

Byron's Shakespearean Imitations

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Abstract

Though Byron is known for his provocative denials of the importance of Shakespeare, his public derogations of the early modern playwright are in fact a pose that hides the respect he had for the playwright's powerful poetic vision, a regard which is recorded most comprehensively in the Shakespearean references of *Don Juan*. Byron imitated Shakespeare by repeating and adapting the older poet's observations on the imitative nature of desire and the structure of emulous ambition as a source of violence. His appropriations make his work part of the modern shift away from earlier European societies, wherein ritual means of mitigating desire's potentially inimical impact on human communities were supplemented with an increased reliance on market mechanisms to defer the effects of emulation and resentment. Finding himself among the first modern celebrities, Byron deploys Shakespeare's representations of desire to trace the processes that produced the arc of his own fame and notoriety. Drawing on his deep knowledge of Shakespeare, Byron's poetic vision—in its observations on the contagious nature of desire—exhibits elements of Shakespeare's own vivid depictions of imitation as a key conduit for his characters' cupidity, ambitions, and violence. Exploring how he plays with and integrates these representations into his letters, journals, poetry, and plays, my dissertation investigates Byron's intuitions on the nature of human desire by focusing on his engagement with one of literature's greatest observers of human behaviour, Shakespeare.

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For Dana

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Introduction

Desire is man's very essence, insofar as it is conceived to be determined, from any given affection of it, to do something.

—Benedict de Spinoza, *The Ethics*, III, "Definition of the Affects," I

This imitation of the affects, when it is related to sadness is called *pity* ... but related to desire is called *emulation*, which, therefore, is nothing but *the desire for a thing which is generated in us from the fact that we imagine others like us to have the same desire*.

—Benedict de Spinoza, *The Ethics*, IIIIP27S

Though a significant body of research exploring Lord Byron's relationship to Shakespeare exists, much of this scholarship focuses on Byron's appropriation of Shakespeare's plots and characters and avoids attempts to theorize the significance of the Shakespearean echoes in Byron's poetry and prose. I will examine Byron's deployment of Shakespeare's representations of imitative desire, exploring the extent to which Byron perceives his own intuitions of the nature of desire reflected in Shakespeare's characters and plays. In doing so, I will trace the implications of the two poets' intertextual relationship within the larger context of the European transition from the sacral-monarchical order to market society, with its ideal of individual self-determination as it manifests itself in the phenomenon of Byron's celebrity. Prompting my analysis are four general questions: What insights into desire does Byron share with Shakespeare? What does Byron's use of Shakespeare in his poetry and correspondence demonstrate about his understanding of desire's link to violence and the social structures that manage it? How do the differences separating Byron's representations of desire from those of Shakespeare illuminate Byron's understanding of his culture's evolving conception of, and efforts to manage, desire? What does Byron glean from Shakespeare's understanding of mimetic

desire and its role in producing the phenomena of celebrity and fame? The dissertation will trace the response to Shakespeare's *Richard III*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *King John*, *I Henry IV*, *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Coriolanus*, *Timon of Athens*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest* in Byron's prose, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, *Marino Faliero*, *The Deformed Transformed*, and *Don Juan*. Synthesizing Byron-and-Shakespeare scholarship that focuses on textual, historical, and cultural issues with a comprehensive anthropological theory of desire, this dissertation will provide a reading of Byron that recognizes Shakespeare as not only a literary model-rival for the Romantic poet but a theorist of desire, whose insights help shape Byron's poetic vision.

Critical analysis of Shakespeare's impact upon Byron has largely focused on the creative dynamism proceeding from Byron's ambivalent reception of the older poet, as he both echoes and dismisses Shakespeare's works. In her assessment of Byron's relationship to Shakespeare for the *Cambridge Companion to Byron* (2004), Anne Barton suggests that, while openly denigrating Shakespeare's talent, Byron surreptitiously immersed himself in the Bard's plays, which allowed him to reproduce Shakespeare's protean nature in his own acts of self-fashioning and poetic composition (231). Barton draws this insight in part from G. Wilson Knight's *Byron and Shakespeare* (1966), which explains the tensions of Byron's ambivalence towards Shakespeare as owing to the essentially Shakespearean nature of Byron's inner-self (8-9). Knight claims that Byron knew better than to take Shakespeare as a model, because "he had so much Shakespearian and other drama in him as a man" and took the more stable, rational poetic consciousness of "Alexander Pope as an exemplar" (9). Assenting to Knight's biographical analysis, Barton goes on to read *Don Juan's* Adeline Amundeville and Aurora Raby as avatars of Pope and Shakespeare and convincingly suggests that Byron's Juan would be hard pressed to

make a choice between the poets represented by the two women (235). Extrapolating from this analogy, Barton concludes that Byron identifies more easily with Shakespeare than his adamant assertions to the contrary admit and submits that Byron's irreverence towards Shakespeare and his works often allow his allusions to creatively repurpose the Bard's words to suit the complexities of Byron's own poetic narrative (230).

Referencing contemporaneous accounts of Byron's indifference to Shakespeare against Byron's vast knowledge of the playwright, Jonathan Bate argues that Byron's public derogations of the great poet are a pose that hides the profound respect he had for Shakespeare's powerful poetic vision, a regard which is recorded most comprehensively in the Shakespearean references of *Don Juan* (230-231). Bate, responding to Harold Bloom's characterization of the Romantics' anxiety vis-à-vis Shakespeare's influence, explores Byron's anti-Shakespearean pose as at once deriving from his wish to eschew "heterodox notions" and present himself as a cosmopolitan European as opposed to a nationalist Briton (230). Bate's analysis locates the poet's early desire to diminish Shakespeare, not in his sense of anxiety before his great forbearer, but within his well-known oppositional character.¹ Bate demonstrates Byron's great capacity to enlarge on Shakespearean sentiments both in his poetry and prose. Following Bate, my dissertation will reject an analysis of Byron's relationship to Shakespeare that echoes Bloom's claims in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) regarding the supposed Oedipal anxieties of younger poets vis-à-vis their highly regarded predecessors. Instead, I will suggest that Byron's publically ambivalent posture towards the Bard arises from his sophisticated understanding of how collective mimetic

¹Bate cites Goethe's explanation as the definitive analysis of Byron's disdain, isolating Goethe's observation that Byron initially recoils at Shakespeare's "Heiterkeit"—serenity or clearness—which, early in Byron's career, constituted an element of the playwright's work that Byron's poetic persona and Byronic heroes could not manifest (230). Bate finds an exception to this deficiency in the protagonist of *Don Juan*, which presents the reader with "a counter-hero, but also [in the narrator] adopt[s] a sceptical yet life-asserting tone that was more authentically Shakespearean than anything else in the age" (231).

desire functions to produce literary celebrity. I will claim that, in Byron's estimation, to treat a roundly praised poet with indifference is to distinguish oneself as cultivating a refined aesthetic taste that is inaccessible to the average reader. Byron understood that generating such perception by misrepresenting his true feelings caused others to regard him as an obstacle (since he could not be convinced of their point of view) and a potential model (since his distaste for Shakespeare tended to indicate a profound artistic insight that remained incomprehensible to his interlocutors).

The dissonance between Byron's declamations against Shakespeare and his frequent references to him make explorations of Byron's relationship to the playwright a recurring critical project. Thomas Moore and John Murray's *The Works of Lord Byron: With his Letters and Journals, and his Life* (1832) is the first comprehensive collection of Byron's writings and includes numerous notes that highlight similarities between the two authors' poetic diction along with notes on the Shakespearean references in Byron's journals and letters. Ernest Hartley Coleridge's edition of Byron's works (1898-1904) undertakes the same task more comprehensively.² In 1931, Lucile King would reflect on the correspondences between Byron's plot and characterization in *Marino Faliero* and those of *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Hamlet*. More recently, in *Byron's Historical Dramas* (1992), Richard Lansdown demonstrates the influence of Shakespeare upon Byron's *Marino Faliero*, *The Two Foscari*, and *Sardanapalus* and argues that these early plays most closely follow Shakespearean models and represent "the

²Coleridge's efforts are complemented by Philip H. Churchman's discovery of more references in 1909, which provide new annotations on the echoes of *Julius Caesar* in *Sardanapalus* and *Macbeth* in *Marino Faliero* (126-27). Churchman notes that the references he discovers had not been included in either Ludwig Fuhrmann's *Die Belesenheit des jungen Byron* (1903) or Ernst Zabel's *Byrons Kenntnis von Shakespeare und sein Urteilüberihn* (1904) (126). Following Fuhrmann's lead, Hazel Edward's unpublished thesis, "Byron's Early Reading and Its Influence on His Early Works" (1923), catalogues over one hundred references to Shakespeare, many of which appear in Byron's correspondence. In her 1931 study of Shakespeare's influence upon the Venetian drama, *Marino Faliero*, Lucille King makes reference to Edward's exhaustive catalogue of references, before undertaking a closer reading of the ways Byron appropriates Shakespeare's plot and characterization to gild his dramas.

extent to which Byron was able to resist Shakespearian example...and the extent to which he capitulated to it” in depicting character motivation and plot (118). Lansdown does not limit himself to explorations of Shakespeare in the history plays, but turns his attention to examining Byron’s resistance to the cult of Bardolatry, as it arose with English nationalism. Lansdown also provides an analysis of Byron’s resistance to nationalist tendencies, while reflecting on the influence of *Hamlet* upon *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (5-6).

Instead of merely cataloguing instances of borrowed diction and syntax, recent criticism explores the potential (dis)symmetries between Byron’s and Shakespeare’s preoccupation with the interiority of individual desire and its role in shaping what are often fraught social and historical relationships. In her unpublished Ph.D. thesis, which concerns itself with the larger contemporaneous historical changes Byron responds to, Ann Rachelle Hawkins argues that the engagement of Byron’s *Manfred* with Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* reflects, not simply the posture of Romantic isolationism in *Manfred*, but the nature of social change, as it bears on shifting conceptions of sexuality occurring between the Renaissance and the Romantic periods (i-ii). In a more recent study of Shakespeare’s influence upon *Don Juan*’s fourth canto, Linda Montag demonstrates that Byron’s reflections on the complications of sexual ethics—as they operate in the context of a sultan’s harem—rely heavily on the manipulation of desire represented in *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth* (29-30). Montag marks the sophistication of this episode in *Don Juan*, as it illuminates the ethical questions emerging from the confluence of power and desire. Making a similar point with regard to Byron’s role in creating the cult of Bardolatry, a 2007 essay by Michael Simpson expands on the emergent field of “Romantic theatre theory,” which is largely associated with Hazlitt, to posit a specifically Byronic concept of the theatre (192). Considering Byron’s mentions of Shakespeare in his address upon the reopening of Drury Lane in 1812,

Simpson argues that Byron flatters British elites' aspirations to establish a Bard-centric national stage, which would function as an iconic social forum, the domination of which would become a fraught issue in Regency London's fractious political scene (201). Due to his cosmopolitan pose and exile, Byron was able to stand more or less aloof from the tumult of this scene, which he nevertheless assisted in inaugurating (201).

The dominant critical focus on Byron's Shakespearean influences—as they manifest in his approach to genre, the representation of particular subjects' desires, and his strategic anti-Shakespearean pose vis-à-vis Bardolatry—overlooks the critical possibilities awaiting a comparison of Byron's and Shakespeare's broadly conceived intuitions regarding the imitative nature of desire, especially as they appear in the later poet's engagement with Shakespeare. Despite this lacuna in studies of Shakespeare's influence upon Byron, attempts to determine Byron's and Shakespeare's understanding of human desire remain implicit in surveys of both poets' works. In Byron's case, Jerome McGann's *Fiery Dust* traces the emergence of Byron's poetic persona as it grows out of his ambition to eventually achieve poetic fame and celebrity (27-28). More recently, Jerome Christensen's *Lord Byron's Strength: Romantic Writing and Commercial Society* (1993) argues that, having discovered the socially constructed nature of "authority ... as being no more than nominal" (xvii), Byron built his poetic success through the strength of his desire for himself alone. In 2009, Ian Dennis's *Lord Byron and the History of Desire* took up an inquiry into the evolution of Byron's understanding of mimetic, or interindividual, desire as it operates across and defines cultural, gender, and class boundaries (28). In Shakespeare criticism, contemporary attempts to define the great poet's conception of desire largely occur in the realm of gender, sexuality, and eroticism. For example, the essays in *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage* (1992) provide New Historicist assessments of the

nature of desire in the Renaissance period, insisting on the impossibility of deriving contemporary conceptions of sexual desire directly from the eroticism of Shakespeare's plays (7). However, the New Historicist approaches championed in *Erotic Politics* take for granted desire's fundamentally imitative nature, a characteristic that Shakespeare repeatedly describes as "suggested" (Girard, *A Theatre of Envy* 4). René Girard's *Theatre of Envy* (1991) confronts the issue of desire directly by positing that Shakespeare, like Aristotle, was keenly aware of the highly imitative nature of desire and undertaking an account of Shakespeare's unfolding awareness of the perennial social reality of "mimetic desire" in his plays and poetry (4).

In *A Theatre of Envy*, Girard develops his theory that humanity's awareness of its own mimetic nature becomes increasingly pronounced in the transition to the modern era. Adapting Alexis de Tocqueville's theory of an ongoing process of social levelling (*The Old Regime* 105), Girard's mimetic theory explains the erosion of ritual centres of power and the rise of an increasingly, though not perfectly, egalitarian society, in which mimetic antagonisms between undifferentiated individuals proliferate (*Deceit* 136-37). Girard is also interested in this transition and marks it in Shakespeare's growing disillusionment with the repetitive ritualistic violence of both tragic and comic drama (Schneider 5). In the changing structure of Shakespeare's plays, Girard discovers the playwright's emerging critique of the agonistic mimeticism underlying the theatre's cathartic action in the surrogate victim mechanism (*A Theatre of Envy* 6). Establishing how Shakespeare identifies mimetic reciprocity as the primary cause of conflict in his plays (5-6), Girard explains: "As a dramatic strategist, Shakespeare deliberately resorts to the power of scapegoating," a technique which "transforms the disruptive forces of mimetic rivalry into the constructive force of a sacrificial mimesis periodically reenacting the original violence in order to prevent a return of the crisis" (6). Late in his career, Shakespeare strengthens his critique of

the audience's appetite for mimetic rivalry and scapegoating, while continuing to provide these elements in various forms in order to meet the crowd's aesthetic expectations: "the public wants vicarious victims and the playwright must oblige. Tragedy is revenge. Shakespeare is tired of revenge, and yet he cannot give it up, or he gives up his audience and his identity as a playwright" (Girard 274). Girard argues that Shakespeare's ethically Christian critique of the theatre's representations of mimetic violence ultimately led him to make *Hamlet*—with its hero's oscillation between resolve and moral misgivings regarding revenge—"into a meditation on his predicament as a playwright" (274). *A Theatre of Envy* struck a nerve among Shakespeare scholars, as it seemed to ignore the Shakespearean critical tradition by foregrounding the playwright's anthropological theory of violence instead of engaging the debates that dominated the field at the time. As Richard van Oort notes, Girard sees his approach as illuminating the origins of Shakespeare's theatre in ancient rituals of sacrificial violence, which arose to mitigate the effects of emulous desire, and which previous critical and anthropological interpretations of Shakespeare had overlooked or shied away from (van Oort 280-81). Indeed, Girard claims his apprehension of Shakespeare's awareness of mimetic desire provides access to the origins of culture and, in so doing, grounds an expository critique of the potentially apocalyptic violence menacing the modern era. However, as van Oort points out, "Girard remains blind to a key aspect of modernity, namely, the capacity of its secular institutions to absorb resentment more effectively than its ritual precursors, including its precursors in Christian ritual" (286).

In his forthcoming *Shakespeare's Big Men: Tragedy and the Problem of Resentment*, van Oort scrutinizes the problems in Girard's reading of Shakespeare as a theorist of desire by highlighting Girard's ambivalence towards the role of representation and the aesthetic in mitigating the violence that often results from imitative desire and behaviour. "The idea that

Shakespeare was a keen student of human behaviour,” writes van Oort, “is not new. But the more one emphasizes the idea that Shakespeare was a theorist, the more tricky it becomes to explain the fact that he was also, quite obviously, a dramatist, an entertainer of people” (278-79). Van Oort contrasts his reading of Shakespeare with Girard’s. Following Eric Gans’s extension of Girard’s mimetic theory and the evolutionary biologist Terrence Deacon’s theorization of symbolic representation as a reciprocal, intersubjective phenomenon, he shows how Shakespeare’s tragedies function as part of a socio-symbolic system that defers violence by creating a scene of joint attention around a universally, imaginatively accessible representation of resentment over the symbolic prohibition of appropriating collectively desired objects. “As [Émile] Durkheim realized,” writes van Oort, “culture is above all a system of prohibitions imposed by the community on the individual” (16). This system of prohibitions, which limit violence, depends upon humanity’s symbolic capacity, which subjects acquire and develop via imitation.³ In *The Symbolic Species: The Co-evolution of Language and Brain* (1997), “Terrence Deacon has shown ... [that] language is a system of *symbolic* connections which override the more fundamental, perceptually based *indexical* associations built by the individual’s sensorimotor system” (van Oort 16). In supplementing his own scene of culture’s origin with Deacon’s account of the evolution of symbolic representation, Gans cites Girard’s mimetic theory:

The operation of representing the originary central object, and to a non-vanishing degree, every subsequent object, is a self-confirming one, the association with a perceived object

³In his discussion of the differences between genetic and symbolic evolution, Deacon observes: “There is an important sense in which artefacts and social practices evolve in parallel with their living hosts, and are not just epiphenomena. They must be reproduced from one generation to the next and replicate as each new person learns them, copies them, emulates them, or is forced to conform to them. [...] Language is a social phenomenon. To consider it in purely formal, psychological, or neurobiological terms is to strip away its reason for being. Social phenomena like language cannot be adequately explained without appealing to a social evolutionary dynamic as well as a biological one” (115).

not of a worldly metonymic *index* but of a *symbolic* sign bearing a meaning whose apparently atemporal objectivity depends on the human configuration of mimetic desire that surrounds it and whose potential violence is deferred by it. (*The Scenic Imagination* 208)

As Gans's highly compressed summary of mimetic desire's relationship to the symbolic articulates, the transhistorical capacity of Shakespeare's words to represent human desire's operation itself depends on the socially contingent adaptation of symbolic representation (in the cultural significance and structure of the drama) as a means to manage the volatility of desire. Girard's reading of Shakespeare's plays as reflections upon humanity's envious, emulative tendencies should also be understood in terms of the imitative nature of symbolic representation, which functions to defer the violence that often arises from the hyper-mimetic behaviour of our species. Accordingly, my use of Girard's readings of representations of imitation in Shakespeare's plays is qualified by van Oort's criticism of Girard's indifference to the role of symbolic representation in deferring mimetic violence.

A reading of Byron that locates his intuitions of the nature of desire in Shakespeare's works produces a rich array of intertextual connections that illuminate early modern notions of desire as they inform later romantic and proto-modern understandings. Most scholars proceed on the unexamined anthropological assumption that some form of desire animates all cultural forms constituting what we think of as human. Taking up the hypothesis that mimetic desire played a constitutive role in the emergence of the human, my project examines how this hypothesis is represented in the works of Shakespeare and Byron. Thus, reading Byron's use of Shakespeare for its rendering of desire's mimetic quality yields an understanding of Byron's poetic reflections upon the emerging modern phenomena of celebrity. Further, Byron's deployment of Shakespeare

in his renderings of the radical changes accompanying the growth of the global market offers insights into an evolving understanding of desire in the interval between Europe's early modern period and the early nineteenth-century. Whether or not it is always acknowledged by those who undertake it, this task of attending to the movements of human desire that give rise to historical change is the common labour of artist and critic alike.

For example, many of those writing the literary history of the late romantic poets today do so with a tacit understanding of the importance of imitative desire in shaping the creative and philosophical minds working during the Romantic era. The popular concept of sympathy in Romantic studies represents the widespread, unacknowledged recognition of desire's imitative nature among contemporary literary scholars.⁴ In a recent example of such criticism, Mary Fairclough's *The Romantic Crowd: Sympathy, Controversy and Print Culture* (2013) speaks to the importance of the concept of sympathy as it operates in both the Romantic era and the theoretical lexicon of those who continue to study the period. Fairclough defines sympathy as, "not a passion, a feeling, or an opinion in its own right, but rather... a medium for the transmission of energies ideas and emotions within a collective" (3). Fairclough draws her definition from quotations from Hume's "Of National Characters" (1748) and De Quincey's "Conservative Prospects" (1841), wherein both writers describe sympathy as the impetus for crowd contagion. Fairclough asserts that "though both Hume and De Quincey remark on the powerful influence of sympathy on social communication, neither seems able to offer an explanation for its operation" (1-2). In the quotation from De Quincey, this lack of an explanation holds true, but in Hume's quotation Fairclough's assessment is inaccurate, since the

⁴Recent titles taking up the notion of sympathy include Thomas McCarthy's *Relationships of Sympathy: the Writer and the Reader in British Romanticism* (1997), Rebecca Domke's *Sympathy and the State in the Romantic Era: Systems, State Finance, and the Shadows of Futurity* (2009), Jonathan Lamb's *The Evolution of Sympathy in the Long Eighteenth Century* (2009), Andrew Rudd's *Sympathy and India in British Literature, 1770-1830* (2011), and Ildiko Csengei's *Sympathy, Sensibility and the Literature of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (2012).

selected passage from Hume offers an explanation of sympathy in its opening sentence: “The human mind is of a very imitative nature; nor is it possible for any set of men to converse together, without acquiring a similitude of manners, and communicating to each other their vices as well as their virtues” (qtd. in Fairclough 1). Imitation—the explanation of sympathy that Fairclough overlooks in Hume’s words—is Girard’s definition of the phenomena of mimetic or sympathetic desire. Imitative, or mimetic desire, explains the contagion of radicalized revolutionary violence Fairclough explores. Though Fairclough touches on the issue of imitation later in her book, the thrust of her study shies away from developing a fully articulated theory of imitation. Nevertheless, the widespread interest in human sympathy operating in the social, literary, and political world of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century indicates the importance of the anthropological articulation of imitative desire to understanding the social context that Byron and his works first inhabited.

The shared desires of large segments of the reading public are an underlying assumption for the histories of reader reception in the Romantic period as they appear in Lee Erikson’s *The Economy of Literary Form: English Literature and the Industrialization of Publishing, 1800–1850* (1996) and William St Clair’s *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (2004). These cultural historians set out to characterize the experience of the average reader in the Romantic period by taking up the reader response theory of Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser as a guide to understanding what desires motivated consumers in the literary economies they reconstruct and analyze. “Since readers read within a framework of desire,” Erikson writes, “the economy of literary forms can be described from the perspective of reception as well as that of production” (8). Focusing primarily on the genres sought by readers in the period, Erikson claims that “the aspirations of writers and the desires of their audiences” may “be seen as aesthetic

interference patterns or feedback phenomena, mutually created, on the one hand, by authors seeking to anticipate their readers' responses, and, on the other, by readers reading a work within what ... Jausss calls their 'horizon of expectations'" (8). St Clair makes a similar appeal to Jausss's category when, framing his study of how "[r]eading helped to shape mentalities and to determine the fate of the nation" (1), he cites Jausss's and Iser's reception theories as the basis upon which to "reasonably assume," that "'communities of interpretation' who bring shared preconceptions and expectations about texts and genres to the act of reading [...] may have devoted considerable efforts to trying to build a full and balanced critical understanding of the meaning of the texts which they read" (4-5). Jausss's notion of the "horizon of expectations" is defined by theory historian Robert Holub as "an intersubjective system or structure of expectations, a 'system of references,' or a mind-set that a hypothetical individual brings to a given text" (323). In his study, St Clair "propose[s]...to take the concept of 'horizon of expectations' ... [and] widen it from the individual reader to the constituency, and from single texts to groups of texts... [in an] attempt to retrieve the main historical elements of some of the actual horizons that were present in the romantic period" (269). In order to achieve this, St Clair selects "the official mainstream ideology as it stood during the romantic period" (269). In doing so, he recognizes that there was never "necessarily ever ... a single ideology," while accepting that his "suggested standard, like the notion of ideology itself, can never be more than a constructed simplification of a range of changing mental states among innumerable participants, too complex to be fully comprehended, described, or abstracted in language" (269). However, he takes his authority for reconstructing such a heuristic model of the romantic reader from the concerted effort of Britain's "political, ecclesiastical, and educational leaders ... [in] identifying, devising, and describing a culture which they believed was appropriate to the times, and which they wished to see diffused and

applied through the nation's ... institutions" (269). In order to illustrate the nature of this ideology, St Clair creates a list and characterization of the texts that would have been known to, and frequently referenced by, a wide cross section of society. This list includes: the English-language Bible; Blair's *Sermons*; Buchan's *Domestic Medicine*; Burn's *Justice* (270); conduct books for men and women, which advised against reading poetry and novels (274-76); and the reviews printed in quarterlies such as the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review* (284-85). Outside of these texts, which would be familiar to almost every reader of the period, St Clair points to the conversations prevalent among reading societies regarding the classical notion of "correctness" in poetry," which suggested that the poetic rendering of particular events or landscapes should be based upon and elicit particular emotions in author and reader. For example,

[t]he men and women of the romantic period found sublimity in war. War was honourable, often glorious. [...] Weeping widows, and hungry orphans, soldiers and sailors mutilated by war ... all had their allotted place in the scheme of things ... [and were] celebrated in innumerable works of literature and conduct books as fitting objects of sympathetic sensibility. (287)

Understanding the general horizon of expectation—or intersubjective network of imitated desire—referenced by the majority of readers in the romantic period (a majority which would make up Byron's readership) provides a means by which to assess how Shakespeare's representations of mimetic desire affected Byron's poetics and the role of that effect in his rise to celebrity. Erikson's and St Clair's appeal to reader response theory's horizon of expectations foregrounds the existence of widely shared, mutually influenced desires among the Romantic

period's reading public without explicitly addressing the role of imitation in the communication of these desires.

St Clair's research suggests that Byron imitated his contemporaries' growing interest in Shakespeare. Byron appealed to Shakespeare because, as is often noted, the playwright was too ubiquitous and important to readers in the Romantic era to avoid. St Clair argues that part of Shakespeare's wide popularity was due to the monopoly on his works that, until 1774, had kept prices on the playwright's works artificially inflated, which contributed to a high valuation of the plays in the minds of the average reader. The end of the monopoly on Shakespeare's oeuvre in 1774 inaugurated a period of high production and consumption of Shakespeare's works: "When we add in the anthologies, the abridgements, the sale in parts, his inclusion in school books and all the other innovation of the post-1774 public domain, we can say that, by about 1800, Shakespeare at last became available to readers of all classes and ages" (157). Taking place in Aberdeen after 1788, Byron's early education corresponded with the period that saw Shakespeare enter the average school classroom. Though his education was modest, he certainly would have had access in his childhood to Shakespeare's plays. Like the other readers of his class and period, Byron could not avoid learning his Shakespeare and, as he developed as an author, he turned to the playwright to better articulate the reflections on desire that appeared in his own verse. The contagious desire for Shakespeare's works is legible in the historical period Byron inhabited.

Beyond historical criticism, recent theories dealing with embodiment, the limits of the concept of the human, and the nature of desire turn to the mimetic character of sympathy as a coordinate in understanding literary representation. Anna Gibbs's article "Sympathy, Synchrony, and Mimetic Communication," in *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010), argues that "sympathy,

synchrony, and various forms of mimicry and imitation ... [otherwise known as] mimesis ... provide a starting point for theorizing mimetic communication” (186-87). “[M]imetic communication’ or mimesis” constitutes, says Gibbs, “the corporeally based forms of imitation, both voluntary and involuntary ... on which literary representation ultimately depends” (186). She goes on to link her concept of mimesis to the proliferation of affects (understood in the Spinozan-Deleuzian sense), which she explores using both Brian Massumi’s category of an entity’s potential for “virtual co-presence” and psychologist Silvan Tomkins’s fine distinctions between affective states, which go beyond “traditional psychoanalytic ... degrees of arousal anxiety and aggression” (qtd. in Gibbs 187; Gibbs 188). This amalgamation of theory with social and cognitive science leads Gibbs to reflect on the difficulties in establishing interdisciplinary communication between the humanities and empirical research. To illustrate this, she notes “Rey Chow[‘s] ... comments that [suggest] ... the most far-reaching analysis of mimesis as both natural and cultural phenomenon in Western thought—that of René Girard—has failed to be productively taken up because it lacks empirical or scientific justification” (189). Hoping to correct the lack of interest in mimesis as a conduit for the contagion of affect through non-falsifiable and inductive argumentation, Gibbs states that her essay will “sketch a rough map of the recurrent concern with mimesis in various kinds of empirical work” (189). Her essay refers to the work of Vittorio Gallese on the embodied simulation of other entities’ experiences via mirror neurons (196). The links Gibbs draws prove timely, as—in the year following the publication of her chapter in *The Affect Theory Reader*—a collection of essays linking Girard’s mimetic theory to neurobiology appeared. Edited by Scott R. Garrels, *Mimesis and Science: Empirical Research on Imitation and the Mimetic Theory of Culture and Religion* (2011) is a collection of essays that includes a chapter by Gallese, which interprets his own empirical work in terms of Girard’s and

explores the expanding empirical basis for an interdisciplinary conversation between mimetic theory and neurobiology. Gibbs's exploration of the nature of mimesis in corporeal reality and in literature asserts that the mimetic "[c]ontagion [of affect and desire] is everywhere.... It leaps from body to body, sweeping through mediatized population at the speed of a bushfire," while recognizing that "[c]onsumer economies ... rely on [this] contagion for everyday functioning, connecting people, money, goods, resources, ideas, and beliefs in global flows of communication and exchange in ways that fundamentally alter relations in the process" (186). Although efforts to discover an empirical basis for the transmission of affect and desire via imitation are admirable, they have their limits, as (at least for humans) the mimetic experience largely occurs via symbolic representation which is a joint scene of attention between two subjects and therefore tends to elude empirical attempts at measurement. Nevertheless, the interest in imitative behaviour from emerging fields such as affect theory is encouraging, as it presages a growing ability to apprehend the observations on imitation that already exist in the works of authors such as Shakespeare and Byron.

