

Radicalism in Byron's *Manfred*: A Politico-religious Study

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Abstract—This paper offers a politico-religious reading of *Manfred* that demonstrates how the Byronic hero is shown as the symbol of rebellion against the tyrannical government and its institutions. The paper traces the movement from symbolic presentation to Byron's rejection of resigning to supernatural powers. Byron accused his own country-men of arraying their strength in the side of tyranny and stated that freedom could be possible when the powerful obstacles, thrones and courts were removed. Ultimately the paper aims at exploring all possible political meanings of the play in the light of Byron's political and religious beliefs.

Index Terms—radicalism, politico-religious, *Manfred*, tyranny

I. INTRODUCTION

Byron stood for both personal and national liberty. His views were determined by a powerful and positive belief in the work of individual man. He resembled Blake in his condemnation of senseless cruelty and hypocrisy which it bred for its support. He was the upholder of the natural man and thought that his bodily pleasures were worthy of protection. He fought for the cause of liberty and went to Greece to support the Greeks in their struggle against tyranny. His conception of liberty was more instructive than intellectual. His love for liberty is well-marked in his works. He wrote the *Prisoner of Chillon* in the defence of liberty, and the hero Bonnyard is a votary of liberty like Byron himself. The whole oppressed Europe looked to him for salvation and he became the trumpet voice of freedom. With Byron liberty became the ruling passion, and he considered it his birth right to fight against all tyranny.

Byron remained more than other Romantics a true follower of the principles of the Romantics a true follower of the principles of the Revolution. Much more than Wordsworth and Coleridge, who after their first enthusiasm for the Revolution surrendered to caution and scepticism, more even than Keats, whose love of liberty was hardly developed to its full range, Byron wished to be free and wished the other men must be free too.

Byron was equally revolutionary in his attitude towards the evils and vices of his age. He was a social revolutionary and ruthlessly exposed and attacked, as in *'Don Juan'* the philistinism of the upper English class, the aristocracy and the monarchy. He exposed the hypocrisy, the senseless cruelty, snobbery, the fraud, the cant and the indolence of the upper classes in society.

The romantic revolt against social authority took as many shapes as the one against literary tradition. Most of the romantics were radical in their political views and crusaders for the emancipation of the individual. The French Revolution affected all the romantic poets though in different ways. The young Wordsworth and Coleridge were thrilled with joy at the fall of the Bastille, which signified for them the cracking of the tyrannical chains which had kept in bondage the human spirit for so long. Later, however, with the Reign of Terror, the Lake Poets (Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey) turned conservative. The later romantics—Shelley, Keats and Byron were stronger and more consistent radicals than the earlier ones. All of them devoted themselves to the cause of freedom in all lands. Byron upheld the cause of Greek freedom in his poetry and his person, not only financially and morally.

On Byron the French Revolution exerted no direct pressure. But he was a revolutionary in his own right. He was against almost all social conventions and institutions, and felt an almost morbid pleasure in violating and condemning them with the greatest abandon. In his poetry he most vigorously championed the cause of social and political liberty and died almost as a martyr in the cause of Greek Independence.

"Talk not of seventy years as age; in seven/ I have seen more changes, down from monarchs to/ The humblest individual under heaven,/ Than might suffice a moderate century through." (*Don Juan*, XI.82.1-4)

The changes which Byron refers to during these seven years were radical ones. The political powers of the monarchy and aristocracy, on which the churches had relied, were drastically reduced. The advent of plays like Victor Hugo's *Notre dame de Paris* and Beaumarchais's *Figaro's Wedding* marked the generally held disdain against the traditional privileges of the Church and the nobility. Figaro's soliloquy contained the harshest criticism against the nobility, who according to him were parasites unworthy of any privileges (Beaumarchais, 1857). A monarch was overthrown, a

republic declared, and after years of violence, a soldier of the republic declared himself the Emperor of France who was in its own turn overthrown by foreign countries. Hence, for Byron and other Europeans the events from the Revolution to the Battle of Waterloo symbolized the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of a new era.

Certainly, this sense of rapid makeovers had its implications for the literature of the period including the genre of tragedy. "In the eighteenth century, playwrights usually staged a heroic figure who confronted a nonhuman force and finally overcame the chaos that typically marks the tragic world by finding within itself a new order for life" (Cox, 2005, p. 412).

However, the end of the eighteenth century tradition meant that poets could no longer adhere to the principle of human surrender to the powers high above him or depict a hero that stood above the society. Writing in an era of democratic revolutions, the abolishment of hierarchies and the decline of religion, Romantic poets were "seen by many [...] as incapable of producing tragedy" (ibid) in its traditional sense of the word because they could not "depict a hero or delineate a supernatural order." (ibid) *Manfred* seems to belong to this category because it is a play whose major emphasis is upon the freedom of man from the tyranny of the gods by reliance upon his own independent self. This theme has been linked by many critics to the idea of political radicalism. What follows is an attempt to explore all possible political meanings of the play in the light of Byron's political and religious beliefs.

