THE BYRONIC IN JANE AUSTEN'S *PERSUASION* AND *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

Austen and Byron are strange bedfellows. Had they met, it is difficult to envisage how they would have acted or what, if anything, they would have said. As Rachel Brownstein comments, 'it is hard to imagine them finding common ground in a social encounter'.[1] Perhaps their first meeting would have suffered from the same strained misunderstandings and snubs as the hero and heroine's in *Pride and Prejudice*, where 'he looked at her only to criticise' (*P&P*, p. 20). Yet despite their apparent incompatibility, many critics have commented on this unlikely couple (albeit largely to emphasize differences in literary style and disposition).[2] As Brownstein suggests,

> Austen and Byron, close contemporaries, beg to be talked about together, and frequently have been. They seem to embody and invite and thus reinforce familiar binary opposites: male and female, free and constrained, celebrated and obscure, self-indulgent aristocrat and saving, respectable homebody; Romantic poet and domestic novelist, careless producer of endless versions and careful rewriter, oversexed and asexual, sinner and saint. (p. 176)

Such stark dichotomies, however, not only rely on oversimplification—casting Austen as a prudish, parochial novelist and Byron as the profligate poet—but also neglect the deep Romantic undercurrents that connect their work.[3]

After establishing a number of parallels between these two authors, this article will initially focus on Austen's *Persuasion*. Written during 1815–16 and published posthumously in 1817, this novel refers to a range of contemporary fiction, including a number of poems by Byron, as well as incorporating a 'remarkable constellation of Romantic ideas'.[4] I shall subsequently concentrate

Note. References to *Persuasion* and *Pride and Prejudice* are abbreviated as follows:

P *Persuasion*, ed. by Gillian Beer (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998)
P&P *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. by Ian Littlewood (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1992)

Unless otherwise stated, references to Byron's Oriental Tales are taken from *Byron: Poetical Works*, ed. by Frederick Jump (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), abbreviated as follows:

BA *The Bride of Abydos*
C *The Corsair*
G *The Giaour*

[1] Rachel M. Brownstein, 'Romanticism, A Romance: Jane Austen and Lord Byron, 1813–1815', *Persuasions*, 16 (1994), 175–84 (p. 179).

[2] Notwithstanding the differences in their social status, a few, albeit tenuous, family connections can be traced between the two writers. See Gaye King, 'Catton Hall', *Transactions of the Jane Austen Society*, 2 (1991), 61–63. Byron also knew a number of Austen's neighbours; for further details of the poet's involvement in Lord Portsmouth's scandalous second marriage, see Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life* (London: Viking, 1997), pp. 87–89.

[3] Brownstein sees Austen as a writer of 'stories about three or four families in a country village in England [. . .] who sewed up her plots so neatly', and Byron as 'the author of verse romances about solitary, sullen wanderers in exotic, distant lands' (p. 175). Michael Williams is equally dependent upon caricatures of both writers. See 'Jane Austen and Lord Byron: A View of Regency London', *Unisa English Studies*, 21 (1983), 11–16 (p. 15).

[4] Jocelyn Harris, 'Jane Austen and the Burden of the (Male) Past: The Case Reexamined', in *Jane Austen and Discourses of Feminism*, ed. by Devoney Looser (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 87–100 (p. 95).

Modern Language Review, 102 (2007), 26–39

on Austen's treatment of the hero in both *Persuasion* and *Pride and Prejudice*, considering, in particular, the extent to which Captain Wentworth and Mr Darcy demonstrate character traits more closely associated with Byronic heroes. As to the potential pitfalls of considering Austen's earlier work in the light of a second-generation Romantic poet, *Pride and Prejudice* was not in fact published until 1813, almost a year after the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* appeared. It is therefore conceivable that Austen reacted to the furore surrounding Byron's overnight success and the emergence of the semi-autobiographical Byronic hero when editing this novel. Yet despite what I consider to be the striking similarities between the hero of *Pride and Prejudice* and a number of Byron's male protagonists, I am not arguing for a direct influence. Equally plausible is the assumption that Austen was responding to the same cultural stimuli as Byron; more specifically, Austen's familiarity with a number of the Byronic hero's literary predecessors, from Milton's Satan and Shakespeare's Hamlet to Richardson's Lovelace, suggests an indirect connection through shared sources.

Another figure that constitutes part of both Byron's and Austen's literary inheritance is the Gothic villain. The heroes of the Oriental Tales and *Manfred* were undoubtedly influenced by the numerous Gothic melodramas Byron would have read when serving on the committee to select plays for Drury Lane.[5] Similarly, Austen was, as David Nokes suggests, an 'avid connoisseur of Gothic shockers'[6] and visited the theatre to see, among many other popular plays of the period, a pantomime entitled *Don Juan*, of which she remarked: 'I must say that I have seen nobody on the stage who has been a more interesting Character than that compound of Cruelty & Lust.'[7] Yet although Austen indulged her penchant for the Gothic, part of the pleasure she derived from this genre was its potential for parody. *Northanger Abbey* is perhaps best known for satirizing the overblown language of Gothic novels and exposing the folly of a heroine who, along with many other memorable misconceptions, mistakes General Tilney for a Radcliffean Montoni. However, while the hero's father may not be a stage villain, Austen herself concedes that 'in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she [Catherine] had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty'.[8] Moreover, his tyranny extends beyond the immediate family sphere; as Marilyn Butler has argued, General Tilney is the 'unacceptable face of contemporary capitalism', concerned only with social advancement, 'improving' his estate through landscaping, and defending na-

[5] For a more detailed discussion of Gothic influences on the Oriental Tales and *Manfred*, see the chapters on 'The Gothic Villain', 'Four Turkish Tales', and 'Two Metaphysical Dramas' in Peter L. Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962).