Drawing on Erikson and St Clair, Tom Mole's historicist *Byron's Romantic Celebrity: Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy* (2007) also assumes the effects of mimetic desire in the reception of Byron's works in terms that Eric Gans figures as the emergence of the modern market, a process which proceeds from the early modern period through to the Romantic era. In approaching Gans's theoretical history, it is important to remember that he understands the subject as defining itself against other mimetically motivated subjects who are similarly oriented in their desire towards a collectively sought after, and therefore dominant, centre of attention (*Originary Thinking* 18-19). According to Gans, unlike the classical aesthetic subject, the subject of the Romantic period is increasingly alienated from dominant social forces such as

religion, monarchy, and eventually the market itself (165). In the late eighteenth century, the individual looked upon his or her alienation as a mark of personal virtue or election, a perspective which preserved the subject from being overwhelmed by the ancient forces of traditional religion and hierarchy, or marginalized by the newly emerging menace of irrelevance in the highly competitive realm of market society (166-67). Mole's Marxist analysis of the Romantic reader tacitly accepts Gans's understanding of the modern individual as alienated from the centre of a socio-economic scene via impersonal forces. Mole understands these forces as capital and industry (*Byron's Romantic Celebrity* 3). Girard and Gans interpret such economic markers including currency, credit, and capital as the effects of mimetic desire (Girard, "Innovation and Repetition" 239-40; Gans, *Originary Thinking* 164-65). Gans directly addresses the relation between the rise of capital and modern alienation in the romantic period as it depends on mimetic desire:

The romantic esthetic ... appears in the specific historical conditions of the birth of modern bourgeois society—conditions that would lead within in a century to Western dominance over the rest of the globe. The society that generates romanticism has dissolved its links with the traditional past; the Communist Manifesto remains the most eloquent paean to this dissolution. (165)

The rise of print culture with the proliferation of authors and texts is possible because of the combination of industrialized print and the rise of the bourgeoisie, but—in a reading of history as the steady unleashing and controlling of emulative desire—industry and the rise of the bourgeoisie are the result of a mimetic struggle, wherein imitation leads to class resentment and conflicts that undermine traditional mechanisms for controlling desire in large groups of people. Gans takes particular note of this process at the beginning of the Romantic era in the case of

Rousseau, whose “resentment, which provided the model for his romantic followers, was directed at the old order” (*Originary Thinking* 164). In the aftermath of the French Revolution, the individualist followers of Rousseau become the bourgeois consumers who guarantee the rise of

the free market, [which takes] secular culture as the source of the dominant models of worldly existence. [However,] ... once the market comes into its own as a dominant social force, the esthetic [subject] manifests its dependency on it not by promoting its values but by denying them. The esthetic of market society thrives on its hostility to market exchange. (165)

Hostility to market exchange spurs readers to search for materials that ostensibly provide an exit from the frenetic new realities of literary life, and Byron—with the other literary celebrities discussed by Mole—is there to provide these materials. The crisis facing the modern reader is a mimetic crisis born of the imitation animating both literary producers and consumers, who assiduously mimic each other in their attempts to display their uniqueness in skill or taste. Byron inadvertently benefits from these circumstances by creating a character, in Childe Harold, who purports to have no interest in the market whatsoever, an assertion which allows him to gain a following of readers who feel his weariness with the hyper-mimeticism of the market. This is the basis for the intimacy Mole argues that Byron cultivates with his readership, who—like Byron—have themselves grown weary of “the throng / [o]f louder minstrels in these later days” (*Childe Harold* 2.94)

Mole’s historical analysis of Byron’s rise to celebrity combined with a mimetic theory of the rise of the market in the aesthetics of the Romantic era opens a window into the ways that Byron’s reaction to Shakespeare’s fame draws upon Shakespeare’s understanding of mimesis in

order to comprehend the phenomenon of his own celebrity. In a discussion of the way that Byron and his publisher set about establishing the young poet as a brand in the literary marketplace, Mole references “[t]he Byronic hero [who] enabled readers to project ideas and emotions connected with the author onto his characters, functioning as a further tool for increasing his personal visibility in Romantic culture” (19-20). This schematic for how Byron’s works drew attention to the poet via the powerful Byronic hero illustrates desire’s mimetic nature as it operates between author and reader. Drawing on Gans in his *Lord Byron and the History of Desire*, Dennis demonstrates that the young Byron of *Childe Harold* “is vigorously exploring and testing tactics for achieving centrality in the market as he finds it. He proclaims his difference in every indifferent gesture, in every sated sigh and contemptuous sneer at the worn-out techniques of others” (56). These calculated gestures of disdain play upon the desire of his audience by suggesting that Byron’s desires are, unlike those of his readers, moved only by the most exotic and exulted experiences available to the people of his time and place. Thus, Byron gives the impression that he imitates no one in his desire and communes with the best the universe has to offer in a way that his readers can only begin to fathom by reading his poetry. The haughty pose of the Byronic hero is a version of a posture explored by Shakespeare in *Coriolanus*, a play whose protagonist Byron frequently identified with in the early years of his fame after the publication of *Childe Harold*. In Shakespeare’s play Coriolanus is alternately desired and despised by the people of Rome, but—for the play’s audience—his character remains fascinating throughout because of his aggressive belief in his own nobility in comparison to all of his mimetic rivals. Coriolanus’s emulous antagonism appears in different forms in the hubris of Macbeth, Brutus, Timon of Athens, and Hamlet. In the Byronic hero, Byron co-opts the mimeticism common to these figures—which, for example, Hamlet self-

consciously claims during his confession to Ophelia: “I am myself indifferent honest, but yet ... I am very proud, revengeful, [and] ambitious”—in order to fashion protagonists who set themselves apart and garner readers’ interest by confessing an austere, market-opposing uniqueness as “the most unfit / [o]f men to herd with Man” (*Childe Harold* 3.12). Thus, by deploying Shakespearean motifs of mimetic desire, Byron situates himself in the literary market, while purporting to scorn it. However, this is only the beginning of Byron’s deepening understanding of how to live in a modern society that operates on increasingly complex flows of imitative desire. As his career proceeds, he must come to terms with his inability to completely control the interindividual movements of desire that undergird his celebrity status. After his social disgrace and relative drop in popularity as an author, Byron’s poetry turns repeatedly to the metaphor of a bubble on the sea as a means of figuring the proto-modern subject’s contingent status within the inexorable movements of desire in history. Early in his career, Byron’s identification with Shakespeare’s rivalrous, tragic heroes buoys his defiant ambition to master society and the emerging literary marketplace, but later the fates of Shakespeare’s protagonists serve to expose the desire that animates subjects and exists largely beyond the individual’s control.

The frequency of Shakespearean allusions and language in Byron’s writing suggests they are more than mere poetic gilding or blandishments placed to woo conventionally minded readers. Most of Byron’s allusions are drawn from the tragedies and histories, and almost all of them are closely connected to the play’s anti-heroic villain or doomed protagonist. Byron often deploys these references to illustrate the conflicted circumstances of his own protagonists, who like Shakespeare’s tragic figures are driven by emulation. In its attention to these echoes, Byron’s understanding of desire’s nature—as it drives his characters, his readers’ interest in past

and present poetry, and the unfolding of history—is cast in relief. Drawing on patterns of human behaviour represented by his poetic forbearer, Byron’s Shakespearean borrowings illustrate how a consistent characteristic of human behaviour—imitation—propels the transition from pre-modern sacral social organizations to modern market society. Considering how the aesthetic medium he works in mirrors the religious and political structures that arise to channel the desires of individuals and groups away from violent ends, Byron’s Shakespearean imitations project a poetic vision attentive to the causal relations generating the cultural forms that mitigate the resentment stirred by emulative desire. The Byronic vision’s frequent references to Shakespeare seizes on the older poet’s exposition of desire’s contagious nature as a key to comprehending the forces that engender the Western transition from the pre-modern to the modern.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 considers Byron’s emerging awareness of Shakespeare’s representations of mimetic desire in the young poet’s identification with various Shakespearean figures in his letters and journals. In the seven years after his brilliantly successful publication of *Childe Harold*, his appropriation of the voices of Shakespeare’s most rivalrous heroes and villains to discuss the strife of his public and private life in his personal correspondence and journaling demonstrates that Byron had a nascent sense that emulation, or imitative rivalry, animated his ambitions. The circumstances and attitudes of Shakespeare’s resentful characters become, in Byron’s prose, analogies to his own life’s circumstances, aims, and behaviours. These analogies are not mere window dressing included to add interest to commonplace letters; rather, they show a mind attempting to understand its own motivations by drawing on the insights of a well-regarded literary expert in human behaviour. The respect Byron had for Shakespeare is masked,

however, by his pose of contemptuous indifference to Shakespeare's abilities, which reflects the ambition of a youthful poet attempting to best both his monolithic predecessor and bardolatrous contemporaries. As a poet striving among poets of the past and present, Byron's desire is mediated through others towards the object of literary honour. By framing his desire in Shakespeare's terms—which, when contextualized within the plays, appear as the product of imitative mediation—Byron betrays a developing intuition of the structure of mimetic desire, even while he remains mostly blind to the nature of its operation. Inevitably, this intuition is not limited to the literary realm, and he frequently frames himself as an embattled Shakespearean hero in his letters' and journals' discussion of the romantic and political imbroglios emulative desire involves him in. That he is not completely lucid regarding the illusory nature of his autonomy is reflected in the vehemence of his struggle to maintain the coherence of symbolic, socially constructed, and mediated objects of honour, as he apprehends them in his status as an important literary figure and socially respected husband. The limits of his understanding of desire are especially evident as the scandal of his separation from Annabella Milbanke approaches. Byron's persistent self-comparison to Shakespeare's tragic protagonists, however, aids him in beginning to develop a theory of desire, which, by 1819, will allow him to confront and articulate, through reference to Macbeth's entrapment in the movement of invidious rivalry, the interindividual quality of his own, at times, vengeful ambitions.

Using the history traced by Gans, the second chapter examines how Byron's *Childe Harold* responds to past aesthetics and how this romantic response functions to create an intimate tone in his poem, which Mole argues was the determining factor in Byron's earliest experience of literary celebrity. In an addition to the preface of *Childe Harold*, Byron links his poem's eponymous protagonist to both the Shakespearean and classical iterations of Timon of Athens,

with the intention of presenting a caricature of past renderings of self-exile, while continuing to use the figure of the sympathetically depicted social outsider as a means to build rapport with his audience. As Mole demonstrates, Byron's ironic play with classical, medieval, and early modern tropes functions to give his audience the sense that they have been included in a performance of candid, but sophisticated, irreverence towards England's poetic tradition. As Gans demonstrates, the historical development of new aesthetic traditions adheres to particular arrangements of desire between the art work's central figures, its periphery, and its audience. Considered within these contexts, imagining Harold as Timon sheds light on a broader aesthetic history, with its attendant movements of reciprocal desire, which Byron's poem responds to and extends. The contrast between classical and early modern aesthetics appears in the nuances of Timon's self-exclusion from Athenian society. Where the classical Timon wants nothing more to do with Athens after he abandons it and must defend his position vis-à-vis the angry mob that resents his self-centralizing rejection of the community, Shakespeare's Timon enacts his resentment for the social centre of Athens by assisting Alcibiades in sacking the city. As Gans's history helps us understand, these medieval and early modern efforts to infiltrate and dominate the centre of the aesthetic scene from the periphery via the avatar of the famous general illustrate an emerging consciousness of the threat of resentment to the cohesion of the community around a common, inviolate centre.⁵ In terms of Gans's history, Byron's "modern Timon" is quintessentially romantic, as, in his self-removal from society, he avoids making an overt display of his resentment vis-à-vis his community's centres of attention, while—like Shakespeare's misanthrope—he still harbours resentment towards them. Because of Harold-cum-Timon's ostensible indifference to any prior or contemporary collectively constructed scene of attention,

⁵Gans groups the medieval and early modern periods together because both are governed by the Christian doctrine of election, wherein all souls have—in theory, if not in practice—access to the collectively desired sacred qua aesthetic centre.

he is an excellent vehicle for Byron's ironic representation of past historical aesthetics, as he quickly becomes disillusioned with, and ultimately abandons, each scene of desire he encounters. In Gans's analysis, the romantic aesthetic centres on a subject who figures himself cast out from society while containing within himself a supposedly unique scene of desire, which no one else—barring a few intimates—may participate in. Thus, Mole's account of Byron's original intention for the first two cantos of *Childe Harold*—which were initially written to be a comic, homoerotic picaresque for a few of his university friends—accords well with the romantic aesthete's attempt to imagine a scene utterly divorced from traditional, hegemonic centres of mimetic attention. Mole demonstrates that the intimate sense of inclusion such a scene creates in its readership allows Byron's publisher Murray to make the most of a small first printing for a wealthy few, which he marketed via word of mouth advertising. Because of its success, Byron's modern Timon would have to learn to engage more readily with his public, who—paradoxically attracted by his wish to retreat—had made him famous overnight.

The third chapter compares the link between drama and the lyric poem as it operates in both Byron's lyric poetry and Shakespeare's Sonnets. Byron's lyric work bears a resemblance to Shakespeare's Sonnets in its treatment of a given speaker's involvement in the larger drama of world history. These gestures highlight the shared nature of human desire as they circulate through an erotic and political past. Standing as memorial accounts, Byron's lyrics report the drama the speaker has lived through and looks forward to. As an adaptation of the early modern aesthetic's treatment of desire, Byron's Romantic lyricism strives to imagine centres of imitative interest detached from the traditional hegemonic loci of Shakespeare's world. Following Shakespeare's Sonnets, Byron looks on the lyric as a means of memorializing moments in the speaker's history of desire. Thus, like the Sonnets—which function as parts of a fragmentary

drama—Byron’s lyric poems open themselves to the particular experience of desire each of his future readers will bring to them.

The next chapter examines Byron’s political play, *Marino Faliero*, in relation to Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, with a view to exploring the intersection between revolutionary action and mimetic desire. Critics have noted that *Marino Faliero* draws on *Julius Caesar* as a means to reflect on the revolutionary movements fomenting throughout Europe in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Byron’s play is a study of the ritualization of the revolutionary violence of the French Revolution, as seen through the lens of similar violence in *Julius Caesar*, with the difference that instead of founding a new political order the collective mimetic violence of *Marino Faliero* leads to the dissolution of Venetian society in a final mob scene. This final scene constitutes an accelerated dissolution of hierarchical differentiation occurring throughout continental Europe in the lead up to, and aftermath of, the French Revolution. The old Whig attitudes that enabled Byron to, on the one hand, welcome the chastening of corrupt tyrannical orders while, on the other, insist on the necessity of maintaining a benevolent noble ruling class are manifest in the figure of Faliero, who imagines that by leading a popular uprising he can re-establish a legitimate, just aristocracy with himself at its head. Byron frames these dissonant political commitments as the product of intraclass resentment, which becomes the vehicle for popular resentment to pursue its political ends contra the city’s oligarchs. Faliero embodies both Shakespeare’s republican Brutus and the tyrannical Caesar as he struggles both to give a voice to the city’s labourers and soldiers, and to restore respect for the authority of the Doge. As Dennis points out, having been crudely mocked and having had his demands for recompense dismissed by his fellow aristocrats, Faliero’s resentment stems from being raised by his erstwhile social equals to the pinnacle of his society only to act as a figure of collective derision, around which

his former peers may consolidate the community he is now excluded from. In this sense, the crowning of Faliero as Doge functions as a symbolic sacrifice made from among the ranks of the city's elite and thus a means of sustaining their society's order. Like Brutus, his resentment drives him to undermine his position as player-king, a position which resembles that of Caesar in Shakespeare's play, where—according to Girard—Caesar becomes an ineffective sacrifice to the state. In order to restore order in Shakespeare's play, a second sacrifice is needed and Brutus, via his suicide, is fashioned by the concluding speeches of Marc Antony and Octavian into just such a conciliatory corpse. Byron's play echoes this double sacrificial movement via the initial symbolic sacrifice of Faliero—in his Dogeship and concurrent social mortification—and his final, literal execution. However, unlike Shakespeare's play, *Faliero* contains no clear re-establishment of the social order in the aftermath of the Doge's beheading. The mimetic behaviours that give rise to the resentment animating the violence of the Venetian oligarchs, the common citizens, and Faliero are not effectively quelled by violent ritual; whereas, in Shakespeare's play, the death of Brutus appears as a founding violence upon which a new state may be erected. In this way, Byron's play expresses the uncertainty caused by the growing inefficacy of ancient deployments of violent ritual to shore up the social order as revolution reshapes Europe in the late Romantic period. Byron's vision of the loss of differentiation in the final mob scene reflects this anxiety and uncertainty, while also gesturing with jubilation towards a future where tyrannical forces are perpetually undermined by popular action.

Chapter 5 examines the parallels between characters in Shakespeare's plays and those of *The Deformed Transformed* by focusing on the symbolically loaded figure of the latter's demonic Stranger. In his last unfinished play Byron draws on Goethe's *Faust*, Joshua Pickersgill's *The Three Brothers*, and six of Shakespeare's plays to create a demon, who both

represents the play of interdividual desire and explores the role of mimetically engendered resentment in generating ambition for fame. In the play, the Mephistophelean Stranger, who offers to transform the deformed outcast Arnold into the flawed hero Achilles, resembles Shakespeare's Duke of Gloucester, Thersites, and Iago. In his supernatural form, and his vocation to draw Arnold into ever escalating mimetic rivalries, the Stranger further resembles the witches of *Macbeth* and the vengeful ghost of *Hamlet*. At the beginning of the play, as he collects wood and suffers the execrations of his cruel mother, Arnold echoes Caliban of the *Tempest* in his resentment towards his family and humanity generally, a resentment which is also expressed in his emulative ambition to equal and surpass his persecutors in strength and fame. When the Stranger's transformation of Arnold into Achilles brings about his longed for status by making him a mercenary soldier, Arnold confronts and, ultimately, laments the violence that has accompanied his success, an attitude for which the demonic figure mocks and baits him in the mode of Shakespeare's Thersites antagonizing Achilles and Ajax in *Troilus and Cressida*. Though the Stranger initially provides Arnold with a range of classical heroes into which he may refashion himself, Arnold suggestively chooses the fabulously famous Achilles. Renowned for his resentment vis-à-vis Agamemnon, arrogance borne of his famous martial skill, and fatal weakness, Achilles symbolizes how hubris concocted by mimetic desire and resentment is inimical to its subject if he remains unable to perceive and renounce its influence over him. Thus, the demon (who makes Arnold's transformation and success as a mercenary possible) represents the ambivalent movement of desire in generating both fame and notoriety. What begins as reciprocal verbal antagonism between Arnold and his supernatural liaison develops, in the play's unfinished third part, into full blown mimetic rivalry for the attention of Olimpia, whom the pair have saved from rape during the 1527 sack of Rome. Barton observes that, as the rivalry begins

to unfold, Byron turns to *Othello*, aligning Arnold with the Moor and the Stranger with Iago, as a means to bring the play to a tragic, murder-suicide conclusion. The diabolical and supernatural qualities of the Stranger share, beyond their association with Goethe's Mephistopheles, affinities with *Hamlet's* ghost and *Macbeth's* witches, entities who have deep historical resonance with Judeo-Christian representations of violent mimetic behaviour. Considered in light of European history's representations of demonic forces, Arnold's rival doppelganger appears as a personification of the mimetic rivalry that spurs his resentment, ambition, and tragic fall.

The final chapter focuses on Byron's direct references to Shakespeare in his great unfinished poem, *Don Juan*. In *Don Juan*—which contains lucid depictions of interindividual desire's role in modern market society and the phenomenon of celebrity—Byron makes nine direct allusions to Shakespeare as a playwright and national icon, all of which contain some extension of Shakespeare's theory of mimetic desire as a crucial constituent element of the socio-symbolic order and the production of literary fame. Throughout the poem, the worldly narrator expresses an urbane understanding of how subjects of modernity are drawn towards centres of mimetic attention, which make up the various foci of reciprocal symbolic and material exchange. Byron's references to Shakespeare are often wryly ambivalent in tone, as he alternately appeals to the older poet as an authority and includes him as a means of deriding his contemporaries' popular, nationalistic Bardolatry. In this way, *Don Juan's* narrator sets out to build upon Shakespeare's representations of desire by appropriating insights that accord with his own intuitions on the subject, while cultivating the impression that he is as antagonistic towards Shakespeare as he is towards the other figures he satirizes and attacks throughout the poem. Byron's adaptation of Shakespeare's vision of desire largely pertains to the generation of social prestige, celebrity, and fame as they operate in the martial, political, and literary realms. Byron

deploys Shakespeare in his references to the Duke of Wellington, Catherine the Great, and Walter Scott, whose social *cachet* is an analog for their position as centres of mimetic attention. In his consideration of the collectively conferred prestige constitutive of fame, Byron turns to Hamlet's famous question ("to be or not to be?") and uses it as an opportunity to muse on the continuous forces uniting social and material phenomena in an abstract metaphorical discussion of mimetic reciprocity, as it moves between the personified entities of Life and Death. This discussion presents an image of imitative feedback on a vast—indeed all-encompassing—scale. Byron concretizes his abstruse, but evocative, theorization of universal desire with the English canto's exploration of the amorous resentments characterizing Juan's relationship with Adeline Amundeville and Aurora Raby, whom Byron designates as an avatar of Shakespeare. The issue of Juan's developing relationship with Adeline and Aurora is cut short, as the poem is left unfinished. However, the passages that describe Aurora's character suggest that Byron finally understands Shakespeare as a fascinatingly austere, perspicacious theorist of desire and human behaviour, who nevertheless retains proto-modern anxieties regarding mimetic desire's potential to engender violence, while recognizing its unlimited capacity to generate new loci of social, political, and aesthetic attention.

Chapter One:

Byron's Shakespearean Ventriloquism in his Letters and Journals

In the early years of his fame after *Childe Harold's* publication, Byron's epistolary and journal prose provides himself and his readers an experience of Shakespearean drama mediated through his own life. As we shall see below, Byron adds interest to his letters and journals by drawing analogies between the circumstances of his own life and those of Shakespeare's tragic heroes and villains. However, Byron's use of Shakespeare to illuminate his experiences do not serve to simply gild his prose, but shows thoughtful attention to the inner workings of the plays as they model and gloss his own circumstances, desires, and behaviour. Jonathan Bate's and Anne Barton's assessments of Byron's prose references to Shakespeare recognize his identification with the playwright's tragic heroes. In Byron's well known letter to James Hogg, which makes the tongue-in-cheek claim that "Shakespeare's name stands absurdly too high and will go down" (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 4.84-85), Byron's ironic deprecation of Shakespeare indicates he took him as poetic model and rival. The same letter indicates, in similarly ironic terms, the intense sense of rivalry Byron felt with the poets of his own day. In many of his references, Byron concentrates on the pursuit of the symbolic object of honour, which itself motivates many of the emulous conflicts Shakespeare's plays depict. In his journal reflections on Napoleon's abdication, his frustration with Caroline Lamb, his private reactions to society's censure of "Lines to a Lady Weeping," his pursuit of Annabella Milbanke, and his letter to Lady Byron in the wake of Sir Samuel Romilly's suicide, Byron's deployment of Shakespeare's words indicate an undeveloped intuition of the potentially dangerous, emulative

quality of desire. The conflicting ambitions of the characters, whose voices Byron correlates with his own emotions and ambitions, are typically directed towards attaining a symbolic aim, which is often a question of honour pertaining to specific erotic, domestic, and public domains. In some of his self-comparison to Shakespeare's tragic figures, Byron's use of the plays traces the line separating tragedy and comedy, as his own longings and reactions provide a reading of the desire represented in the play he references. In such instances, Byron is not lucid regarding his highly imitative tendencies, though his allusions help to illuminate them. However, in his reflections on his attempts to maintain his honour as a literary figure and married man, Byron indicates an emerging awareness of his mimeticism. In the time leading up to his separation from Annabella, Byron was unable to reflect meaningfully on the destructiveness of his rivalrous desire, while—as evidenced in a 1819 reference to *Macbeth* included in a letter to his estranged wife—his composition of *Childe Harold Cantos IV* helped him to more fully apprehend the emulous nature of his vengeful sentiments. Considering these prose references to Shakespeare, I will argue that, in his correspondence and journals from 1812 to 1819, Byron's appropriation of the voices of Shakespeare's tragic characters constitutes an unintended theorization of his experience of imitative desire by drawing parallels between his own social, political, and literary difficulties and those of certain Shakespearean characters who face similar mimetic conflicts.

In his prose writings in the early years of his fame, Byron's analogical self-presentation as a Shakespearean hero resembles the strategic manipulation of imitative desire that he pioneered in *Childe Harold*. As Ian Dennis explains, the poem does not merely present exotic locales to the homebound reader so much as mediate the protagonist's interior experience of these places: "A desirable experience is pervaded more integrally, more intimately, perhaps more lastingly by the person who modeled it, than are most material possessions by those who own

them” (Dennis 34). The desirability of an experience is uniquely tied to the individual who undergoes it and depends upon the experiencing party’s narrative mediation to be made comprehensible (34). This strategy, Dennis goes on to argue, is a large part of why Byron became such an exalted literary celebrity in the wake of *Childe Harold*’s publication. In his many prose references to Shakespeare, Byron achieves a similar aesthetic effect to those mediated experiences of *Childe Harold*. By presenting his circumstances and attitudes as those of Shakespeare’s great tragic figures through both the appropriation of their language and analogy to his own life, Byron allows his readers to feel that they are in proximity to the great figures of Shakespeare’s plays. In his prose use of Shakespeare, he mediates the experience of the tragic figures he ventriloquizes for his readers and thereby provides—with the details of his own expressions of desire—a gloss of the well-known plays, both for himself (in his journals) and for his friends and associates in his letters. This reciprocal reading of desire occurring between Shakespeare’s dramas and Byron’s prose provides readers with an experience of the mimeticism driving Shakespearean tragedy and shows the young poet’s under-developed, but emerging, understanding of the emulative quality of desire.

Identifying with Rival Doubles and Tragic Heroes

Byron’s references to Shakespeare arise from a mind saturated with his plays. This is the case that Barton makes in her essay “Byron and Shakespeare,” where she argues that Byron was continually immersed in Shakespeare’s plays, while still resisting the uncritical tendency to Bardolatry of his compatriots (226-227). Barton claims that, in addition to his wide reading of Shakespeare as a child, Byron’s lifelong love of the theatre sharpened his knowledge of, and capacity to draw on, the plays meaningfully (229). Barton, referring to Byron’s defence of *Don*

Juan in a letter to John Murray, presents the poet's obscure reference to *I Henry IV* as indicating "a good deal...not only about his intimate and highly individual familiarity with the minutiae and byways of Shakespeare's texts, but just how profoundly (whatever his public protestations to the contrary) his own ways of thinking and writing had been influenced by the man from Stratford" (231). Illustrating Byron's idiosyncratic intimacy with Shakespeare, Barton goes on to assert with G. Wilson Knight that Byron's Shakespearean "ventriloquism [is] generically different from mere allusion" and suggests that, "whether in earnest or in jest," Byron appropriated for himself "the feelings of various figures in the plays" (231).

Bate and Barton draw attention to Byron's identification with tragic heroes, but stop short of attempting to theorize the significance of this affinity against the larger themes of desire operating in Shakespeare's tragedies, while looking askance at the limits of Knight's eccentric, essentialist attempts to provide such a theory in spiritual terms. In a chapter titled "Byron's Pose," Bate argues that, though often quoting from comedies and histories, "those [quotations Byron draws from] the tragedies, *Macbeth* especially, often define his own state of mind" (228). Bate goes on to illustrate the importance of *Macbeth* to Byron, who "in a letter to Lady Melbourne...claimed to be descended from Banquo" (228). After citing Byron's stated intention to imitate *Macbeth*'s fierce spirit in struggling against his financial difficulties, Bate further suggests that most of Byron's identifications with *Macbeth* "are stoical," an assertion for which he provides the example of Byron's use of *Macbeth*'s words on grief to describe his feelings upon the death of his friend John Edleston (229). The resonance between Byron's emotional states and those of Shakespeare's tragic heroes provides, Bate insists, evidence of Byron's comprehensive knowledge of the plays, but not the spiritual connection between the playwright and young poet which Knight argues for (Bate 229). Barton presents a more generous vision of

Knight's assessment of Byron's relation to Shakespeare than Bate, arguing that, while Knight is "eccentric in [his]... programmatic insistence that in the course of his life [Byron] became the incarnation of various Shakespearean characters," Byron does not simply allude to Shakespeare, but appropriates his words for his own unique purposes (231). Barton does not go on to explore the basis of this ventriloquism beyond noting the emotional identification evident in Byron's allusions to the Bard's characters and plays. Bate's and Barton's treatments of Byron's Shakespearean allusions depend on notions of affective sympathy which, in their definitions, exist at the level of un-theorized emotional identification. In her reading of the *locus classicus* of Byron's Shakespearean allusions in his journal entries (a reaction to Napoleon's 1814 abdication), Barton—like Bate—notes Byron's appropriation of Hamlet's, Macbeth's, Romeo's, and Lear's voices in his "complicated personal identification with Napoleon," which focuses on their shared ambitious natures, moral failures, and experiences of pain (232). Bate's and Barton's readings of Byron's sympathy with Shakespeare's heroes provide a partial vision of the young poet's affinity for Shakespeare's tragic characters in his correspondence and journaling. However, an exploration of the imitative desires precipitating the emotions in question illuminate the nature of the desire that requires Byron to draw upon Shakespeare and illustrates how Shakespearean voices help him to more accurately articulate his experience.

The entries reacting to Napoleon's abdication on April 9th and 19th of 1814 do not contain explicit references to mimetic rivalry; however, the April 8th entry illustrates Byron's understanding of the emulous desire motivating Napoleon's actions, as it compares the motivating affects behind those actions to the hubris grown from competitive success that lead to the death of the Crotonian athlete and warrior, Milo. Two days after hearing of the Allied occupation of Paris on April 6th, Byron laments: "my poor little pagod, Napoleon, [has been]

pushed off his pedestal;—the thieves are in Paris. It is his own fault. Like Milo, he would rend the oak; but it closed again, wedged his hands, and now the beasts...may tear him” (*Byron’s Letters* 3.256). According to Michael B. Poliakoff, the story of Milo’s death is a parable against hubris, as it was “overweening belief in his strength [that] brought Milo to his death” (118). Milo’s and Napoleon’s high estimation of their abilities depends on their past victories in sport and battle. The structure of both athletic and martial conflict, as illuminated by Girard’s reading of contests operative in tragic dialogue and combat, consists of a mimetic symmetry between opponents (*Violence and the Sacred* 150-51). After any contest, the winner’s hubris arises from victory achieved by miming an opponent’s efforts to the point where one contestant can no longer reciprocate the gestures of his rival. Milo’s and Napoleon’s excessive beliefs in their strength derive from their never having encountered an opponent who could match their endurance in the game of emulative reciprocity. The metaphor of the hand caught in a tree—an analogy for nature’s insuperable strength—serves to show how repeated success in mimetic duels precipitates an escalation in frenetic imitative action as the efforts of competitors reach a crescendo that terminates in tragic destruction and catharsis. In the final lines of the April 8th entry, Byron is not certain how Napoleon’s drama will end. Though he has an intimation that Napoleon, like Milo, will suffer for his mimetically propelled ambition, he muses that Napoleon “is in [the Allies’] rear—between them and their homes,” and he asks, “will they ever reach them?” (*Byron’s Letters* 3.256). In the following entries, Byron, by identifying with Napoleon, echoes the voices of the tragic figures, who—as thralls to mimetic rivalry—are unable to disengage from the imitative draw of conflict in order to save their own lives.