The play is set in the Alps where Manfred, the protagonist of the play, lives in a Gothic castle. Tortured by his own sense of guilt for destroying Astarte, a girl he loved in the past, Manfred invokes six spirits of the universe, and a seventh who determines his personal destiny. None of the spirits are able to grant him what he wishes; they offer "Kingdom, and sway, and strength, and length of days," but not what he is looking for which is forgetfulness. From now on Manfred is accused by an unknown voice of having done evil deeds and informed that a curse will be upon him which will torture him forever without ever granting his wish for death. In the next scene, Manfred attempts to kill himself by jumping from the mountains, but he is rescued by an elderly Chamois Hunter who takes him back to his cottage where Manfred confesses his love for Astarte and how this love destroyed her. Although Byron subtly avoids specifying the relationship between the two, modern critics, having the facts of Byron's life in mind, have usually described it as an incestuous relationship. After leaving the chamois hunter, Manfred summons the Witch of the Alps who promises to help him on the condition that he submits to her will. Manfred refuses and leaves for the Hall of Arimanes wherein Nemesis calls up the spirit of Astarte for him. However, the spirit only foretells Manfred that his misery will end within a day. Manfred returns to his castle feeling peaceful for a while. He is visited by the Abbot of St. Maurice who offers him the consolation of religion. Manfred refuses, although he takes the hand of the Abbott at the moment of death, saying "Old man! 't is not so difficult to die."

Not surprisingly, while reading the play, a person familiar with the facts of the poet's life cannot avoid relating the protagonist to Byron himself, and Astarte to his sister. In fact, many critics see this play as reflecting Byron's own affair with his sister, Augusta Leigh. This coincides with Hazlitt's remark that "while reading Byron's works, Byron himself is never absent from our minds". (2004, p. 66) However, there are critics who point to the possibility and even necessity of historical and political readings of his works. Watkins, among others, suggests "as the recent excellent editions of letters, journals and poetry [...] make emphatically clear, [...] there is a vitally public dimension to all of his work, one which includes a variety of political, social and historical issues." (1993, p. 149) No matter how much *Manfred* may be mixed with facts from the personal life of the poet, Watkins continues, Byron "rarely lost sight of the larger contexts [...] of his particular situation," and, that *Manfred* is "about complex struggles and conflicts defining the entire Romantic Age across Europe. (p.19)

Although Byron himself was an aristocrat, he was affected by the new ideas preached against his class. In the third canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron presents sympathetic portraits of three of the heroes of the Enlightenment, Voltaire, Rousseau and Gibbon, whose ideas were championed by the leaders of the French Revolution. Watkins quotes David Erdman who once remarked "Byron and his heroes often appear acutely conscious of the mortality of their own class." (p. 154) He applies this assumption to the drama *Manfred* and sees Manfred's "extreme alienation and the conviction of certain defeat and death that Manfred everywhere expresses; his desperate search for some as yet untried trans-historical power to solve personal difficulties; his acute awareness of the inability of conventional actions and systems of belief to provide comfort" (p. 154) as an explicit example of an aristocrat aware of the demise of his class. However, Watkins's suggestion is useful to demonstrate that while Byron was aware of the demise of his class, he was not frightened by it. This is confirmed by a comment that he made to Leigh Hunt in which he spoke of his desire for significant political change:

When a proper spirit is manifested 'without doors' I will endeavour not to be idle within –do you think such a time is coming? Methinks there are gleams of it- & the fruit of it was a title and the loss of an enormous property, –if the old struggle comes on –I shall lose the one & shall never gain the other –but–no matter –there are things even in this world –better than either. (BLJ 5, p.19)¹

II. DISCUSSION

¹ BLJ in this paper refers to the book: Byron, George Gordon, Baron. *Byron's Letters and Journals*. Ed. Leslie A. Marchand. 12 vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973-82.

