IV.i.397-98). But Ulric defends himself by arguing that his “nature is not given | To outward fondling” (IV.i.329-30), and, as with Ida, he accuses Siegendorf of attempting to domesticate him:

You have forbid my stirring
For manly sports beyond the castle walls,
 ... you bid me turn a chamberer,
To pick up gloves, and fans, and knitting-needles,
And list to songs and tunes, and watch for smiles,
And smile at pretty prattle, and look into
The eyes of feminine, as though they were
The stars receding early to our wish
Upon the dawn of a World-winning battle[.] (IV.i.402-10)

As with Ida, Ulric accuses Siegendorf of denying him the freedom to pursue masculine activities. He suggests that Siegendorf wants him to give up hunting and “manly sports” for knitting, songs, and conversations. His conversation with Rodolph at the beginning of Act IV is also telling. He says that he considers Siegendorf’s domestic gatherings “feasts and fooleries” (IV.i.116) and “peal[s] of nuptial nonsense” (IV.i.117). As with Siegendorf, Ulric explains that he values outdoor and military activities much more than domestic ones, arguing that “I have not the time to pause | Upon these gewgaws of the heart. Great things | We have to do ere long” (IV.i.125-27). Given Byron’s complaint in *Don Juan* of how aristocratic men in Regency England have lost their heroism, I believe this is another criticism of the effeminate English society. More specifically, Byron criticizes the Regency idolization of the domestic sphere by displaying how it is unfit to reform Ulric. It is also a criticism of the Romantic ideologies of freedom, nature, and the self-sufficient man. When one values such attributes, Byron suggests, he becomes unfit for society. Even more, Byron suggests that those who buy into the Romantic ideology even scorn the domestic sphere.

As seen, Ulric’s performance of his duties without conviction leads Siegendorf and Ida to suspect that there is a side of him he does not disclose. But Ulric is actually quite an inept actor; consequently, he risks disclosing his secret even before Gabor tries to blackmail him. Throughout Act IV Ulric exposes his guilt through uncontrolled outbursts and facial expressions, leading Ida and others to speculate about what may be troubling him. Between Acts III and IV, Ulric becomes noticeably jumpy and he takes every opportunity to overemphasize his feigned innocence. For example, when Ida criticizes him for only focusing on their blood relationship, Ulric responds alarmingly “Blood!” (IV.i.157). He also tries to explain away his alternating pale and blushing demeanor by claiming that Ida’s “presence sent [the blood] | Back to my heart,

which beats for you” (IV.i.160-61). But Ida makes the same comment later on as well. In the presence of Rodolph, Ulric’s subservient leader of the banditti, Ida comments that he has “turn’d so pale and ill” (IV.i.214), a comment Rodolph affirms with his own observation that “within this quarter of an hour | You have changed more than I e’er saw you change | In years” (IV.i.216-18). Ulric tries to dismiss their observation with laughter, admitting that he is “the trueameleon” [sic] (IV.i.219). He also insists that the report of Stralenheim’s death by fever “was so” (IV.i.193), and he dismisses the possibility of murder – as suggested by Ida’s dream – by telling her that “All dreams are false” (IV.i.194). Through such outbursts, rumors, and conversations, it becomes clear that Ulric is not the model hero his family has made him out to be. Yet, even with the family’s concern over his coldness, no one thinks that Ulric may have killed Stralenheim or be the leader of the banditti.

In Act V, in fact, the Siegendorf family participates in the celebration for the end of the Thirty Years’ War at Prague, a celebration which “hath double claims” (IV.i.253) for both the restoration of peace and the restoration of the family’s nobility. Had the play ended here, it would have certainly lived up to Jeffrey Cox’s consideration of it as a melodrama (*In the Shadows* 40).⁸² The establishment of peace, the reunion of the family, and Ulric’s engagement would have been fit occasions for celebration, and the scene could have ended with all of the music and spectacle Ida describes. But the celebration is quickly disrupted by the presence of Gabor who confronts Siegendorf and threatens to expose Ulric. At this moment, the play turns from celebration to tragedy. Gabor’s disclosure actually brings about two tragedies. First, it undermines Ulric’s integrity. Gabor informs Siegendorf – and the reader if he or she has not yet interpreted all of the clues – that Ulric murdered Stralenheim. Consequently, it is at this moment

⁸² Richard Lansdown has also called *Werner* a melodrama, though with some reservation. He argues that “It is not the ‘crudest’ melodrama by a long chalk – but it is melodrama all the same” (*Byron’s* 52).