Girard elaborates the mimetic link between tragedy and war, which Byron illustrates in his association of Milo, Hamlet, Macbeth, Romeo, and Lear with Napoleon. Citing Heraclitus,

who Girard notes is sometimes called “the philosopher of tragedy,” he aligns the pre-socratic thinker’s fragment on war—“Strife is the father and king of all. Some it makes gods, others men; some slaves, and others free” (qtd. in *Violence and the Sacred* 88)—with the function of dramatic tragedies. In his reading of Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*, Girard explains how hubris arises as a characteristic in each of the rival disputants of the play—Oedipus, Tiresias, and Creon—who are confronted with the crisis of the plague threatening Thebes. All three men, Girard writes, are “drawn unwittingly into the structure of violent reciprocity—which they always think they are outside of, because they all initially come from the outside and mistake this positional and temporal advantage for a permanent and fundamental superiority” (69). The actions of the characters, Girard argues, “correspond to each man’s illusion of superiority, his hubris” (70). Having illustrated the doubling of each character against his rival disputant, Girard explains why one character, Oedipus, is singled out to suffer as the play’s tragic victim by interpreting the plague, Oedipus’s parricide, and incest as metaphors for the general threat of undifferentiated mimetic violence, which arises from the rivalries of the Theban population: “The whole process of mythical formulation leads to a transferral of violent undifferentiation from all the Thebans to the person of Oedipus. Oedipus becomes the repository of the community’s ills” (77). The threat of an unchecked escalation of mimetic rivalry, or war, attends the play’s failure to assign blame for the conflict to a particular character. Similar symmetries of passions inflamed by mimetic rivalry and tragic conclusions animate the Shakespearean heroes Byron references in his reflections on Napoleon’s abdication. Hamlet vies with Claudius and Laertes, Macbeth struggles against Macduff, Romeo must finally duel Tybalt, Lear must face the usurpers of his throne, and all must die to close their play’s action.

The Shakespearean quotations Byron employs in his reflections upon his relationship to Napoleon illustrate the poet's embryonic awareness of emulous desire as the substrate of his and the general's passions. Evidence of Byron's sense of Napoleon's mimetically engendered hubris appears in his choice of Hamlet's self-dismissal after his reflection on his friendship with Horatio and Horatio's ability to control his passion through detachment:

Give me that man

That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him

In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,

As I do thee. Something too much of this. (3.2.69-72)

Byron repeats this last sentence after making a maudlin reflection upon the fate of Napoleon's historical legacy: "Alas! this imperial diamond hath a flaw in it, and is now hardly fit to stick in a glazier's pencil:—the pen of the historian won't rate it worth a ducat. Psha! 'something too much of this'" (*Byron's Letters* 3.256-57). Like Hamlet rousing himself from his reverie upon the value of dispassionate detachment, Byron—departing from Hamlet's praise of controlled passion—recognizes Napoleon's excessive ambition as a flaw, while vowing to remain loyal to the defeated Emperor. In the play, Hamlet's reflection on detachment is directed towards his friend, Horatio, with whom Hamlet has no animosity. Hamlet explains the reason for this lack of tension as owing to the absence of any object of rivalry between the two men: "For what advancement may I hope from thee, / That no revenue hast but thy good spirits / To feed and clothe thee?" (3.2.55-57). As a poor scholar, Horatio has no stake in the emulous conflicts of Elsinore. Being outside Hamlet's sphere of potential rival-doubles, Horatio cannot become an antagonist of the prince. Likewise, Byron—while identifying with Napoleon's ambitions—recognizes himself as outside of Napoleon's sphere, writing: "I think *I*, even I (an insect

compared with this creature [Napoleon]), have set my life on casts not a millionth part of this man's" (256). Thus, Byron inverts the class relation between Hamlet and Horatio in his appropriation of Hamlet's words to characterize his sentiments regarding Napoleon; Byron cannot compete with Napoleon, but he imitatively figures the ambitions that drive him—his life's casts—as modeled in miniature on those of the general's. In his next phrase, Byron turns from identifying himself with Hamlet, and Napoleon with Horatio, to identify Napoleon with the faltering tragic Macbeth, when he writes "But I won't give him [Napoleon] up even now; though all his admirers have, 'like the Thanes, fallen from him'" (257). Sympathetic to the plight of heroes, who—like Macbeth—have been drawn by mimetic desire into conflict and tragic defeat, Byron refuses to utterly condemn the general who violently and tyrannously imposed the model of the French republic throughout Europe. By recognizing some, but not all of the, elements of the mimetic impetus driving Napoleon's and his own ambitions and by dismissively entertaining a comparison of his own life to Napoleon's, Byron cast in relief his own mimetic sympathy with the general at the same moment his Shakespearean allusions intimate the emulous quality of both his own and Napoleon's desires.

The Ephemerality of Erotic and Political Honour

Byron's tendency to appropriate Shakespearean renderings of mimetic rivalry was not limited to abstract reflections on his relationship to distant military and political figures. In the tumult of his personal affairs Byron often resorted to Shakespeare's phrases in characterizing the antagonisms and questions of honour that his romantic and sexual liaisons often led him into. For instance, in the early part of his affair with Lady Caroline Lamb, the poet—whose lameness made him insecure at the dancing parties she often threw—would become jealous of Caroline's enduring attachment to her husband. This devotion to William Lamb continued despite Byron

and Caroline's affair, occasionally causing the jealous Byron to "boast the blackness of his own character; thinking of his deformity, he would cry that William Lamb was to him as an Hyperion to a satyr" (Marchand 1.339). Appropriating the role of Shakespeare's Claudius, Byron casts himself as the play's scapegoat, attempting to portray himself as the victim of the mimetic contagion animating Shakespeare's most popular revenge tragedy in the secret collusion between Caroline and his rival for her affections. As the affair progressed and the risks of public embarrassment for both parties increased, Byron—basking in the celebrity of *Childe Harold's* 1812 release—increasingly came to view Caroline as his opponent in securing a modicum of dignity before the society who had begun to take a keen interest in the outcome of their liaison (Marchand 1.384-85). In the final stages of their deteriorating relationship, Caroline's efforts to punish Byron took on a theatrical character, when, according to Benita Eisler, "she orchestrated her anger into a sacred drama of revenge. Costuming a band of neighboring little girls in white dresses, she had them dance around a huge bonfire, chanting maledictions she had written for the occasion as they tossed [copies of] Byron's letters and poems into the flames" (383). Learning of Byron's commencement of a new relationship with Lady Oxford, Caroline—in a further attempt to embarrass Byron—requested he return the gifts she had given him and demanded that Byron burn her letters in the presence of Lady Melbourne, who was the former couple's intermediary and mutually trusted acquaintance (Marchand 1.377-78). In a letter to Lady Melbourne that responds to the demands Caroline had relayed, Byron reacts to her threats of armed vengeance—which were to be carried out by male protectors, whom Caroline had supposedly dispatched to confront Byron in a duel (*Byron's Letters* 2.256)—with a comic profession of valour taken from Nim in *Henry V*: "I will wink and hold out mine iron" (2.1.8). In this phrase, which Byron adapts to: "I can wink & hold out my cold iron" (*Byron's Letters* 2.256), the poet perhaps adds the

adjective “cold” to denote the ostensibly dispassionate temper of his response, which constitutes a symmetrical inversion of Caroline’s rage. Considering the possibility of the mimetic escalation of tumultuous desire in a duel, Byron again resorts to Shakespeare’s language, using the lines “honour’s thought / Reigns solely in the breast of every man” to articulate his sense of the symbolic nature of the rivalries animating his and Caroline’s cruel reciprocal gestures (*Byron’s Letters* 2.256; *Henry V* 2.3-4). Corporal Nim’s impulse to preserve his martial honour—which arises as a response to French aggression vis-à-vis English interests—corresponds to Oedipus’s, Creon’s, and Tiresias’s rush to defend their own feelings of fundamental superiority over their rivals. Though, as a clown, Nim is the opposite of a tragic hero, at this moment in *Henry V* his warlike sentiments as a defender of his own honour align with those of Coriolanus or Brutus. By casting himself as a clown-cum-hero, Byron ironically suggests he is too morally base to earnestly enter a conflict that holds Caroline’s honour as its stake while simultaneously indicating his willingness to engage the mimetic agon touched off by such a challenge, if only to preserve his own sense of honour.

Byron sometimes couches his sense of honour—as it consists of his impulse to mirror the posture of those who attempt to intimidate him—in the terms of Shakespeare’s tragic heroes. Several such examples of this tendency appear in the scandal surrounding the 1814 publication of “Lines to a Lady Weeping” in the same volume as *The Corsair*. The poem criticizes the Prince Regent for his inconstancy towards his Whig friends in parliament by addressing Princess Charlotte, daughter to the Regent, who was supposed to have wept upon hearing her father publicly disparage his former Whig friends (Eisler 347). Upon the publication of the verse, two Tory newspapers, *The Courier* and *The Morning Post*, denounced Byron as a dangerous radical (Marchand 1.434-35). His publisher, John Murray, left the stanzas out of the second edition of

the volume containing *The Corsair*, but Byron wrote to Murray insisting upon the poem's inclusion in future editions (435). In his letters to Lady Melbourne and Samuel Rogers at the time of the scandal, Byron draws on Shakespeare to explain his refusal to react to the attacks in the press by either omitting the poem from further printings or answering his accusers. In a February 11th letter to Lady Melbourne, Byron describes his intractability in the face of criticism from the Regent, Tory Lords, and conservative press as deriving from an internal impulse "that bounds against opposition" (*Byron's Letters* 4.53), an impulse which Shakespeare associates with emulation. In his reading of *Troilus and Cressida*, Girard explores Shakespeare's renderings of how degree, or hierarchized difference, may—via the attrition of traditional boundaries—dissolve into a crisis of undifferentiated violence (*Theatre of Envy* 163). Byron's inclination to resist opposition regardless of the height of the social position from which it proceeds signals such a crisis, which was widely feared in the post-revolutionary foment of Byron's day. Criticism of the monarchy and the antagonisms between Tories, Whigs, and radicals are examples of the emulous nature of the nation's political strife, in which Byron participated. In Shakespeare's play, Ulysses articulates the nature of a crisis of degree threatening to incapacitate Agamemnon's army in the event his men devalue his authority. If, Ulysses explains,

The general's disdained

By him one step below; he, by the next;

That next, by him beneath. So every step,

Exemplified by the first pace that is sick

Of its superior, grows to an envious fever

Of pale and bloodless emulation. (1.3.129-34)

Byron, by disdaining the Prince Regent in verse and refusing to reverse himself, engages a crisis of degree, which he exacerbates via the emulous nature of his contradiction and condemnation of the Regent's political choice. Byron believes his political ideals are fit to rival those of the prince, whom he condemns for disgracing himself and committing a political error ("Lines to A Lady Weeping" 2, 4). The boldness of Byron's versified affront further highlights the decay of class hierarchy in Regency England, as it manifests the loss of an ethical nobility that Byron perceives in the Hanoverian dynasty's reign: "Weep, daughter of a royal line," he writes, for "A Sire's disgrace, a realm's decay" ("Lines" 1-2). For Byron, the decay of the monarchy's moral fiber precipitates the realm into crisis. Byron is anxious about the same loss of order described in Ulysses's caution to Agamemnon, concerning which Girard asserts that "the last and most important word of the entire speech, *emulation*, means mimetic rivalry...it is the Shakespearean term for it" (163). In his unretracted poem, Byron engages in a rivalrous act against authority, which—according to Shakespeare's Ulysses—indicates a general tendency towards unchecked mimetic rivalry and crisis. In his affront, he performs the very decay, or loss of difference, that Shakespeare's rhetoric and action predicts and represents.

In his letter to Lady Melbourne, Byron compares himself to the embattled Hamlet and Macbeth as he expresses his passionate opposition to those who attempt to censure him. Though he refuses to answer the charges against himself, his correspondence indicates that he understands his refusal to retract, combined with his silence, constitutes an emulous act of resistance; he intends to answer his detractors' vehemence with the same level of vehemently intractable silence. To Lady Melbourne, Byron imagines himself in a position similar to Hamlet vis-à-vis Claudius's spies Rosencrantz and Guildenstern:

The Morning Papers this day announce the intention of some zealous Rosencrantz or Guildenstern to ‘play upon this pipe’ in our house of hereditaries. [...] [A]ll motions—censures—sayings—doings & ordinances of that august body shall never make me even endeavour to explain or soften a syllable of the twenty words which have excited—*what*—I really do not exactly know.... (*Byron’s Letters* 4.53)

Byron’s zeal, evident in his adamance against responding, matches that of those in the press, which is described by Marchand as “an eruption of righteous indignation” (434). His peers will not play upon his will. If they demand action, he will remain inactive. Like Hamlet in his reproach to his friends from Wittenberg (Act 3, scene 2), Byron displays his emulous desire vis-à-vis his opponents in a letter to his trusted confidant, Lady Melbourne. Reassuring her that he has not “& shall *not* answer,” Byron invokes the final duel between Macbeth and Macduff (Act 5, scene 8), where Macbeth learns from Macduff’s account of his birth that it is he who will kill Macbeth. Byron adapts the text of the play to his defiant posture by synthesizing dialogue from the warriors’ exchange: “the Demon whom I still have served—has not yet cowed my better part of Man” (*Byron’s Letters* 4.53). Inverting Macbeth’s original meaning, by suggesting that he is not afraid of his public or the Regent, Byron rejects the tragic hero’s resignation in the face of his final agon. Casting himself as Macbeth in rivalry with Macduff for a symbolic object, Byron willingly embraces the mimetic struggle. Byron recognizes the symbolic character of the sought after object of honour and prestige, which consists of the mimetic desire directed towards it by the potential rivals who make up his society.

Adopting the voice of Coriolanus, Byron maintains a similar tone in his letter to Samuel Rogers on the same subject. Quoting Coriolanus, who is loath to retract the scornful words he spoke about the people of Rome, Byron writes to Rogers—who remonstrates with Byron on

behalf of Byron's influential friend Lord Holland to retract the offending poem—"I have already done all in my power—by the suppression [of a conciliatory response]—if that is not enough—they must act as they please—but I will not 'teach my tongue a most inherent baseness' come what may" (*Byron's Letters* 4.61). Though Byron's quotation is inaccurate in its supplementation of "tongue" for "mind," it echoes Coriolanus's sentiments in response to his mother's, Cominius's, and Menenius's urgings to make peace with the plebeians by affecting to treat them as equals:

I will not do't,
 Lest I surcease to honour mine own truth,
 And by my body's action teach my mind
 A most inherent baseness. (3.2.120-23)

The struggle to preserve honour prevents Coriolanus and Byron from giving over their campaigns of resistance against their rival others. Coriolanus's rival is the common Roman people, while Byron's is the Prince Regent and offended members of the British aristocracy. For both poet and tragic hero, honour subsists in the maintenance of the mimetic antagonism, which simultaneously unites and divides them from their rivals, who themselves seek to maintain their own honours over and against poet and general. As Girard explains in his elaboration of Shakespeare's rendering of mimetic rivalry via Ulysses phrase, "pale and bloodless emulation," "[i]f we read [Ulysses term] as mimetic rivalry, we understand why it is portrayed as 'pale and bloodless': it insidiously devours the substance of whatever it singles out, leaving only an empty shell" (*Theatre of Envy* 163). Girard's polemical overstatement serves to highlight the way comprehensibly material objectives cease to serve as the contested object for rivals engaged in the final stages of an exacerbated mimetic crisis. In fact, the quasi-metaphysical object of the

rivals' desire becomes purely symbolic or representational. Concerned with how such rivalry drives the action of Shakespeare's plays, Girard links such honour-focused rivalries to the expulsion and death characterizing many of the plays' conclusions. Mimetic rivalry "is a consumptive fever that in the end destroys everything, objects and antagonists alike;" he writes, "it seems to energize the human spirit, but in reality kills it" (164). Byron's appropriation of Coriolanus's defiant phrase, combined with his knowledge of Shakespeare's dramatic depictions of mimetic rivalry and its tragic outcomes, present an angry young man, who looks upon mimetic antagonisms over honour and their often destructive outcomes as a perennial and unavoidable process. At this time in Byron's emerging understanding of his contingency upon mimetic desire, he was able by expounding Coriolanus's tragedy in relation to the antagonisms animating his own behaviour to articulate a vague intimation of his honour's contingency on his rivals' desires. Byron's fatalism with regard to the mimetic processes he is caught up in leads him to take great risks in preserving his own sense of honour.

In maintaining his sense of honour through emulation, Byron, like Coriolanus, confronts the possibility of exile, which would function as a symbolic marker of his victory over those who censure him. In an addendum to his letter to Rogers, Byron concludes: "I shall bear what I can, and what I cannot I shall resist. The worst they could do would be to exclude me from society. I have never courted it, nor, I may add, in the general sense of the word, enjoyed it—and 'there is a world elsewhere!'" (*Byron's Letters* 4.61). This last phrase is taken from Coriolanus's response to the plebeians and tribunes who order his exile from Rome on the grounds that he refuses to show them due respect and tyrannically suggests that the office of tribune should be abolished. The tribunes call for his banishment and Coriolanus responds by insulting the crowd, rejecting their friendship, and stating: "I banish you," before concluding, "Despising / ... the city, thus I

turn my back. / There is a world elsewhere” (3.3.127, 137-39). Imitating his rivals by repeating their sentence back to them, while simultaneously accepting their expulsion as a welcome exit from the society of the city’s commoners, Coriolanus maintains his honour at the expense of his continued place in Rome. For his honour’s sake, Byron prepares himself to follow the same course of action and takes the pattern of mimetic desire outlined in Shakespeare’s play as his guide. Caught up in the typically blinding fervour of emulation described in Shakespeare, Byron appropriates words which precede the violent destruction of the tragic figure who speaks them. Byron’s ability to identify with a given tragic character, whose prior actions and ultimate end he knows, indicate that he has an awareness of the character of the desire driving the hero’s actions. However, the fact that he continues in his course of resistance suggests his sense of powerlessness vis-à-vis the desires that animate him. By framing his intractability in the terms of a tragic play that depends on mimetic rivalry for its action, Byron indicates his un-developed awareness of the mimetic motivation for his resistance in Coriolanus. The Roman general is his model in submitting himself to the mimetic tumult necessary for the preservation of his honour, which itself is a mimetic construct he has yet to fully understand.

The unoriginality and self-defeating nature of Byron’s desire as it manifests in his identification with Coriolanus operates as an unintended ironic reading of the play and his own behaviour. Though Byron is not yet fully attuned to the mimetic implications of his invocation of Coriolanus, the assertions of affinity with the intractable Roman general attest to the similarity in the mimetic desire uniting Coriolanus and his rival general Aufidius, as they unwillingly oscillate in their loyalties between the influences of their communities’ desire and the desire of their rival-turned-friend. It is this lack of autonomy accompanying the profound belief in his exceptionality that causes Coriolanus to so frequently appear ridiculous, as his mimetically engendered sense of

superiority over other citizens leads him to bungle consolatory political gestures and squander the popular adulation his identity as a famous general depends upon. In the scandal surrounding “Lines to a Lady Weeping,” Byron, like Coriolanus, would like to see himself as a determined and grave personage, who acts for the purposes of his unique understanding of honour. However, he does not acknowledge that in representing himself this way he opens himself to criticism of his hubristic aggression, which is behaviour common to those locked into mimetic rivalry with a competitor. Byron appropriates the desire to maintain his honour before the public from the Prince Regent, who has the same desire. In this round, the tragedy Byron courts is exposed in its repetitions—which show that no actor actually retains the unique desire they suppose they do—as a comedy. The darkly ridiculous, and therefore comic, nature of Byron’s potentially tragic agon emerges when the continuity of desires animating his and his society’s actions are revealed.

The comic possibility in the relation of tragic events depends on the recognition of the universal reciprocity of desire driving the behaviours of Shakespeare’s protagonists, Byron, and his readers. The comic effect that sometimes accompanies Byron’s appropriations of Shakespearean voices arises from the thin line separating the tragic and comic, which allows the reader to interpret Byron’s grand self-comparisons as a joke directed against his own relative insignificance without entirely discounting the affinities uniting the his experience of desire and that of the tragic hero. In an essay titled “Perilous Balance: A Comic Hypothesis,” Girard argues that the often overtly mimetic action of comedy operates on the same principle that is hidden in tragedy, but, nonetheless, drives the choices of tragic characters, who typically insist their wills are their own. Tragedy, he argues, tends to obscure this fact by attributing the hero’s downfall to the excessive passion of a self-determining individual, while comedy provokes metaphorically expulsive laughter by exposing the contingency of all individual choice as an effect of the

reciprocal desire moving between characters (129). Ultimately, laughter at comedy arises from the spectator's anxious acknowledgement of the reciprocity generating the self-defeating loss of autonomy of those on stage, which, in turn, causes the audience to react with laughter to the personal threat of a similar loss that would accompany a full acknowledgement of the self's contingency upon imitated desire (128). In tragedy, the passions driving the play's action are typically presented as belonging to the actors; however, "[a]s soon as it is suggested that the lack of reciprocity in the love relationship [of the tragic figures] is too constant to be due to 'destiny' or to the mystery of personal choice, as soon as it appears that a [impersonal imitative] law is at work ... tragedy is annihilated" and turns into a kind of farce (126). Byron's identification with tragic heroes often accomplishes the same tragicomic effect as the suggestion that an imitative law is at work because it presents the supposed autonomy of Shakespeare's tragic heroes in terms of his own highly mimetic social and literary life. When compared to the actions of the characters of Shakespeare's tragedies, Byron's desire for prestige and success—as it is contingent on the models of desire operating in his own society, such as the Prince Regent—exposes the mimetic logic of the plays he refers to. Thus, the prose references to Shakespeare of Byron's early years of fame often provide an unintentionally trite and semi-comic reading of his own mimetic tendencies.

Mimetic Constructions of Honour in Literary Rivalry and Marriage

In his pursuit of literary distinction and honour, Byron's arch posture towards both Shakespeare and his contemporaries takes on a bluff tone in his prose, the irony of which attempts to dispel the nervousness attending the potential disintegration of his literary identity in an excessive acknowledgement of the imitative nature of his craft. Wishing to lay total claim to his literary identity, Byron, Barton relates, was eager to demonstrate to Leigh Hunt "that he had

no copy of Shakespeare...in his library. This, Byron assured [Hunt], was because he had so frequently been accused of borrowing from" the Bard (227). Addressing Bloom's claim that an Oedipal "anxiety of influence" dogged Byron and Shelley throughout their careers, Bate observes that

[m]ost of us go through a phase of being suffocated by, even of rejecting, our fathers, but we grow up: we are able to love our father and be ourselves. By speaking Shakespeare's words...Keats and Byron acknowledge their forefather while at the same time finding their own voices. (247)

Bate's even-handed assessment of Shakespeare's influence on Byron concludes a chapter that began with a reflection on Byron's ironically rough treatment of Shakespeare's talent as a poet in his 1814 letter to James Hogg, who—attempting to compile a collection of contemporary verse—asks Byron if he would like to contribute some lines (Bate 224). From the start of the letter, Byron's tone is arch. This tendency is especially obvious when he writes: "You seem a plain spoken man, Mr. Hogg, and I really do not like you the worse for it. I can't write verses, and yet you want a bit of my poetry for your book. It is for you to reconcile yourself with yourself" (*Byron's Letters* 4.84). Continuing in this tone, the letter goes on to present a brief critical survey of the poetic tradition. It understatedly refers to Milton's "Paradise Lost...as...a heavy concern" that is likely some of the best poetry produced "at least since the flood," and it casually "makes little doubt Abel was a fine pastoral poet, and Cain a fine bloody poet," before turning its attention to Shakespeare's virtues and failings (84). It is due to these types of wry literary assessments that Bate reads Byron's comments on the Bard as an "ironic critique of Shakespeare," while asserting that, in his actual opinion of Shakespeare, "Byron refuses to be pinned down" (225). The ambivalence of Byron's opinion of Shakespeare manifests in the irony

with which he diminishes his works, while setting them on par with those of his own poetic contemporaries. In the letter to Hogg, Byron predicts Shakespeare's name will eventually fall before accusing the playwright of pilfering his plots from old novels and suggesting that almost anyone could have matched Shakespeare's accomplishments if they had "such ready-made stories as *Lear*, *Macbeth*, &c." (*Byron's Letters* 4.85). Bate reads irony into Byron's remarks because of the younger poet's assertion that Shakespeare, having plagiarized his plots, "threw their stories into a dramatic shape, at as little expense of thought as you or I could turn his plays back again into prose tales" (85), a claim which he follows up with the question: "Could not one take up *Tom Jones* and improve it, without being a greater genius than *Fielding*?" (85). "The rhetorical question," writes Bate,

is phrased in such a way that at first glance the reader will assent to it, but on reflection he is likely to think 'No, one could not improve *Tom Jones* without being a greater genius than *Fielding*.' Whether Byron intended Hogg to see the irony is open to question, but it is quite possible in view of his admiration for *Fielding*, whom he called 'The *prose* Homer of human nature' ... (225)

Byron's "ironic manner," Bate demonstrates, "is such that we can rarely take his pronouncements at face value" (224). Byron's ambivalence towards Shakespeare's work constitutes an affront to his Bardolatrous contemporaries rather than the playwright himself.

When, in his letter to Hogg, Byron turns his attention away from Shakespeare and onto his contemporaries he continues in his satirical denunciations. Invoking his perennial whipping-boy, Southey, Byron writes: "I hate these talkers one and all, body and soul. They are a set of the most despicable impostors....They know nothing of the world; and what is poetry, but a reflection of the world? What sympathy have this people with the spirit of this stirring age?"

(*Byron's Letters* 4.85). In his letter to Hogg, Byron names “Coleridge as best of the trio—but [notes] bad is the best” before going on to suggest that “Southey should have been a parish-clerk, and Wordsworth a man-midwife” (*Byron's Letters* 4.85). As subjects who, unlike Shakespeare, compete with Byron in the contemporary literary market place, these poets are immediate potential rivals with Byron for poetic prestige. Nevertheless, there remains a joviality in the irony he adopts in his description of these figure’s ineptitude. This comic strain deflects, through laughter, the risk Byron takes in comparing himself to both Shakespeare and his contemporaries, whose influence he inevitably feels, but refuses to discuss seriously, as the reciprocal nature of the desire for literary greatness threatens to overthrow his continuing illusions of autonomous desire and identity.

However, Byron’s rivals were not limited to those who threatened his sense of literary autonomy and greatness. Byron’s identification with conflicted Shakespearean figures in his letters to, and about, Annabella Milbanke illustrate the sense of mimetic agon he experienced in his relationship with her. In 1812, she had declined his first proposal. Marchand observes that, due to Byron’s newly won celebrity as author of *Childe Harold* “half the women of London society wore their hearts on their sleeves” for the literary lion (1.370). However, “Miss Milbanke refused his offer...because she could not feel a sufficiently ‘strong affection’ for him. Nothing could be more intriguing to Byron” (1.370); though, in his correspondence with Lady Melbourne, he minimized the disappointment of Milbanke’s refusal. In 1814, Byron would hazard a second proposal, and—in the months leading up to it—his correspondence with his potential mate makes reference to his embarrassed first attempt by hyperbolically comparing it to failures in *King John* and *Macbeth*. When she asked him to express his feelings for her, after writing “I did—do—and always shall love you” (4.155), Byron recalls his first, failed proposal:

“the rest you know—and I will not trouble you with ‘a twice told tale’ ‘signifying nothing’” (4.155). The passing appropriation of Louis the Dauphin’s words in *King John* reference the prince’s failure to subject England, which leads him to assert: “Life is as tedious as a twice-told tale /.../ And bitter shame hath spoiled that sweet world’s taste, / That it yields naught but shame and bitterness” (3.4.109, 111-12). Macbeth’s lament just prior to his death—where he claims his life is a tale “signifying nothing” (5.5.27)—attempts to obviate his existence’s meaning in an effort to assuage the despair accompanying defeat. Both of the brief quotations Byron appropriates to supplement a full description of his disappointment at Milbanke’s first refusal are taken from warriors who have been thwarted in a contest of escalating mimetic rivalry. Byron—in making such comparisons—suggests that he looks upon his potential spouse as simultaneously a prized contested object and a rival contestant for that same prize.

Byron’s self-comparison to Shakespeare’s Richard III in his correspondence during the lead up to his second proposal further illustrates his sense that he plots against rival suitors just as Shakespeare’s Duke of Gloucester plots against his political rivals. To ensure that Lady Melbourne (who was Annabella’s aunt) approves of his wish to make a second proposal, Byron asks if she “would not put Richard’s question to me?” (4.99). Byron refers to the envious and ambitious Richard’s rhetorical queries regarding the recently widowed Lady Anne: “Was ever woman in this humour wooed? / Was ever woman in this humour won?” (1.2.215-16). Upon receiving word of Milbanke’s acceptance, Byron again places himself in the position of Richard when assuring Lady Melbourne that he will be a good husband and abandon his prior libertinism: “I will endeavour to make your niece happy not by ‘my deserts but what I will deserve’” (4.175). Here, Byron echoes Richard’s assurances to Queen Elizabeth, which he makes in an attempt to bolster his political position by securing the Queen’s permission to marry his niece and the

daughter of the late King Edward. Byron's self-ironizing hyperbolic comparisons of himself to the notorious Richard III follow in his tendency to a dark, provocative sense of humour (Marchand 2.507-08, 516). Such comic provocations play upon, as Girard suggests, the mimeticism active in tragic figures who refuse to acknowledge the unoriginality of their desire. By ventriloquizing King Richard after having acknowledged his jealousy and shame over the failure of his first proposal, Byron glosses the desire of the tragic villain he parodies with his own jealously-inspired matrimonial ambitions. Byron does not explicitly recognize the mimetic nature of his desire, but the circumstances surrounding his self-comparison to Richard III show his wish to marry Annabella is not his own, just as Richard's desire for the throne derives from—as a worried citizen in the play observes—"emulation" among the various potential monarchs waiting upon Edward IV's death (2.3.25). In this way, by playfully comparing himself to the villainous Richard, Byron, likely unwittingly, calls attention to the derivative quality of his choices, allowing himself and his reader to laugh at the uncomfortable prospect of mastery and autonomy lost to fluid, impersonal desire.

This tragicomic method of mitigating the threat of losing the integrity of one's identity to the apprehension of mimetic influence appears in Byron's behaviour towards Annabella in the first hours after their marriage and during their honeymoon. Opening his chapter on the 1815 marriage of the Byrons, Marchand writes that on the carriage ride to Halnaby after the Byrons' marriage ceremony Byron "had time for reflection on the freedom he had lost, the innocent girl he had married, [and] the settled routine that was expected of him" (Marchand 2.506). In response to this realization of his loss of autonomy, Byron adopted a dark and "antic disposition" similar to that of Hamlet. On the morning after their wedding night, Annabella relates that Byron "met me repellently, and uttered words of blighting irony: 'It is too late now. It is done, and

cannot be undone” (qtd. in Marchand 511). Feeling that his desire had been co-opted by Annabella and the socially contingent institution of marriage, Byron attempts to ward off the angst attending his perception of lost autonomy by representing himself as an unwilling actor, who holds an area of himself in reserve via bitterly ironic fatalism. Performing the role of a tragic figure, who is bound by the violent mimetic reciprocity uniting him to a fatal rival, Byron makes dark jokes at the expense of his new marriage.