[6] For further information on Austen's eclectic reading habits, see the section entitled 'Nice Affecting Stories' in David Nokes, *Jane Austen: A Life* (London: Fourth Estate, 1997), pp. 102–17 (p. 104).

[7] *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. by Deirdre Le Faye, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 221 (15–16 September 1813). All subsequent references to Austen's letter are taken from this edition and will be dated in the text. Regarding the vast number of Gothic plays being staged at this time, Austen also saw Mrs Jordan in *The Devil to Pay*, a performance which Byron praised when he saw it three nights later.

[8] Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. by David Blair (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1993), p. 268.

tional security.[9] In Austen's politicized Gothic, General Tilney is not only a 'diabolical anti-father', but a figure closely related to both the Gothic villain and Byron—the vampiric predator—who, like Manfred in *The Castle of Otranto*, would readily take his son's place to secure the attentions of the heroine.[10]

Consequently, critics are increasingly rethinking Austen's regard for this genre: 'Austen aims not so much to denigrate but to rehabilitate the Gothic sensibility.'[11] Her exposé of the more ludicrous aspects of the Gothic constitutes a good-natured, 'cheerful intertextuality' which, like most parodies, affirms a respect for the original subject (significantly, Henry Tilney reads Radcliffe's novels whereas John Thorpe does not).[12] Austen's ostensibly negative approach to the Gothic generates what Natalie Neill refers to as 'irreducible dialectics', a tension between imitation and critique out of which a new, 'third' meaning emerges.[13] A slanted reading of the Gothic villain in *Northanger Abbey* simultaneously conveys humour and serious political connotations, thereby conflating both fantasy and realistic anxieties. According to Cates Baldridge, this novel was a rejection of the 'absolutism of Gothic and Byronic texts': yet other critics, such as Paul Giles, have even detected a residual Gothic charge in *Pride and Prejudice*.[14] Just as General Tilney remains something of a mystery, as indicated by the final lines of the novel and the continued compulsion to define his character, so Darcy can be seen as a 'radically double character'.[15] The subject of further discussion in the final part of this article, Darcy is, as Giles suggests, 'a haughty Derbyshire gentleman one moment and an enigmatic Gothic hero the next' (p. 70).

[9] Butler's 'Introduction to *Northanger Abbey*', in *The Nineteenth-Century Novel: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Stephen Regan (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 143–70 (p. 161). Robert Hopkins situates General Tilney in a more specific social context, seeing him as 'an inquisitor surveying possibly seditious pamphlets' ('General Tilney and Affairs of State: The Political Gothic of *Northanger Abbey*', *Philological Quarterly*, 57 (1978), 213–24 (p. 220)).

[10] Nina Auerbach, 'Jane Austen and Romantic Imprisonment', in *Jane Austen in a Social Context*, ed. by David Monaghan (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 9–27 (p. 21). Both John A. Dussinger and Diane Long Hoeveler detect a sexual frisson between General Tilney and the heroine, raising the Gothic and, of course, Byronic theme of incest. See John A. Dussinger, 'Parents against Children: General Tilney as Gothic Monster', *Persuasions*, 20 (1998), 165–74; and Diane Long Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Press, 1998). Darryl Jones similarly sees Sir Walter Eliot in the light of the contemporary vogue for fictional vampires, reading this father figure as a 'harbinger of the death of the aristocracy' (*Jane Austen* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), p. 169).

[11] Douglas H. Thomson and Frederick S. Frank, 'Jane Austen and the *Northanger* Novelists', in *Gothic Writers: A Critical and Bibliographical Guide*, ed. by Douglass H. Thomson, Jack G. Voller, and Frederick S. Frank (London: Greenwood Press, 2002), pp. 33–47 (p. 35).

[12] In 'Jane Austen and the Burden of the (Male) Past' Harris argues that Austen's 'bonds with her predecessors, male as well as female, provide rich and productive origins for her fictions' (p. 89).

[13] Natalie Neill, '"the trash with which the press now groans": *Northanger Abbey* and the Gothic Best Sellers of the 1790s', *Eighteenth-Century Novel*, 4 (2004), 163–92 (p. 166). See also Casie Hermansson, 'Neither *Northanger Abbey*: The Reader Presupposes', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 36 (2000) ⟨http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/searchFulltext.do?id=R00811842&divLevel=0&queryId=../session/1146753768_11381&trailId/10A655B0BA9&area/abell&forward/critref_ft⟩ [accessed 28 February 2006].

[14] Cates Baldridge, *The Dialogics of Dissent in the English Novel* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1994), p. 44; Paul Giles, 'The Gothic Dialogue in *Pride & Prejudice*', *Text and Context*, 2 (1988), 68–75.

[15] Auerbach, p. 25, who sees the hero of *Pride and Prejudice* as both redeemer and jailer.