– when Siegendorf gives Ulric an opportunity to deny Gabor’s accusation – that Ulric confesses. The confession undermines Siegendorf’s idolization of Ulric as a heroic, dutiful son whose goodness has compensated for the rebellion of his own youth.

Siegendorf also witnesses Ulric’s immorality firsthand. After Gabor’s story and Ulric’s confession, Ulric draws his sword and prepares to silence/kill Gabor to protect the family. While Siegendorf argues that he will not stain the family name with accusations of more bloodshed, Ulric reasons that “the grave will keep it down” and that “ashes are feeble foes” since “it is more easy | To baffle such, than countermining a mole, | Which winds its blind but living path beneath you” (V.i.435-38). Ulric also criticizes Siegendorf’s principled objection, telling him that he would willingly “be | Denounced – dragg’d, it may be, in chains” because of his “inherent weakness, half-humanity, | Selfish remorse, and temporising pity, | That sacrifices your whole race to save | A wretch to profit by our ruin!” (V.ii.34-39). Essentially, Ulric makes the case of the Romantic hero; he advances the idea that one who is superior in strength and mental ability should not be hampered by the limitations of society, including moral prohibitions against murder. In this sense, Marjean Purinton is right in that Ulric discloses “mentally constructed tyrannies of socially conditioned organizations” (65) which cause principled characters such as Siegendorf to “handcuff themselves by adherence to mentally constructed systems” (87). Furthermore, she argues that the characters of the play are “enslaved by a mental structuration that seeks to preserve appearances of name, reputation, title – the old order and power base – at all costs” (92). However much this line of reasoning may be true for Ulric, I disagree that it is true for Byron. I specifically disagree with Purinton’s equating of Ulric’s reasoning with that of Byron’s when she argues that Byron was “Dissatisfied with [the] superficial changes” of Whig reformers, believing that they only put on the show of reform without actually enacting “a more

total reconstruction of social configurations, one that reconstructed the very foundation or ideology on which reforms rested” (55). Consequently, Purinton argues, Byron turned to the closet drama of *Werner* because he could ensure that the revolutionary ideas he espoused through Ulric would not be distorted by the theater industry. I disagree that Byron privileges Ulric’s point of view. Given Byron’s objection to needless violence and his objection to a full-out revolution, I believe that he displays the tragic consequences of adopting Ulric’s self-defined principles. By the end of the play, Ulric is exposed as the leader of the banditti and as an immoral opportunist who uses violence for personal gain. Given what Byron has written about such figures in *Don Juan* and in the historical dramas, I doubt Byron would have wanted readers to admire Ulric. As this chapter has argued, in fact, Byron has gone through considerable effort to show that Ulric is a false prophet and that belief in him leads to tragedy.

The fall of Ulric also brings about the second tragedy, the fall of Siegendorf, a fall from his own high estimation of himself. In addition to Ulric’s criminality, the confrontation with Gabor also exposes how naïve Siegendorf was to believe in the redemptive power of his son. Specifically, it exposes how Siegendorf has benefitted from the denial of wrongdoing, and it convinces him that he is the originator of his own downfall since, according to Ulric, his own logic authorized the murder of Stralenheim. As Ulric reminds him, it was “*You [who] kindled first | The torch – you [who] show’d the path*” (V.i.465-66) when Siegendorf/Werner stole the rouleau from Stralenheim and “*proclaim’d to me | That there were crimes made venial by the occasion*” (V.i.441-42). Furthermore, Ulric insists that he only acted on his father’s impulses, arguing that Siegendorf “*invites to deeds | He longs to do, but dare not*” (V.i.451-52). In fact, Ulric presents himself as the manifestation of Siegendorf’s unconscious will, asking “*Is it strange | That I should act what you could think?*” (V.i.452-53). Ironically, Siegendorf has gone to great

length to appease his conscience from the past. He uses the past tense in Act I to distance himself from his youthful rebellion, he adopts Ida, and he donates the rouleau he stole from Stralenheim to the church, requesting that it be used for the benefit of his enemy's soul.