Further evidence of his identification with tragic figures stripped of their sense of contained selfhood by the movement of mimetic desire appears in Byron’s acknowledgement of the mediated nature of his desire for Milbanke soon after their engagement. In the days after her acceptance of his proposal, Byron wrote to her comparing his affection to that of Othello and confessing his tendency to jealousy: “I had struggled on in the full conviction that your heart was another’s ... the ... mention of your name by any third person—all and every thing which recalled you to my memory... conspired to tell me in the sensations they produced that I still coveted ‘a pearl—worth all my tribe’” (*Byron’s Letters* 4.181). Byron’s mimetic propensity is illustrated in the mediated nature of his recollected desire for Milbanke, which appears in his pained, envious belief that she had accepted another proposal. Byron highlights the violent nature of his imitated desire by referring to the self-composed legacy that Othello relates to Lodovico over Desdemona’s strangled, lifeless body immediately before his suicide:

Then must you speak
 Of one that loved not wisely but too well,
 Of one not easily jealous but, being wrought,
 Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand,
 Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away

Richer than all his tribe.... (5.2.352-57)

Attempting to protect himself from the accusation of an irrationally jealous nature, Othello—who finally recognizes that Iago had mediated his jealousy vis-à-vis Desdemona and Cassio—hazards an explanation of his behaviour as owing to his “being wrought / [and] [p]erplexed in the extreme.” The word “wrought” has a double valence denoting both violently stimulated and artificially constructed; both meanings correspond to the characterization of the suggestion of jealousy communicated to Othello by Iago. By laying such emphasis on the mimetic social context of his interest in Milbanke before appropriating the remorsefully jealous voice of Othello, Byron illuminates his nascent sense of subjection to the imitative forces of suggestion that have brought about their marriage.

Byron’s dark use of Shakespeare betrays his unarticulated sensitivity to the movement of desire that incites his envy. His humiliation at Milbanke’s rebuff of his first proposal continued to fester throughout their marriage. Marchand relates that Byron’s “resentments of her prudish and didactic attitudes before their marriage surged up to choke him with rage” (2.515). Some nights he would bring out letters that she had written him prior to and during their engagement, reading passages that he found particularly troubling, while reproaching her for rejecting his first proposal: “[H]is anger was so great [at these times] that she feared he might strike her” (2.515). Byron’s unbalanced behaviour betrays the effects of mimeticism on the subject’s emotional state. In his reading of historical diagnoses of hysteria as phenomena that are in fact manifestations of the dialectics operative in desire, Jean-Michel Oughourlian relates Paul Briquet’s 1859 accounts of hysteria: “The hysterical claim expresses itself in two very common clinical phenomena: competitive overreaching and emulation” (184). Citing a case study collected by Briquet, Oughourlian highlights the “suggestibility” of those patients diagnosed as hysterical (184).

Byron's rages against Annabella led her to eventually suspect "that he was subject to insane delusions" (Marchand 2.556). In its emulous suggestibility, Byron's behaviour resonates with Briquet's characterization of hysteria. For Byron, Annabella had become a model-obstacle; her exacting moral standards, the memory of her past rejection, and his embarrassment before her due to the financial demands of married life caused him to view her as an idealized model, whom he was unable to fully master. As Byron confided to Lady Blessington, Annabella possessed

a degree of self-control that I never saw equalled.... This extraordinary degree of self-command in Lady Byron produced an opposite effect on me. When I have broken out, on slight provocations, into one my ungovernable fits of rage, her calmness piqued and seemed to reproach me. (qtd. in Marchand 2.547)

Unable to live up to Annabella's standards of exacting self-control and striving to secure the funds to maintain their ostentatious mansion on Piccadilly Terrace, Byron, via his rages, symmetrically opposes Annabella's passive indictment of his erratic behaviour. The conflictual quality of the couple's relationship escalated as Annabella took legal steps to formalize her separation from Byron.

Byron's troubled marriage to Annabella resembles Girard's characterization of a relationship of rival doubles, which manifests itself in dramatic swings in mood and demeanour. Of Byron's and Annabella's dispositions in the lead up to their separation, Marchand notes the wild oscillations in Byron's attitude towards Annabella (2.556), and Annabella's alternation between attempts at conciliation and her sense that Byron was inexorably insane (559-60). Both members of the marriage moved between extremes of excitement and calm. These alternations were such that Byron did not anticipate her discontentment was so great that she intended to leave him on the grounds that he was unstable, and, as he told Hobhouse, he felt that they had

“lived on *conjugal* terms up to the last moment” (qtd. in Marchand 2.561). “Byron apparently thought,” writes Marchand, “that everything had been smoothed over by his apologies” (2.561). The reciprocity between Byron’s erratic behaviour and Annabella’s strong reactions to this behaviour corresponds to the dynamics of an exacerbated binary system of mimetic rivalry, as Girard characterizes it in his critique of psychoanalytic theory. “In the world of doubles,” writes Girard, “there can be no neutral relationships. There are only those who dominate and those who are dominated. [...] This relationship puts us in mind of a swing, where one of those playing is always at the highest point when the other is at the lowest, and the reverse” (*Things Hidden* 305). In 1816 as his marriage was disintegrating, Byron was oblivious to the mimetic rivalry that he had come close to acknowledging in his analogies between himself Othello and Richard III. His resort to Shakespeare retrospectively illuminates the mimetic crisis he was undergoing in his relationship with Annabella and indicates that his knowledge of Shakespeare’s plays might eventually assist him in coming to a more lucid understanding of the imitative nature of desire.

Two years later, in Canto IV of *Childe Harold* and in a letter to Lady Byron, Byron would eventually acknowledge the antagonism he felt towards Annabella and those who had assisted her in securing a separation. The 1818 suicide of a lawyer involved in Byron and Annabella’s separation, Sir Samuel Romilly, provides the occasion for an illuminating instance of Byron’s epistolary use of Shakespeare in theorizing his own tendency towards emulous desire. Romilly, whom Annabella’s mother consulted on behalf of her daughter regarding the separation, had accepted a general retainer to act as Byron’s counsel. Marchand relates that, when, on February 12th, 1816, Byron wrote Hanson to ensure that Romilly was available to him, “Hanson was unaware that Lady Noel [Byron’s mother-in-law] had already consulted him. Not until March 16 did Byron learn that Romilly had been counseling Lady Byron” (2.577). Byron’s

friend Hobhouse eventually confronted Romilly, who admitted that, having been already retained by Byron, he had erred in counseling Lady Byron: “Sir Samuel then declined to arbitrate the terms of the separation, but Byron never forgave him” (577). When in late October of 1818 Romilly’s wife, who had suffered a long illness died, the lawyer and politician cut his own throat (Melikan para. 14). Upon hearing the news of his suicide, Byron wrote to Annabella expressing his sentiments in the words of Macbeth. The letter conveys his resentment towards Annabella and those involved in securing the couple’s legal separation, while indicating that Byron, like Macbeth, possessed a self-critical awareness of the deleteriousness of his mimetic antagonisms. The tone of Byron’s 1818 letter is dark and, on its surface, cruel. It begins: “Sir Samuel Romilly has cut his throat for the loss of his wife,” and it goes on to recall how the lawyer was the “[a]pprover of the proceedings which deprived [Byron] of” his own wife (*Byron’s Letters* 6.80). Referring to his favorite novel, *Tom Jones*, Byron confesses that he does not feel at ease passing judgment on Romilly, “but,” he writes, “This even-handed Justice / Commends the ingredients of our poisoned Chalice / To our own lips” (80). Byron’s words are taken from Macbeth’s reflective and equivocating soliloquy prior to his murder of Duncan and his sons. As king, Duncan is the model of—and obstacle to—Macbeth’s desire for kingship, but in contemplating his planned murder Macbeth acknowledges that an act against one subject against another is likely to be mirrored by that other (or his supporters) and, thereby, often returns to beset the first actor:

But in these cases

We still have judgement here, that we but teach

Bloody instructions which, being taught, return

To plague th’ inventor. (1.7.7-10)

This reflection immediately precedes Byron's quotation from the soliloquy, which reiterates the recognition of the reciprocal nature of grossly violent acts, or "even-handed justice," by figuring Macbeth as a suicide, ensuring his own murder via his assassination of Duncan. It is to avoid the mimetic contagion of violence that Macbeth, earlier in the soliloquy, wishes: "that this [Macbeth's murderous] blow / Might be the be-all and end-all, here" (1.7.4-5). For Byron, Romilly (having been retained to protect his interests, but violating his trust by acting as an obstacle between himself and Annabella) is a rival for the object of his domestic happiness. As a reflection on his rage against the deceased lawyer, Byron's choice of Macbeth's reflections on the justice of mimetic reciprocity indicates his sense of responsibility for Romilly's suicide and his apprehension that he too may suffer a violent end.

The last lines of his letter to Annabella indicate why Byron draws on Macbeth's reference to mimetic reciprocity by referring to—what Jerome McGann terms—the "*forgiveness-curse*" (*Fiery Dust* 43), which Byron levels against his enemies in the fourth canto of *Childe Harold*. This reference indicates that his interpretation of his part in Romilly's suicide and his apprehension of the inevitable recoil of his actions upon himself are not merely superstitious ravings, but a metaphorical rendering of the influence of desire between subjects who encounter one another in a mimetic duel. To conclude his letter, Byron writes:

Perhaps previous to his Annihilation [Romilly] felt a portion of what he contributed his legal mite to make me feel,—but I have lived—lived to see him a Sexagenary Suicide.—It was not in vain that I invoked Nemesis in the midnight of Rome from the awfulest of her Ruins.—Fare you well" (*Byron's Letters* 6.81).

Measuring his pain at the loss of Annabella against Romilly's pain at the death of his wife, Byron indicates that he has long regarded Romilly as one of his most bitter rivals in law and life.

Because of this apprehension of his rivalry with those who had prosecuted his separation from Annabella and, thus, calumniated his name in England, Byron (in 1817) made a versified appeal to Nemesis from the ruins of Rome's colosseum and cursed his malefactors in this stanza of *Childe Harold's Canto IV*:

And thou, who never yet of human wrong
 Left'st the unbalanced scale, great Nemesis!
 Here, where the ancient paid the homage long—
 Thou, who didst call the Furies from the abyss,
 And round Orestes bade them howl and hiss
 For that unnatural retribution—just,
 Had it but been from hands less near—in this
 Thy Former realm, I call thee from the dust!

Dost thou not hear my heart?—Awake! thou shalt, and must. (4.132)

In one of the stanzas which McGann designates as the most explicitly autobiographical in the canto (*Byron* 185), Byron's invocation of Nemesis—the goddess responsible for enacting justice and vengeance through retribution—publicly represents his resentment, which mirrors Annabella's resentment manifest in the legal separation she undertook with the help of Romilly, while making reference to the mimetic rivalry inherent to Rome's gladiatorial duels; the vengeance of the gods visited upon Orestes for killing his mother; and the barbarians' vengeance against Rome, as manifest in the ruins of the colosseum. However, as McGann explains in his reading of stanzas 128-51 (*Fiery Dust* 42-43), Byron does not intend to uncritically accept the mimetic rule of visiting wrong-for-wrong, but inverts the deity's traditional role by calling Nemesis to curse his enemies with forgiveness: “*thou shalt take / The vengeance, which shall yet*

be sought and found” and “pile on human heads the mountain of my curse! / That curse shall be Forgiveness” (4.133, 134). In these lines, the poet self-consciously resists the impetus to mimetic rivalry by forcing “Nemesis to balance the scales of Justice not with vengeance but with forgiveness” (*Fiery Dust* 44).

Once again, Byron exhibits his tendency to read Shakespeare as a preceptor on the nature of desire, which is a catalyst for both destruction and ameliorative, poetic creativity. Girard contends that *Hamlet*'s crucial theme of deferred vengeance constitutes Shakespeare's critique of the logic of violent reciprocity. Considering the expectations Shakespeare faced as a playwright in providing audiences with the “just,” violent recompense the genre of revenge tragedy demands, Girard writes: “In a world where every ghost, dead or alive, can only perform the same action, revenge...all voices are interchangeable. [...] To seek singularity in revenge is a vain enterprise, but to shrink from revenge in a world that looks upon it as a ‘sacred duty’ is to...become a nonentity” (*Theatre of Envy* 273). The fascination of Hamlet's equivocation and delay, Girard goes on to argue, is evidence of Shakespeare's attempt to extract his hero from the necessity of the genre's violent reciprocity (283). By embedding within the play an implicit critique of revenge, Shakespeare both highlights the inimical nature of mimetic rivalry and demonstrates how representations of rivalry's course are enriched with reflection on the ethical import of such real and represented actions. Girard does not undertake a reading of *Macbeth*, but Macbeth's soliloquy, which Byron quotes from, closely resembles the violence-deferring equivocations that characterize Hamlet's speeches. By quoting Macbeth in his letter to Annabella, Byron provides an exposition of his growing knowledge of Shakespeare's understanding of mimetic rivalry and links his personal desire for revenge—as represented and

creatively deferred in *Childe Harold*—to Shakespeare’s insights regarding the imitative nature of vengeance and violence.

Conclusion

I have argued that Byron’s passing and, at times, conventional appropriations of tragic Shakespearean voices between 1812 and 1819 present the young poet’s emerging awareness of the nature of mimetic rivalry. In the analogies he makes between his own life and those of tragic characters, Byron offers his reader proximity to the well-known experiences of mimetic desire represented in the Shakespeare’s plays. As Bate and Barton demonstrate, Byron’s references to Shakespeare indicate a mind deeply inculcated with the action and significance of the plays. In the years of his fame leading up to his separation from Annabella, the mimetic rivalry and resentment exhibited in the plays he cites function as a reading of Byron’s own emotional state and behaviour. In his obsession with literary and social prestige, which characterized his relationship to Caroline Lamb, the political power centre of his nation, Shakespeare’s legacy, his literary contemporaries, and Annabella, Byron is animated by emulous ambition, a fact which is betrayed by the dynamics of the plays he uses to characterize his position vis-à-vis his various rivals. In the years after his separation and during his composition of Cantos III and IV of *Childe Harold*, Byron’s understanding of his mimeticism developed and allowed him to critique the vengeful mimetic impulses that he had previously accepted as inevitable. These prose allusions to Shakespeare appearing in the early years of Byron’s fame provide a telling window into the young poet’s emerging awareness of mimetic desire’s machinations.

Chapter Two:

The Aesthetics of Byron's Modern Timon

In his amendments to the preface of the second edition of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron reveals that he hopes to develop his hero into a modern Timon.⁶ The comparison of Childe Harold to Timon of Athens presents the reader with a young poet who is sensitive to both the classical and early modern aesthetics informing the interior life of the character who made the poem a colossal success. Byron was likely familiar with both Lucian's and Plutarch's versions of the Athenian misanthrope, which inform Shakespeare's rendition of the same character (Wells et. al. 943). While the classical and early modern characters both hate mankind and withdraw from society, the classical Timon uniquely refuses to interfere in the fate of Athens, while Shakespeare's Timon assists Alcibiades in laying siege to and conquering the city. Eric Gans notes that the tragic heroes of antiquity do not consider themselves marginal characters who must transgress the stage's sacred centre, as they take for granted their central status, while early modern heroes often pursue their resentment against the centre and die in their attempts to appropriate it for themselves. Byron's modern Timon, as he emerges in the post-Rousseauian romantic aesthetic outlined by Gans, does not prosecute his resentment in the way that the early modern Timon does, however. Instead, Childe Harold successively occupies and

⁶ In his *Records of Shelley, Byron, and the Author*, Trelawny, while reflecting on his surprise at finding the exceptional Byron measurable by the "ordinary standard of men" (40), relates how Byron chided him for imagining he would be an unapproachable personality: "Now, confess," said Byron, "you expected to find me a 'Timon of Athens'" (40).

ironizes the classical, medieval, and early modern postures of resentful withdrawal thereby cultivating an atmosphere of complicity with the poem's readership, who are on guard against the resurrection of dated poetic aesthetics. As Tom Mole demonstrates, Byron's original intention in parodying medieval motifs was to amuse a coterie of intimates (46). However, due to the loss of some of his closest friends in the lead up to the poem's publication, Byron redirects his intimate and sardonic tone towards the reading public, an audience which responds extremely well to Byron's arch rendition of Spenserian ethics and aesthetics alongside an ironic deployment of classical conventions. In 1816, when he takes up the poem after his separation from Annabella and the collapse of revolutionary aspirations at Waterloo, Byron continues his efforts to cultivate intimacy between himself and his readership by reflecting on the collaborative and ameliorative act of poetic creation, which he and his readers undertake by following Harold into exile. I will argue that *Childe Harold's* capacity to create what Mole characterizes as an air of intimacy with its readers arises from its representation of the protagonist as a modern Timon of Athens, a figure which caricatures past renderings of self-exile, while continuing to valorize withdrawal as a means to create a restorative poetic experience.

Timon's Aesthetic Development

At the beginning of an essay focused on the spectral quality of exile and return as an element of the Byronic hero's development, Mark Phillipson details Byron's early and intense identification with Timon. Referring to the preface of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Phillipson notes that "Byron[in omitted lines from *Childish Recollections*] fashion[ed] Harold in the mold of Timon, arranging for his character to escape;" "three years before [writing *Childe Harold*]... the young Lord Byron was looking in the mirror and seeing Timon" (303). Phillipson is referring

to lines that were ultimately omitted from *Childish Recollection*, which read: “Weary of love, of life, devour’d with spleen, / I rest, a perfect Timon, not nineteen” (*Complete Poetical Works* 1.158). Byron’s phrasing indicates he may be referencing Aristophanes’ *The Birds* (414 BCE),⁷ in which Timon appears. In the ancient comedy, Prometheus—a god who despises his fellow gods—compares himself to the man-hating Timon, with the words: “Τίμων καθαρός” (Aristophanes 1549). Benjamin Rogers translates the qualifier, καθαρός, as a superlative, which affirms the absolute Timon-like nature of Prometheus: “A regular Timon!” In this way, Prometheus’s use of the superlative closely resembles Byron’s use of the adjective “perfect” in his own self-comparison. Though it is possible that the words of Aristophanes’ Prometheus resonated with the young Byron, it is certain that he was familiar with Shakespeare’s *Timon of Athens*. Byron’s interest in Timon suggests a fascination with both the classical and early modern treatment of the desire to withdraw from human society. This desire depends on an inversion of the imitative impulses that draw individuals together and create the uncomfortable experience of resentment. In the aesthetics of the ancient and Shakespearean accounts of the misanthrope, representations of the emulous nature of desire inform the ethical movements of the narratives.

Extending the implications of René Girard’s mimetic theory to consider the role of mimetic desire in the development of the literary aesthetic, Gans argues that the drama of the classical period presented its audience with a scene of collective desire, which is dominated by a protagonist who—as a result of defending the community’s sacred centre—must suffer the play’s tragic agon. His zealous defence of the centre makes the hero a mimetic rival to both his

⁷ Rogers explains in his notes on the line that “[t]he epithet καθαρός means that Prometheus is a Timon through and through, hating his fellow-Gods exactly as the Athenian [Timon] hated his fellow-men, without any qualification whatever” (206). In the play, two disgruntled Athenians, who are irritated by their city’s obsession with laws, mobilize the birds of the world to build a city in the sky that will take in the smoke of the Athenian sacrifices to the gods, forcing the gods and the Athenians to submit to the two men and their birds. Late in the play, Prometheus appears to give advice to the bird’s human leader, Pisthetaerus, telling him that the gods are ready to submit to his will, but advising Pisthetaerus to demand that Zeus give up his sceptre and his consort, Supremacy.

community and the gods (*Originary Thinking* 137-38). The scene, Gans posits, depends on the mimetic interest of those who vest the central object—which is typically a royal or sacred position—with its value through their imitated desires (133). Gans traces the origins of this aesthetic scene back to the sacrificial religious rituals that precede it. He argues that, though there was certainly a ritual and “festival context in which the Athenians recited Homer and performed tragedies, the fact that we can read and perform these works today oblivious to this context demonstrates art’s liberation from ritual” (132).

Providing *Oedipus Rex* as an example of the classical aesthetic, Gans’s analysis of the tragic hero’s fall provides a larger anthropological context in which to situate the motif of Timonesque withdrawal. The Aristotelian characterization of tragedy as arousing pity and terror to facilitate catharsis continues to function in Gans’s reading, but he also addresses how tragedy represents the resentment existing between a tyrant and his subjects, a dynamic which often precipitates the mimetic rivalry that constitutes the play’s main action. Oedipus—whose violent appropriation of the centre brought plague on the city—represents the violent discord unleashed by unchecked mimetic appropriation of collectively desired objects. Considering the effects of Oedipus’s inappropriate domination of the sacred centre of Theban society (as it is ultimately discovered in his parricide and incest) Gans writes:

[b]ecause the tyrant [Oedipus] has secured power by force rather than consecrated inheritance, he easily becomes the object of the community’s ‘justified’ resentment. In the final lines of ... *Oedipus*, the chorus laments, in reference to the hero: ‘not a citizen who did not look with envy on his lot— / see him now and see the breakers of misfortune swallow him!’ (140-41).

Gans reads these lines as intended to convey to the audience—who are supposed to share the chorus’s emotions—a sense of “both resentment and admiration among the Thebans,” who “are both relieved and saddened by his downfall” (140). Exposed as an unwittingly incestuous patricide, Oedipus blinds himself before withdrawing from Thebes. His exile is expected by both himself and Creon who, as Thebes’ new king, speaks for the people (Sophocles 1515-17). Thus, the classical hero’s withdrawal operates as an aesthetic mechanism for the maintenance of social order, as it warns the individual away from following his or her mimetic inclination to dominate the society’s sacred centres.

According to Lucian and Plutarch, Timon withdraws from the cultural centre of Athens after having suffered the cruel ingratitude of his fellow citizens. In both narratives, Timon’s self-exile and renunciation of human society follows from his great show of generosity, which makes him a model-obstacle to citizens who appropriate his wealth for themselves, but do not reciprocate his generosity when his financial fortunes turn. Raging against Plutus, the god of prosperity, Timon recognizes how his wealth “put me in the power of flatterers, set designing persons on me, stirred up ill-feeling, corrupted me with indulgence, [and] exposed me to envy” (Lucian 36). Now destitute, he curses Athens and the gods and goes to work as a labourer (6). The classical Timon makes no effort to use his tragic position on the margins of his society to usurp the sacred centre. Instead he is content to stay away from all society and repel all those who attempt to approach him (Plutarch 298). The classical tragedy of Timon presents a hero who dominates the social scene of desire through his excessive generosity and suffers the consequences of this excess, while the early modern tragedy’s representation of his resentment over his exile from the centre becomes the staging ground for the vengeful return of the protagonist.

The motif of the hero's withdrawal in the early modern tragedy, which Gans classifies under the "neoclassical esthetic," resembles the classical hero's own position at the scene's centre with the crucial difference that the hero remains fully aware of his centrality and chooses to suffer the agon attending the usurpation of the centre because he views it as a sign of his divine election. With the emergence of Christian ethics, wherein each individual is ostensibly of equal value before a single central deity, the classical aesthetic began to integrate a concept of the individual that proved inimical to the social hierarchies of the classical world (Gans, *Originary Thinking* 151). Gans explains that "[t]he equality of souls is subversive of the implicit dependence of the classical esthetic on an unexamined ontological hierarchy of the human. The new Christian anthropology refuses to distinguish a priori between those worthy or unworthy to occupy the center" (151). This unprecedented theory of equality causes the neoclassical subject to experience a "new 'inwardness'" and requires her theological awareness of her own centrality to be manifest in a new aesthetic (151). Thus, unlike the classical heroes of the previous age, the heroes of the medieval and early modern period manifest a self-conscious awareness of their election to the centre. "This is not," Gans writes, "the immanent personal self-consciousness of the romantic era, but it is a precursor of it" (151).

Gans's examples of what he designates the "neoclassical" aesthetic implicitly refer to the hero's gesture of withdrawal as a sign of divine election. In the dramas of this era, "[c]entrality is no longer a given" for protagonists (151). Now, "[o]nly a sign of election can distinguish the central figure from the spectator who would otherwise be a rival" (152). Gans points to the *Chanson de Roland* to illustrate the nature of election by recalling that Charlemagne's choice of Roland to act as his rear guard sets the stage for Roland's heroic martyrdom. Moving away from the centre of the court, Roland accepts his position and refuses to save himself from death by

blowing his horn. Dante withdraws in a similar way, writes Gans: “[t]he soul who wanders off course ‘in the middle of the road of life’ and is led by Virgil’s shade to the entrance to the underworld is a figure of humanity in general elected to enter the scene of significance” (152). Similar to Roland, who is distinguished by leaving the main body of Charlemagne’s army, Dante distinguishes himself in the first stanza of *The Divine Comedy* as someone who has taken an unusual path, an act which has isolated him in a gloomy wood. It is from this distinct position on the margins of the socius that Dante’s and Roland’s special quests begin to unfold. In Gans’s neoclassical aesthetic, election occurs alongside withdrawal to an aesthetic scene that exists on the margins of a larger scene:

Shakespeare’s heroes do not merely struggle for the center; they understand centrality as a role to be played.... The source of this role, the sign of their election, remains outside them, and they are aware of their submission to it as well as of their essential detachment from it. The Shakspearian play-within-a-play is the exemplary incarnation of the neoclassical doubling of the scene. (*Originary Thinking* 152-53)

Shakespeare’s Hamlet and Macbeth, for example, each entertain an imaginary reality in which they occupy the central position of the social and political world that makes up the larger context of the play. The ghost elects the withdrawn Hamlet and the witches elect the previously unambitious Macbeth. Both characters retreat into an interior life of reflection and equivocation that makes up the fascinating dialogue of their sequestered soliloquies. The sophistication of the language combined with the length of time devoted to their interior life in these scenes further confirms Hamlet’s and Macbeth’s election as the plays’ protagonists.

Turning his attention to Hamlet’s interior scene, Gans argues that the Danish prince’s withdrawal to a private scene in fact constitutes a challenge to the classical aesthetic, which

centres on the king who presides over Elsinore's court: "Dressed in black and showing contemptuous indifference to the worldly matters of the king's council, the young prince distracts the spectators' attention by his eccentric strategy and challenges the central role of the king" (156-57). In this way, Hamlet's withdrawal operates as a tactic in the hero's effort to usurp the play's centre. The neoclassical hero self-consciously attempts to dominate the centre of the play from the margins by taking steps to carry his resentment into action, whereas the classical hero struggles to maintain his central position, while naively attributing the violence and exile he undergoes to fate. In both cases violence is the result of mimetic rivalry, since it is the emulous desire to dominate the centre that centralizes Oedipus upon the throne of Thebes, and it is mimetic rivalry for the throne of Elsinore that brings Hamlet into conflict with Claudius. The "challenge [to the public centre in *Hamlet*'s opening scene] is unspoken but overt" writes Gans (157). In his long periods of introspection, Hamlet withdraws in preparation for a return and enactment of revenge. Thus, "[i]n the neoclassical context—in contrast to the romantic—Hamlet's rival 'private' centrality poses a public threat that cannot go unnoticed" (157).

Shakespeare's neoclassical Timon retains the same withdrawn pose presaged by the classical Timon, but—by financially underwriting the cause of the similarly exiled and vengeful Athenian general, Alcibiades—Shakespeare's misanthrope is able, by proxy, to desecrate the sacred centre of the Athenian polis and finally triumph over those who ruined him and prompted his self-exile. Returning to Athens in order to destroy it for having banished him, Alcibiades encounters Timon, on whom he takes pity and offers gold. Timon—who in his digging has discovered vast quantities of gold—refuses Alcibiades's alms. However, when Timon learns that Alcibiades's intends to lay waste to Athens, Timon offers the general his own resources: "Go on," he urges Alcibiades, "here's gold; go on. / Be as a planetary plague... /.../ There's gold to

pay thy soldiers” (4.3.108-09; 127). Ultimately, though, Timon does not wish Alcibiades to rule over Athens, and he sends him on his way with these words: “Make large confusion, and, thy fury spent, / Confounded be thyself. Speak not. Be gone.” (128-29). Wishing to triumph through the total annihilation of humanity, Timon dispatches Alcibiades to destroy all in his path and, finally, to destroy himself. From his position on the margins, Timon still has an interest in dominating his society’s centre without sullyng his own hands by taking up arms against it. Unlike the classical Timon, Shakespeare’s neoclassical figure deploys his withdrawal as a means to create a rival centre of mimetic attention, which—in the action of Shakespeare’s play—is calculated to overwhelm the public scene that thwarts him at the end of the third act.

Gans’s conception of the related romantic and proto-modern aesthetics contains a vision of withdrawal that elaborates the interiority of early modern subjects via Rousseauian resentment. Rousseau’s hero resents the established order and rejects its hierarchy, which he supplants with an ideal of an egalitarian state of nature, wherein the victimized and excluded individual is explicitly privileged above all else. Gans discovers the exemplum of Rousseau’s self-exiled romantic subject in the émigrés of the French revolution: this “group ... [had] impeccable credentials as martyrs of an act of usurpation; the only center to which these exiles could claim allegiance was the one they still bore within themselves” as French nobility (*Originary Thinking* 164). Thus, the scene of the romantic aesthetic, which exists within the imagination of its central figure, takes an innocent victim as its primary locus. Deploying Gans’s formulation of the romantic aesthetic in a reading of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Richard van Oort observes the similarity between the classical protagonist and the romantic protagonist. Oedipus—self-exiled as the surrogate victim to save Thebes—constitutes a monstrous criminal, whom the classical and neoclassical audiences pity and abhor; whereas,

the specifically romantic contribution to the tragic aesthetic of the Greeks is to conceive of the sacrificial victim as no longer a negative model ... but on the contrary as a model of desire in general. Romantic protagonists, unlike their classical counterparts, wear their monstrosity proudly on their sleeves. This is Rousseau's contribution to romanticism.

The romantic aesthetic is thus based on a constitutive paradox. The more marginal the protagonist, the greater his claim to centrality. (*The End of Literature* 159)

As van Oort goes on to demonstrate, *Frankenstein* offers excellent examples of the valuation of the romantic pose of withdrawal in its depiction of a French émigré family, the De Laceys.

Despite their abject circumstances in the exile of Switzerland they are not the greatest romantic heroes on the novel's aesthetic scene, as it is the Monster—longingly spying upon, clandestinely assisting, and pathetically aspiring to inclusion within the warm domesticity of their lives—who remains the story's most marginal character (161). The Monster, having suffered at the hands of Frankenstein and withdrawn into the polar ice of the North Sea, is the novel's ultimate victim and an exemplary romantic protagonist (162).

Van Oort concludes by illuminating how the gesture of resentful withdrawal undertaken by the victimary romantic character—as an adaptation of the classical and neoclassical subject—accrues a relative value in a modern literary market, which is no longer dominated by a single sacred centre of mimetic attention. As the Monster and Victor Frankenstein struggle to dominate each other, the novel's narrator, Walton, “stands outside the tragic cycle of desire figured by Victor and his monstrous appropriation of the sacrificial centre. But Walton's peripheral relationship to Victor and his monster is a reflection of the centerless world of the market” (168). By remaining on the periphery of the action and producing a literary account of the mimetic rivalry, agon, and withdrawal he has heard of and observed, Walton transforms the Monster's

final resentful withdrawal into a marketable product, as distinct from preceding classical and neoclassical works that depended upon ritual centres of attention to stage their protagonists and so produce a viable aesthetic scene of collective attention.