This complex treatment of literary sources is not limited to the Gothic novel. Austen's comment in a letter to her sister, 'I have read the Corsair, mended my petticoat, & have nothing else to do', has understandably been read as dismissive (5 March 1814). In response to this line, John Halperin states, 'So much for Byron' (despite noting Byron's influence elsewhere in his biography of Austen); and Brownstein also detects a hint of mockery.[16] However, such remarks fail to take into account the way in which Austen read and interacted with the work of other authors. William Deresiewicz states that to see 'Austen's satire as a mark of disdain is fundamentally to misunderstand it. [. . .] For Austen, satire was the sincerest form of flattery'; irony, in her letters as well as her fiction, is directed at what Austen admired and, more importantly, what she found intellectually engaging.[17] Even the work of Samuel Richardson, one of Austen's favourite novelists, was the subject of youthful burlesques—in which she 'succeeded in reducing Richardson's million-word, moralizing epic [*Sir Charles Grandison*] to a ten-minute stage lampoon'—and more subtle caricatures in her later fiction.[18] Yet as much as Austen is pushing Richardson to absurd extremes and deflating his solemn style, she is also paying homage by rewriting him.[19]

As Isobel Grundy states, Austen's 'judgments on contemporaries are particularly slippery to assess'.[20] What is not open to speculation, however, is that alongside reading a number of the Oriental Tales, Austen uncharacteristically copied out lines from Byron's poem 'Napoleon's Farewell'. David Gilson notes that her version of the poem 'differ[s] considerably from Byron's original'; the title has been changed to 'Lines of Lord Byron, in the Character of Buonaparté' and a number of other alterations are evident in the manuscript.[21] Yet

[16] John Halperin, *The Life of Jane Austen* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 252; Brownstein, p. 175.

[17] William Deresiewicz, *Jane Austen and the Romantic Poets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 7. A number of other critics have noted the prominence of satire in the work of both Austen and Byron. Doucet Devin Fischer, for example, claims that 'Austen's awareness of the multiple ironies that Byron chose to compress into one clever pun is diffused throughout her fictions' ('Byron and Austen: Romance and Reality', *Byron Journal*, 21 (1993), 71–9 (pp. 73–4)). Similarly emphasizing this connection, W. H. Auden commented on Austen's irony in 'Letter to Lord Byron':

> You could not shock her more than she shocks me;
> Beside her Joyce seems innocent as grass.
> It makes me most uncomfortable to see
> An English spinster of the middle-class
> Describe the amorous effects of 'brass',
> Reveal so frankly and with such sobriety
> The economic basis of society.

See *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927–1939*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), pp. 169–99 (p. 171).

[18] Nokes, p. 109. Gerarda Maria Kooiman-van Middendorp notes that Austen was 'well-acquainted with contemporary authors', yet reserved a special status for Richardson: see the chapter on Jane Austen in *The Hero in the Feminine Novel* (Middleburg: G. Widen Boer, 1931), pp. 49–59 (p. 49). See also Joe Bray, 'The Source of "Dramatized Consciousness": Richardson, Austen, and Stylistic Influence', *Style*, 35 (Spring 2001), 18–33.

[19] See Harris, pp. 92–93.

[20] Isobel Grundy, 'Jane Austen and Literary Traditions', in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. by Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 189–210 (p. 201).

[21] David Gilson, 'Jane Austen's Verses', *Book Collector*, 33 (1984), 25–37 (p. 37). The manu-

these alterations are largely limited to the occasional word and a few phrases in the final stanza: essentially, Byron's lament for Napoleon's 'weakness' remains the same.[22]

'Napoleon's Farewell' was published anonymously in *The Examiner* on 30 July 1815 and later in *Poems 1816*. If Austen encountered Byron's poem in the latter, she would also have seen a group of poems 'From the French' in which Byron oscillates between condemning Napoleon—'goaded by ambition's sting | The Hero sunk into the King' ('Ode from the French')—to praising his bravery (the voice of 'To Napoleon', for example, is that of a loyal Polish officer who celebrates 'My chief, my king, my friend', 'Idol of the soldier's soul').[23] Like Byron, Austen 'found a certain appeal in this true-life fable of hubris and nemesis'.[24] She even contemplated writing a history of Napoleon, partly due to the strong naval connections in her own family, but principally because she associated the lure of ambition and celebrity with his fate.[25] It is well known that Byron regarded Napoleon as a foil for his own troubled and complex personality; though it is less immediately apparent, Napoleon can also be seen as instrumental in shaping Austen's career. Deresiewicz traces the timescale of *Persuasion* to the period of Napoleon's first exile, stating that the novel 'takes place in the shadow of Napoleon's return—the shadow of Waterloo' (p. 146). Likewise, Nokes associates Austen's efforts to complete *Emma* with Napoleon's escape from Elba and conflates the success of these endeavours: 'By the end of March, when the French Emperor resumed power in Paris, she had finished the book' (p. 459).

However, despite Austen's engagement with his work, references to Byron's poetry in *Persuasion* are invariably cited as evidence of her disdain for Byronic despair. Certainly, Anne Elliot prescribes 'a larger allowance of prose' to counteract Captain Benwick's indulgence in Scott's tender songs and Byron's 'impassioned descriptions of hopeless agony' (*P*, p. 94). Halperin views Louisa Musgrove's accident, occurring immediately after a discussion about the relative merits of Byron and Scott, as 'the fruit of excessive romanticism' (p. 303). Yet while the accident acts as a symbolic punishment for Louisa's passionate, headstrong nature—recalling Marianne's breakdown in *Sense and Sensibility*—romantic feelings and language are not purged from the novel. If we accept Peter Knox-Shaw's suggestion that Austen and Byron's 'strong divergence in outlook' is made clear in the criticism of Benwick, how can we account for Louisa's subsequent alliance with this character, a man who woos his bride with the same literary diet of 'richness' and 'wretchedness' that supposedly infected the atmosphere at Lyme (*P*, p. 94)?[26] Rather than having her scepticism intensified by the accident, Anne feels 'an increasing degree of good-will'

script of 'Lines of Lord Byron, in the Character of Buonaparté' is housed in the University of Southampton Library. I would like to thank the Senior Archivist, Karen Robson, for her assistance.

[22] References to 'Napoleon's Farewell' are taken from *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980–93), III (1981), 312–13.

[23] References to this group of poems are taken from Lord Byron, *Poems 1816*, intro. by Jonathan Wordsworth (Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1990), pp. 25–38.

[24] Nokes, p. 462.