This is common knowledge that Byron, along with Shelley, belonged to the party of political radicals; and being a radical meant lack of faith in divine providence. Their vision of the world was one which was devoid of the religious optimism that God will make things right. Rather, defying the old hierarchical system, these radicals even challenged the authority of God as an absolute monarch. They attacked Christianity and joined the party of its opponent, Satan. They saw him as the symbol of “rebellion against unjust order and tyranny of the ancient regime and its institutions.” (Shocker, 2003, P. 156) Both Byron and Shelley had agreed in challenging the morality of Divine retribution. Byron felt the absurdity and injustice of God’s making man in the knowledge that he would disobey Him, and then exacting a penalty for his sin. Such considerations “put Divine revenge in a far less favorable light than the ‘wild justice’ of a Guiccioli”. (Kerrigan, 2006, P. 247) As a result, when the Abbot in Byron’s *Manfred* quotes “Vengeance is mine alone!” (Forman, 1880, P. 127) Manfred replies with a boldness that reminds the reader of Byron himself. “Must crimes be punished but by other crimes?” (P. 127) Manfred asks. To Shelley and Byron God was a cruel punisher who imposed a “terrible vengeance” on Lucifer who was himself the chief and original victim of creation. Milton’s Devil as a moral being, wrote Shelley: is far superior to his God as one who perseveres in some purpose which he has conceived to be excellent [...] is to one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy. (P. 127)

Byron was also skeptical about the existence of God. His uncertainty about and detestation of the idea of an afterlife with “varieties of burning, smothering and freezing” (Clark, 1988, P. 270) reveals itself in Manfred’s Hamlet-like soliloquy in Act II: “We are the fools of time and terror: Days/ Steal on us and steal from us; yet we live, / Loathing our life, and dreading still to die.” (PP. 64-66) Thus, evidently, for Byron too, it was certain that the hero of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* was not God but Satan. As he wrote to his former friend at Cambridge, Francis Hodgson, “the hero of tragedy and (I add meo periculo) a tragic poem must be guilty, to excite ‘terror and pity [...] Who is the hero of ‘Paradise Lost’? Why Satan.” (BLJ 8:115)

Depriving himself of the consolation of an afterlife, Manfred has to bear the burden of his guilt all by himself. This mental independence, which accounts for his rejection of penitence to protect himself from divine retribution, gives him a heroic dimension. To him “remorse without the fear of hell” is enough to make a hell within him. To the Abbot he says:

Old man! there is no power in holy men,/ Nor charm in prayer, nor purifying form/ Of penitence, nor outward look, nor fast,/ Nor agony, nor, greater than all these,/ The innate tortures of that deep despair/ Which is remorse without the fear of hell/ But all in all sufficient to itself/ Would make a hell of heaven”. (III, pp. 66-73)

Manfred’s remorse for his guilt feigned or not, does not in any way make him ask for forgiveness but, instead, he asks for forgetfulness which is a kind of running away from the reality of life and the past. He even seems to be pleased with his predicament for it makes him feel superior in mental power to the average men. Manfred’s attitude with its emphasis on the self-sufficiency of man’s conscience in the realm of morals is a distinguishing characteristic of the Byronic heroes. By rejecting the claims of the witch, the spirits of the universe, the forces of Arimanes and Nemesis, the solace of the nature, and finally the Abbott, Manfred refuses to yield to any spiritual authority, discarding pantheism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity each in its turn. In doing so, Manfred represents man in the increasingly secular world of the nineteenth century. The French Revolution, by executing the king and abolishing the authority of the Church, destroyed the hierarchical providential order of traditional tragedy which relied upon a sense of God who finally established the order of the things. “Accordingly Byron’s *Manfred* staging a world where nature spirits, the Witch of the Alps, Nemesis, Arimanes, and the God of the Abbot all inhabit the same universe”, (Cox, P. 424) implies that none of those religions is adequate to life. Talking about this aspect of *Manfred*, Richardson (2004, P. 145) argues:

Byron’s heterodox mythology in *Manfred* –placing pagan witches, Classical Greek deities, and the Zoroastrian evil principle (from the pre-Muslim Persian religion) on the same footing as the Abbot’s Christian references– implies a cosmopolitan religious skepticism [...] intensified by his open dislike of priests.

Due to this lack of religious faith and his abhorrence of abstract, Byron yielded to cynicism. He brought the truth of human viciousness to light and hence was accused, he says, of “A tendency to under-rate and scoff/At human power and virtue, and all that.” But he replies:

I say no more than hath been said in Dante’s/Verse, and by Solomon and by Cervantes; By Swift, by Machiavel, Rochefoucault,/By Fenelon, by Luther, and by Plato/By Tillotson, and Wesley, and Rousseau,/Who knew this life was not worth a potato.(*Don Juan*, VII,p. 3-5)

Unlike such Romantic thinkers as Rousseau who accused the society of corrupting the noble nature of humankind, Byron does not believe in the essential goodness of human nature and the progress of human history. As Lockridge (1989, p. 418) suggests, “He is a poet who denies that human history goes anywhere, that human beings are noble or honest,” still, in spite of all this, “he supports revolutionary causes.”