Nevertheless, Siegendorf takes personal responsibility for the murder and feels that the sins of the past have finally caught up with him. As he tells Ulric, "my dead father's curse! 'tis working now" (V.i.434), and he feels that he has already been "plunged into the deepest hell" (V.i.482). At one point, he identifies with Stralenheim and accuses Ulric of "parricide" (V.i.423). In a note to the International Byron Society's edition of the drama, Peter Cochran suggests that Siegendorf makes a mistake – "A Freudian slip" (117 n.154) – since Ulric killed Stralenheim not his father, but the invective is accurate given that Siegendorf believes he has been symbolically killed. He says so explicitly to Gabor by telling him that "I am not master ... of my own castle" (V.ii.6-7), and, at the end of both scenes i and ii, he suggests that his soul has already died. At the end of Act V, scene i, he is disoriented and asks a string of questions which suggest he is undergoing an epiphany: "Am I awake? are these my father's halls? | And *yon* – my son? *My* son! *mine!*" (V.i.479-80). Likewise, at the end Act V, scene ii, he speaks directly to his dead father and suggests that he is already heading towards death: "All is over | For me! – Now open wide, my sire, thy grave; | Thy curse hath dug it deeper for thy son | In mine! The race of Siegendorf is past!" (V.ii.63-66). This is actually an interesting performance. Even though Ulric committed the murder, it is Siegendorf, not Ulric, who performs the role of the tragic hero. Thus, at the end of the drama, Werner appropriates the role of the tragic hero for himself. He interprets the exposure of Ulric's criminality as a sign of his own downfall. Meanwhile, Ulric turns out to be a villain. What is more, the end of the play suggests that Ulric will continue to benefit from his leadership of the banditti, especially if he is able to kill Gabor. Thus, Ulric loses

the good opinion of his father, but it was never real anyway; he has learned no lesson about the need to obey society's laws. Consequently, Siegendorf has undergone a change – he has changed the way he understands the world – while Ulric remains the same. It is an unfortunate ending for Siegendorf. As Thomas Corr asserts, Siegendorf learns that he must live “with the knowledge that exile in a fallen world is permanent” (Corr 398).

Criminalizing Ulric

As mentioned above, *Werner* was one of Byron's most performed plays in nineteenth-century London theaters. It remained in repertoire between 1830 and 1866, averaging between four and twelve performances per year (Taborski 153-54). However, as with other Byron plays, the main focus was transformed. Rather than demonstrating how the melodrama of political restoration depends on violence and self-deception, the drama was transformed into the tragedy of an ailing father who is undermined by his scheming child.

While Byron's published play includes much dramatic irony which exposes Ulric's criminality through rumor and through Ulric's poor attempts to hide his guilt, Macready's performance script (the script used for nearly all productions of *Werner* during the 1800s) hides Ulric's crime. It does this by omitting damaging rumors about Ulric and by deleting scenes where he nearly discloses his guilt. For example, Macready cut many of Fritz's lines about Ulric in Act II, scene i, including those in which he compares Ulric to a tiger and to the ruthless generals of the Thirty Years' War. He also cut the moments of half-disclosure in Act IV where Ulric responds with visible concern to Ida and risks exposing his guilt by overcompensating in his attempt to hide it. More specifically, Macready cut lines in which Ida asks Ulric about her

father's death (IV.i.175-92), and he cut Ulric's responses to both her question and her vision of Stralenheim's murder (IV.i.197-204).