[25] See Austen's letter to her sister, dated 4 February 1813.

[26] Peter Knox-Shaw, '*Persuasion*, Byron, and the Turkish Tale', *Review of English Studies*, 44

towards Benwick (*P*, p. 107): his reading marks him out as a 'clever man' (*P*, p. 172) who would merit Lady Russell's approval, and, more importantly, he is blessed with a second love (sparking the debate that reunites the hero and heroine). Romantic recklessness may precipitate Louisa's fall, but it also saves her, aiding her recuperation and promoting a happy union.

Austen may be suspicious of Romanticism, particularly if it encourages an unhealthy self-absorption or thoughtless behaviour, but it is not rejected. Firstly, Byron and Scott are singled out as 'the first-rate poets' of the age (*P*, p. 94). Secondly, rather than exhibiting the influence of the Romantic poets in one single episode, *Persuasion* has, as Darryl Jones suggests, a 'recurring intertextual preoccupation with Byron' (pp. 186–87).[27] Towards the end of the novel, the heroine's feelings of 'high-wrought love' become so intoxicating that 'It was almost enough to spread purification and perfume' through the streets of Bath (*P*, pp. 94, 181). The Romantic climax of *Persuasion* does not occur during the drama at Lyme, but in an apartment at the White Hart when, according to Keith G. Thomas, both the hero and the heroine alternately act the part of the Romantic poet.[28] Wentworth is almost 'unmanned' by an 'irresistible governance' to 'pour[ ] out his feelings': 'You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope. [. . .] I can hardly write (*P*, pp. 226, 222).[29] In response, Anne experiences the 'full sensation [of] overpowering happiness', while their mutual pleasure is depicted as 'spirits dancing in private rapture' (*P*, pp. 223, 225).[30] As Knox-Shaw suggests, 'it is interesting to find the narrator toying, a trifle nervously, in the last pages, with the language of full-blown romance' (p. 53).

Love is not, however, always blissful in *Persuasion*. Wentworth is tormented by his jealousy of Mr Elliot and Anne suffers from a 'restless agitation' (*P*, p. 213). In her exploration of the complex, mixed emotions of such a strong attachment, 'deep in the happiness of such misery, or the misery of such happiness, instantly', Austen voices a Romantic preoccupation with the interrelatedness of love and loss (*P*, p. 215). For example, the Giaour's entreaty to 'Give me the pleasure with the pain, | So would I live and love again' (*G*, l. 1119) is echoed in Anne's feelings of 'agitation, pain, pleasure, a something between

(1993), 47–69 (p. 52). Elsewhere, however, Knox-Shaw concedes that 'Austen uses allusion to signal affinity as much as to barb satire' (p. 48).

[27] As F. B. Pinion states, Austen's appreciation of Byron and Scott 'emboldened her to make more of landscape and the expression of deep feeling in *Persuasion*' (*A Jane Austen Companion: A Critical Survey and Reference Book* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1973), p. 174). Furthermore, Austen's lively engagement with Romantic fiction extended to her final, unfinished work 'Sanditon'. Sir Edward may be lampooned for his 'silly' devotion to sentimental fiction but, as Halperin concedes, his 'taste in novels is described in particular detail and with obvious relish' (John Halperin, 'Jane Austen's Anti-Romantic Fragment: Some Notes on "Sanditon"', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 2 (1983), 183–91 (p. 187)).

[28] Keith G. Thomas, 'Jane Austen and the Romantic Lyric: *Persuasion* and Coleridge's Conversation Poems', *ELH*, 54 (1987), 893–924 (pp. 917–18).

[29] Darryl Jones argues that Wentworth's letter-writing represents an 'ideological fissure'. The hero is so overcome by his emotions that the 'pen of patriarchal authority falls from his hands', thereby permitting a romantic resolution (pp. 185, 187).

[30] Internalized emotions are, of course, an intrinsic aspect of Romantic poetry. In Byron's *The Corsair*, a poem Austen read soon after its publication, Conrad's passions are strongest when felt 'in their inmost force' (III. 423).

delight and misery' (*P*, p. 165).[31] Instead of keeping her feelings in check, Knox-Shaw suggests that 'Anne is typically caught up in a whirl of conflicting sensation' (p. 53). Even the opening section of Austen's novel is infused with the poetry of a poignant autumn, 'that season of peculiar and inexhaustible influence on the mind of taste and tenderness' (*P*, p. 78), which recalls Byron's lines from *The Giaour*:

> The wrack by passion left behind,
> A shrivell'd scroll, a scatter'd leaf,
> Sear'd by the autumn blast of grief!
> (*G*, l. 1254)

Rather than rejecting Byron's poetry out of hand, Austen's last complete novel shares some of its central preoccupations. In addition to the two Byron poems cited in the novel—*The Giaour* and *The Bride of Abydos*—both *Persuasion* and *The Corsair* celebrate the 'blue crystal' (*G*, l. 17) and 'purple diadem' of the sea (*BA*, II. 356).[32] For Anne and Wentworth, the Navy offers freedom from the restrictions of civilian life (and provides one of the few examples of a happy marriage in Austen's fiction), while Byron's wandering heroes often resort to the lawlessness of piracy to ensure that there are 'no limits to their sway' (*C*, I. 5). In *Persuasion* and the Oriental Tales, 'The breezy freshness of the deep beneath' acts as a refuge from the constraints of life ashore (*C*, I. 536). Moreover, while slavery in the Oriental Tales can be a literal state for both the hero and the heroine, Austen's female protagonists often suffer a metaphorical bondage. Anne Elliot, in particular, is bound by duty, the stifling dictates of a superficial society, and the galling insensitivity of those around her. In many respects, this heroine endures a 'gnawing solicitude' comparable to Byron's prisoner of Chillon (*P*, p. 213). As Auerbach suggests, 'a restricted world and its unrelenting imprisonment brings Austen into a special sort of agreement with her Romantic contemporaries' (p. 10).