Byron observes that the “lapse of ages changes all things [...] except man himself, who has always been, and always will be an unlucky rascal. The infinite variety of lives conduct but to death, and the infinity of wishes lead but to disappointment.” (BL , p.19-20) This is exactly the attitude that Manfred expresses towards human kind. Averse to life and scornful of his race he separates himself from “mortals of a dust” like the chamois hunter and says, “My spirit walk’d not with the souls of men,/ Nor look’d upon the earth with human eyes;/ The thirst of their ambition was not mine;/ The aim of their existence was not mine;” (II, pp. 51-54) Meanwhile he does not behave toward other men with

hostility; on the contrary, on few accusations that he meets other people like the chamois hunter and the Abbot, he treats them with gentleness and consideration. This seems to be a result of his sense of pity for the inevitable doom which they all share. Recognizing the littleness of life and the mortality of man, Manfred is able to discern a truth which makes all his endeavors meaningless. This is a recognition which Manfred shares with his author. In fact, Byron's pessimism is his departure point from an idealist like Shelley. While Shelley identified poets as 'the unacknowledged legislators of the world,' (Forman, 1880:392) Byron scoffed at imagination as the worst quality of literature. As McGann (1976, p. 156) asserts:

It is the fashion of the day to lay great stress upon what they call 'Imagination' and 'Invention' [*sic*] the two commonest of qualities—an Irish peasant with a little whiskey in his head will imagine and invent more than would furnish forth a modern poem.

He had a distinguishing desire for truth which kept him on the ground at a time when Romantic poets were riding their wild Pegasus. Disparaging the highly imaginative innovations of his Romantic contemporaries in his *Detached Thoughts* he writes: "One of my notions, different from those of my contemporaries, is, that the present is not a high age of English Poetry: there are more poets than ever there were, and proportionally less poetry." (BLJ 9, p. 35) He believed poetry to be the reflection of the world, hence attached great importance to factual experience. In a letter to Murray he writes, "But I hate things all fiction [...] there should always be some foundation of fact for the most airy fabric-and pure invention is but the talent of a liar." (BLJ 5, p. 203)

This tendency to realistic literature which culminated in his masterpiece *Don Juan* was reflected in his ode *To Romance*. In this poem he writes:

Parent of golden dreams, Romance!/
Auspicious Queen of childish joys,/
Who lead'st along, in airy dance,/
Thy votive train of girls and boys;/
At length, in spells no longer bound,/
I break the fetters of my youth;/
No more I tread thy music round,/
But leave thy realms for those of Truth (pp. 1-8)

In this poem, he shows his desire to see the world as it is: composed of contradictions and mysteries and dissatisfactions: "But leave, at once, thy realms of air I/ [...] Confess that woman's false as fair/ And friends have feeling for –themselves?" (pp. 19-22) This insistence on truth, which according to McConnell, meant "candor and resolution in facing the voluminous problems of knowledge and experience," (1978, p. 362) seemed to be a quality borrowed from the Enlightenment and its demand for logicity. As a result, dissatisfied with the new poetic system of his age, in a letter to Murray, his publisher, in 1817 he writes:

With regard to poetry in general, I am convinced, the more I think of it, that Moore and all of us –Scott, Southey, Wordsworth, Moore, Campbell, I– are all in the wrong –one as much the other; that we are upon a wrong revolutionary poetical system, or systems, not worth a damn in itself. (BLJ 4, p.169)

Even in writing the *Turkish Tales* he insisted on the authenticity of his representation of the Orient and it seems that he tried to offer a faithful portrayal of the Muslim East. (However, this is a claim recently rejected by Eastern scholars). Consequently, the idealistic attitude of some poets of the time was against his penchant for the real. About this kind of mind-set which was common among some of his contemporary poets he wrote, "I have no great esteem for poetical persons, particularly women; they have so much of the 'ideal' in practices, as well as ethics." (BLJ 2, p. 346) "Shelley was one of those in search of a Utopia, who dreamt of the perfect state that humankind might one day achieve. These dreams arose partly from his reading of William Godwin's *Political Justice*." (Hands, 2008, pp. 143-161) Byron's skepticism to Shelley's dreams reveals itself in a remark he made to Medwin on how this utopianism damaged Shelley's career: "if he were not so mystical, and would not write Utopias and set himself up as a Reformer, his right to rank as a poet, and very highly too, could not fail of being acknowledged." (Earnest, 1966, p. 235)