Along with minimizing the criminality of Ulric's character, Macready also cut lines in which characters undermine the stability of the new peace. In one part of Act II, for example, Macready cut several of Stralenheim's lines that portray the new peace as a façade which covers unheard of crimes and suppresses people's innate violent impulses only temporarily (II.i.167-73). Likewise, Macready cut nearly the whole discussion between Eric and Henrick at the beginning of Act IV. This scene originally included about a hundred lines in which the two speak about Ulric's unrest during this time of peace; it also originally included Rodolph's inquiries about Stralenheim and about why Ulric looks so pale. Such omissions in the performance script drastically reduced Byron's dramatic irony. Consequently, elements of Macready's production no longer worked to undermine the happy ending of the Siegendorf family or to display the family's self-delusion about Ulric. Instead, Ulric was portrayed as a much more positive character, and the audience was invited to participate in the Siegendorf family's idolization of him. Macready even added a few lines to the beginning of Act IV which feature a family attendant ordering servants of the Siegendorf family not to dress or behave inappropriately during the parade so that "Nor prince nor noble... | Shall cast into eclipse the train of Siegendorf" (IV.i.9-10). As a result, the end of the Thirty Years' War was celebrated without irony. Not only did Macready cut lines of minor characters who suggested that the peace would only last temporarily, but he also cut lines that were critical of the celebration itself. In Act V, for example, he cut the lines of a minor character who calls the celebrations "dull pageantries" (V.i.13) and exclaims, "The devil take | These revels and processions!" (V.i.6-7). Thus, when Josephine exclaims "Heaven be praised, the show is over" (V.i.14), she comes across as merely

exhausted rather than as critical of the celebration. Consequently, without Byron's criticism, the audience would be less inclined to see through the performativity of the celebration, and they would be much more expectant of a happy ending.

Macready also reduced the dramatic irony around Ulric by transferring suspicion onto his own character. In Act IV, for example, he cut Siegendorf's long complaints about Ulric, cutting about 35 lines from the soliloquy in which he complains that Ulric is "obedient, but with coldness." Instead, he added to Siegendorf's soliloquy about a dozen lines which allude to his guilt over Stralenheim's murder. He also famously cut a portion of Act I where Werner shows Josephine his unstained knife and the whole scene with the prior in Act IV where he goes above and beyond to atone for a murder he has not committed. With these cuts, Macready took away the suspicion of crime from Ulric and placed it on himself. By doing so, he was able to do two things that greatly affected the performance. First, he aligned Werner/Siegendorf much more closely with the Gothic villain of the Victorian theater. This obviously altered Byron's use of the Gothic and compromised his vow not to appeal to popular taste, but the alteration may have been one of the keys to the play's success. The mystery of crime in Macready's production was thus more suspenseful and entertaining than Byron's dramatization of Siegendorf's self-deception. Secondly, by transferring suspicion onto Siegendorf, Macready was further able to deceive the audience into believing in the goodness of Ulric. Consequently, audiences would have sympathized with Siegendorf when he discovered Ulric's secret rather than criticize him. Unlike in Byron's drama, Siegendorf and the audience learn of Ulric's crime simultaneously, so there is no disconnect between what Siegendorf and the audience know about Ulric.

This simultaneous discovery meant that the audience could share Siegendorf's pain. Rather than denouncing him for his idolization of Ulric, the audience would have experienced

the same feelings of disappointment and betrayal. Macready made this happen by reducing dramatic irony; he reduced Byron's distancing effect between the audience and Siegendorf. He also streamlined the whole play so that it climaxed in Siegendorf's discovery. This meant cutting many lines, particularly in Act V. As written by Byron, Act V moves very slowly; in fact, there is almost no action in the whole Act. Instead, Byron's drama contains long monologues in which Gabor slowly discloses how he came to witness Stralenheim's murder. They allow a physical actor such as Edmund Kean to portray the mental torture Siegendorf goes through while listening to Gabor, providing a detailed psychological study of the main character. Rather than displaying action, Byron's closet drama envisions a mental theater in which the reader imagines each emotional response Siegendorf goes through. This lack of action, however, would not have translated well on the Victorian stage, particularly since the large theaters required loud voices and broad physical movements in order to be heard and seen by the audience.

Instead of displaying the minute psychological pain of Siegendorf, Macready displayed Siegendorf's surprise by over-dramatizing it. He did this through the use of two tableaux. First, he highlighted Siegendorf's faith in Ulric. In Byron's text, much of the focus in Act V is on Gabor's disclosure and on Siegendorf's response. Ulric stands around "drawing lines with [his sabre] on the floor" (409) unnoticed and silent for much of the Gabor-Siegendorf exchange. Since Macready shortened Gabor's monologues, Ulric does not spend so much time idling alongside his father. Instead, Macready involved Ulric in the action by having Siegendorf hold hands with him and by speaking in the first-person plural. For example, Macready revised a line that originally read "And what is this to Ulric?" (V.i.242) to "What is it to us?" Thus, in the first

tableau, Siegendorf presents a united front against Gabor's accusation, and he asserts that both he and Ulric are being accused.