Alongside the 'sluggish yoke' of society, both the hero and the heroine of *Persuasion* are afflicted by 'the breast that inly bleeds', the perpetual pang of a love that cannot be forgotten (*BA*, II. 338; *G*, l. 1155). Their initial romance, albeit brief in duration, has a profound and lasting impact that casts a shadow over Anne's early life. In addition to her 'Giaour-like mourning for Wentworth', the heroine's steadfast devotion to one man, judging all others unfavourably by comparison, is decidedly Byronic.[33] Furthermore, as becomes increasingly apparent during the course of the novel, 'eternal constancy' is not the sole preserve of women (*P*, p. 181). When Wentworth confesses to the heroine that 'I have loved none but you. Unjust I may have been, weak and resentful I have

[31] Byron often uses a rhyming couplet to force a connection, an ambiguous interdependence, between opposite forces. Take, for example, these lines from *The Giaour*: 'Who falls from all he knows of bliss | Cares little into what abyss' (ll. 1157–58).

[32] Gillian Beer traces the reference to 'dark blue seas' in the Lyme section of *Persuasion* to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, II. 17, which presupposes that Austen read at least the first two cantos of this epic poem (see *P*, p. 245 n. 8). Another possible source, which we know Austen read, is the first line of *The Corsair*: 'O'er the glad waters of the dark blue sea'.

[33] Deresiewicz, p. 130. Knox-Shaw also detects Byronic traits in Louisa Musgrove, comparing her wilfulness to Gulnare's bid for power in *The Corsair*.

been, but never inconstant' (*P*, p. 222), he also champions the Byronic virtue of fidelity:

> Yes, it was love—unchangeable—unchanged,
> Felt but for one from whom he never ranged.
> (*C*, I. 287)

To see Wentworth as Byronic is, according to Mary Waldron, a misreading of his character: yet a number of notable characteristics mark him out as a contemporary of such Byronic heroes as Conrad and the Giaour.[34] In addition to falling 'rapidly and deeply in love' with the heroine, Wentworth attracts the attention of other women (*P*, p. 26). Just as Conrad proves irresistible to both his own forsaken wife and the wife of his enemy, so the handsome hero of *Persuasion* sparks a 'fever of admiration' that almost proves fatal to one of the Musgrove sisters, quite literally turning her head (*P*, p. 76). The possible impropriety of Wentworth's flirtatious behaviour is raised by Austen and, although he is cleared of any intentional wrongdoing, it is his 'agony', repentance, and willingness to make reparation in the aftermath of Louisa's accident that absolves him of his former conduct (*P*, p. 102). While he is mostly silent during the episode in Lyme, remaining 'mute' like Conrad at crucial moments in *The Corsair* (I. 142), the intensity of Wentworth's feelings is even more compelling than Louisa's lifeless form.[35] Prior to these scenes, the narrative has focused on the heroine's sensitive disposition, but her 'age of emotion' is more than matched by the hero's Byronic 'despair' (*P*, pp. 46, 102).

From the very first description of the hero, he is singled out for his 'intelligence, spirit and brilliancy', qualities that distinguish his naval career (*P*, p. 26). However, as with nearly all Byron's protagonists, journeys overseas represent a bid for freedom, as discussed above, and a form of self-exile. Feeling 'ill-used' and fleeing from the country after Anne's refusal gives credence to Lady Russell's fears about his impetuous and imprudent nature (*P*, p. 28), Wentworth is described as being potentially 'dangerous' at both the beginning and the end of the novel, but the second reference checks this initial assumption; his ardour and fearlessness are seen in a new light, for example, when used to assist the impoverished Mrs Smith (*P*, pp. 27, 233). In keeping with Byron's satirical treatment of social pretension and vanity, Wentworth barely manages to conceal his contempt for Anne's family, flashing a 'dilating eye' reminiscent of the Giaour (*G*, l. 834), yet these glimmers of the Byronic are always tempered by restraint and civility. A notable example of Wentworth's balanced temperament occurs in Chapter 8, when we are reminded of the hero's 'bright eye, and curl of his handsome mouth', Byronic features which he quells to sympathize with Mrs Musgrove over the death of her, by all accounts, worthless son (*P*, p. 63). Similar instances of kindness emerge when Wentworth releases Anne from her boisterous nephew and secures a place for the fatigued heroine in the Crofts' carriage. While both acts suggest the assured presence and 'commanding art' of the Byronic hero (*C*, I. 177), these minor, undemonstrative incidents

[34] Mary Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of her Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 147–48.

[35] Similarly, the Giaour insists that he proved his love 'more in deed than word' (*G*, l. 1031).

also denote a thoughtful nature with a 'warm and amiable heart' (*P*, p. 84). By combining 'glowing, manly' attributes with gentleness, Wentworth becomes, as Serajul Islam Choudhury suggests, 'Austen's masculine ideal' (*P*, p. 57).[36] The hero of *Persuasion* is both the dynamic lover—a character usually discredited in Austen's novels—and a trustworthy, considerate partner. As Margaret Wilson argues, 'When Frederick Wentworth re-enters Somersetshire, he displays the charms of the other man but he also demonstrates the solid qualities that denote a gentleman and an Austen hero.'[37]