However, Lord Byron was himself a lover of ideal and the realization of the failure of the real to match the ideal constituted the essence of tragedy for him. Although history shows that there can be no permanent change in our bad luck, for Byron, "it is necessary to act as if there could be." (McConnell, 1978, p. 431) Despite a sense of futility which dominates the atmosphere of *Manfred*, the hero shows commitment to action and boldness in standing against the tyranny of the metaphysical forces in the world. When Manfred summons the Witch of the Alps, a beautiful spirit who is ready to help him on condition that he become her subject, Manfred refuses to swear loyalty; he likewise rejects to resign himself to Arimanes and his forces. Unlike Faust, Manfred is not willing to submit to any external authority, no matter what their nature or intention. Provoked by the Spirits which remind him of his mortality he says: "The mind, the spirit, the Promethean spark,/
The lightning of my being, is as bright,/
Pervading, and far-darting as your own,/
And shall not yield to yours, though coop'd in clay!" (I, pp. 154-158) This quality that Prometheus, Harold, Manfred and Cain, which were written simultaneous with *Don Juan*, have in common is their Byronic heroism, a superiority of spirit does not allow for an easy acceptance of the world and life as they are. The hero yearns for something beyond the limitations of his wretched existence and his tragedy starts when he realizes the fact that it is impossible to achieve the ideal by means of human wisdom and earthly conditions.

For all its sense of nonconformity, Byron's ode 'Prometheus' serves as an introduction to *Manfred* and the plays; in it he compares the Promethean rebellion, defiance and "impenetrable spirit" with man's ability to assert his element of immortality in the face of his mortality:

"Like thee, Man is in part divine,/
A troubled stream from a pure source;/
And Man in portions can foresee/
His own funereal destiny;/
His wretchedness, and his resistance,/
And his sad unallied existence;/
To which his Spirit may

oppose/ Itself--and equal to all woes,/ And a firm will, and a deep sense,/ Which even in torture can descry/ Its own
concenter'd recompense,/ Triumphant where it dares defy,/ And making Death a Victory.” (pp. 47-59)

The heroes of Byron's plays are committed to action; however, they are aware of the ineffectiveness of their attempts. This is the Byronic dilemma that “though history insists that there can be no permanent change in our bad luck, it is necessary to act as if there could be.” (Lockridge, 1989: 431) That was the case with Byron's involvement in Carbonari uprising and the war for the Greek independence. According to Abrams (2006, p. 1608) although he was well aware of the conditions in Greece and was too skeptical of human nature to entertain hope of success”, he exclaims:

But, onward! It is now the time to act and what signifies self, if a single spark of that which would be worthy of the past can bequeathed [sic] unquenchably to the future? It is not one man, nor a million, but the spirit of liberty which must be sprea. (*BLJ* 8, p. 20)

Byron who belonged to the second generation of Romantic poets did not experience the shock of the failure of the millennial dreams which were entertained during the French Revolution. According to Trott (1999) he and his younger contemporaries could not completely give in to the idea of the failure of the liberal cause of the Revolution, therefore, they embarked on creating rebellious characters. The kind of Promethean rebellion, which reveals itself in *Manfred* and other works of the period, has been interpreted in political terms by many critics. The defiance of a Manfred against the supernatural powers is assumed to represent a satanic rebellion against God, hence is related to Milton's republicanism. In fact, the voice that condemns Manfred to eternal suffering at the beginning of the play gives a description of him which resembles that of Satan in the *Paradise Lost*.

By thy cold breast and serpent smile,/ By thy unfathom'd gulfs of guile,/ By that most seeming virtuous eye,/ By thy shut soul's hypocrisy;/ By the perfection of thine art/ Which pass'd for human thine own heart;/ By thy delight in others' pain,/ And by thy brotherhood of Cain,/ I call upon thee! and compel/ Thyself to be thy proper Hell!/ (pp. 242-251)

Nowhere else in the play is a sound reason for this curse given to explain the evil deeds that Manfred might have committed in the past to deserve such damnation. Therefore, it seems that Byron's intention for writing this passage has only been to intensify his hero's alienation to a satanic degree, thus to arouse sympathy for him in an audience acquainted with radical ideas advocated in William Godwin's *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (1793). As Nicola Trott remarks Godwin in his work uses Satan to question the injustice of the current systems of government. Godwin had asked: “why did Satan rebel against his maker? It was, as he himself informs us, because he saw no sufficient reason for that extreme inequality of rank and power which the creator assumed.” (Williams, 2000, p. 48) However, as Richardson (1988) argues, Byron falls back on the defiant self-torment of Milton's Satan to end his play and this defiance results in no solution for Manfred's existential problem. Nothing comes out of this action and the poet does not provide the reader with a resolution to Manfred's sufferings. The reason is that Byron was actually portraying himself and the fact that there is no resolution at the end of the play, proves his own inability to answer the questions that he raised. As Marchand says, “in his speculative dramas, [...], the driving force is always the poet's desire to work out a solution to his own deepest quandaries.” (1968, p. 12) Price too believed that “Lord Byron only knew how to depict one man: himself”. (1983, p. 91) Marchand (1968) claims that we might believe that most of Byron's works grew out of his personal need for emotional release and the questions he tried to answer were his own. Moreover, he was trying to come up with sincere solutions and fake romantic optimism was not what he sought. The result was no resolution at all because in fact he did not possess any. The Promethean revolt of the Byronic hero whose emotional and intellectual capacities are superior to the average man is meant to be the way he asserts his individuality against the forces which are beyond his control. This courageous rebellion, which is presented as the hero's only means of dealing with the reality of life, not only fails to make a change in the conditions, but also costs him his life. McConnell describes Byron's dramas as “modern tragedies of existential revolt,” which “only assert the value of the rebellion itself;” (1978, p. 408)