In his addition to the preface of *Childe Harold*, Byron ironically foregrounds elements of the classical and, especially, the neoclassical aesthetics his poetic persona will ultimately withdraw from and thereby ensure his centrality as a new focus of attention in a decentred modern marketplace. As already noted—at the end of the preface—Byron expresses his intention to make Harold a “sketch of a modern Timon” (20). By invoking Timon, Byron presents a figure who appears in both classical and neoclassical aesthetics as a self-exiled subject, while manifesting the classical and neoclassical protagonists’ attitudes towards the ritual centre that they have fought for and withdrawn from. Byron’s ironic treatment of the neoclassical aesthetic ensures success in a new marketplace where “Rousseau is the exemplary model of romantic exile-cum-celebrity,” who “turned [the neoclassical] Hamlet’s purely literary strategy of resentment toward the center into a worldly practice, the success of which is measured concretely in terms of the ‘brand-name’ status of literary celebrity” (Van Oort 169). Harold’s resentment towards England’s centrality, as it exists in the average reader’s mind, manifests in his withdrawal from English society and societies in general. The poem inaugurates this iterative movement of successive detachment, when, in the epigraph to the preface, Byron quotes from Foucheret de Monbron:

The universe is a kind of book of which you have read but one page when you have seen only your own country. I have leafed through a sufficient number to have found them equally bad. This study has not been unprofitable for me. I hated my country. All the

peculiarities of the different people among whom I have lived have reconciled me to it.

(McGann, *Byron* 1026)

In this passage, readers first learn how thoroughly the author has resented the traditional mimetic centre of his own community. Readers then learn how the author resented other traditional centres of cultural attention. For de Monbron and Byron, all centre of communal attention equally deserve their contempt. Adopting a posture similar to Hamlet—who despises both Denmark and resents its rival nations—Byron appropriates de Monbron’s words to make a display of his contemptuous withdrawal from England. Monbron’s admission that an ultimately satisfying self-exile is not possible due to the undesirability of all the communities on offer allows authors to present their point of view as a unique commodity—newly available to the literary consumer. Instead of actually enjoining his readers to go abroad, Byron encourages them to cultivate a taste for his brand of anti-nationalist critique and allows them to derogate their country while continuing to enjoy the familiar security and comfort it offers. The unification of such contraries becomes a useful source of irony for Byron and his critics.

Intimacy and Byron’s Ironic Treatment of the Classical and Neoclassical Aesthetics

Byron’s “sketch of a modern Timon,” does not—like the neoclassical hero—fantasize about returning to dominate the centre or exact vengeance, but invites his home-bound, reading consumer to direct his or her attention away from the traditional ritual centres of religious and nationalist society. Michael O’Neil has recently observed the ambivalence in the first two cantos’ description of Harold’s attitude regarding his departure from England—the usual centre of his and his readership’s attention. O’Neil illuminates the equivocal nature of the narrator’s representation of Harold’s willing and determined attitude towards abandoning his decadent

lifestyle in the first canto's eleventh stanza, wherein the speaker lists all of the comfort and luxury the protagonist is to leave before stating: "Without a sigh he left, to cross the brine, / And traverse Paynim shores, and pass Earth's central line" (1.11). Cantos I and II, writes O'Neil, deploy "a poetic language straining to mediate between tones, moods, identities, cultures, and allowing that strain to find expression in a poetry that flinches as it encounters, retreats as it moves forwards, and conquers as it yields" (124). At the beginning of Canto I, Harold prepares to turn his back on the nationalist, authoritarian icon of the ancestral manor house, "a vast and venerable pile" that, with its "Monastic dome," recalls England's reformation and the traditional sacred ideals of his homeland. By casting Harold as a profligate aristocrat seeking to reform himself by fleeing his home—where "strength was pillared in each massy aisle /... [but is now] condemned to uses vile"—Byron further illustrates the reluctance with which the protagonist withdraws from England. This reluctance is signaled his wish that the sacred centre of his community could be purged of its vices. Thus, Childe Harold constitutes a modern Timon in the regret he feels at the necessity of his self-exile. This new Timon neither loves nor hates his homeland, but himself contains a greater object of interest than his people's debased society can provide him with. Harold will not find a new centre of mimetic attention to attach himself to. Instead, "[a]s he passed through ... [other] countries and observes their manners he gives us not so much a picture of them as a moving picture of his reactions to them" (McGann, *Fiery Dust* 49). Rather than resenting the former centre of mimetic attention he once validated with his presence, as Shakespeare's Timon does, Harold laments the necessity of his withdrawal, while carrying within his own mind an idealized focus of desire that will constitute the aesthetic centre of the author's and his readerships' communion throughout the poem.

Byron renders his protagonist's reluctant departure in a tone of historically conscious irony calculated to create an atmosphere of complicity between himself and his readers, which will reinforce his own desire as a covert rival to the vestigial desires of the neoclassical centres he departs from and encounters in his travels. Jerome McGann observes that "[c]ritics like to attack the opening stanzas for their Spenserian diction," but these critics overlook how "such diction...develops a raffish charm by exploiting the antique language for some important comic effects" (*Fiery Dust* 56). Citing the second stanza's extreme use of Spenserian diction to

introduce Harold in the time prior to his departure from England, McGann argues that "[t]he antique language helps to reveal the poet's attitude to the reader" (56) and further explains that

the highly derivative character of this language makes it a focus of the narrator's self-consciousness: [thus,] a tension is set up in the early stanzas of the poem between the narrator's use of artificial Spenserian diction and his more normal declamatory-
meditative-conversational language. (57)

By ironically taking up the language of the late medieval to early modern periods to describe the rakishness of his protagonist, Byron acknowledges the neoclassical aesthetic's moral and artistic ideals. However, Byron's intentionally inconsistent use of this language appropriates the medieval genre of the Romaunt for the modern purpose of degrading the ritual-aesthetic centres for the past. Over the poem's course, Harold will encounter various pre-modern ritual systems and values, but none of these will become the focus of the poem's movement or rhetoric. Byron establishes his narrator's freely floating and desiring consciousness as the centrepiece of the poem—an arrangement that (in this modern Romaunt) stands in for the neoclassical quest to attain a sacred object.

In his addition to the preface, Byron critiques readings of the medieval period's literature that sterilize it of its sexual rivalry and violence, arguing that the ideals of love and honour were the occasion for base and brutal acts which are clearly legible the texts. These remarks come in response to the reviews claiming that Harold "is very *unknightly*, as the times of Knights were times of love, honour, and so forth" ("Addition to the Preface" 55-57). Providing a scholarly reference that contradicts this characterization of the period, Byron maintains: "The vows of chivalry were no better kept than any other vows whatsoever" (61-62). He goes on to point out that standards of contemporary decency are violated in the songs of troubadours, the *Song of Roland*, in the behaviour of Sir Lancelot, and the circumstances surrounding the institution of the Order of the Garter. He concludes his reading of chivalry by taking aim at Burke's lament over its loss in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*: "Burke need not have regretted that its [chivalry's] day are over, though Maria Antoinette was quite as chaste as most of those in whose honours lances were shivered, and knights unhorsed" ("Addition to the Preface" 75-78). Byron's wry analysis of the ideals of a period—which cloaked its violent mimetic and sexual rivalries in a code of honour that it perpetually violated—recalls the behaviours of tragic protagonists in the neoclassical aesthetic. Sir Lancelot is an apt example of the neoclassical hero, as he (via his withdrawal from the Knight's of the Round Table and his affair with Queen Guinevere) is exiled from the narrative's ritual centre only to stage a violent re-appropriation of that centre, as it is embodied in Guinevere. Thus, Byron aligns the rakish Harold with the chivalric period as a means to ironize his contemporaries' idealization of the past.

By satirically representing the neoclassical aesthetic, Byron lays a foundation for the emerging celebrity status of his own poetic persona. Presenting his reader with an ironic version of Shakespeare's withdrawing Timon, Byron indexes the resentment for the conventional power

centre of nation and religion associated with the heroes of early modern tragedy and marks it out for ridicule in a gesture which allows him to appear to transcend the mimetic impulse to dominate the literary scene and the interest of the country's readership. In this new iteration, Timon becomes modern via Byron's construction of the illusion that his character ceases to be influenced by the desires of the collective. Instead, the impression Byron gives is that he speaks directly to a friend and confidant, who is complicit with him in his indifference to the conventional centre and implicitly suggests that the smaller centre of interest formed by the reader and himself constitutes the last vestige of real ethical and aesthetic value. The fascinating draw of Byron's newfound centrality to a scene established contra the conventional centre depends on the circle of readers who take Byron as a common locus upon whom to project—and receive intimate confirmations of—their own experience of marginality and alienation.

The production of this exclusive site of withdrawn intimacy in *Childe Harold* I and II contributed to Byron's emergence as a literary celebrity. As Tom Mole demonstrates in a chapter titled "*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*: Beginning the Hermeneutic of Intimacy," Byron's representation of himself-cum-Harold in the various beginnings of Canto I were calculated first to engage the desires of his closest friends and ultimately revised to appeal to those of the broader reading public. "[W]hen Byron began writing *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*," writes Mole, "he imagined a small audience of friends who would mediate between him and the unpredictable reaction of a larger and more public audience. The loss of that sense of a mediating audience," with the deaths of Charles Skinner Matthews and John Edleston, "deprived Byron of the protective intimacy of a coterie and precipitated him into the constructed intimacy of celebrity" (47). To make his case for Byron's preference for an audience of trusted friends, Mole turns to the first version of Canto I, which begins with the stanzas written with Spenserian

diction and mock-sententious sentiment. In the seventh stanza, Byron refers to Harold's riots with the ironic reflection on the unchaste monks who might have inhabited Newstead Abbey:

Where Superstition once had made her den
 Now Paphian girls were known to sing and smile;
 And monks might deem their time was come agen,

If ancient tales say true, nor wrong these holy men. (1.7)

Mole argues that these lines are an inside-joke designed for a group of Cambridge friends—who shared with Byron an interest in classical homoerotica (Mole 48)—which refers to a party at Newstead where the group dressed up as medieval monks (46). Mole further claims that Byron intended to first present the poem to his friends—glossing the many homoerotic references verbally—as a means of preparing for a truly public presentation of the poem in publication. The death of his two friends made Byron feel he had lost his audience and “placed [Byron] against his will into an unmediated relation with the anonymous audience of the Romantic period” (54). In an effort to prepare his poem for its first publication, Byron added the first stanza, which includes the seemingly conventional, but, in fact, detachedly ironic invocation of the Muse (45). The intimate tone Byron had cultivated via his parodic treatment of the early modern aesthetic now extended further back to satirize the classical aesthetic. Thus, his ironic withdrawal from both aesthetics combined with his private tone in addressing a coterie of intimates ultimately contributed to his poem's tone of complicity between author and reader, which seemed to detach itself from traditional centres of ritual attention and invite its readers to construct a new scene around Harold's exiled consciousness. This effect allowed each reader to feel as though he or she had sequestered him or herself with the poet in a private aesthetic scene that looked back scornfully and indifferently upon the society they had abandoned together.

The Plan of a Modern Timon Realized

Byron's comparison of Harold to Timon sensationalizes the eventual appearance of Cantos III and IV. In his addition to the preface in the year of its publication, the young poet indicates that his plan for making Harold into a modern Timon is not fully realized in the first two cantos, but in the later cantos Harold's vehement misanthropic nature would become more obvious. "Had I proceeded with the Poem," he writes, "this character would have deepened as he drew to the close; for the outline which I once meant to fill up for him was, with some exceptions, the sketch of a modern Timon, perhaps a poetical *Zeluco*" (*Byron* 21). Imagining a character whose vigorous contempt for man exceeds a simple withdrawal, Byron pairs Timon's name with the villain-hero of John Moore's 1789 novel, *Zeluco: Various Views of Human Nature, Taken from Life and Manners, Foreign and Domestic*. The misanthropy of the novel's protagonist exceeds Timon's own in his attempts to inflict emotional and physical pain on virtually every living thing he encounters (Moore 1.5-6). Unlike Timon, *Zeluco* actively pursues a place in society in order to seduce his victims. By pairing Timon with *Zeluco*, Byron qualifies his intended characterization of Harold by suggesting that he does not wish his protagonist's withdrawal to be as complete as Timon's, while further suggesting that he may elect to give Harold some morally shocking or brutal tendencies. After their self-exile, Lucian and Shakespeare's Timons manifest their hatred of human society via cruel curses and their habit of driving away those who attempt to approach them (Lucian 34; Shakespeare, *Timon* 5.1.111-13).

Though the depiction of Harold's emotional state at the end of the Canto II and the beginning of Canto III indicates a personality still withdrawn from his homeland, Byron's rendering of an emerging modern Timon presents a protagonist who confines himself to urbanely criticizing his erstwhile society. Harold does not indulge the violent excesses of Lucian's and Shakespeare's

Timons or Zeluco; instead, the Byronic avatar of Canto IV (in the wake of the poet's separation scandal and the social rejection that followed from it) presents—in the curse of forgiveness (4.135)—an inversion of the violent curses levelled by Shakespeare's Timon at Athenian society, which acknowledges the impossibility of any subject's complete escape from mimetic violence, while continuing to court his public in the intimate mode he establishes in Cantos I and II.

Timon's misanthropic curses direct the reader's attention towards the mimetic nature of human activities and highlight the propensity of those activities to become destructively violent in nature. As he leaves Athens, Timon looks back at the city and says: "O thou wall / That girdles in those wolves dive in the earth / And fence not Athens!" (4.1.1-3). Timon's exhortation to the city wall signals that he wishes the distinctions that protect the Athenian citizens from escalating mimetic rivalry to collapse. These words are followed by a series of calls for disorder, which highlight a further loss of the boundaries holding potentially competing subjects apart: Matrons should act promiscuously; young men should beat their elders to death; and "Degrees, observances, customs, and laws, / [should] Decline to your confounding contraries / [to] Let confusion live!" (19-21). Making note of Shakespeare's awareness of mimetic rivalry as the background for Timon's curse against Athens, Girard argues that Timon's soliloquy is a version of other such speeches about the "crisis of degree," which is a recurring motif in Shakespeare's plays. Girard finds Timon's curses reflect the undifferentiation that accompanies uncontrolled mimetic rivalry and leads to a breakdown of social institutions:

the 'crisis of Degree' pervades all plays of Shakespeare, and we can easily understand why. Drama requires intense human conflict; human conflict in Shakespeare takes the form of mimetic rivalry; mimetic rivalry is the product of internal mediation; internal mediation does not occur until a society becomes undifferentiated. (*Theatre of Envy* 174)

Claiming that Shakespeare does not give the explicit reasons for the crisis of degree expressed in Timon's soliloquy as he does in other plays, Girard refers his readers to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *King Lear*. Girard goes on to point out that "[o]ne of the commonest signs of this undifferentiation in Shakespeare is a quasi-impressionistic fusion of sea and sky, the literal melting of the one into the other" (179). Girard reads the motif of a stormy sea and sky as signalling an undifferentiated crisis in *Othello*'s, "It is a high-wrought flood. / I cannot 'twixt the heaven and the main / Descry a sail" (2.1.2-4), and also in the lines: "the main and th' aerial blue / An indistinct regard" (2.1.40-41). Shakespeare invokes the mixture of sea and sky again, when—in the near-violent culmination of *The Winter's Tale*'s first mimetic crisis—the Clown says: "I have seen two such sights, by sea and by land! but I am not to say it is a sea, for it is now the sky; betwixt the firmament and it you cannot thrust a bodkin's point" (3.3.81-84). Shakespeare's aqueous representations of an undifferentiated mimetic conflict were certainly known to Byron, who frequently deploys similar imagery to illustrate the same effects. Thus, Harold's Timonesque withdrawal from, and critique of, his society constitutes a softened version of Timon's rivalrous wish to see Athens plunged into a self-destructive melee of undifferentiating mimetic rivalry.

As in Shakespeare's representations of mimetically engendered undifferentiation, Byron's reflection upon his personal state of crisis at the beginning of Canto III—and in the wake of the separation scandal—begins with watery imagery. Re-establishing an intimate tone by speaking to his reader as himself and addressing his first stanzas to his infant daughter Ada, the poet locates himself as "Once more upon the waters," where the "waves bound beneath" him (3.2). His description celebrates the ocean's tumult, while revelling in its elemental disorder and figuring himself as a piece of flotsam, which has been absorbed into the ocean's movement:

Though the strain'd mast should quiver as a reed,
 And the rent canvas fluttering strew the gale,
 Still must I on; for I am as a weed,
 Flung from the rock, on Ocean's foam, to sail

Where'er the surge may sweep, or tempest's breath prevail. (3.2)

The distinction between the speaker and his environment is virtually erased in this passage. Byron presents himself as an insignificant aspect of a grand inexorable movement, which resembles other stanzas that metaphorically present the subject as a bubble that is continuous with the sea. Byron's imagery closely resembles that of his avowed model Alexander Pope, who—describing “The whole Universe as one System of Society” (114)—wrote in his *Essay on Man*:

See matter next, with various life endued,
 Press to one centre still, the general good.
 See dying vegetables life sustain,
 See life dissolving vegetate again:
 All forms that perish other forms supply
 (By turns we catch the vital breath, and die),
 Like bubbles on the sea of matter borne,
 They rise, they break, and to that sea return. (Pope 3.13-20)

Near the end of Canto IV of *Childe Harold*, Byron will deploy this metaphor again, and, he will return to it multiple times in *Don Juan*. Byron's invocation of the undifferentiated space of the sea depicts an emotional state reflecting the continuous quality of desire, as it depends upon imitation and communicates itself from one subject to the other. Observing—in his overly

wrought state upon his exile from England—the oscillation between the unifying and disruptive forces of mimetic desire figured in the movement of the sea beneath him, Byron embraces the inevitability of mimetic conflict in the same way he embraces the dangers of the sea. Girard notes that Timon’s retreat to the forest, like the withdrawal of the mimetically conflicted lovers in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, expresses the misanthrope’s yearning “for a vast, uncivilized space in which his frenzy may perhaps spend itself more or less harmlessly, like that of the four lovers” (*A Theatre of Envy* 175). Byron re-enacts Timon’s withdrawal, but—rather than cursing a society maintained by often inimical imitative tendencies—he relinquishes the illusion of his total agency vis-à-vis desire and elects to allow the “tempest’s breath [to] prevail.”

Byron’s adaptation of Timon’s attitude towards the mimetically engendered brutality that he risks in his self-abandonment to the fluid, interindividual movement of desire does not prevent him from mirroring Timon’s discontent with society in his characterization of Harold. After Byron relates his personal feelings as they pertain to the new journey he has undertaken, “[l]ong absent HAROLD re-appears at last” (3.8). Having “Secure[d] [himself] in guarded coldness, he had mix’d / Again” after his last journey “in fancied safety with his kind” (3.10). At first, Harold hopes to find satisfaction for the desires pursued in his last solitary quest, “But soon he knew himself the most unfit / Of men to herd with Man; with whom he held / Little in common” (3.12). The reason for Harold’s exceptionality lies in his inability to “submit / His thoughts to others” (3.12). “He would not yield,” the exiled narrator writes, “dominion of his mind / To spirits against whom his own rebell’d” (3.12). According to stanzas twelve and thirteen, Harold finds society in nature. However, the society of human beings make him “a thing / Restless and worn, and stern and wearisome, / Droop’d as a wild-born falcon with clipt wing” (3.15). The description of his state before the “Self-exiled Harold wanders forth again” indicates (3.16)—

contrary to the earlier statement that his spirit remains unaffected by society—that Harold’s will is deeply influenced by those around him. Harold’s withdrawal in Canto III, as in Canto I, operates as a symmetrical gesture of opposition to the cohesion of society; in an inverted imitation of society’s cohesion and mutual sympathy, he seeks “A life within [himself, and] to breathe without mankind” (3.12). Like Timon’s misanthropic inversion of sympathy, Harold’s self-exile arises from negative mimetic desire, wherein the subject seeks the exact inverse of his model’s desired ends.

In his analysis of desire’s mimetic nature, Jean-Michel Oughourlian examines the reasons that might cause subjects such as Timon and Harold to remove themselves from society.

Following Girard’s theory that desire is always imitated from the other, Oughourlian posits that

[d]esire is the source of the self. The self is thus, in fact, a self of desire.... Because the self is engendered by desire, it cannot lay claim to the ownership of that desire.

Furthermore, desire is mimetic, since it reproduces or copies another desire. Therefore the self cannot claim that the desire that constitutes it has priority over another’s desire.

(12)

However, subjects typically believe in their relative autonomy from the other, as it seems manifest in the distinctness of their material body from the bodies of others. Thus, the self, Oughourlian goes on to argue, “will in most cases maintain itself in existence by way ... of forgetfulness” (18). In order to effectively operate in a distinct body, the self-of-desire must forget “what it owes to the desire that produces and animates it” (18). Like most other subjects, Harold and Timon—by misunderstanding the source of their desires as emanating exclusively from within their bodies—shore up their identities and claim their desires as their own. Thus, Harold’s desire derives from the models he encounters in society, but—as he increasingly

experiences the force of mimetic desire in society's seeming imperative to "yield the dominion of his mind" (3.106)—he encounters society as a rival. As Oughourlian explains, "the model does not always remain a model to the necessary degree. When he or she becomes a *rival*, the misunderstanding [of desire's mimetic nature] becomes pathogenic" (18). The subject claims that the desire is exclusively his or her own and also imagines that the desire is anterior to, and holds priority over, the desire of the other (18). Animated by the desires of their society, both begin their withdrawal upon the intuition that they are controlled by the desires of others, which causes them to attempt to ensure their autonomy via their self-removal from society. Timon's realization of his desire's contingency on the other occurs because of his loss of credit and concomitant social ruin, while Harold finds his identity is animated by his imitation of his friends' pursuit of pleasure. Realizing that what they thought were their own desires in fact belong to the social other, both characters experience their community as a rival for complete control of their identity and pursue the illusory goal of complete autonomy through withdrawal. More naive than the poet himself—whose narratorial voice, by Canto III, recognizes mimetic desire as a key element of "the Universe as one System of Society" (Pope 114)—Byron's modern Timon continues to believe he can escape the influence of others' desire.

It is because of this belief that Harold (in his Timon-like expostulations upon humanity's folly) becomes a vehicle for Byron's own ruminations on the disasters proceeding from competing societies' pathogenic, or violent, tendency to assert the uniqueness and anteriority of their desire over and against the desire manifest in other societies' actions. When Harold visits the site of Waterloo, the narrator takes the opportunity to critique the triumphalism characterizing the Conference of Vienna (1815) in the wake of the allied victory over Napoleon. The desire for tyrannical dominion, Byron suggests, is ubiquitous and not—as the Conference of

Vienna supposes—manifest solely in the recently subdued general: “Did nations combat to make *One* submit; / Or league to teach all kings true sovereignty?” asks Byron (3.19). He goes on to characterize, via rhetorical questions, the interminability of individuals’ and nations’ pursuits of sovereignty: “Shall we, who struck the Lion down, shall we / Pay the Wolf homage? proffering lowly gaze / And servile knees to thrones? No; *prove* before ye praise!” (3.19). In composing these lines, “Byron,” Leslie Marchand notes, experienced “Waterloo...not as a victory but a melancholy defeat, for Europe was still in fetters and tyranny wielded more power than ever” (2.612). Invoking the despoiled ideals of freedom manifest in what he perceives as a failed revolution, Byron depicts the collective movement towards freedom culminating in the assassination of a single figure, whose murder merely repeats the murder of despots throughout history:

o'er one fallen despot boast no more!

In vain fair cheeks were furrowed with hot tears

For Europe's flowers long rooted up before

The trampler of her vineyards; in vain years

Of death, depopulation, bondage, fears,

Have all been borne, and broken by the accord

Of roused-up millions: all that most endears

Glory, is when the myrtle wreaths a sword

Such as Harmodius drew on Athens' tyrant lord. (3.20)

The imitative sympathy of desire animating the mob movements of the revolution communicate their impetus to the “roused-up millions,” who collectively participate in a re-enactment of the attempted assassination of Athenian tyrants, Hippias and Hipparchus. Not realizing that the

desire for freedom exists individually, the revolutionary mob, the despot, and the allies acting to depose the despot all mistake their desire for sovereignty as their own. All imagine their desire as anterior to the desire of a given rival, who therefore appears to have unjustly usurped their aims from some other—be it mob, tyrant, or allies. From his position on the fields of Waterloo, Byron understands the pain suffered by Europeans throughout history to have resulted from the striving of competing entities after the ineffable and mimetically generated ideal of “glory” or sovereignty.

As in Shakespeare’s account of the undifferentiation arising with the crisis of degree depicted in *Timon*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Macbeth*, the increasing violence accompanying Napoleonic militarism’s push to supplant the sovereignty of institutions and individuals derives from the human tendency towards mimetic rivalry. In this and the previous chapter, we have seen that the crisis of degree that Timon wishes on Athens also appears in the mouth of *Troilus and Cressida*’s Ulysses, as he exhorts Agamemnon to re-establish order in the Grecian army. Likewise, *Julius Caesar* opens on a mass of disorderly citizens poised to bring about a crisis that will precipitate the empire into civil war: “in the [play’s] very first lines ... two tribunes rebuke the populace for showing up on the Forum without the signs of their professions, [thus] turning themselves into an undifferentiated mob” (Girard, *A Theatre of Envy* 176). In a group where no social distinctions exist, there are no longer any institutional checks on acts of violent reciprocity. In his reading of Carl von Clausewitz’s *On War* (1832), which distills the military strategist’s observations on the Napoleonic wars, Girard remarks upon Clausewitz’s observation of the reciprocal nature of all conflicts: “Violent imitation, *which makes adversaries more and more alike*, is at the root of all myths and culture. This seems to be the principle that

Clausewitz saw reappearing” in the Napoleonic era (*Battling to the End* 12). “Mimetic theory,” Girard continues,

contradicts the thesis of human autonomy.... When we are speaking of military automatism and interactions between opposing armies, such tools work well. [...] The Napoleonic Wars were the jolt that caused this change [towards militarization] in European societies. (10)

As in Shakespeare’s plays and Byron’s account of the similarity of competitors in the race to secure sovereignty, Girard’s thoughts on the undifferentiated nature of Napoleonic militarization suggest the crucial role of mimetic desire in the crisis preceding Byron’s composition of Canto III. In Byron’s favourite Shakespeare play, *Macbeth*, the same undifferentiated mimetic crisis appears as a result of the Thane of Cawdor’s attempts to overthrow the ruling dynasty, an attempt which precipitates a confused social environment where “[f]air is foul, and foul is fair” (1.1.10).

In a reference to *Macbeth* in stanza eighteen of Canto III, Byron depicts Europe’s crisis of undifferentiation in a metaphorical rendering of Napoleon as a fallen eagle, who last held “pride of place” on the fields of Waterloo. Byron glosses his use of this term, which appears in quotes, with a note that reads: “‘Pride of place’ is a term of falconry, and means the highest pitch of flight.—See *Macbeth*, etc. / A Falcon towering in her pride of place / Was by a mousing Owl hawked at and killed” (*Byron* 139). The quotation comes from act two, scene four in the aftermath of Macbeth’s murder of Duncan, when Ross and an old man discusses the portents preceding and occurring on the day of the king’s murder. Ross remarks on the darkness of the day, asking the old man if the darkness is related to the day’s events, and the old man answers:

‘Tis unnatural,

Even like the deed that's done. On Tuesday last
 A falcon, tow'ring in her pride of place,
 Was by a mousing owl hawked at and killed. (2.4.10-13)

The incongruity of a nocturnal predator, who typically consumes only rodents, attacking a day-hunting hawk constitutes—in the augury practiced by this old man—a sign that disordered events are underway throughout the land and in all spheres of activity. Byron—in his admiration of Napoleon's ambition and the principles of freedom that initially motivated his conquest—compares Napoleon to the hawk, who (in Byron's appropriation of Shakespeare's words in stanza eighteen) is not felled by an owl, but “by the shaft of banded nations,” who make “Ambition's life and labours all ... vain” (3.18). Like the old man in *Macbeth*, Byron takes the fall of the eagle, Napoleon, as evidence of a levelling of a hierarchy that will ultimately result in a more uncertain competition between the allies, who were only joined together by their resentment and fear of the French general's military superiority. For Byron—as figured in “Harold [who] stands upon this place of skulls, / The grave of France, the deadly Waterloo”—a crisis of undifferentiation similar to that wished by Timon upon Athens seems imminent. Since Europe cannot, in Byron's estimation, pay homage to the wolf-allies “who struck the Lion [Napoleon] down” (3.19), the future of the continent remains uncertain.

Deciding how best to navigate the uncertainty of the modern world—which no longer orients itself (as the world of Shakespeare's Timon did) towards large centres of power, but increasingly, resembles a patchwork of competing entities—preoccupies Byron in the opening stanzas of Canto III, as he prepares to reintroduce Harold to his audience. In the conclusion of Shakespeare's *Timon*, Alcibiades uses the gold provided by Timon to conquer Athens; thus, the peripheral hero usurps the centre of the aesthetic scene, and Timon—having seen to his enemies'

subjection—dies. In Byron's modern rendering of Shakespeare's tragic hero, a similar tragic ending would ignore the diffusion of power and the proliferation of various centres of mimetic attention proceeding from the loss of faith in colossal entities such as the French monarchy and the Napoleonic Empire. Byron's use of the metaphorical lone wolf to characterize the nature of the modern world's multifarious centres of authority also applies to his own status as the romantic author. As van Oort notes, these figures sequester themselves at a distance from the dominant centres of their societies, which they feign indifference to while secretly hoping to be noticed and, perhaps, become great loci of mimetic attention in their own rights. Like Timon or a lone wolf traveling away from the human herd or pack, Byron's Harold allows the poet and reader an escape from the competing foci of their society's attention (including the nationalism of post-Waterloo England and the starkly tragic figure of Napoleon), but—unlike Timon and the wolf, who wish to best Athens and the lion—Byron the poet and the modern reader begin to establish a community that will thrive at a remove from the one they have left. Near the beginning of Canto III, Byron (in the intimate tone he directs to Ada in the first stanza) again invites his reader to participate in the project of constructing a new centre of aesthetic attention that takes his imagination as its primary mediator and focus:

He, who grown aged in this world of woe

.....

he can tell

Why thought seeks refuge in lone caves, yet rife

With airy images, and shapes which dwell

Still unimpair'd, though old, in the soul's haunted cell. (3.5)

Weary of repeatedly watching popular collective ideal centres usurped by would-be tyrants and sceptical of the market's multiplication of centres of authority competing to draw as many imitative subjects towards themselves as possible, Byron offers the reader—what Dennis in his reading of *Don Juan* calls—an alliance (222). Byron elaborates his intentions in the following stanza when he writes:

‘Tis to create, and in creating live
 A being more intense, that we endow
 With form our fancy, gaining as we give
 The life we imagine, even as I do now. (3.6)

While asserting that he imaginatively attends to the intensity of his infant daughter's life, Byron also presents *Childe Harold's* creative vision of the world as a means of inhabiting a more powerful imaginary being, a proposition which acknowledges that his own and his readers' quotidian existence remain mired in a “world of woe,” as it is tainted with the resentment of those who dominate conventional centres. In Canto III, Byron saddles his modern Timon with this woe and sends him into exile to act as a virtual point around which the poet and his readership may construct a new community of intimates. This community's imitative interest will make the Childe's experiences a unique locus in a world of proliferating social entities and personalities, which all compete for the modern literary consumer's attention.