According to Kooiman-van Middendorp, 'she [Austen] gave free scope to her imagination in her wish to swerve from the regular type of hero' (p. 52). As for Wentworth, the hero of Austen's most recognizably 'Romantic' novel, Byronic attributes are neither endorsed nor derided, resulting in a complex masculine hybrid. The final part of this article will explore how Austen regards, and how the heroine negotiates, the Byronic attractions of the male suitor in *Pride and Prejudice*. As stated above, I am not arguing for a direct influence or attempting to identify specific instances of indebtedness: rather, this section is concerned with concurrences or what Brownstein refers to as the 'near intersections' between Austen and Byron (p. 179). I have already determined that Austen's attitude towards other authors was complicated; her celebrated irony was often employed to interact with, and establish critical distance from, her contemporaries. If we accept Fischer's point that 'not even the self-styled "grand Napoleon of the realms of rhyme" could still Austen's voice, which offers a persistent, teasing corrective to the presumptions and patriarchal assumptions of Byronic heroes' (p. 78), can Darcy therefore be read as an attempt to deflate the figure of the narcissistic anti-hero? Does the rehabilitation of the hero in *Pride and Prejudice* necessitate the eradication of anything remotely Byronic or are these traits mocked and rewritten to be ultimately reclaimed?[38] Finally, if vestiges of the Byronic hero are evident in the latter stages of the novel, how have his characteristics been modified and with what effect on Austen's male protagonist?

Despite his position as 'a darling of the society', Darcy struggles, more than any of Austen's heroes, to maintain what D. W. Harding describes as 'the earlier ideal of narrowly reasoned control in emotional life'.[39] As I have already demonstrated in relation to the hero of *Persuasion*, Darcy's character resonates

[36] Serajul Islam Choudhury, 'Jane Austen's Heroes: Are They Adequate?', *Dacca University Studies*, 10 (1961), 113–34 (p. 126). Likewise, Philip Mason hails Wentworth as Austen's 'most perfect' hero (*The English Gentleman: The Rise and Fall of an Ideal* (London: André Deutsch, 1982), p. 78).

[37] Margaret Madrigal Wilson, 'The Hero and the Other Man in Jane Austen's Fiction', *Persuasions*, 18 (1996), 182–85 (p. 184).

[38] A number of female Romantic writers, including Mary Shelley and Felicia Hemans, attempted a makeover of the Byronic hero in their work. See Paul A. Cantor, 'Mary Shelley and the Taming of the Byronic Hero: "Transformation" and The Deformed Transformed', in *The Other Mary Shelley: Beyond 'Frankenstein'*, ed. by Audrey A. Fisch, Anne K. Mellor, and Esther H. Schor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 89–106; Susan J. Wolfson, 'Hemans and the Romance of Byron', in *Felicia Hemans: Reimagining Poetry in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Nanora Sweet, Julie Melnyk, and Marlon B. Ross (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 155–80; and Caroline Franklin, *Byron and Women Novelists* (Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 2001).

[39] D. W. Harding, 'The Character of Literature from Blake to Byron', in *From Blake to Byron*,

with a Romantic need for self-expression; he is unable to repress the startling strength of his feelings in the first proposal scene, and cries out 'with more feeling than politeness' after hearing the news of Lydia's elopement (*P&P*, p. 264). In this respect, Darcy reflects the 'dilemma of masculinity' that emerged towards the end of the eighteenth century when politeness, which could easily be mistaken for effeminacy, ceased to be the dominant ideal.[40] As Kooiman-van Middendorp states, Austen 'allowed her hero to speak as neither the illustrious Grandison, nor any other gentleman of Darcy's standing would have done', echoing Elizabeth's retort about his improper conduct (p. 50).

In direct contrast to the eighteenth-century 'man of conversation, distinguished by his civility, good breeding, manners, and his ability to please and make others feel easy', the socially awkward hero of *Pride and Prejudice* can be more readily compared to the heroes of the Oriental Tales with their 'haughty gesture[s]', 'lofty port', and 'distant mien' (*C*, I. 570, 541).[41] Darcy is deemed to be 'handsomer than Mr Bingley', and the superior of his friend in many other respects, yet 'his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased' (*P&P*, p. 8). Pride is a ubiquitous trait of the Byronic hero (often prompting the battles in the Oriental Tales), and just as Byron's Manfred is found wanting when compared with the humble virtue of the chamois hunter, so the people of Meryton remain unimpressed by Darcy's 'high and imposing manners' (*P&P*, p. 74). When Darcy slights Elizabeth, even the impressionable, grasping Mrs Bennet is repelled by his 'shocking rudeness' and proclaims 'I quite detest the man' (*P&P*, p. 11). Despite his ten thousand a year, the aristocratic hero fails to elicit admiration: 'The general prejudice against Mr. Darcy is so violent, that it would be the death of half the good people in Meryton, to attempt to place him in an amiable light' (*P&P*, p. 218).

By introducing the usually isolated Byronic hero into an intimate, domestic setting, Austen exposes the more unappealing aspects of his character. Darcy is not only guilty of giving offence at a provincial dance but, more damagingly, of being ungracious to the partnerless women at the dance (in direct contrast to Mr Knightley's treatment of Harriet Smith in *Emma*). During Darcy's presumptuous first proposal, we are told that 'he had no doubt of a favourable answer', and the heroine repeatedly expresses the belief that his attentions are intended to frighten her into submission (*P&P*, p. 183). Just as Conrad's crew dare not question him—'all obey and few inquire his will' (*C*, I. 80)—so Mr Bennet capitulates to the hero's request for his daughter's hand; Mrs Gardiner's letter to Elizabeth, while confirming her favourable opinion of Darcy, raises the issue of his obstinacy; and even Bingley is struck by his friend's 'aweful manner', a pun which reflects Darcy's impressive yet alarming demeanour (*P&P*, p. 47).

The Pelican Guide to English Literature, ed. by Boris Ford, 5 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), pp. 35–68 (p. 51); Choudhury, p. 116.