With this show of confidence – both in action and in speech – Macready sets up the scene for his second tableau. In this instance, he over-dramatizes Siegendorf's surprise and pain at hearing of Ulric's crime. Again, Macready does this both in action and in speech. At one point, he created a new exchange between Siegendorf and Gabor during performance, adding “you cannot | Feel for misery like unto a mine” – a “spontaneous interpolation” which, Margaret Howell explains, “was greeted with a roar of approval” and became a permanent part of the script (153). He also included several of his famous fainting spells at important moments in the play. These tactics culminated in his on-stage death (an addition to Byron's text) at the end of Act V. Macready rewrote the ending so that rather than stand alone with Josephine like Cain and Adah and tell her that “we are now alone!” (V.ii.61) – a statement that is more analytical of their fallen condition than an expression of his pain – Siegendorf gives full vent to his misery. In a *Lear*-like ending, Siegendorf emotionally expresses the pain his son has caused him, stating “Oh! Pray for him!” and “Oh! Ulric! Ulric!” The emotional outburst was also accompanied by an equally over-dramatic on-stage death. According to one contemporary reviewer, Macready's death scene was a “rare effect” in theater:

What Macready achieved here in the way of facial expression and symbolic gesture ... has never ... been exceeded. ... Macready produced one of those rare effects, which become traditions of the theatre. With a shrill cry of agony, as if pierced mortally by a dart, he bounded from his seat, and then, as if all strength had failed him, wavered and fluttered forward ... till he sank on one knee in front of the stage. (Qtd. in Taborski 232)

I agree with Helen Damico's claim that Siegendorf's death "frustrates the thematic and dramatic development of [Byron's] play" in that it "materially subverts Byron's view of the tragic experience" (67). As Thomas Corr has argued, *Werner* demonstrates that "man cannot ... redeem himself from the mysterious state of exile, misery, and damnation in which he finds himself" (377). In the original drama, Byron demonstrates what happens to characters like Siegendorf who reach beyond human ability and deceive themselves into believing that the past can be atoned for with the establishment of an enclosed edenic realm such as the Siegendorf estate.

Although Macready's ending changes the nature of Siegendorf's tragedy as Byron envisioned it, it does introduce a new element into the play that Victorian audiences would have approved. Along with staging Siegendorf's death, Macready also staged the arrest of Ulric. Actually, Siegendorf's on-stage death happened not simply because he learned that Ulric had committed murder but more immediately because Gabor returns with officers to arrest Ulric. Consequently, at the end of the play, Ulric is no longer the mysterious Romantic hero who defies society's laws and lives by his own principles. Instead, he is turned into a prisoner and most likely faces execution. Thus, Siegendorf's lament that "The race of Siegendorf is past" (V.i.66) takes on new meaning. While the expression originally signified a fall from respectable nobility, it now suggests the family's extermination. However, as tragic as it is for Siegendorf, Ulric's arrest is a celebration for Victorian law and morality. Stralenheim's family has found justice, the prohibition against murder has been reestablished, and the law has prevailed. While Byron wrote *Werner* as a response to the melodramatic ending of popular dramas, Macready's production of *Werner* ironically appealed to Victorian audiences expressly because it followed the standard melodramatic ending.

The height of Macready's fame as Werner happened somewhat early in his career, during the 1830-31 season with 31 performances at Drury Lane (Taborski 153), and then again between 1837 and 1841 with an average of ten to twelve performances per year, except during the 1838-39 season (Taborski 154). Otherwise, Macready continued to perform *Werner* outside of London and once or twice a year in the city until 1851. Afterwards, Samuel Phelps took over the role until 1866, though he had been performing as Werner since 1844 – and previously alongside Macready as Gabor and as Israel Bertuccio in *Marino Faliero*. While Phelps used Macready's script, his athletic physique changed Macready's performance of a weak, dying father into more of a dominating masculine persona, leaving one reviewer to call Phelps's character a "noble ... work of art as ever came from the mind of man" (qtd. in Damico 72).