Byron himself grew dissatisfied with this heroic view of existence. In *Don Juan* he abandoned the heroic for the comic vision of “things really as they are.” He was conscious of the futility of the revolt as a way to oppose the inevitable fate. His deep-seated suspicion of the abstract led him to a happy surrender to life in his satirical epic, *Don Juan*. While the plays dealt with the existential issues of life and their protagonists were heroic and committed to action and revolt; *Don Juan* deals with no lofty subject matter and its protagonist is un-heroic and passive. McConnell (1978, p. 414) believes that “Don Juan is Byron himself who disappointed by the inadequacy of man in building the ideal world yields to passivity and passes to a position beyond rebellion and even beyond choice”.

Byron rejected the role of a romantic poet-prophet for a mere narrator of the realities of the world as he saw them. He had been accused of immorality in *Don Juan*. Interestingly, his answer to this accusation was another rebuff to them: “But now I'm going to be immoral, now/ I mean to show things really as they are.” (*Don Juan*, 12, XL) Defending his satirical poem, he wrote to Douglas Kinnaird: “As to Don Juan [...] it may be bawdy but is it not good English? It may be profligate but is it not life, is it not the thing? Could any man have written it who has not lived in the world?” (*BLJ* 6, p.232) In his wide traveling, Byron had gathered enough material to put into the frame of his satire. He was realistic enough to consent to the bitter fact that that there were no values left in the modern world; and virtue was not encouraged and rewarded by the society.

In *Manfred*, as in *Don Juan*, Byron's view of the world is a pessimistic one. The world that Byron depicts in *Manfred* is a world dominated by evil spirits which repair shattered thrones, restore dynasties, avenge men upon their enemies

and save the tyrants and traitors. In their gathering with Arimanes, their master, the spirits declare that “all that liveth, more or less, is ours,/ And most things wholly so”.(II, iii, pp. 24-5) Even the existence of an afterlife is questioned by Manfred who while pondering over Astarte’s fate remarks: “What is she now?-- a sufferer for my sins--/ A thing I dare not think upon-- or nothing.” (II, ii, pp. 197-8) Byron himself usually wrote satirically about the immortality of the soul:

“[...]’which is best, life or death, the gods only know,’ so Socrates said to his judges... it has been said that the immortality of the soul is a grand peut-être –but still it is a grand one. Everybody clings to it– the stupidest, and dullest, and wickedest of human bipeds is still persuaded that he is immortal.”(BLJ, pp. 8:99)

In spite of all this, it seems obvious that Lord Byron could not accept the reality of life as simply as frivolous Don Juan. He had experienced a restless life of adventures, battles and sports; and he seized every opportunity to assist the helpless people around him. Therefore, the protagonist in the plays may be described as the man Byron himself desired to be, a man capable of making a stand. All of Byron’s tragic protagonists recognize the necessity of commitment and therefore they act. Don Juan, on the other hand, is an uncommitted, passive anti-hero who moves easily in society and does not seem to question anything. One may conclude that a desire for ideal was more congenial to Byron’s spirit than cynicism towards human endeavors. As Marchand (1968) suggests Byron was so constituted that his state of mind wavered between the ideal which was his only true love, and a melancholy realization of how disgustingly short of the ideal the real is and must always be.

As a result, in his dedication to *Don Juan*, Byron who adhered to the Whig party attacked the Lake poets for their conversion to Toryism and admiration of the king. Like Byron himself whose scandalous relationship with his sister, his radical political debates in Parliament, his attack on the great poets of his time and his later deathly involvement in liberal movements across the world constituted an uncommon kind of life for him, the superiority of Manfred resides in his ability to perform deeds which others “could not brook to dream” (II, i, p. 78) Dissatisfied with the events in England, Byron turned to Italy where there was still hope for the success of the cause of freedom. (XVI) This unchanging impulse to freedom and commitment to action despite a general sense of futility explains Manfred’s persistence in defying and scorning the spirits which come to take his soul away at the end of the play. Although at the beginning of Act I Manfred shows disdain to littleness of life and human weakness in a Faustian soliloquy –“Half dust, half deity, alike unfit/ To sink or soar, with our mix’d essence make/ A conflict of its elements, and breathe/ The breath of degradation and of pride,/ Contending with low wants and lofty will,/ Till our mortality predominates,” (I,ii,pp. 40-6)– his final speech demonstrates him as a supreme creature whose superior knowledge, daring and strength of mind give him a supernatural air. He shows tremendousness in his fall and succeeds in meeting death with great dignity. To the spirits he says:

