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FL3002 British Romanticism

7 December 2020

Mad, Bad, and Dangerous to Know:

Deconstructing the Seduction between the Byronic Hero and his Readers

Within Lord Byron's oeuvre, *Don Juan* has typically been read as his flamboyant masterpiece on desire. Consequently, contemporary critics have eagerly flocked to the text to analyze Byronic seduction. Yet it is the earlier, angst-ridden speakers of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Manfred* who first transfixed the public and engendered the poet's celebrity. I venture to argue that the initial attraction sparked by those seminal works warrants analysis to understand how seduction occurs in the interplay of signs between poet and reader. Byron's speakers are not innately heroic (in fact, their characterization is vulnerable to decidedly unheroic readings under scrutiny), and yet they become heroes by seducing their reader's sympathetic attention. Conversely, the reader's willingness to feel seduced by portrayals of Romantic individualism allows the Byronic myth to prosper.

I propose that Byronic seduction is threefold – through piquing readerly interest via exotic signs, emotionally appealing to readers in his professions of disillusionment, and ultimately, through retreating into autobiographical ambiguity as an invitation for readers to inscribe their own meaning. Specifically, the Byronic speaker begins his seduction by mapping an alluringly affective foreign landscape colorized by pathetic fallacy. He then laments via allusions his self-imposed exile, arousing readerly sympathy for his painfully intractable, and yet egoistic alterity. Finally, the speaker blurs the line between literary persona and Byron himself. This rhetorical strategy both tempts reader curiosity and cedes room for readers to imagine – or rather, project – a captivating hero.

My proposal drew inspiration from Alexis Spiceland Lee's dissertation "'I Unsex'd My Dress': Lord Byron's Seduction of Gender in *The Corsair*, *Lara*, and *Don Juan*." Lee

interprets seduction as a complicit, performative, and open-ended exploration. I intend to share Lee's application of seduction as a critical framework, while focusing on Byron's engagement of readerly attention via pathos – rather than gender – as the site of seduction. My analyses will also be supported by Tom Mole's *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*. In his book, Mole persuasively argues that Byron fashioned his literary personae in acute responsiveness to his imagined reader. I contend that this responsiveness manifests via emotive rhetorical strategies aimed to seduce the reader. This line of argument will find support in Deborah Forbes' chapter on "The Drama of Breakdown," where she reasons that Byron's dramatic rejection of social convention is a source of poetic charisma.

  Ian Dennis and Emily A. Bernhard Jackson's articles will likewise inform my analysis. I intend to cite Dennis on how Byron's exotic settings in *Childe Harold* and *Manfred* facilitate contemplations of desire. The ontological skepticism Jackson notes in *Manfred* also bolsters my argument that the readers' freedom to speculate meaning consummates their seduction.

  Ultimately, I hope to contribute to existing scholarship on Byron by analyzing seduction as an interplay of signs between poet and reader, rather than limiting such interactions to gendered criticism. Additionally, through locating my sites of analysis in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Manfred,* I hope to demystify and reaffirm the seductive appeal of the early Byronic heroes.

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註解 [4]: You need to explain this paradox.

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註解 [5]: Do you mean "gender"?

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删除: reaffirm and

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