[40] See Michèle Cohen, '"Manners" Make the Man: Politeness, Chivalry, and the Construction of Masculinity, 1750–1830', *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005) ⟨http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/searchFulltext.do?id=R03565112&divLevel=0&queryId=../session/1146231131_26006&trailId=10A46343F1B&area=abell&forward=critref_ft⟩ [accessed 28 February 2006] (para. 4 of 43).

[41] Cohen, para. 33 of 43.

Above all, Elizabeth recognizes the same 'will to power' that both Jerome McGann and Paul Cantor detect in the Byronic hero: 'I do not know any body who seems more to enjoy the power of doing what he likes than Mr Darcy' (*P&P*, p. 177).[42]

Halfway through the novel, Darcy confesses to being a reserved outsider who does not 'perform to strangers' (*P&P*, p. 170). His desire to achieve the same self-regulation or autonomy that Manfred boasts is, in many respects, commendable—he refuses, for example, to join in with the Bingley sisters' spiteful insults—yet it is often accompanied by, or perceived as, conceitedness. Towards the end of the narrative, Darcy critiques his own conduct:

> As a child I was taught what was *right*, but I was not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit. [. . .] I was spoilt by my parents, who though good themselves, (my father particularly, all that was benevolent and amiable,) allowed, encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing. (*P&P*, p. 357, emphasis original)

Darcy's birthright, his high rank in society, does not automatically entail a noble character. His inheritance largely consists of defects, anticipating Macaulay's comments on how Byron was spoilt by good fortune: 'all this world, and all the glory of it, were at once offered to a young man to whom nature had given violent passions, and whom education had never taught to control them'.[43] Earlier in the novel, Darcy also betrays a bitterness of temper that lends credence to Wickham's account of his 'malicious revenge' and 'inhumanity' (*P&P*, p. 77). Certainly, it is Darcy's pride that creates Elizabeth's prejudice. Elizabeth's suspicions about Darcy's 'scandalous' behaviour seem to be confirmed by his treatment of her angelic sister, for which no adequate explanation is ever given (*P&P*, p. 185):

> He [Darcy] had ruined for a while every hope of happiness for the most affectionate, generous heart in the world; and no one could say how lasting an evil he might have inflicted. (*P&P*, p. 180)

For the reader to accept Darcy as a worthy partner for Elizabeth, Austen must, as Henrietta Ten Harmsel states, 'change the initially "villainous" aristocratic hero into an acceptable husband for the victorious heroine'.[44] Not even *Jane Eyre*, with its shocking mutilation of masculinity, is quite as successful as *Pride and Prejudice* in reforming the hero. Where Conrad hopes in vain that Medora may still redeem him, Austen's heroine triumphs. As Darcy tells Elizabeth, 'What do I not owe you! You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled' (*P&P*, p. 357). Darcy unlearns his pompous behaviour through what Paul Giles refers to as 'an orgy of teasing' (p. 72); and not content with directly deflating the hero's self-importance, the heroine even teaches his reserved sister that 'a woman may take liberties with

[42] Jerome J. McGann, 'Hero with a Thousand Faces: The Rhetoric of Byronism', *Studies in Romanticism*, 31 (1992), 295–313 (p. 302); and Cantor, p. 94.

[43] Review of Thomas Moore's *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: With Notices of his Life*, in *Edinburgh Review*, 53 (June 1831), 544–72; cited in *Byron: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Andrew Rutherford (London: Routledge, 1970), pp. 295–316 (p. 297).

[44] Henrietta Ten Harmsel, 'The Villain-Hero in *Pamela* and *Pride and Prejudice*', *College English*, 23 (1961), 104–08 (p. 107).

her husband' (*P&P*, p. 376). Yet although Darcy may be the recipient of many 'saucy speech[es]', he also has a 'very satirical eye' that humbles the heroine in turn (*P&P*, pp. 315, 21). Darcy is never merely a malleable, reactionary figure who can be understood 'wholly within the space of Elizabeth's psychology'.[45] The hero's flaws are not only rectified by Elizabeth's changing perceptions but, significantly, by his own exertions. While Darcy may not engage in skirmishes like the heroes of the Oriental Tales, his encounters with Wickham in London betray none of his 'usual sedateness' (*P&P*, p. 240). Note the number of verbs in the following lines:

> He had followed them purposely to town, he had taken on himself all the trouble and mortification attendant on such a research; [. . .] he was reduced to meet, frequently meet, reason with, persuade, and finally bribe, the man whom he always most wished to avoid. (*P&P*, p. 314)

Whereas Darcy's part in the separation of Bingley and Jane consisted of persuasion and concealment, this quotation reveals a significant shift from evasion to confrontation in his dealings with those around him. In other words, the detached Byronic hero is gradually being integrated into wider society.

Thus, the change in Darcy's behaviour is signalled. The chance meeting at Pemberley gives the hero an opportunity to impress Elizabeth with his civility and kindness, and the success of his efforts are confirmed by the unbiased first impressions of Mr and Mrs Gardiner: 'He is perfectly well behaved, polite, and unassuming' (*P&P*, p. 246). Although the Gardiners conclude 'there was no fault to find', more is yet required to reclaim Darcy's character for both Elizabeth and the reader (*P&P*, p. 253). Immediately prior to the revelation of the improved Darcy, the housekeeper of Pemberley reminds us of, and forces Elizabeth to acknowledge, the hero's 'handsome face' (*P&P*, p. 236). More importantly, we are introduced to a new aspect of his character. In marked contrast to Manfred, whose lack of interest in his rank stems from a profound egotism, Darcy is a good master. Mrs Reynolds effectively rebuts the charge of Darcy's improper pride, praises his 'sweet-tempered', 'generous-hearted' nature, and continues: ' "He is the best landlord, and the best master," said she, "that ever lived" ' (*P&P*, pp. 237–38). Wickham's earlier concession that Darcy is 'liberal-minded, just, sincere, rational, honourable' with both rich and poor alike unwittingly adds weight to the housekeeper's claims; and Elizabeth's aunt later confirms that Darcy is acknowledged as 'a liberal man [who] did much good among the poor' (*P&P*, pp. 79, 253). Much has been written of Austen's affection for this novel, her 'darling Child', and its heroine, as 'delightful a creature as ever appeared in print' (29 January 1813), yet she also demanded that her readers like the hero and bestowed on him the feelings of 'Love, Pride & Delicacy' in a letter to her sister (significantly resituating his supposed 'defect' among virtues, 24 May 1813).[46]