Conclusion

By taking Timon of Athens as a model for his romantic hero, Byron sets the stage for an ironic appraisal of the ethics and aesthetics of the classical and early modern worlds that will inspire readers to echo his critique, but he also—by taking into account the novelty of the modern hermit's posture of withdrawal—provides his readers with an alternative to the militarist

and nationalist aesthetic and ethical experiences on offer in the last years of the Napoleonic wars. Though—in his reflection on the Battle of Waterloo—Byron will single out individual soldiers to honour, his criticism of the conflict is ultimately a repudiation of overweening pride, as it arises from the escalation of mimetic rivalry and the delusion that extreme violence is a fit price to pay for absolute sovereignty. In this conceit, Byron's modern Timon has more in common with the ancient figure—whose renunciation of humanity was complete unto itself—than the early modern Timon, who surreptitiously seeks to exact revenge and establish his moral preeminence over and against his former comrades. However, this does not mean that the creator of Harold does not resent—or is incapable of expressing his resentment for—the centre. Byron's modern Timon disguises his resentment in satire because he knows it is a tasteless display of mimetic desire to present it as explicitly as his predecessors do. In *Childe Harold*, Byron is beginning to develop his ironic sensibility regarding the desire to dominate existing centres of attention. As Mole illustrates in his reading of the irony in the early stanzas of the poem, Byron understood—within the small scale of his coterie of intimates—how to engage the sympathy of an audience embarrassed by the mimetic nature of desire that continued to exceed the past aesthetics designed to manage its effects. In Shakespeare's classically inspired Timon, Byron finds a fitting precedent for his hero, who elaborates an ironic vision of the mimetic desire animating history's modern trajectory.

Chapter Three:

Mimetic Drama in the Sonnets and Byron's Historicizing Lyricism

Unlike drama, the lyric poem is typically understood as referring primarily to the individual speaker's affective and personal experience. However, the boundary between the dramatic and lyric genres is not impermeable, as both Shakespeare's Sonnets and Byron's lyrics demonstrate. While lyric poems typically present the reader with a single speaker, they often refer to other figures, who relate to the speaker along lines of reciprocal desire. Shakespeare's Sonnets figure the imitative quality of this mimetic reciprocity, as it manifests in the complex relationships between the figures of the poets, the young man, and dark lady. Helen Vendler, Eve Sedgwick, and René Girard all note the compelling nature of the drama that the Sonnets' speaker obliquely refers to in his addresses and reflections. By focusing on this drama, Sedgwick and Girard extrapolate sociopsychological insights, which are sharpened by examining the speaker's nuanced subjective analysis of his situation relative to the other figures. Simon Palfry and Tiffany Stern's recent research into the early modern practice of dividing a play into materially distinct, individual parts illuminates the continuity between the lyric and the dramatic by pointing up how Shakespeare, as a playwright and an actor, understood each role as provisionally separable from the drama as a whole. Practically speaking, these parts function as atomized lyrical reflections on a larger drama in a mode similar to both the Sonnets' and Byron's lyrics. Byron's poems echo the Sonnets' dramatization of a particular subject's intimate mimetic relationships, emotions, and thoughts as they pertain to the socius as it changes through time.

Byron's refiguring of the mimetic dynamics in the Sonnets serves to tragically dramatize his own life, as it engages flows of desire operating beyond the traditional subjectivity of lyric poetry and touches the passions driving the social and political events of his day, which he understood as having world historical import.

In Shakespeare's oeuvre there is perhaps no more explicit and concise a rendering of mimetic desire than that found in Sonnet 42:

That thou hast her, is not all my grief,
 And yet it may be said I loved her dearly;
 That she hath thee is of my wailing chief,
 A loss in love that touches me more nearly.
 Loving offenders, thus I will excuse ye:
 Thou dost love her because thou know'st I love her,
 And for my sake even so doth she abuse me,
 Suff'ring my friend for my sake to approve her.
 If I lose thee, my loss is my love's gain,
 And losing her, my friend hath found that loss:
 Both find each other, and I lose both twain,
 And both for my sake lay on me this cross.
 But here's the joy: my friend and I are one.
 Sweet flattery! Then she loves but me alone.

Here, the imitative nature of desire appears in the context of a familiar triangle of sexual rivalry. The poet speaks to his young male lover regarding his longing, which is directed towards both the poem's intended auditor and the dark lady of whom it speaks. The pair have formed a bond

that excludes the speaker, but—because of the imitated desire that links him to both figures—he forgives their betrayal. The young man “dost love her because [he] know’st I love her,” while she accepts the young man’s favour “for my sake,” or—in other words—because she knows how strong the poet’s desire for the young man is. Thus, desire circulates between the three figures by way of their reciprocal imitation. This realization is the sonnet’s concluding claim, towards which the poet moves over the course of the lyric as he discards unacceptable notions of his and his two lovers’ autonomous desire. The differences between the three figures are effaced in the final couplet, which nevertheless—in its use of the personal pronoun and assertion of singularity—hints at the maudlin instability of the poet’s self-consoling resolution. The resolution is provisional, as the mimetic drama of this love triangle—which in the Sonnets is only described by one unanswered voice at a time—cannot ultimately have a conclusion, as the imitative desire the lyrics describe circulates endlessly.

The Sonnets’ reflections on the nature of mimetic desire are manifold and showcase the multiplicity of the phenomenon’s emotional and symbolic effects. For example, Sonnets 1-17 urge the young man to mirror his beauty in the production of a child—or an act of biological mimesis—a possibility that the poet sees threatened by the advance of time. Other examples are found in the discussion of symbolic thought’s capacity to represent—through imaginative mimesis—the image of the desired lover (see Sonnets 44-47). Sonnet 77 typifies the poet’s fascination with representation—be it in verse, mirrors, or merely in the poet’s mind—as a function of desire, the pains and pleasures of which are ultimately represented as subject to the necessity of death as a result of time’s movement. Along with the broader reflections on mimesis, the triangular configuration of desire between the three figures persists into the later sonnets. Take for example the opening conceit of 134:

So, now I have confessed that he is thine,
 And I myself am mortgaged to thy will,
 Myself I'll forfeit, so that other mine
 Thou wilt restore to be my comfort still.

The poet again admits he will imitate the desire of the dark lady for the young man. Thus, the mimetic logic of the Sonnets recursively asserts itself, as Shakespeare elaborates the intractability of the interdividual relationship that dominates his lyric imagination. In his final two sonnets, he turns to Greek myth and the Ovidian figure of Cupid to situate the mimetic scenario his verses elaborate as a timeless and enduring configuration of desire. In these poems, Cupid's arrow of love, or symbol of desire, is appropriated by a woman who uses it to contaminate a well that might have liberated the speaker from the "disease" of desire; when he immerses himself in the desire-contaminated water, the speaker's amorous feelings are predictably all the more inflamed.

The sociopsychological insights Shakespeare's sonnets contain are often noted by critics. Wishing to return scholarship of the Sonnets to primarily literary concerns, Helen Vendler's *The Art of the Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1997) criticizes Eve Sedgwick's sociological reading of the poems by denominating it the result of a widespread, "persistent wish to turn the [sonnet] sequence into a novel (or a drama) [, which] speaks to the interests of the sociopsychological critic, whose aim is less to inquire into the successful carrying-out of a literary project than to investigate the representation of gender relations" (2). In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), Sedgwick examines the triangular configuration of the Sonnets' characters in terms of gender and the asymmetry of power that such relations necessarily involve. Vendler admits that the Sonnets lend themselves to such a project, if only because the

lyric form allows for virtually any reader to identify with the speaker: “Because lyric is intended to be voiceable by anyone reading it, in its normative form it deliberately strips away most social specification (age, regional location, sex, class, even race)” (2). The power of the Sonnets’ lyric form derives from this capacity to allow its reader to inhabit a given narrative position along with all of his or her unique experiences and assumptions, personal elements which complicate the poem’s reception and allow the reader to reflect on the point of view the work provides.

In her gendered reading of the Sonnets, Sedgwick takes up Girard’s identification of triangular desire in the nineteenth-century novel to demonstrate that he (like other European male voices) assumes that the symmetrical relationships in the poems illustrate gender equality in terms of power distribution within sexual relations between men and women. Sedgwick’s aim is to expose the transhistorical affirmation of male privilege accomplished via Girard’s and Shakespeare’s disregard for the inequality inherent to gendered power relations, which systematically disadvantage women. Sedgwick argues that both Girard’s *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* and Shakespeare’s Sonnets propagate the myth of equality between the sexes by emphasizing the image of the symmetrical balance supposed by the geometric figure of the triangle:

Girard’s reading presents itself as one whose symmetry is undisturbed by such differences as gender; although the triangles that most shape his view tend, in the European tradition, to involve bonds of ‘rivalry’ between males ‘over’ a woman, in his view *any* relation of rivalry is structured by the same play of emulation and identification.

(*Between Men* 22)

When undertaking a reading of Sonnet 42, which begins her more general engagement with the poems, Sedgwick observes “[t]he Girardian point that the speaker cares as much about the fair

youth as about the dark lady,” with whom he is a rival, is also “Shakespeare’s point, and no critic is likely to be more obsessive about the orderliness of the symmetry than the poet himself” (29). Sedgwick’s task is to demonstrate that the bond of rivalry joining the speaker and the dark lady is, in reality, unbalanced by the stronger homosocial bond already existing between the poet and the young man, a bond of male complicity which is always smuggled into relations between the sexes. While she is effective in seeking a more sophisticated rendering of the movements of desire operating in both the triangles of the European novel and those of the Sonnets, Sedgwick’s analysis disregards the dynamically imitative nature of the desire that first establishes the triangles. These relations of imitative desire must necessarily shift the configuration’s geometric alignments as the dramatic movements of the works unfold.

While differences in the relative social power of the subjects are an important part of understanding the poems, they do not diminish the importance of imitation as an impetus for desire. As they are intimately related, gendered power relations must be considered alongside the mimetic motivations that drive action. Sedgwick does not challenge Girard or Shakespeare’s observations regarding the imitative nature of desire in his speaker’s choice of objects; indeed, she hardly mentions imitation at all. In *A Theatre of Envy*, which appeared six years after Sedgwick’s *Between Men*, Girard would examine the mimetic triangles of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 42 and note the intuitive quality of mimetic theory for all readers by observing that “[w]ithout mimetic theory we cannot even summarize this poem competently” (*A Theatre of Envy* 298). In his reading of the poem, Girard’s focus is on demonstrating that the Sonnets’ characters are always implied to stand in some type of mimetic relation, wherein power shifts as the subjects’ desires shift in varying intensity between multiple mediators (300-01).

In making this argument, Girard gestures towards the generic question of how the lyric poem, as a rendering of an individual perspective, assumes and sets up a wider implied world, which—for the poem to be interesting to the greatest number of readers—must reflect a broad set of social circumstances or experiences. Jealousy is a dominant theme in the Sonnets for this reason, as, in Sonnet 42, the speaker attempts to resign himself to the outcome of his unsuccessful contest with his model; or when (as Girard observes of Sonnet 144) one figure experiences the angst of doubt in his potential exclusion from the relationship he supposes to exist between his “[t]wo loves.” The broader social context suggested by this “[a]cute jealousy could be,” Girard states, “the intellectual ferment out of which the idea of such [Shakespearean] characters as Phebe, Silvius, Orsino, Pandarus, Claudio, Othello, Leontes, and many others arose” (306). Girard’s argument that the lyric form of a given sonnet is a fragment of a larger dramatic narrative, or scene, interior to author and reader gains further credence in light of the material circumstances of the early modern dramatic production that Shakespeare’s lyrics and dramas emerge from.

Recent Shakespeare scholarship has taken an interest in the interdividual forces that shaped the dramas of the early modern period, and this interest points again to the mimetic desire represented in Shakespeare’s works, which depend on a sharp awareness of how the lyric subjectivity expressed in a particular player’s part reflects upon and feeds back into larger intersubjective movements of desire. Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern’s *Shakespeare in Parts* (2007) explores the connection of the play’s atomized roles to the rest of the drama, its creators, and characters. Their study proceeds by examining how Shakespeare’s early modern players’ individually transcribed parts—as distinct text detached from the complete draft of the play—“lead to remarkable innovations in creating subjectivity and engineering dramatic affect,

producing on-stage drama of unprecedented immediacy” (12). The study concerns itself with the reciprocity between players and playwright by reading its movement in the structure of the players’ individual parts. Palfrey and Stern dramatize the collaborative process of playwriting: “Even as [Shakespeare] was meditating upon some brand new work, deep within the fabled smithy of his imagination, part of the metal must have been his mates, their jokes or aura or expectations, the voices from the previous day’s playing or the night’s carousing” (4). They do this in order to gesture towards a theory of influence, the basis of which is left in vaguely social terms:

What matters are the years and years of experience, of working in each others’ pockets, that ensures both repetition and difference; what matters is the individual actor working with the part by himself, picking up everything, identifying with everything, remembering and anticipating everything. (6)

Thus, the individual parts of the actors Shakespeare worked with for so many years become reciprocal—often repetitively imitative or rivalrously different—responses to their collaborator’s desires, in which real social relationships are written into the individual parts of the play. Of course, the detailed milieu that forms the backdrop for these part-cum-poems necessarily remains largely unretrievable, as the necessity of the plots and characters of the plays themselves apply formative pressure to the parts’ lyrical expressions of subjective desires. Nevertheless, by atomizing the play into a series of discrete parts, Palfrey and Stern open another way to valorize the social import of subjective lyric expression in the Sonnets, which similarly present the reader with a solitary individual’s perspective on the larger drama that occasions his verse. “We cannot grasp the part,” they write of the plays’ fragmented elements, “without first sensing the whole; but equally, we will not know the whole without first rethinking the part” (10). The same could

be said of the various imagined narratives uniting the fractured dramatic “parts” known as the Sonnets. In both Shakespeare’s Sonnets and plays, a combined multiplicity of subjective voices illustrate the role of imitation in shaping behaviour, plot, and thereby provide a glimpse of the common human experience of desire. Thus from the mimetically impelled wishes of the individual, lyrical speakers in Shakespeare’s fragmented dramas and poems, multiple histories of desire contribute to a more general theorization of desire’s imitative nature.

In its ventriloquism of the multiplicity of subjectivities animated to ceaseless conflict via the imitative exchanges that constitute history, Byron’s lyric poetry represents an experience of desire that mirrors in macrocosmic dimensions the effects of mimetic desire figured by Shakespeare’s speaker in the Sonnets. According to Jerome McGann, Byron’s lyric voice depicts the determinism that drives the subject ineluctably into a desolate future, providing a vision which is often troubled by its apprehension of the personal pain wrought by the reciprocity between the individual and his larger socius. Reflecting on Byron’s lyricism—especially as it is exemplified in “The Prophecy of Dante,” wherein Byron theatrically adopts the Florentine’s persona—McGann states that Byron’s version of the “poet literally tells the tale of his own damnation, including the damnation of his poetry,” and notes that “[w]hat is worse (from any normative moral and aesthetic point of view), the poet does not ask his readers to transvalue the values by which it will be condemned” since “[a]ll is cursed” (220). McGann’s reading aptly characterizes the following lines from the poem, which also betray Byron’s awareness of the collective mimetic forces driving his own and Dante’s elevation to both ignominious exile and acclaimed positions in cultural history:

“What have I done to thee, my people?” Stern

Are all thy dealings, but in this they pass
 The limits of man's common malice, for
 All that a citizen could be I was;
 Raised by thy will, all thine in peace or war,
 And for this thou hast warred with me.—'Tis done:
 I may not overleap the eternal bar
 Built up between us, and will die alone,
 Beholding with the dark eye of a seer
 The evil days to gifted souls foreshown,
 Foretelling them to those who will not hear;
 As in the old time, till the hour be come
 When Truth shall strike their eyes through many a tear,
 And make them own the Prophet in his tomb. (4.141-51)

These lines, which come near the end of the poem, echo in more desolate terms the closing sentiment of Shakespeare's Sonnet 42. Like Shakespeare's speaker, Byron's Dante has endeavoured to give himself wholly to a beloved other: his erstwhile Florentine fellows. As in Sonnet 42, the speaker is not free to pursue autonomously chosen ends, but is "raised by thy will, all thine in peace or war." Though the two poems' speakers are subject to a radically mimetic sympathy, Shakespeare's speaker (at least in Sonnet 42) is able to fashion a more definitive conclusion than is Byron's Dante. Where Shakespeare rhetorically figures the continuity in desire between his lovers and himself as a symbolic consummation, Dante articulates the pain of a separation from the collective, a pain which gestures towards the cold comfort of lyrical representation in imagining "[w]hen Truth shall strike their eyes / ... [a]nd make them own the

Prophet in his tomb.” The optimism that characterizes Sonnet 42’s final couplet (“But here’s the joy: my friend and I are one. / Sweet flattery! Then she loves but me alone”) contrasts with the resentful despondency of Byron’s final conceit. Having been borne aloft by the imitative desire of his countrymen—just as the sonneteer’s desire is transmuted and inevitably reciprocated in the mimeticism of the singularity of the three passions—Dante, unlike Shakespeare’s speaker, is finally alone and “may not overleap the eternal bar.” Byron’s lyric confronts in bleak terms the harrowing movement of collective desire as it impacts the speaker as a historicized memory, while imagining a future where the poet-prophet is symbolically reconciled to his beloved people. Thus, the difference between Byron’s lyricism and the lyricism of Shakespeare’s Sonnets, as it pertains to mimetic desire, rests primarily in the affective tone accompanying the representation of desire’s alternately elevating and alienating effects; where Shakespeare is variously detached and optimistic about the power of his imagination (often self-referentially expressed as the Sonnets themselves) to provide a positive outcome to desire’s sometimes painful machinations, Byron, as McGann notes, imagines the poet-subject damned, while posterity benefits from his prophetic perspicacity regarding the nature and import of desire (215).

Both Byron and Shakespeare register that the mimetic flow of affect in personal romantic relationships transmutes itself to the wider field of human history. Before comparing Sonnet 55’s subject matter to that of Byron’s *On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year*, G. Wilson Knight notes that Shakespeare’s poem transfers the speaker’s desire for the young man to the enduring social realm of symbolic representation by consigning it to a finely wrought lyrical form (68-69):

Not marble nor the gilded monuments

Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme,

But you shall shine more bright in these contents
 Than unswept stone besmeared with sluttish time. (Sonnet 55.1-4)

This appeal to history positions the poetic expression of desire as a transhistorical monument open to future readers' subjective inspection and identification: "Not marble, nor the gilded monuments / of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme" (13-14). In a way similar to Shakespeare, Byron understands his personal experience of interindividual desire as potentially communicable to multitudes of future politicized readers. In the poem's final lines, Byron charges himself and these future readers to "Seek out ... / A Soldier's Grave" in pursuit of a worthy political cause (37-38). Registering the intersection of the political and private, Knight's appraisal of *On this Day* intimates the similarity between the two poet's lyrics when it suggests that Byron "describes a move from personal love to public service, and death" similar to Shakespeare's (69). However, Byron's identification with Shakespeare's lyric voice as an element in a larger drama of mimetic reciprocity is not a "transcendence of personal passion" (71), as Knight suggests; rather, the poem accepts the inextricable, but painful, integration of his individual experience of passion with a larger, collective matrix of desire that endures through history:

'Tis time this heart should be unmoved,
 Since others it hath ceased to move:
 Yet, though I cannot be beloved,
 Still let me love!

My days are in the yellow leaf;
 The flowers and fruits of Love are gone;

The worm—the canker, and the grief

Are mine alone! (1-8)

While distinctly echoing the sentiments regarding aging time that appear in Shakespeare's Sonnet 73 ("That time of year thou mayst in me behold / When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang" [1-2]), the tragic tone of Byron's lyric on his role in the historical drama of Greek nationalism exceeds in intensity the note of despair in Shakespeare's poem, which ends warmly with the grateful apprehension of his lover's faithfulness: "This [my aging decline] thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong, / To love that well which thou must leave ere long" (13-14). Taking a slightly different course, Byron's *On this Day* repeats Sonnet 55's monumentalization of individual passion by mediating his desire through the memory of former lovers—who, having reciprocated his desire in the past, are now unmoved by their shared desire—towards a politicized act of love that will expiate his desire's force in a self-sacrificial, martial gesture undertaken in the theatre of Greek history. Unlike the shadowy figures of the Sonnets, the "others" he refers to are easily identified via the explicitly autobiographical nature of his oeuvre. These others are most likely his estranged wife and the lost readership of his later career. These relationships, as Chapter 1 and 2 demonstrate, are mimetic in nature. Thus, a triangular configuration between Byron, Annabella, and his readership constitutes the dramatic system of mimetic reciprocity which Byron feels desire no longer circulates in. Still charged with the force of desire communicated by these others, Byron lyrically channels his ambition through such remembered mediators into the political theatre of the struggle for Greek independence.

In his lyric echoing of Shakespeare's Sonnets, Byron makes a Shakespearean tragedy of his own life. Characterizing Byron's poetry as forging a link between personal and socio-political history, McGann points to *On this Day* as exemplary of Byron's style, before asserting:

‘The personal is the political.’ That widely circulated current idea was never more fully realized than in the case of Byron. [...] Byron’s lyrical procedures ... regularly draw upon a complex set of political, social, and world-historical meditations. Byron identifies himself with whole nations... and with their national heroes (political as well as artistic). Those identifications produce in turn a series of further equations between Byron’s personal life and the ‘lives’ of these nations and their leading figures. (211)

Thus, Byron expands upon the Sonnets’ association of microcosmic interdividual desires with the general macrocosmic progress of time in monuments and “wasteful war” (Sonnet 55.5) by tracing the continuity of his personal, intersubjective desire to the desires animating a specific political cause. In this expansion, Byron abandons the reassuring resolutions of Shakespeare’s Sonnets for the catharsis of his tragic dramas:

If thou regret’st thy Youth, *why live?*

The land of honourable Death

Is here:—up to the Field, and give

Away thy Breath! (33-36)

The observation and question on aged wisdom’s regret recalls the poem’s title and opening lines, which make this stanza a candid confession of regret over “The hope, the fear, the jealous care, / The exalted portion of the pain / And power of love,” which belong to the past personal relationships he can no longer participate in despite feeling their influence on his desire as a “chain” (13-16). Accordingly, the regretted passions of his youth force him to the tragic question, which is reminiscent of Hamlet’s “to be or not to be?": “*why live?*” In this way, one of Byron’s best known and most mature lyric poems echoes Shakespeare’s drama in parts—otherwise known as the Sonnets—as they are animated by triangular mimetic rivalry, a rivalry

which lurks behind Shakespeare's lyrics and appears fully developed in the plot and characterization of his tragedies.

It is well known that Byron died while engaged in the cause of Greek independence only months after composing *On this Day*. This poem, among Byron's other lyrics, reflects Shakespeare's dramatization of mimetic desire through the voice of a lone speaker, but—in the emphasis it places on the tragic intensity of his life and correctly forecast death—Byron amplifies the Sonnets' tragic tone. This tone derives primarily from the Sonnets' fascination with the conflicts produced by imitative desire and the passage of time, which causes the Sonnets to resemble parts of a larger drama. For Byron, the larger drama behind his lyrics not only included his personal and literary life, but the course of European history as a whole. Recognizing his experience of desire as continuous with the desires of others, Byron repeats Shakespeare's insight at the end of Sonnet 42, while—in his pained tone—indicating that the continuity of subjectivities created by the recognition of imitative desire's effects may not always serve as the consolation that Shakespeare's "my friend and I are one" (42.13) would have it to be.

Chapter Four:

Julius Caesar and *Marino Faliero*—Sacrificial Violence and Revolution

The dissonance between Byron's revolutionary sentiments and his belief in the legitimacy of an honourable nobility is often remarked upon by critics. Byron believed in the possibility of a nobility that did not act tyrannically, but supported the common people's pursuit of liberty. In his life and opinions, the tensions characteristic of this position were acted out in his contempt for popular rule and his participation in revolutionary movements, which began in Italy and ended in Greece. In the lead up to his involvement with the anti-Austrian movement in Italy, Byron's literary works—the plays *Marino Faliero*, *The Two Foscari*, and *Sardanapalus*—were preoccupied with how to reconcile the privileged place of nobility with the popular struggle for greater equality. In *Marino Faliero*, which he began writing in Venice and completed after moving to Ravenna in 1820, Byron provides an interpretive history of an obscure Venetian Doge (1354-1355), whose political career culminates in his attempt to demonstrate how a privileged ruler might show solidarity with the city's dissatisfied masses, as they struggle to overthrow the establishment that raised Faliero to his position of power.

Byron's *Marino Faliero* draws on *Julius Caesar* to frame the emulous motivations animating Faliero and his co-conspirators in their shared effort to violently efface Venice's resentment-inspiring inequalities. In Byron's play, the Doge awakens the contempt of the patricians, a disdain which the city's elites also display towards the common people. As in the Rome of *Julius Caesar*, a few Venetian conspirators believe that the state's values are systematically flouted by a presumptuous ruling class. This class is headed by a Doge who, to the

city's jealous elite, appears to enjoy excessive privilege in his popularity among the people. In Faliero's character, Byron perceives both Shakespeare's Julius Caesar and Brutus. Representing Faliero's resentment of his fellow patricians as a version of the resentment Brutus clandestinely cherishes for Caesar, Byron presents Faliero's elevation to the position of Doge as a symbolic sacrificial act undertaken by his peers, who—by making him a kind of player-king—neutralize his agency and set the civic stage for his literal sacrifice, a ritual process which (according to Byron's carefully researched historical notes) has long served to maintain the hierarchical order of the city. Byron's play, that is, cribs this double sacrificial movement from *Julius Caesar*, wherein Brutus unsuccessfully attempts to re-establish the republican order he sees crumbling by killing Caesar, after which Brutus himself becomes—through his suicide—the play's ultimate tragic victim, whose death and apotheosis ironically founds the imperial Rome that he had murdered Caesar in order to thwart. Thus, Byron's play gestures towards the anthropological and historical function of sacrificial rituals in founding and maintaining social order, as represented by Shakespeare. However, the conclusion of *Marino Faliero* indicates that Byron—reacting to the prelude and aftermath of the French Revolution—sees the dominion of European society's sacrificial institutions in the advanced stages of decay. As C.L. Barber and René Girard demonstrate, Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies are echoes of ancient saturnalian rituals, which have their roots in a classical and medieval European past. These rituals are typically oriented around a central figure, who plays the role of monarch and sacrificial victim for the ritual and whose death, or deposing, amends the disorder characterizing the period of saturnalian festival or crisis. Shakespeare's plays directly reference and represent these crisis-turned-festivals. Byron's engagement with this leitmotif in *Julius Caesar* highlights the role of resentment and violence in the disillusion and reordering of social hierarchies. However, where

the deployment of violence is successful in establishing a new order in *Julius Caesar*, the conclusion of *Marino Faliero*—which depicts the Doge’s execution sparking new disorder—suggests that Byron understands institutional ritual violence as increasingly ineffective in quelling the process of social levelling underway across Europe. Though Byron takes up Shakespeare’s representation of mimetic rivalry leading to resentment, conspiracy, and sacrificial violence in *Julius Caesar*, *Marino Faliero* departs from Shakespeare by attempting to represent and come to terms with the contemporary events reshaping Europe before its author’s eyes. Ultimately, *Marino Faliero* re-examines the efficacy of the surrogate victim mechanism in maintaining a social order in the aftermath of the French Revolution’s destruction of traditional barriers to the proliferation of mimetic conflict.

Marino Faliero constitutes a reflection on the problem of revolution as the author observes it in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars. Assessing the English theatre scene against the political and social climate of the period, Anne Barton observes that it was “a time of general social turmoil, when England hovered on the brink of revolution ... when ... the misery of the working classes confronting the Industrial Revolution ... and (for a good many years) the threat of Napoleon, were all convulsing society” (“A Light to Lesson Ages” 141). During this time, the English theatre remained “parasitic either upon the Gothic novel, producing vast, sprawling Germanic dramas of ghosts and ruined castles, incest and vengeance, or upon Shakespeare” (141). In light of this mood in the theatre of the time, Barton does not find it surprising that Byron’s political drama was so poorly received by critics, such as Hazlitt and Jeffery, who found its fixation on historical particularities and inter-class conspiracy at odds with the period’s tone (143). Though the instigating event of the play is a lewd insult against Faliero’s wife, Barton points out that the Doge’s motivations for his subversive activities stem from his long standing

“concern for the plight of the Venetian people under the patrician tyranny” (146). However, Faliero’s reflections on the fate of Venice are more complicated than a simple affirmation of the necessity of popular revolution as a means to depose tyranny. “Although [Faliero] knows,” writes Barton, “that the misery of the people cries out for redress, he still dreads (even as Byron did himself) the possibility and characteristics of popular rule” (147). Barton reads Byron’s choice to “tip the balance [of the play’s action] on the side of revolution” as a frank acceptance of the consequence of this turn:

The play simply presents the facts of the matter as honestly and fully as it can. If men set out to overthrow an otherwise unassailable tyranny by violence, they must be prepared to trample on their human instincts and emotional ties, to falsify their own natures and mythologise those of their victims. (151)

Rather than contributing to the escapist theatre of the period, Byron’s *Marino Faliero* examines the most salient issue of his time in a rendering of a failed popular revolt alongside a thwarted attempt by the aristocracy to renew Venice’s prospects. In the process, he makes use of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* to explore the nineteenth-century’s fraught, continent-gripping project of deposing tyranny and instituting a more just social order.