However, Henry Irving's one-time performance on June 1, 1887 at the Lyceum changed the play even further. Although this one performance cannot match the theatrical legacy set by Macready and Phelps, it should not be ignored, particularly since it starred such an important nineteenth-century actor. The play used a new script adapted by Frank Marshall. As with other Byron plays performed in the late century, the production was more of a theatrical spectacle than a dramatization of Byron's play. Thus, as with *The Doge of Venice* and *Sardanapalus*, "Elaborate new scenery was prepared, costumes executed in Paris, complex lighting effects arranged ..., and incidental music composed" for the new *Werner* (Damico 73). Marshall's new script, moreover, rearranged scenes, cut the humor, added a new scene between Werner and Ida, and, most importantly, it showed Stralenheim's murder on stage. The decision to stage the murder, consequently, made it "a play of incident" (Damico 73). As Helen Damico explains, "It indicated that the events to follow would relate directly to the mechanics of apprehending the murderer, and that the hero [Werner] (who has now been shown to be innocent) would either be

cleared of the crime, or should the manhunt fail, be falsely condemned for it” (73). The new play thus focused on Ulric’s apprehension rather than on Siegendorf’s reaction. This adaptation represents the extreme to which Byron’s play could be altered so that it may follow the most formulaic melodramatic plot. By showing the murder, Marshall prohibited any sympathy the audience could have for Ulric; he was no longer the dashing, half-mythical Romantic hero who promised to establish a new society beyond good and evil. Instead, he was turned into a murderer at large, a public enemy who defied Victorian law and morality. With such an evil character before them, the audience lost sympathy and hoped for his arrest – and implicitly hoped for the extermination of the Siegendorf line – for the good of the country. Marshall’s adaptation thus turned the Siegendorfs’ tragedy into a celebration for the State. While Byron did not intend his drama to sanction state violence so explicitly – indeed Josephine laments the “feudal tyranny” shown to “petty victims” in Act I and holds respectful Tuscan citizens and merchants as models of human behavior – it is nevertheless part of Byron’s legacy in the theater that his dramas have been used to reaffirm the conservative sociopolitical order he often criticized.

CHAPTER 7

CODA: CONSIDERATIONS ON A THEATRICAL LEGACY

This dissertation has been making a case for the use of performance theory with Lord Byron's historical dramas and *Don Juan*. It is an approach to Byron that has existed implicitly in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship, but it has never been adequately articulated. The dissertation specifically contributes to an understanding of Byron's legacy in the Victorian theater by examining what happened to his works in nineteenth-century London theaters. Such a study can be considered performative in that it analyzes the effect of Byron's writings and theatrical presentations.

The previous chapters focused primarily on the stylistic elements of the poetry and drama – particularly on Byron's handling of the themes of change and mobility and his imitation-variation form of writing. But these literary themes and Byron's poetic style present more than a mode of writing. Byron also uses them to bring about a change in himself and in the world through the power of his written word. The best way to analyze his concern for the power or consequences of the word would be through an analysis of speech acts and by treating written documents and theatrical productions as kinds of speech acts. Chapter 3, on *Marino Faliero*, does this the most explicitly. Doge Faliero, his nephew, and the Senate pass judgment on the effect of Steno's graffiti from the very beginning of the play. Moreover, Bertuccio warns the Doge not to speak negatively against Steno and the Senate even as he encourages the Doge to give the command to murder Steno. Likewise, it is the Doge's commanding authority (symbolized by his commanding voice) which leads the conspirator Israel Bertuccio to seek the

Doge's commitment to the revolution through a verbal pledge. Finally, Benintende and the Giunta take steps to silence the conspirators and the Doge by denying them an audience. Consequently, in the final scene of the play, Venetian plebeians may see the Doge, but they cannot hear his influential words. Byron also explores this limitation of a character's voice in *The Two Foscari*. As Chapter 4 demonstrated, the political marginalization of Marina stands as both a cause and a symptom of an oppressive State.