If not a 'New Man', then Darcy can certainly be seen as a 'new gentleman'. According to Michèle Cohen, during the time Austen was writing, 'revived

[45] John Wiltshire, *Recreating Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 121.

[46] Austen wrote of her niece's response to *Pride and Prejudice*: 'Her liking Darcy and Elizth is enough. She might hate all the others if she would' (9 February 1813).

chivalry' emerged as the model for masculine behaviour.[47] Clearly, the second half of *Pride and Prejudice* attempts to establish Darcy's gallantry as an antidote to his earlier unchivalrous conduct, yet, in line with her ambiguous treatment of the Gothic novel, Austen probes 'chivalry's plural meanings'. Towards the end of the novel, Mrs Reynolds hails Darcy as the best of men—'If I was to go through the world, I could not meet with a better'—even though he can still be found sunk in a typically Byronic 'meditation; his brow contracted, his air gloomy' (*P&P*, pp. 237, 266). Rather than following a simple trajectory from anti-hero to ideal partner, Darcy retains, as does Wentworth, an occasionally grave disposition and a contemptuous look to rival the Byronic hero's sneer. Indeed, Margaret Wilson's argument that Wentworth can be seen as both the 'other man' and suitable marriage material need not be limited to *Persuasion*; as Wickham loses his appeal, Darcy adopts some—although by no means all—of his characteristics. Instead of being left with the 'safe' choice, Elizabeth is increasingly drawn to an attractive and impulsive man who blurs the boundaries between hero and anti-hero.

The heroine's efforts to ascertain the 'true' nature of the hero generate much of the momentum in both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion*. Even as Wentworth's renewed affection for the heroine becomes clear, Anne still sees him as 'irresolute' (*P*, p. 179); and, similarly, Elizabeth's attempts to sketch Darcy's character are invariably thwarted by her own 'widely different' feelings (the pragmatic Charlotte Lucas also finds her observations of Darcy 'disputable', *P&P*, pp. 205, 175). The hero of *Pride and Prejudice* excites 'a contrariety of emotion' in Elizabeth (*P&P*, p. 197):

> she threw a retrospective glance over the whole of their acquaintance, so full of contradictions and varieties, sighed at the perverseness of those feelings which would now have promoted its continuance, and would formerly have rejoiced in its termination. (*P&P*, p. 267)

This confusion can, in part, be explained by her former prejudice and misapprehensions: yet Darcy, in keeping with his Byronic counterparts, remains decidedly indeterminate. Just as Byron describes Conrad as a 'mystery', his vacillations between tenderness and rancor capturing the 'strange union of opposite extremes' that Macaulay sees as characteristic of the Byronic hero, so Elizabeth and Anne remain puzzled by their prospective partners (*C*, I. 173).[48] According to Keith G. Thomas, Anne is in a perpetual state of 'interpretive agitation prompted by the inscrutability of the object [i.e. Wentworth]' (p. 901). Likewise, Wiltshire regards the hero of *Pride and Prejudice* as a hologram capable of being read from multiple perspectives: he 'remains out of reach, an enigma, other, to the end' (p. 122).

Rather than resisting the influence of her contemporaries, Austen engages closely with Romantic, and particularly Byronic, ideas. However, as I hope to

[47] Cohen, paras. 32, 11 of 43.

[48] Cited in *Critical Heritage*, p. 296 (see above, n. 43). For Virginia L. Blum, Darcy is a 'mystery' because of his reticence, a highly erotic repression that is emphasized in the BBC's adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* (1995) ('The Return to Repression: Filming the Nineteenth Century', in *Jane Austen and Co.: Remaking the Past in Contemporary Culture*, ed. by Suzanne R. Pucci and James Thompson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 157–78 (p. 165)).

have shown, Austen does not merely incorporate the latest trends into her work; she is, as Harris suggests, in 'deliberate dialogue' with both the past and the present (p. 97). In the novels discussed above, Austen is in the process of redefining heroism; like the changeable protagonists in Byron's poetry, Wentworth is, by turns, brave, irascible and, recalling Conrad's 'tender melody of tone' (*C*, I. 550), gentle. Equally, *Pride and Prejudice* bears testament to the enigmatic appeal of this figure: Darcy acts as a facilitator or catalyst for Elizabeth's character development while also remaining 'remote, substantive, compellingly distinct' from the heroine.[49] Austen transformed and re-educated the flawed Byronic hero, yet she also retained his elusiveness. In *Pride and Prejudice* Darcy's Byronic traits are debated, derided, and, ultimately, desired, creating one of the most enduring and influential fantasy figures in English literature. Regardless of the well-rehearsed differences between Austen and Byron, the heroes of *Persuasion* and *Pride and Prejudice* constitute the offspring of an undeniably fruitful and lasting alliance.

DURHAM UNIVERSITY SARAH WOOTTON

[49] Wiltshire, p. 121.