As noted above, the character of Marino Faliero combines elements of both Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* and Brutus in order to demonstrate the equivocal nature of the political motivations driving Byron’s tragic hero. Barton observes that “Byron invokes Brutus and Caesar on a number of occasions” in the play, “but this identification of a Venetian present with a Roman past is purposeful in ways that make it seem as though Byron’s play were engaged in a dialogue with Shakespeare’s” *Julius Caesar* (145). Philip Calendaro, who works in the city’s arsenal and becomes a leader among the rebels, appears as Cassius remonstrating with Israel

Bertuccio, who (as chief of the arsenal and head of the conspirators seeks redress for a nobleman's personal insult) resembles Shakespeare's Brutus. According to Barton, Faliero is also "associated with Brutus ... with all the ambiguity of motive and self-torment that implies" (145). However, "it is impossible," Barton asserts, "to forget that his position in the state, at least nominally, is that of Caesar" (145). In his historical analysis of the play, Richard Lansdown charts "the extent to which Byron was able to resist Shakespearian example in the composition of *Marino Faliero*, and the extent to which he capitulated to it, necessarily and almost unconsciously" (118). While Lansdown discerns the influence of *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Richard II*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* in *Marino Faliero*, he assigns a privileged place to the influence of *Julius Caesar* (122-23, 125). "Not only does Byron make reference to entire scenes of the Roman play," writes Lansdown, "he borrows ideas of Shakespeare's and grafts them on to his own.... [...] [T]he creative relation between Byron and Shakespeare here—between *Marino Faliero* and *Julius Caesar*—is unique" (125). These grafted ideas pertain primarily to the nature of revolutionary conspiracy and violence. For instance, "Israel optimistically believes that revolutionaries succeed even in death," and "Brutus' defiant suicide is an act of just this colour" (129). Thus, Lansdown's reading echoes Barton's incisive observation. "Like *Julius Caesar*," Barton writes, "*Marino Faliero* is about revolution and the relationship between personal feelings and public causes" (145).

Conspiracy and Resentment

Julius Caesar focuses on the nexus of "personal feelings and public causes," which both arise from imitative desire and lead to violent political action on the socio-historical stage. Girard argues that Shakespeare's play opens on the Roman community in the advanced stages of a building, mimetically driven crisis of degree. Romans have ceased imitating each other's desires

for status or objects and begun to imitate each other's enmities. At the outset of the play, the politically rivalrous characters "are no longer interested in one another's [political or material] objects, being so obsessed with one another as obstacles and rivals that murder has become their main preoccupation" (*A Theatre of Envy* 185). In such circumstances, "dual conflicts give way to associations of several people against a single one, usually a highly visible individual, a popular statesman like ... Julius Caesar" (186). Thus, Girard accounts for the structure of conspiracy—both in the play and in history—in terms of escalating mimetic rivalry. Shakespeare, Girard contends, demonstrates in *Julius Caesar* how the crisis of degree brought on by the decay of traditional boundaries and hierarchies escalates and resolves itself in "the scapegoat or victimage mechanism," which was the process that underlay the ancient drama of religious sacrifice and the cultures these sacrifices sustained (185). Girard attributes a critique of drama's dependence upon the victimage mechanism to Shakespeare, to whom he attributes an arrangement of the play that foregrounds the anthropological phenomena of mimetic violence as it culminates in the killing of a collectively identified enemy, an act which brings about a quasi-sacrificial catharsis. Unlike the classical tragedies that—because fearful of the contagion threatened by representations of violence—hid the murders and deaths of their tragic heroes off stage at the end of the play, *Julius Caesar* foregrounds the violent act by focusing "neither on Caesar nor on his murderers; [as] it is not a play about Roman history but about collective violence itself" (223). "In order to grasp its unity," he argues, "we must realize that its real subject is the violent crowd" (223). Shakespeare is interested in how desire as manifest in emulous ambition could bring about the events depicted in the play as a mirror of history.

Emulation, which leads to resentment, is a central concern in *Julius Caesar*. As Girard argues in *A Theatre of Envy*, the rationalizations that Brutus deploys to validate his involvement

in the conspiracy barely mask the underlying resentment that drives him (187). Though he strives to appear both to himself and to others as perfectly virtuous, Brutus envies Caesar his popularity, and this envy is as strong a motivation for his actions as his aspiration to preserve the Republic (187). Accordingly, Shakespeare shows how Brutus's resentment is imitated from the flattering and persuasive Cassius. In conversation with Brutus—who is troubled by thoughts he cannot name (1.2.41-44)—Cassius offers to be a “mirror” which will show that “many of the best respect in Rome— / Except immortal Caesar—[are] speaking of Brutus” and his merits as a leading senator of Rome (61-62). The figure of the mirror, Girard suggests, underscores the mimetic nature of the influence that Cassius exercises over Brutus (188). Girard further notes that beyond flattering Brutus, which he does in the extreme (1.2.92), Cassius invites him to imitate his resentment of the celebrated general's fabulous popularity, which he deems inappropriate for a man as common and flawed as Caesar (188). After relating the story of how Caesar challenged him to swim the Tiber (but was unable to complete the crossing without assistance) Cassius says to Brutus: “And this man is now become a god, and Cassius is / A wretched creature, and must bend his body / If Caesar carelessly but nod on him” (1.2.117-20). Rhetorically grouping Brutus with himself in his envious resentment of Caesar, Cassius continues: “he doth bstride the narrow world / Like a Colossus, and we petty men / Walk under his huge legs, and peep about” (1.2.136-38). His attitude towards Caesar being mediated by Cassius, Brutus becomes the first member of the conspiracy and agrees to lead it, while rationalizing his decision by reflecting on the nature of Caesar's ambition—a trait he himself has in abundance, as evidenced by his propensity to be moved by Cassius's flattery.

Verification of Girard's argument for Brutus's mimetically animated resentment and competitive ambition appears in Brutus's self-conscious, but deluded, reflections on his feelings

towards Caesar in Brutus's soliloquy at the beginning of Act 2, Scene 1. Of this scene, Girard notes that "Shakespeare makes Brutus's political indictment of Caesar extremely weak and unconvincing" (206). If a closer reading is given to the soliloquized indictment Girard refers to, the imitative self-comparison Brutus makes between himself and Caesar appears in Brutus's rationalizations regarding his decision to participate in the conspiracy. Reflecting on how best to address the problem of Caesar's popularity Brutus concludes:

It must be by his death. And for my part

I know no personal cause to spurn at him,

But for the general. He would be crowned.

.....

And to speak truth of Caesar,

I have not known when his affections swayed

More than his reason. But 'tis a common proof

That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,

Whereto the climber upward turns his face;

But when he once attains the upmost round,

He then unto the ladder turns his back,

Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees

By which he did ascend. So Caesar may. (2.1.10-12, 19-27)

Brutus holds nothing against Caesar's character. What he despises is Caesar's relative position, which among aristocrats in a Republic should be one of equality with their peers. In the allegory for ambition that Brutus constructs, lowliness is the ladder that individuals climb to attain the heights of popularity, which Caesar now inhabits. Once upon these heights, the climber turns his

back on the ladder, which represents the unjustly ignored peers as “base degrees.” Brutus’s speech asserts (while self-deceptively leaving the assertion unexplored) that anyone who feels relatively lowly in relation to another is equipped with “young ambition’s ladder.” Recognizing himself as relatively insignificant in relation to Caesar, the conspiring Brutus now begins to climb competitively with Caesar thereby taking his friend as a model and striving against him for pre-eminence. Thus, though supposing himself to be acting purely from a virtuous love of the Republic, Brutus’s own rationalizations for killing Caesar indict him for the failings he attributes to his popular friend.

The envy Brutus and his fellow conspirators have for Caesar is an indication that Rome is embroiled in a crisis of degree (Girard, *A Theatre of Envy* 176). In *Julius Caesar*, as in Shakespeare’s other plays, this crisis is brought on when emulous desire becomes too great and the normal social categories that prevent conflict fail. In *Julius Caesar*, this crisis is announced in the play’s first lines where tribunes scold the plebeians for not wearing the signs of their professions on a day not sanctioned as a holiday:

Is this a holiday? ...
 Being mechanical, you ought not walk
 Upon a labouring day without the sign
 Of your profession?.... (1.1.2-5)

When questioned, the trades-people say they have made a holiday to celebrate Caesar’s victory over his countryman Pompey. The disorder in the streets of Rome is a product of the discord among Roman patricians, which has caused them to fight against one another rather than against their enemies. This, indeed, is a crisis of degree occurring at both the highest and lowest levels of Roman society.

In *Marino Faliero*, the resentment that drives Faliero and the plebeian conspirators has a similar source to that driving Brutus and his accomplices. Faliero's initial sense of lowliness arises from the Venetian court's decision not to enforce the death penalty for the young patrician named Steno who publicly insulted him and his wife. When his nephew asks Faliero what redress for the crime would have satisfied him, the Doge responds:

Death! Was I not the Sovereign of the state—

Insulted on his very throne, and made

A mockery to the men who should obey me?

Was I not injured as a husband? scorn'd

As man? reviled, degraded, as a prince?

Was not offence like his a complication

Of insult and of treason?—and he lives!

Had he instead of on the Doge's throne

Stamp'd the same brand upon a peasant's stool,

His blood had gilt the threshold; for the carle

Had stabb'd him on the instant. (1.2.192-202)

The most galling part of the insult and the patrician court's reaction to it is how it positions Faliero in terms of relative honour or prestige. As Faliero sees it, his honour has been depreciated below that of the most common peasant because he is not permitted the enforcement of justice he feels appropriate to his honour as a husband and ruler. Thus, Byron represents the crisis of degree at the highest levels of Venetian society, where the individual appointed to rule over the city has been diminished, which precipitates the community's hierarchy into a state of disorder. The play soon reveals that a similar crisis is felt by the common people of Venice, whose

grievances are first presented to Faliero by Israel Bertuccio. “[T]he whole people,” says Bertuccio, “[g]roan with the strong conception of their wrongs” (1.2.461-62), which include unpaid wages for soldiers, the widespread oppression meted out by the patricians upon every plebeian family, and a “hopeless war / [a]gainst the Genoese,” which continues to take plebeian lives and resources (1.2.463-72). As Chief of the Arsenal, Bertuccio appears before the Doge—who is still fuming over the Senate’s light sentence for Steno—to seek redress for a personally insulting blow he received from a patrician. Over the course of their interview, Bertuccio reveals that there is a conspiracy to overthrow the city’s oligarchs and that the conspirators hope the Doge, having suffered from their injustice, will join with the plebeians in a revolt. As with Brutus and the conspirators in *Julius Caesar*, the impetus for Faliero and the plebeians to revolt arises from their resentment of those who seem to degrade them in the pursuit of their own ambitious goals. Faliero is made to recognize that he is merely a figurehead, who is mocked for his powerlessness,⁸ and Bertuccio contends also that the oligarchs have become oppressive in wielding their privilege. Like Brutus, in his reflection on the course of Caesar’s ambition, Faliero and the Venetian conspirators feel that the patricians scorn them for occupying a comparatively low social degree. While social degree—with the institutionalized violence that functions to reinforce class distinctions by checking inter- and intra-class resentments—long succeeded in maintaining order in Venice, Byron’s rendering of Marino Faliero’s story focuses on the way the popular critique of rituals of social control give rise to revolutionary movements. Ultimately, such movements seek to disestablish not only class hierarchy but also the sacred and quasi-

⁸When he learns that Bertuccio wishes him to administer justice for the blow he has suffered he tells him:

You overrate my power, which is a pageant.
 This cap is not the monarch’s crown; these robes
 Might move compassion, like a beggar’s rags;
 Nay, more, a beggar’s are his own, and these
 But lent to the poor puppet, who must play
 Its part with all its empire in this ermine. (1.2.411-16)

sacred rites that maintain social distinctions by providing state sanctioned outlets for the resentment generated by desire.

Desire with its attendant reciprocity of resentment shapes the behaviours of Faliero, the oligarchs, and the plebeians, creating a series of reactions which determine each movement of the personal and political drama Byron constructs. Elaborating how mimetic desire engenders centres of sacralized attention, Ian Dennis explains how Faliero's elevated position leads him to resent the aristocrats who appointed him by examining the reasons Faliero provides for his actions in discussion with the plebeians he conspires with:

Once he became Doge, 'the *Doge* THEY *made me*,' [as Faliero puts it,] his fellow patricians are no longer friendly, no longer kind to him, no longer, somehow, allow him 'privacy of life.' [...] One might wonder how much of this is not the common fate of any ruler. [...] [Nevertheless,] [t]hey resented *him* [Faliero] first. They resented—perversely!—the very centrality they had conferred upon him. And he resents...*their* resentment. ("Like Sheeted Fire from Heaven" 124)

The reciprocal resentment between himself and the patricians that spurs Faliero to conspire to overthrow the oligarchs of Venice is a product of the same desire that had driven the collective assent of an elite majority to centralize Faliero as the leader of the city. The Doge was elected, which means those aristocrats who voted for him were persuaded by their peers—or, in other terms, mimetically induced—to select him as their chief magistrate. This imitative social configuration establishes an opposition between the central ruler, the peripheral aristocrats, and the plebeians of Venice. The interests of each citizen created the position of Doge, yet these peripheral citizens are now prone to envy (or resentfully desire) their appointed leader's power and privilege. It is this resentful desire—which is only controlled by violent threats implicit in

the hierarchical structure of the state—that leads Steno to insult Faliero and causes the high council to ignore the Doge’s demand for a harsher sentence against the young patrician. In an effort to degrade the status of the city’s leader and thereby elevate himself in relation to that privileged position, Steno inscribes an insult on the ducal throne itself (1.2.58-61). The resentment of the plebeian conspirators is, likewise, motivated by this desire to wrest the city’s central positions away from the envied patricians. Feeling himself to be already deposed from the position of Doge, Faliero throws in his lot in with the rebels and fancifully imagines a future where the relation between ruler and ruled is free of the resentment that is ultimately inherent to any order that centralizes power among a few individuals.

Sacrificial Success and Failure

The final tragic death in *Julius Caesar* is not that of the play’s eponymous protagonist, but of a conspirator in his murder, Brutus. Girard argues that placement of Caesar’s murder in the middle of the play and Brutus’s suicide at the end indicates Shakespeare’s nuanced awareness of how communities habitually resolved the various crises of degree which threatened their society’s cohesion (207). Rome’s social cohesion long depended on its republican order, which is menaced by the popularity of Caesar, for whom the people have an excessive love that (in the minds of some patricians) threatens to install Caesar as a tyrant. Emulous jealousy—framed as the wish to preserve the Republic—inspires Brutus and the other conspirators to attack and kill Caesar. As Girard points out, Brutus, whose ancestor participated in the expulsion of the tyrant Tarquin at the founding of the Roman Republic, wishes to make Caesar’s assassination a repetition of that that founding event—with all of its quasi-religious sacrificial elements—in order to reestablish the Republic that has been threatened by Caesar’s inordinate popularity (211-12). The success of Brutus’s effort to make Caesar’s death a ritual reenactment of the state’s

violent foundation is contingent upon how well the necessary violence of the ritual is contained. As violence is largely governed by imitative impulses, it is highly contagious and may escalate the crisis of degree rather than act as its resolution (214). For this reason, Brutus would like his fellow conspirators to act as priests killing Caesar with pure hearts untainted by rivalrous desire, which is why he balks at the suggestion of killing any other political rivals aside from Caesar, as such killings would indicate that envy-driven retribution was a factor in the conspirators' decision to execute the popular general (194). If they chose to kill Antony, as well as Caesar, Brutus argues,

Our course will seem too bloody...

To cut the head off and then hack the limbs,

Like wrath in death and envy afterwards—

For Antony is but a limb of Caesar.

Let's be sacrificers, but not butchers, Caius.

We all stand up against the spirit of Caesar,

And in the spirit of men there is no blood.

O, that we then could come by Caesar's spirit,

And not dismember Caesar! But, alas,

Caesar must bleed for it. And, gentle friends,

Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods,

Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds.

And let our hearts, as subtle masters do,

Stir up their servants to an act of rage,

And after seem to chide 'em. This shall make

Our purpose necessary, and not envious;
 Which so appearing to the common eyes,
 We shall be called purgers, not murderers. (2.1.162-80)

Here, Brutus argues that there is a beneficent form of collective violence that may be employed to end mimetic rivalry. He imagines this as a good violence existing alongside an inimical collective violence, which tends to exacerbate mimetic rivalry and further fragment the community rather than uniting it.⁹ Immediately after having killed Caesar and attempting to convince himself of the goodness of the violence he has undertaken, Brutus suggests that the conspirators all bathe their hands and weapons in Caesar's blood and walk into the marketplace crying "peace, freedom, and liberty!" (*Julius Caesar* 3.1.106-11). However, the display of uncontained mimetic aggression, as it is manifest in freshly spilled blood, precipitates a new outbreak of discord among the plebeians—who imitate the murderers' bloody act by tearing apart an innocent poet who happens to have the same name as one of the conspirators (3.3.26-28)—and then among the aristocrats, whose mimetic impulse to reciprocate violence on Caesar's behalf propels the republic into a civil war that culminates in the battle at Philippi and Brutus's suicide. Thus, there are two cycles of sacrificial ritual in *Julius Caesar*; the first (Caesar's assassination) fails to bring about peace through mimetic violence, but the second (Brutus's defeat and suicide at Philippi) succeeds in bringing about peace and founding a new social order. Girard argues that in this double sacrifice, Shakespeare provides contrasting paradigms for ineffective and effective sacrificial deaths, the last of which brings the peace, but not the political outcome, Brutus had hoped to achieve in assassinating Caesar (*A Theatre of Envy* 221). In their eulogies for Brutus, Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar transform his suicide into a sacrificial

⁹“Brutus is seeking an impossible middle ground between a violence too impure not to exasperate the crisis and a violence so pure that it will be no violence at all. [Over the course of the play's action,] Shakespeare ironically suggests that this perfect violence does not exist” (Girard, *A Theatre of Envy* 216).

killing that inaugurates the transition from the Roman Republic to the Roman Empire, as Octavius eventually takes on the imperial mantle and becomes the second Caesar in what will be a long line of emperors.

In his reading of these two cycles of violence, Shakespeare's primary concern is not the political machinations of characters that brought the historical events about, but the emulative ambition that drove the events and led to the violent resolution of the two mimetically engendered crises in the play. Girard explains:

Shakespeare is not interested primarily in Caesar or in Brutus. What ... fascinates him is the exemplary nature of their deaths—exemplary not in a heroic but in an anthropological sense. He is clearly aware that the only reason why collective violence is essential to tragedy is that it has been, and still is, essential to human culture as such. He is asking why the same murder that cannot do the trick at one moment will do it at another, how the murder of Caesar can be a source of disorder first, and then a source of order, how the sacrificial miscarriage of Brutus can become the basis for a new sacrificial order. (224)

Shakespeare's exposition of this sacrificial order necessarily subjects it to the critique of violence latent in religious traditions.¹⁰ As Girard goes on to demonstrate, Shakespeare's later plays increasingly called into question the acts of violent catharsis that determine their own aesthetic structure and effect. In *The Winter's Tale*—a play that begins as a tragedy and ends as a comedy—Girard argues that Shakespeare reverses the tragic, *Othello*-like conclusion that might have followed from Leontes's jealous rage and his attempts to kill Hermione and Perdita (341).

¹⁰Andrew McKenna argues that Judaism's and Christianity's treatment of sacrificial violence—which had a determining influence on the imagination of early modern playwrights—addresses a basic ethical concern: “Scripture reveals ... the foundational role of violence and the mystified role of the victim as the structuring principle of the sacrificial resolution to human violence” (203). The ethical import of such an anthropology “confides in the irreducible dichotomy of victim and persecutor, ... [which] no critique of difference... is proof against ... for indifference to that difference sanctions the persecution of all and threatens the survival of all” (135).

Leontes's violent jealousy, Girard maintains, "stems from the intersubjective—interdividual—collaboration of mimetic rivalry, and structures not only our individual psyches but the entire human world, imprisoning us all in its circular pattern. The violence that it generates is the real origin of the false forms of transcendence that severely limit our vision" (341). This experience of transcendence is the cathartic resolution that Aristotle identifies as deriving from the execution of justice—in the expulsion or death of a miscreant, criminal, or subject of Fortune's doom—that typically conclude both comedies and tragedies. The abuse meted out on *Twelfth Night's* Malvolio is the comic equivalent of Hamlet's death alongside Claudius. A central objective in Shakespeare's later plays, and particularly in *Julius Caesar*, is the exposition of the flow of interdividual desire combined with a critique of the violence it generates.

In his brief foray into a Girardian reading of Byron's romanticism in *Marino Faliero*, Jerome Christensen argues that Byron, like Shakespeare, both describes and responds critically to the mimetically engendered sacrificial logic animating both tragic drama and the historical events that inspire them. "Romanticism appears," writes Christensen, "as a fundamentally social poetry in a world where the very socius is at stake.... Insofar as Romanticism holds together, then as now, it coalesces as a writing about how things or persons ... hold together," in a coherence that is sustained "[b]y sacrifice" (xxi). It is typical of Romantic poets, Christensen continues, to attack "the logic of sacrifice, called Molochism by both Byron and Coleridge" (xxi). Christensen frames this challenge to the cycles of sacrifice as primarily an ethical endeavour on Byron's part (xxi). Further, in his reading of *Marino Faliero*, he invokes Girard's anthropological description of sacrifice as it appears in Byron's play. Drawing on Girard's analogy between the surrogate victim mechanism and the social vaccination of the assassination

in *Julius Caesar*,¹¹ Christensen asserts that—whether he intended to or not—Faliero inoculates “the state with a discord of such weakness that it could be localized and contained, thus allowing the germs of civil conflict to exhaust their malignancy before they could fester into a mortal illness” (266). Thus, “the execution of the doge is a scapegoating that does not deny his sovereignty but decisively consummates it” (266). In this analysis, Christensen does not go on to explore the mimetic behaviours that drive the action of the play. However, the similarities of the mimetic dynamics appearing at the beginning of Byron’s play and those in *Julius Caesar* illustrate how closely the impetus for the violent action of *Marino Faliero* resembles that depicted by Shakespeare.

Just as Caesar’s assassination founds his name as an institution at the head of a new Roman Empire, Faliero’s inauguration as the latest in a long line of historical Doges is tantamount to a symbolic act of sacrifice, which the Venetians contrive—by thwarting and humiliating their victim-leaders—to maintain peace and order in their society. By occupying the place of a supreme ruler, Faliero is sacrificed to the state, as a means to maintain civic order. When, in the final act of the play, Faliero confronts the oligarchs of Venice, he references their circumscription of ducal powers (5.1.215-17) and accuses them of making a sacrificial victim of him by giving him his position:

You singled me out like a victim to
Stand crown’d, but bound and helpless, at the altar
Where you alone could minister. I knew not—
I sought not—wish’d not—dream’d not the election [.] (5.1.207-10)

¹¹ “Medical images are traditional in connection with violence and sacrifice,” as they often deploy Galenic metaphors for the “expulsion” of evil that seems to occur via the sacrificial mechanism (Girard, *Theatre of Envy* 220)

Faliero's rendering of his position and status—a helpless, crowned victim subjected to a religious rite—is pregnant with sacrificial imagery, which reflects the ancient tradition of sacral kingship that has its roots in practices of human sacrifice. In *Violence and the Sacred's* exploration of kings as sacrificial victims, Girard observes that the special status traditionally afforded to monarchs is part of the community's designation of royalty as a future victim, whose violent death will serve to reenact the cathartic expulsion of violent discord from the group. Thus, the ceremonial rituals and festivals that surround royalty constitute key elements of the community's cultural life, as the monarch-focused rites defer and expiate the resentments engendered via conflictual desire throughout the society.

The connection between Shakespeare's plays and the English cultural tradition of festival has been observed by C.L. Barber, whose analysis of Shakespeare's treatment of England's saturnalian rituals correlates with Girard's reading of Shakespeare's dramas as explorations of desire and the ritual killings (or expulsions) that provide catharsis for the exacerbated imitative desires manifest in festivals and plays. Though Barber's *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (1959) does not consider the highly permeable boundary between comedy and tragedy, the observations he makes regarding Shakespeare's treatment of social rituals in the comic plays allow for consideration of how tragedy, like comedy, arises from an early modern culture that still observed many of the medieval rites that had had their roots in pre-Christian social traditions. Barber understands the comedies to contain a saturnalian form, and he recognizes that the rites of the saturnalia are significant because they address “a paradoxical human need, problem and resource” (15). The saturnalian movement of misrule represented in comedies reflects the loss of difference between subjects, as the movement of interindividual desire is allowed—within the context of the social ritual—to circulate uninhibited. Reflecting on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*,

Barber explains that “[t]he life in the lovers’ parts is not to be caught in individual speeches, but by regarding the whole movement of the farce, which swings and spins each in turn through a common pattern, and evolution that seems to have an impersonal power of its own” (128). Citing Barber’s reading of this process in his own analysis of the *Dream*, Girard illustrates that the impersonal power of the Midsummer festival in fact derives from the mimetic behaviour of those involved (*A Theatre of Envy* 35-36). In this play—which exemplifies Shakespeare’s awareness of the imitative forces working in ritual and human relations generally—the imitative reciprocity of Shakespeare’s comic characters motivates the movement of misrule that leads the lovers into the greenworld. It is in the greenworld where—as Barber illustrates (21)—the traditional English Maying and Midsummer festivals largely took place. At the beginning of the play, the young lovers’ account of their relationship’s prehistory indicates that Helena, Hermia, Demetrius, and Lysander are already caught up in a mimetic entanglement before Shakespeare introduces the fairy plot,¹² which—by representing the supernatural agents of England’s folklore traditions as striving to assert their precedence over each other—mirrors the emulous motivation for the young lovers’ actions, as they are exacerbated by Puck’s errors in his deployment of Oberon’s “Love in Idleness” potion. Throughout the play, mimetic rivalry and conflict between the lovers escalates, until the saturnalian lack of social control and resulting mimetic violence culminates in a minor instance of surrogate victimage and catharsis, which brings the play to a peaceful ending.

¹²In the first act of the play the imitative nature of the youths’ conflicted romantic situation is explained (*A Theatre of Envy* 33-34). Initially, Helena and Demetrius shared a mutual attraction, while Hermia and Helena were close friends. Aware of the attraction, Hermia took Helena as the model for her desire for Demetrius, who she manages to entice away from Helena (1.1.190-93, 238-45). However, having succeeded in attracting Demetrius’s attention away from Helena, her friend and would-be lover had diminished prestige in Hermia’s eyes, as Helena became an uninteresting rival, and Demetrius was no longer tantalizingly inaccessible. In the absence of any other attractive friends, Hermia sets her sights on Lysander, with whom she plans to flee Athens (1.2.219-20).

It may seem strange to speak of catharsis in a comedy rather than tragedy, but the tensions aroused over the course of the play require some form of amelioration, which is provided, in the historical folk ritual, by the figure Barber identifies as the Lord of Misrule, who—in the *Dream*—appears in the character of Puck. The leader of the festival, known alternately as the Lord of Misrule, “Robin or King of the Maying” would typically act as stand-in for the actual Manor Lord, since “by giving way to a substitute, the master’s own authority was kept clear of compromise” (Barber 24-25). This figure bears a close resemblance to Shakespeare’s fairy Puck, who—aside from insulating Oberon from direct involvement in the humans’ forest antics—is identified by another Fairy as “that shrewd and knavish sprite / Call’d Robin Goodfellow” (2.1.33-34). Because Puck exacerbates the mimetic rivalries already active among the four lovers, he—as a manifestation of the problem of desire—plays the role of a surrogate victim, who defuses the tensions aroused over the course of the evening (Girard, *A Theatre of Envy* 235-36). As the mimetic aggression between Lysander and Demetrius reaches a dangerous pitch, Puck lures the two youths away from each other by transforming himself into doubles of their respective rivals. In so doing, the supernatural Puck plays the role of a scapegoat: “[w]hen scapegoats seem worthy of worship [that is as a supernatural agent], it can only be for the same reason that makes them seem worthy of hatred. By providing a single common target to the violence generated by human interaction, they save the communities from this violence” (236). Exhausted by pursuing these apparitions, the two combatants give over their reciprocal aggression and fall asleep. The nonviolent catharsis has worked, but the violence Shakespeare represents in the characters’ mimetic conflict indicates that such rivalries might just as easily have been resolved through less peaceful means; the *Dream* might just as easily have been a tragedy as a comedy. In *Julius Caesar*, which appears only a few years after the *Dream*,

Shakespeare will depict just such a conclusion. The processes encompassing the resentments, threats of violence, and cathartic resolutions in these plays are common to all societies insofar as every community is subject to the, often fraught, movements of desire. By highlighting these movements, Shakespeare identifies a homologous pattern of human behaviour in the impetus for England's cultural traditions and the animus for first-century Rome's political conflicts.

By linking the *Dream*'s action to saturnalian rituals, Barber anticipates Girard's exploration of desire's link to festival in his consideration of the ancient sacrificial rites catalogued by James Frazer in *The Golden Bough*. An example of these interrelated rituals appears in the real traditions of Europe, which, as Frazer notes, often culminated in the expulsion of a mock-king who resembles Robin Goodfellow or The Lord of Misrule; in these festivals, low born people were allowed to play the part of kings and gods by indulging in various excesses and the violations of cultural norms (Frazer, *The New Golden Bough* 559-60), a practice which marked them out as potential surrogate victims. In some late Roman versions of the saturnalia, the mock-king was chosen by lots and, at the climax of the festival, was expected to cut his own throat on the altar of Saturn (560-61). Setting up a king, pretend or real, as an element in a ritual of renewal is not a practice confined to Europe. Observing how various African monarchical societies permit and even encourage their kings to violate fundamental prohibitions, Girard argues that such practices operate to designate the king as a criminal, who has brought the menace of unrestrained mimetic violence into the community through the violation of prohibitions designed to ward off such a threat (*Violence and the Sacred* 105-06). "The king," Girard writes, "has a genuine function identical to that of any sacrificial victim. He is the catalyst who converts sterile, infectious violence into positive values" (107). By playing the role of a criminal, who under normal circumstances would be excluded from the community, the king sets

up the conditions of his own expulsion, which will enact the expulsion of mimetic violence itself. In the renewal rites of the Incwala of Swaziland, a symbolic execution of the king occurs when the monarch transfers his violent potential to a cow, “transforming the animal into a ‘raging bull,’ which is then put to death” (110).

In light of these widespread cultural traditions surrounding the ritual victimization of (mock-)kings, Byron’s decision to have Faliero figure himself as an impotent, victim-ruler, bound before an altar takes on larger significance. Like Caesar, Faliero is a sacrificial victim, who acts as a catalyst for the continued peaceful functioning of the state. The patrician assignment of Faliero to the position of Doge—which he realizes is almost completely symbolic—mirrors Brutus’s attempt to reinforce the endangered republican values of Rome by assassinating Caesar. However, both efforts to enact the sacrificial ritual necessary to renew the stability of their respective societies fail because of an excessive deployment of the violence required by the rituals. Brutus—convinced he has committed a pious act—makes too great a show of Caesar’s blood in the aftermath of the murder, while Steno makes the symbolic nature of Faliero’s position too obvious to the Doge and the plebeians, who thus conclude it is safe to approach Faliero to join their revolutionary conspiracy. Faliero’s impotence is flaunted past the point he can bear, and his resentment is ignited into revolutionary action. Thus, Byron’s play follows Shakespeare’s play in presenting an initial act of ritualized victimization which ultimately proves ineffective: Faliero is victimized through his induction into the symbolic position of Doge, while Caesar is more literally victimized in the conspirators’ assassination.