I do defy ye,-- though I feel my soul/ Is ebbing from me, yet I do defy ye;/ Nor will I hence, while I have earthly breath/ To breathe my scorn upon ye-- earthly strength/ To wrestle, though with spirits; what ye take/ Shall be ta'en limb by limb. (III, iv, pp. 99-104)

In his *History of Western Philosophy*, Russell sets apart two kinds of revolt which were both derived from the French Revolution and the philosophers of the Enlightenment: the romantic revolt of Byron and the rationalistic revolt beginning with the French philosophers of the Revolution. He argues that “the romantic revolt passes from Byron to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche and is afterwards practiced by Mussolini and Hitler. Among the characteristics that he numbers for Byronic revolt is the glorification of certain kinds of violence” (2004, p. 652-7) which his admiration of Napoleon is an example of. It is evident from his poetry that compared to the tyranny of people like “Cold-blooded, smooth-faced” Castlereagh at home and abroad he prefers the tyranny of Napoleon: “Where is Napoleon the Grand? God knows! / where little Castlereagh? The Devil can tell!” (*Don Juan*, 11, LXXVII) This is how Lockridge (1989, p. 448) defines Byron’s stand against these two major aggressors of his time:

Byron does admire aggression, provided that its target is evil or ludicrous. To admire aggression indiscriminately is a dangerous sentimentality, which he, like Blake, sometimes approaches, as when he says that even evil acts are superior to inactivity (LJ IV, 162) [...] The aggression of [...] a Castlereagh [...] is evil, that of Napoleon is of ambivalent value, showing the best and worst of qualities.

This partiality to Napoleon is due to his common characteristics with the Byronic hero which made him the Titan of his age. Byron’s imagination had always been moved by Napoleon. “At Harrow he had kept a statue of him in the room and later proclaimed his wish for Napoleon’s victory”. (Russell, 2004, p. 678) When he heard of Waterloo he said, “I’m damn sorry for it.” (ibid) However, Byron was never uncritical of Napoleon. “He had witnessed the brutality of the French aggression in Spain during the Peninsular War,” says Bewley (1970, p. 405), “and his republican and anti-imperialistic convictions were revolted.” (405), In 1814 he wrote his ‘Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte’ which contains some of the harshest criticism of Napoleon one can find in poetry:

Ill-minded man! Why scourge thy kind/who bowed so low the knee?/By gazing on thyself grown blind/ Thou taught’st the rest to see/ with might unquestioned,-power to save,-/To those that worshipped thee;/ Nor till thy fall could mortal guess/ Ambition’s less than littleness. (pp. 10-17)

However, Napoleon was the child and champion of the Revolution and Byron could not share in the general reaction held against him and against the French revolution. Even when Napoleon was exiled in Elba, Douglass quotes Byron, “but I won’t give him up even now, though all his admirers have, ‘like the thanes, fallen from him.” (2004, p. 24) Therefore, after Napoleon’s escape from Elba, Byron could write, “I can forgive the rogue for utterly falsifying every

line of my Ode [...] It is impossible not to be dazzled and overwhelmed by his character and career.” (*BLJ* 4, p.284) Bewley (1970, p. 415) mentions that Byron “kept a gilt-framed print of Napoleon in his library in London, and, after Waterloo, once considered making a bid for Napoleon’s coronation robes” and concludes that “Byron was attracted by Napoleon’s Titanism –in a sense he seemed to be an embodiment of the Byronic hero– and Byron tended to identify himself with him.” His treatment of Napoleon’s fate in *Childe Harold* is ambivalent. On one hand he reproaches Napoleon for yielding to his whims: “Oh, more or less than man –in high or low, / Battling with nations, flying from the field;/ Now making monarchs’ necks thy footstool, now/ More than thy meanest soldier taught to yield;/ An empire thou couldst crush, command, rebuild,/ But govern not thy pettiest passion, nor,/ However deeply in men’s spirits skilled,/ Look through thine own, nor curb the lust of war,/ Nor learn that tempted Fate will leave the loftiest star.” (Canto iii, 38) Yet, he justifies all these imperfections by saying: “But quiet to quick bosoms is a Hell/And there hath been thy bane; there is a fire/And motion of the Soul which will not dwell/[...]/Fatal to him who bears, to all who ever bore./ (Canto iii, p. 42)