Byron's concern with the power of speech is one of the clearest points of connection between Byron's dramas and his poetry. As seen in *Marino Faliero*, words are feared and controlled just as much as the violence of the rebels. And all characters continually talk about words. "Word," "words," and "speak," in fact, are among the most repeated words in the play; they appear more frequently than "signor," "senate," or "prince," and are only greatly surpassed by "death," "state," "blood," and "Venice." Such repetition suggests that the concept of words is always on the characters' minds. The Doge himself states that "true words are things, | And [that] dying men's [words] are things which long outlive, | And oftentimes avenge them" (IV.i.288-90). As can be seen, it is words that redress injustices; they have the power to set things right. A similar belief is presented in *The Two Foscari* with Jacopo telling Marina that "The tyranny of silence is not lasting, | And, though events be hidden, just men's groans | Will burst all cerement, even a living grave's!" (III.i.79-81). As in *Marino Faliero*, Jacopo attributes to language (the writing on the prison walls, more specifically) a power that allows it to subvert the oppressive authority in Venice.

This perspective on the function of the word is also shared by *Don Juan*. The narrator's confidence in the power of his words gives him the ability "to redress | Men's wrongs" (XIII.8) through the satire of *Don Juan*. In Canto III, for example, he asserts that "words are things"

(III.88), and he equates writing and other speech acts with the power of political actions and even of violence. In the same Canto III stanza, he explains that “a small drop of ink | ... produces | That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think” (88). At other times, he states that “I will war, at least in words (and – should | My chance so happen – deeds) with all who war | With Thought” (IX.24), and, at one point, he equates Gulbeyaz’s words with weapons, explaining that her words “went through [Juan’s] soul like Arab-spears” (V.117). Moreover, during his narration of the Siege of Ismail, the narrator asserts that he accomplishes his political work – of undermining the heroic spirit, condemning violence, and exposing the erotics of war and leadership – through writing. Like Orpheus, his poetry will move mountains and “teach ... the stones | To rise against earth’s tyrants” (VIII.135). The power of the word gives the narrator authority; consequently, he sees his poetry as a form of public, declamatory speech making where he presents “my addresses from the throne” (III.96). It is this awareness of a public voice that, for many Romanticists, has made Byron a non-lyrical and even anti-Romantic poet. Specifically, Byron’s direct address to the reader aligns his poetry more nearly with John Stuart Mill’s “heard” poem – that is, with rhetoric and oratory – than with the “overheard” lyrical poem.

But the narrator of *Don Juan* hesitates to embrace this form of power. The poem continually turns to examples of writers and speakers who have gone mad with the power of words, including Wordsworth, Southey, Coleridge, and Castlereagh. In the Dedication, for example, Byron explains that Wordsworth could not control his words in *The Excursion* and has produced “A drowsy frowsy poem” (III.94), “a rather long” poem of “five hundred pages” that is fit for only the Tower of Babel (st. 3). But dangerous writing also comes from benevolent intentions. Byron points to Cervantes, one of his role models for the poem, to demonstrate the

danger of good writing. As he explains in Canto XIII, Cervantes has produced a great work of art, but it was “dearly purchased by his land’s perdition” (XIII.11). He explains that “Cervantes smiled Spain’s chivalry away” (XIII.11) and with “A single laugh demolished the right arm | Of his own country” (XIII.11).

When read as closet dramas, Byron’s historical plays reflect on Byron’s own mission as a writer and on his legacy as a poet more broadly. Chapters 6 and 7, on *Sardanapalus* and *Werner*, make this point explicitly. His concern for his own legacy can thus be seen in Sardanapalus’s concern for the legacy of his “golden reign.” Byron’s concern has been explored throughout the dissertation with Byron’s revisionist strategy of imitation-variation as a form of continual self-assessment, an activity that comes across most explicitly in Byron’s revision of the Byronic hero in *Werner*. It is this shared mission of revisionist writing that gives *Don Juan* and the closet dramas such a close connection and makes Byron such an appealing case study for Romanticism, Romantic drama, and performance theory. But the question of legacy can be applied to the theatrical productions as well. Byron’s plays were presented to Victorian audiences in forms different than his publications; as a consequence, the theatrical productions gave Victorians a different version of Byron. It has been the work of this dissertation to demonstrate the difference – by focusing on what was cut, how characters and plots were changed, and how the plays were produced – and to give a cohesive analysis of this neglected, performative Byron.

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