The appreciation of Napoleon’s violence finds equivalence in Manfred’s apparent lack of remorse for his crime. The fact that Manfred seeks forgetfulness shows that he feels guilty about destroying Astarte. But, he does not regret being what he is, he does not wish to change his fate with that of the chamois hunter, he does not even ask for punishment and retribution. He tries to escape the past, not pay for what he has done. The pain of his crime does not overcome his egotism. Actually, he has a sort of Narcissistic attitude to his being which makes him feel superior to the common men. Even his attraction to Astarte is due to her resemblance to himself:

She was like me in lineaments-- her eyes/Her hair, her features, all, to the very tone/Even of her voice, they said were like to mine;/But soften’d all, and temper’d into beauty;/She had the same lone thoughts and wanderings,/The quest of hidden knowledge, and a mind/To comprehend the universe. (II, ii, pp. 199-205)

So we could say that Manfred is not remorseful of his sin, since he deems himself above the rules that govern the society. To the chamois hunter who suggests that there is comfort in “the aid of holy men and heavenly patience” he answers: “Patience and patience! Hence-- that word was made/For brutes of burthen, not for birds of prey;/Preach it to mortals of a dust like thine,--/I am not of thine order.” (II, I, pp. 35-8)

However, Byron himself cannot be accused of ever harming anyone. On the contrary, as Knight (2002: 29) argues “his generosity and kindness, his chivalry, courtesy, humility and courage were noted by those who knew him [...] and others.” His Manfred, too, despite his snobbishness, denies being “black with evil.” He tells the hunter, “My injuries came down on those who loved me--/On those whom I best loved: I never quell’d/An enemy, save in my just defence--/But my embrace was fatal.” (II, i, pp. 85-9) So, this gentle nature must have had stronger reasons for refusing to celebrate Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo. We can find it in Byron’s philosophy, which is constituted of suspiciousness to all systems. It prevents him from the optimism that the Tory poets such as Wordsworth, Scott and Southey showed towards the victory of Waterloo. Shaw (1995, p. 51) remarks that “In 1815 the significance of the battle of Waterloo had yet to be decided.” He continues to say that “to figure Waterloo in terms of the national epic would be to risk alienating a war-weary public already satiated with an array of poems celebrating the virtues of British freedom.” And Tory poets had done their job well in commemorating Waterloo in verse. Byron was disappointed by them as he revealed in the Dedication to Don Juan: “Europe has slaves, allies, kings, armies still,/ And Southey lives to sing them very ill.” To Wordsworth Waterloo was the ‘victory sublime,’ but to Byron it was just ‘the deadly Waterloo’ where ‘rider and horse –friend, foe –in one red burial blent!’ (*Childe Harold*, iii, 252) Byron lacked the hot nationalism which could blind other poets to the vices of their government. He owed this open-mindedness to his wide traveling. “He came home a confirmed one” says Marchand (1971, pp. 99- 100) “and would always view the prejudices and dogmas of the ‘tight little island’ in the light of his knowledge of ‘the ways and farings of many men.’”

Therefore, after the battle of Waterloo he could ask:

“is Earth more free?/ Did nations combat to make One submit;/ or league to teach all kings true sovereignty?/[...]/ Shall we, who stuck the lion down, shall we/ Pay the Wolf homage? Offering lowly gaze/ And servile knees to thrones? No; prove before ye praise!/ If not, o’er one fallen despot boast no more!/ (*Childe Harold*, iii, 164-172) He saw the indignity of a war fought against tyrants by tyrants and the recurring fact that all states fall down into ‘wealth, vice, corruption, –barbarism at last’. (*Don Juan*, iv,p. 108)

III. CONCLUSION

According to Rawes (2004), through *Manfred* Byron tries to find an answer to Europe’s sense of living under the weight of a long and violent past and in a diminished, withered present and he finds the answer not in the transcendental solutions offered by religious traditions, but in the resources within human existence. Rawes explains that while Manfred is trying to find some relief for his sufferings in the outside world and in self-oblivion, in Act III he suddenly enjoys a moment of calm and freedom from his painful memory. In contrast to the inadequacy of religion in its different shapes to answer the human problems, Byron shows the power in man to save him from his mental quandaries. Facing a Europe which was devastated by a long war, he still believes man to be able to find the path to freedom:

There is a calm upon me--
Inexplicable stillness! which till now
Did not belong to what I knew of life.

If that I did not know philosophy
 To be of all our vanities the motliest,
 The merest word that ever fool'd the ear
 From out the schoolman's jargon, I should deem
 The golden secret, the sought 'Kalon,' found,
 And seated in my soul. It will not last,
 But it is well to have known it, though but once:
 It hath enlarged my thoughts with a new sense,
 And I within my tablets would note down
 That there is such a feeling. (III,i, PP. 6-18)

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