Ritual Violence and Revolution

Marino Faliero echoes *Julius Caesar*’s representation of two attempts to renew the social order, but—unlike Shakespeare’s play—it foresees a future wherein sacrifice has completely lost

its traditional ability to re-establish peace in the community. In Shakespeare's play's final two acts, Brutus is haunted by Caesar and—at the moment of his suicide—wishes his death to complete what his ineffectual murder of Caesar did not: “Caesar now be still. / I killed not thee with half so good a will” (5.5.50-51). However, as Girard points out (*A Theatre of Envy* 221), it is the speeches of Octavius and Antony that transform Brutus's suicide into the sacrificial death that will found a new Roman era. Antony forgives Brutus's involvement in the conspiracy and frames him as a statesman, saying: “[h]e only, in a general honest thought / And common good to all, made one of” the group of conspirators; Octavius then offers his own tent as place for Brutus's bones to lie in state: “[w]ith all respect and rites of burial. Within my tent his bones tonight shall lie” (5.5.70-71, 76-77). Thus, Brutus's body is treated like the body of a great leader or king, whose death renews the common accord. The patricians' decision to condemn the Doge Faliero to death for his participation in a conspiracy to overthrow the state is meant to secure the position of the Venetian oligarchs, who equate their enduring hegemony with the health of the state. Accordingly, Benintende—The Chief of the Ten, who presides over Faliero's sentencing—explains to the Dogressa who has come to plead for her husband's life: “His punishment is safety to the state” (5.1.364). Like Shakespeare's Brutus, Faliero must die to conclude the tragedy of which he is a part, but—in Byron's play—his death will not guarantee the regeneration of Venice the way Brutus's death ensures the renewal of Rome in *Julius Caesar*.

This fact is indicated by Byron's decision to use the Doge's final speech to issue a series of dooms against the city, which foresees the degradations (legible to Byron in the historical record) that will culminate four hundred fifty years later in Venice's subjection to Napoleon during his annexation of Italy. In his curses against the city, Faliero predicts: “she, who built 'gainst Attila a bulwark, / Shall yield, and bloodlessly and basely yield, / Unto a bastard Attila”

(5.3.47-49). This “bastard Attila” likely refers to Buonaparte, who in 1797 threatened Venetian Senate envoys by saying he would “prove an Attila to Venice. If you cannot . . . disarm your population, I will do it in your stead—your government is antiquated—it must crumble to pieces” (Scott qtd. in Coleridge, *The Works of Lord Byron* 4:456). Byron’s Faliero predicts that Venice’s humiliation will continue “when the few who still retain a wreck / Of their great fathers’ heritage shall fawn / Round a barbarian Vice of Kings’ Vice-gerent” (5.3.64-66). Here, Faliero takes on the voice of Hamlet describing Claudius as “a vice of kings” (3.4.89) and thereby comparing Napoleon to a usurper overseeing the leadership of his “Vice-gerent,” Eugène de Beauharnais, whom Bonaparte appointed Viceroy of Italy in 1805 (Coleridge 4:458). Thus, in his diminishment of Napoleon’s emperorship to the status of a mock-king, Byron references Bonaparte’s eventual exile as yet another example of a failed sacrificial expulsion, which the European powers undertake to reestablish an accord among the continent’s political entities. As his speech draws to a close, Faliero compares the city to the biblical valley of Gehenna, where ritual child sacrifice is purported to have taken place (2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chronicles 28:3; 2 Chronicles 33:6) and calls the patricians who condemn him a “den of drunkards with the blood of Princes!” (5.3.98). These sacrifices, which Byron attributes to the Venetian oligarchs, will not serve to stave off the city’s eventual destruction. In a note on Venice’s history, Byron elaborates on this theme by pointing out that “[o]f the first fifty Doges, *five* abdicated—*five* were banished with their eyes put out—*five* were MASSACRED—and *nine* deposed; so that *nineteen* out of fifty lost their throne by violence” (*The Complete Poetical Works* 4:562). By bolstering Faliero’s condemnation of Venice’s violence with historical information, Byron valorizes the protagonist’s critique of his own political scapegoating, which—in his reference to Gehenna—Byron casts as a sacrificial ritual employed by the city’s elites. However, given the crisis of degree that continues

even after Faliero's execution in the play, it is evident that Byron wishes his audience to recognize that Venice's ritual violence cannot continue indefinitely to achieve its desired ends.

This observation of the inefficacy of sacrificial violence in bringing about lasting peace is also applicable to the contemporary ritualized expulsion of Napoleon from Europe, which does not protect the continent against, what Byron (in the opening to Canto III of *Childe Harold*) calls, "[t]hraldom" and "[t]he patched-up idol of enlightened days" (3.19). This new thraldom is the Concert of Europe, which Byron understands as the latest form of tyranny standing in the way of the project of reform initiated by the French Revolution. Byron's resistance to the provisional peace engendered by Napoleon's defeat appears in his inciting questions: "Shall we, who struck the Lion down, shall we / Pay the Wolf homage? proffering lowly gaze / And servile knees to thrones?" (3.19). The restless spirit articulated in these lines written in 1816 would soon find concrete expression in a trans-European revolutionary wave, which included the Carbonari's revolt in Italy (1820), Colonel Rafael del Riego's rebellion in Spain (1820), the Liberal Revolution in Portugal (1820), and the Greek War of Independence (1821). Writing in 1822, Byron celebrates these revolutions in *The Age of Bronze* as does Shelley, who notes them with optimistic pleasure while writing his *Philosophical View of Reform* between 1819 and 1820. The series of revolutions that erupted in those years react to traditional patterns of the ritualized, hierarchical social control, which Byron indicts in his note on Venice's systematic sacrifice of its Doges. Combined with the revolutions underway while he composed *Marino Faliero*, Byron's uncertain discontent regarding the political fallout of Napoleon's exile as expressed in *Childe Harold* signal that—in the wake of the dislocating upheaval of the French Revolution—pseudo-sacral rituals were increasingly unable to quell Europe's roiling resentments. The play's ambiguous conclusion, which culminates with the mob storming the Giant's Staircase in the

aftermath of Faliero's execution, again suggests that Byron questioned the capacity of staged ritual violence as an effective means of mitigating popular resentment and thereby guaranteeing order in Europe after the collapse of the *ancien régime*.

The Venetian mob's rush into the ducal palace precincts in the conclusion of *Marino Faliero* reflects Byron's understanding of the highly mimetic realm of revolutionary politics that dominated the telos of his time, an understanding which—in the form of a moral sentiment—would later be succinctly expressed in two lines of *Don Juan*: “I wish men to be free / As much from mobs as kings—from you as me” (9.25). Though Byron perceives the imitative and often violent nature of political binaries, he views these conflicts as inevitable, eternal, and ultimately compensatory for those who suffer under the tyrannies he despises. In transition from Faliero's curses to the concluding plebeian charge on the palace, Byron's critique of the tyrannical institution of sacrifice as a means to maintain hierarchical degree gives way to a vision of ongoing revolutionary conflict, wherein the sacrificial crisis remains unresolvable through the traditional means of surrogate victimage. Two years after completing *Marino Faliero*, Byron, in his ironic rendering of the mimetically doubled repartee between Satan and Saint Peter in *The Vision of Judgement* (257), illustrates the practical outcome of his politics of opposition, as it serves to expose the mediocrity of both George III and the sycophantic Southey, who lionizes the King after death. In his youth and throughout his life, Byron adhered to the philosophy of the political minority Foxite Whigs long after the faction's decline (Kelsall, “Byron's Politics” 54). It was this commitment to the whiggish belief in the necessity of a benevolent nobility, who remain critical of the monarchy in order to support the freedom and dignity of the common people that prompted his support of the anti-Austrian nationalist rebellion of the Carbonari and

his later involvement in the cause of Greek nationalism.¹³ Commenting upon Byron's Satanic irony in *The Vision of Judgement*, Malcolm Kelsall explains that, for Byron, "[w]hatever [dominant political establishment there] is must always be opposed" (54). Thus, in Byron's poetic vision "it remains essential that Satanic rebellion does not succeed universally, for that would be to substitute the tyranny of the revolutionary ruler of hell for the tyranny of the status quo" (54). In the year after completing *Marino Faliero* and having allied himself with the militant Italian nationalist movement who "appointed [him] captain of the *Turba* or 'mob' section of the Ravenna Carbonari" (Lansdown 143), Byron wrote in his Ravenna journal:

It is not one man, nor a million, but the *spirit* of liberty which must be spread. The waves which dash upon the shore are, one by one, broken, but yet the *ocean* conquers, nevertheless. It overwhelms the Armada, it wears the rock, and, if the *Neptunians* are to be believed, it has not only destroyed, but made a world. In like manner, whatever the sacrifice of individuals, the great cause will gather strength, weep down what is rugged, and fertilize...what is cultivable. (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 8.20).

In this vision of revolutionary war, Byron's metaphor purifies insurrectionist violence of its negative moral valence by naturalizing it as an ultimately beneficent force that levels, cleanses, and enriches society. In this ongoing war of attrition the sacrifice of individuals is insignificant given the greatness of the work—the spread of liberty—that their deaths forward. More importantly, no amount of incidental or ritual killing can halt the progress of this conflict, which

¹³Citing David V. Erdman and Andrew Rutherford, Richard Cronin writes: "[i]t has long been recognized ... that Byron's [revolutionary] political principles were at odds with his class prejudice" (Cronin 160). In a brief survey of Byron's political commitments as they pertained to his sense of his noble birth, Malcolm Kelsall writes of Byron's early ambitions: "As a hereditary legislator of the British Empire, he had hoped to sway the destiny of nations by the power of oratory. [Byron felt] ...called by the duty of rank to public service" (44). Enamoured with the revolutionary cause—as filtered through the Whig understanding of the "Glorious Revolution" (45)—Byron's model of the great statesman was George Washington "and, for a European aristocrat, [he took] the example of Washington's ally, the Marquis de la Fayette" (44). Thus, Byron accepted the role of an elite group of leaders who assisted in the ongoing revolution against tyrannous forces, but bridled at the idea of institutionalized violence meted out by an autocratic or tyrannical political establishment.

Byron takes to be a continuous and productive process. Byron's analysis of violent sacrificial mechanisms is a necessary corollary to the violence itself. Thus, Byron understands his participation in, and support of, mimetic conflicts that lead to violence as one phase in a series of convulsions that are continuous with a stadial historical process that will ultimately lead to greater freedom for all. This view does not mean that Byron's works fail to represent the anxiety-producing discord that necessarily attends violent social upheaval—especially as that upheaval affects those who hold privileged positions within society. In Byron's play, Faliero and the oligarchs are ultimately subject to the whims of Venice's people, who make up a multitudinous, resentful periphery to the aristocrats' infighting.

Faliero is executed on the Giant's Steps in the courtyard of the Doge's Palace, an event which Byron—in classical style—describes through the observations of plebeian onlookers; rather than acting as palliative against further violence, Faliero's execution sparks public disorder, or a crisis of degree, that recalls that caused by Brutus's assassination of Caesar. The fact that the classical convention of relaying the act of death via onlookers fails to defer the concluding melee underscores the play's departure from a classical past where sacrificial ritual was more effective in deferring escalations in crises of degree. The final scene lacks the catharsis and subsequent denouement of a classical play, as the mob is still in running towards the Doge's decapitated head as the curtain falls. In the final lines of *Marino Faliero*, the immanent unleashing of social chaos looms when one of the citizens who witnesses the execution observes of the locked palace gates: “Wisely they did to keep their portals barr'd. / Would we had known the work they were preparing / Ere we were summon'd here, we would have brought / Weapons, and forced them!” (5.4.22-26). The stage directions given immediately after the execution echo Brutus's actions immediately after Caesar's assassination: “*Enter on the Balcony of the Palace*

which fronts Saint Mark's Place a CHIEF OF THE TEN, with a bloody sword. He waves it thrice before the People, and exclaims, 'Justice hath dealt upon the mighty Traitor!'" (5.4.29-32). Like Brutus—imprudently waving bloody hands and swords before the Roman marketplace and contaminating it with the spectacle of violence—a Venetian aristocrat undoes the potentially pacifying effects of the execution by making a display of the state's violent power and indifference to the city's traditional hierarchies. Though it is not clear that Byron necessarily has Brutus's gestures in mind—in his stage directions—disorder ensues: *"The gates are opened; the populace rush in towards the 'Giant's Staircase,' where the execution has taken place"* (5.4.33-35). The citizen's prior observation on the prudence of keeping the gates to the palace barred against the barely suppressed violence of the commoners suggests that the conduct of the populace is verging on a mob scene, in which the remaining differences between the patricians inside the palace and the plebeians in Saint Mark's Square will be effaced in the chaotic aftermath of the killing. Because the execution is not integrated (like Brutus's death is by Octavius and Antony) into a larger ritual narrative that—through the use of violence-deferring language and signs—decontaminates the act of carnage of its potential to cause mimetic disorder, the staged killing leaves the effective renewal of Venice's socius ambiguous. Thus, the final suggestion of Byron's play—even more than in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* where the first killing fails, but the second succeeds in re-establishing order—is that the efficacy of sacrificial ritual to renew social cohesion is waning. The plebeians—in an effort to confirm that their benevolent aristocratic leader is in fact dead (5.4.27-28)—rush towards the Doge's decapitated head and, in so doing, play their role in the carefully managed ritual execution organized by the city's elites, who proclaim: *"Justice hath dealt upon the mighty Traitor! /... / The gory head rolls down the 'Giant's Steps!'"* (32, 36). The immediate historical consequences of the Doge's

execution in 1355 are known. The sacrificial ritual of execution worked, and the revolt was quelled. However, the references Byron makes in Faliero's curses to the city's subjection to Bonaparte indicate that there are forward-looking suggestions underlying Byron's decision to leave the outcome of the mob's confrontation with the ritually maintained hierarchy of their city unresolved. Though the dissolution of society was not the real historical outcome of Faliero's execution, the staging of *Faliero* for the audiences of 1822 would have depicted the recently experienced phenomenon of a revolutionary mob who remain un-pacified by the ancient conciliatory institutions of their society.

As the curtain falls, the plebeians stand at the base of the Giants' Steps allowing the audience to imagine an alternative outcome to that dictated by history, wherein the mob—incited instead of pacified by the execution—continues its campaign against Venice's oligarchs. When applied to the proto-modern Europe in which the play was composed, this vision of an un-pacified mob mirrors the continent's revolutionary wave, which was underway even as the Concert of Europe attempted to re-establish order in the wake of revolutionary France's defeat. Because *Marino Faliero*'s rendering of ritual violence's inefficacy appears in this context, the play's presentation of an uncertain future takes on added significance with respect to Byron's use of Shakespeare in responding to his own historical moment and position in the social hierarchy of Europe. With his much remarked upon belief in the political usefulness of the nobility, Byron would seem most likely to assent to Shakespeare's rendering of the power of sacrificial violence in Brutus's suicide to stave off uncontrolled mimetic violence, but the ambiguity of the mob's ultimate reaction to Faliero's execution suggests that the ancient rituals maintaining the hierarchy dividing plebeians from nobility may be unrecoverable except, as Christensen argues, in the modern individual's struggle to perpetually reinvent him or herself (xviii). This is a difficult

process, which, in *Childe Harold*, Byron suggests often ends in a “wretched interchange of wrong for wrong / ’Midst a contentious world, striving where none are strong” (3.69). Thus, Byron recognized that—in the post-revolutionary world he inhabited—resentment is ever more ubiquitous at the same time that sacrificial protections and violently imposed social hierarchies rapidly become less efficacious.

In the ambiguous conclusion of *Marino Faliero*, Byron’s ethical critique of the violence accompanying traditional hierarchies organized to control mimetically impelled mass movements signals Europe’s shift towards a democratic market-oriented order. In *Modern Social Imaginaries* (2004), Charles Taylor—distinguishing modernity’s ethos from the concepts dominant in medieval society—figures this transition as the appearance of “a new conception of the moral order of society” (2). Positing a “mutation” in the collective “view of moral order” that brought about “certain social forms ... characterizing Western modernity: the market economy, the public sphere, and the self-governing people,” Taylor posits a “social imaginary” that evolved out of the ethos and values of the medieval world (2). In the Middle Ages, writes Taylor, “the Christian Gospel generates the idea of a community of saints, inspired by the love of God, for each other, and for humankind, whose members are devoid of rivalry, mutual resentment, love of gain, ambition to rule, and the like” (6). The medieval moral ideal—which, as Taylor’s description indicates, turns on the suppression of mimetic rivalry—remained contemporarily unrealized, but would be achieved “in the fullness of time” when all the elect would be “gathered around God in the final dispensation” (6). “In contradistinction to the medieval Christian ideal,” writes Taylor, “[t]he modern idea of order, was seen from the beginning as for the here and now” and “definitely runs along a path, running from the more hermeneutic to the more prescriptive” (7). The prescription of democratic and associated market values underway in the Enlightenment

and fitfully applied during the French Revolution represent a “mutation,” as Taylor puts it, of the earlier ethic that involved ritually expiating the tensions produced by desire, while reinforcing hierarchies as a means of mitigating emulative violence.¹⁴ Testing new means of attaining to the ideals of the earlier period, the modern innovators of the Enlightenment championed the channelling of mimetic desire through the emerging nation state’s democratic processes, a tendency which accorded with the burgeoning market’s capacity to defer individual resentments by offering a multiplicity of possible mimetic mediators and objects of desire to subjects, who had formerly been constrained by strict hierarchies and prohibitions.¹⁵ In this way, modern market society constituted a collectively instituted, ongoing crisis of degree, wherein multitudinous competitors imitate each other’s desires by deploying typically, but not exclusively, non-violent strategies for securing marks of prestige in an ever-shifting field of collectively determined values. Thus, the nineteenth-century’s critique of ritually maintained hierarchies of power, which *Marino Faliero* participates in, is to be seen as an extension of the anti-rivalrous, non-violent ideals that have long maintained Europe’s hierarchies. With the destruction of the ritual hierarchy, the new realities of collective desire in an increasingly democratic and marketized society assert themselves with an unprecedented force. Byron’s play registers his uncertainty regarding the outcomes of his own period’s new order by suggestively omitting the final outcome of the fourteenth-century, revolutionary mob’s occupation of the ducal palace’s precincts during the destabilized period following the Doge’s execution. The loss

¹⁴In *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, Girard argues for the past functionality of religious and state rituals in mitigating the effects of mimetic rivalry (51), and he further claims that the Judeo-Christian tradition radicalizes its denunciation of violence by extending its critique to interrogate all cultural traditions, which the Gospel considers to be founded on violence (444-45).

¹⁵Eric Gans interprets this processual transition in collective imagining in terms of an ongoing historical development of a shared aesthetic scene, which, in the Romantic period, is relocated away from the sacral state sovereign and, instead, vested in the interiority of the bourgeois individual. The privileged role of the individual “is precisely what is required by the bourgeois order, where supply and demand replace ritual interactions as the basis for exchange and distribution” (Gans 166).

and re-establishment of hierarchical difference—or the onset and resolution of a crisis of degree—appear in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, but do not definitively appear in Byron’s play. In a play that draws so heavily on its Shakespearean predecessor, the omission is striking and ultimately reflects the novel social and political situation in post-revolutionary Europe.

Byron’s old whiggish anxiety at the possibility of popular rule appears, Richard Cronin argues, in *Marino Faliero*, which is Byron’s attempt to provide the English theatre audience with something other than the gothic romances and melodramas they had become accustomed to. In the period after the Peterloo Massacre, Byron realized his gentlemanly radicalism was no longer favourably looked upon by the agitant reformers in England. The contradiction between his genteel elitism and his revolutionary politics “forced itself on his awareness quite suddenly, in the closing months of 1819, not as the consequence of a sudden access of self-knowledge, but rather of his recognition that [the working-class radicals] Henry Hunt and William Cobbett ... had changed the nature of English politics” (Cronin 160-61). Hunt and Cobbett organized meetings and rallies that would eventually lead to Peterloo and inspire their plan to murder the Prime Minister and his Cabinet in the Cato Street Conspiracy of 1820. Cronin argues that, in *Marino Faliero*, Byron was reacting to both his alienation from the English political scene and his feeling that “Hunt’s and Cobbett’s politics” were an attempt “to break down the social distinction on which polite society ... depended” (161). Cronin goes on to discuss the Shakespearean dramatic conventions that Byron—in identifying himself with the tragic Faliero’s paradoxical attempt to salvage his nobility by leaguering with an ignoble mob—flouts by calling into question, what Cronin terms, the “morally stable” world of Shakespeare’s history plays (171):

In *Marino Faliero* Byron made his first attempt to break with the Shakespearean tradition of dramatic language and dramatic construction, but his formal experiment is given point by the manner in which his play questions a deeper-seated Shakespearean convention, the notion that human conflicts take place within a stable moral order that subsumes them, and that allows them to be calmly contemplated. (171)

Cronin argues that—in attempting to explain his political situation to the English public from abroad—*Marino Faliero* turns away from the ultimately conciliatory arc of Shakespeare’s plays. The resolution of *Julius Caesar*, as it reestablishes a moral order via Octavius and Antony’s rhetorical transformation of Brutus’s suicide into a founding sacrifice, returns the world of the play to a “stable moral order;” whereas, Faliero’s death figures the definitive end of a morally stable society predicated on the hierarchies Byron clung to in constructing himself as a progressive nobleman. In his correspondence detailing his attempt to bring *Marino Faliero* to the stage via his literary agents in England, “Byron swithers between a nervous ambition for theatrical success, and a bitter sense that to expose himself on the stage to the ‘impertinence’ and ‘insolence’ of the rabble ... could only be intolerable ‘pollution’” (Cronin 172).

By placing itself in conversation with Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, Byron’s play, like Shakespeare’s, engages larger historical and anthropological questions surrounding nobility’s and supremacy’s contingency upon the desires uniting and fracturing the wider socius. Faliero like Caesar is moved by a collective desire from the periphery of his socio-political scene to its very centre; however, the central nexus of the community’s desire is a dangerous space to occupy, as the mimetic suggestions that aggrandize a particular individual may eventually become the very reason for widespread resentment of the individual’s privileged place. By presenting Faliero as both Caesar and Brutus, Byron makes more explicit the ambivalent nature

of desire; where Faliero and Caesar imitate the crowd's approbation and take a place at the pinnacle of Rome and Venice's hierarchies, Faliero-cum-Brutus mirrors the resentment of those who are most marginalized by this movement. Thus, Faliero embodies Byron's particular impasse as a Whig, whose politics are no longer anti-establishment enough to be taken seriously by the emerging English radicalism of his day, but who still sympathizes with popular revolutionary causes. Faliero's predicament illuminates the weakening efficacy of the surrogate victim mechanism in the Romantic period, when, increasingly, there is no need for institutionally appointed sacrificial victims in waiting, and the economic and democratic marketplaces supplant the role of ritual. Further, the quasi-ritualized death of sovereigns ceases to serve the pacifying purpose it did in times past. Byron's rendering of this new reality at the end of the play figures it as a curse, which reflects his own nostalgia for a time when the nobility had a more active and important role, both as rulers and victims of their societies. Ultimately, in *Marino Faliero's* conversation with *Julius Caesar*, Byron does not present the reinstatement of a truer nobility as the solution to the complaints of the mob, but, instead, displays the intractability the modern subject's position vis-à-vis the increasingly liberated social Other. With the knowledge that longed-for political and social change will often necessarily depend, not on a singular sacrificial events, but an ongoing competitive—and often violent—struggle between subjects antagonistic to ancient class hierarchies, Byron's play presents an uncertain view of Europe's political future. This uncertainty is tempered, however, in Byron's greatest poem, which he composed while writing *Marino Faliero*. In *Don Juan*, Byron will represent the capacity of modern market exchange to mitigate the resentments proliferating as a result of the crumbling of the continent's ritualized maintenance of feudal and religious hierarchies.

Chapter Five:

Shakespearean Diabolism in *The Deformed Transformed*

Byron's last unfinished play, *The Deformed Transformed* (1822), derives much of its plot and characterization from Goethe's *Faust* (1808) and Joshua Pickersgill's novel, *The Three Brothers* (1803). However, as G. Wilson Knight and Anne Barton have observed, the action of the play is also shaped by the influence of Shakespeare's plays. *The Deformed's* disfigured and outcast protagonist, Arnold, resembles both Shakespeare's Caliban and Richard III in his appearance, resentment, and ambition. When Arnold's despairing suicide is interrupted by a supernatural figure, who derives in part from Goethe's Mephistopheles, he takes up the demon's offer, is transformed into the shape of Homer's Achilles, and wins fame fighting as a mercenary. The Stranger takes on Arnold's form and directs and accompanies him on his adventure. On this journey the Stranger plays Shakespeare's Thersites to Arnold's rendition of Achilles (of *Troilus and Cressida*) in a running dialogue. In their exchanges, the Stranger provocatively undermines Arnold's moral assumptions and menaces him with an imminent, yet unspecified, calamity. This threat is heightened by Byron's suggestive choice of the figure of the famously flawed Achilles, which further raises the issue of literary celebrity and its contingency on fickle collective desire. The two characters' relationship develops through a constant repartee reminiscent of the exchanges between Lucifer and Cain in Byron's earlier play, where the demonic figure likewise maintains the upper hand. This antagonism takes on the character of a mimetic duel when—after participating in the 1527 sack of Rome and rescuing a maiden named Olimpia—Arnold, the Stranger, and Olimpia are isolated in a mountain villa, where the young woman reneges on (what was from the first) her reluctant allegiance to Arnold. The fragment that makes up the unfinished play's final section does not indicate what the outcome of this unhappy love triangle would have

been, but—as Barton convincingly demonstrates—Byron likely would have drawn on the final tragic scenes of *Othello* to violently quell the current of resentful ambition driving Arnold’s character towards murder and suicide. The supernatural figure who has enabled Arnold’s success manifests in his discourse and appearance the characteristic of a rival double thereby associating him with the reciprocal structure of mimetic rivalry present in *The Tempest*, *Richard III*, and *Troilus and Cressida*. The ambiguously diabolical Stranger also bears traces of the Ghost in *Hamlet* and the Witches of *Macbeth*. Drawing on Shakespeare’s precedent of supernatural agents to fill out the character of Arnold’s double, Byron plays upon the historical religious proscription of mimetic phenomena—such as envy, jealousy, resentment, and vengeance—which is traditionally associated with the diabolical in the Western tradition. As Jean-Michel Oughourlian and René Girard have demonstrated (Girard, *The Scapegoat* 167; Oughourlian 89-90), the dominant cultural understanding of diabolical entities in early modern European society also associated demonic forces with resentment, which is an effect of emulation. Byron’s Shakespearean representations of the relationship between the protagonist and his spectral accomplice suggest the Stranger’s allegorical quality as a manifestation of the interindividual desire animating Arnold’s action in the play. This chapter will explore how the demonic figure—who transforms and antagonizes Arnold—constitutes a personification of the interindividual play of desire and reveals Byron’s late understanding of ambition for fame in terms of Shakespeare’s reflections on desire in *The Tempest*, *Richard III*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*.

In Shakespeare’s plays, characters’ resentments often follow from the disappointment of ambitions roused by mimetic desire. For instance, in Shakespeare’s early play *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Proteus imitates Valentine’s romantic interest in Silvia and, in a fit of

jealousy, disrupts the couple's planned elopement. This is also the case in later plays, such as *The Winter's Tale*, where Leontes's imaginary belief that his most cherished desires—his friendship to Polixenes and his marriage to Hermione—have been thwarted by his loved ones' treachery brings about a fit of intense resentment, which explodes into murderous rage. Thwarted desire leading to resentment is also the animating force in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the action of which depends initially on Demetrius's frustrated ambition to marry Hermia and Helena's hopes of marrying Demetrius. The resentments roused by the confounding of these desires seem destined towards violence until the fairies intervene by putting the overheated lovers to sleep. As Barton notes of Byron's letters, the young poet frequently appropriated for himself "the feelings of various figures in [Shakespeare's] plays" ("Byron and Shakespeare" 231). Byron identified strongly with the ambitions and resentments of Shakespearean characters, and—in his youthful correspondence—embraced the resentment that drove his ambition to establish himself as a poet.

It is no surprise then that, in 1822, a more mature Byron—who was then working on *Don Juan*, and whose resentment-driven aspirations had been chastened by the vicissitude of popular acclaim and subsequent widespread contempt—began to compose a play that would contain a critique of grandiose ambition predicated on resentment as it appears in Shakespeare's late play, *The Tempest*. In her comparative reading of Byron's *The Deformed Transformed* and *Don Juan*, Anne Barton recognizes in the protagonist Arnold (who initially appears as a deformed subaltern forced to collect firewood by his callous mother) the abject figure of Shakespeare's Caliban. In the first moments of the play, Arnold's mother is analogous to Prospero, but her role as a powerbroker who lords it over Arnold is quickly usurped by the demonic black Stranger, later Caesar, who materializes out of a nearby spring and eventually takes on Arnold's shape. For

Barton, the relationship between the powerful magician-spirit and the disfigured Arnold, along with various echoes in *The Tempest*'s diction, reference the relation of imperious oppression and resentful submission operating between Prospero and Caliban:

The parallel between Caliban, 'a savage and deformed slave,' tormented for bringing his wood in slowly, and Arnold at the beginning of *The Deformed Transformed*, driven out of the house to chop wood for the Family by whom he is ostracised, is obvious. [...]

Caesar [or the Stranger], however, does not need to repeat any of Prospero's actual words when he accepts as his own Arnold's hideous, cast-off shape. They are there without being spoken: 'This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine.' ("*Don Juan Transformed*" 213-14)

From their first exchange onward, the dialogue between Arnold and the Stranger is characterized by emulative repartee. Interrupted by the Stranger's appearance in the midst of a suicide attempt, Arnold demands that the spirit admit its diabolical origins. However, the Stranger resists Arnold's attempt to designate him, a resistance which sparks the first of many rounds of verbal sparring between the two characters:

ARNOLD. You have interrupted me.

STRANGER. What is that resolution which can e'er

Be interrupted? If I be the devil

You deem, a single moment would have made you

Mine, and for ever, by your suicide;

And yet my coming saves you.

ARNOLD. I said not

You *were* the demon, but that your approach

Was like one.

STRANGER. Unless you keep company

With him (and you seem scarce used to such high

Society) you can't tell how he approaches (1.1.89-98)

Both speakers strive to position the other beneath himself in intellectual, social, and spiritual terms: Arnold attempts to cast the Stranger as an ignominious demon in league with the Devil, while the Stranger refuses to declare any allegiance and remarks on Arnold's lowly social status in both the material and spiritual realms. Against this insulting observation, Arnold asks: "Do you—dare *you* / To taunt me with my born deformity?" (103-04). Arnold's emphatic repetition and emphasis suggests that he still believes the figure to be a demonic being who is not worthy of his respect. It is only when the Stranger offers to improve his circumstance that Arnold's combative tone changes. The tone of the reciprocal insults echoes that of Prospero and Caliban's exchange in Shakespeare's play:

Prospero: Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself

Upon thy wicked dam, come forth!

Enter Caliban

Caliban: As wicked dew as e're my mother brushed

With raven's feather from unwholesome fen

Drop on you both! A southwest blow on ye,

And blister you all o'er! (1.2.321-25)

The power differential separating Shakespeare's characters does not keep the oppressed Caliban from verbally assaulting his enslaver, a possibility which is the lone benefit he has received from Prospero, as he states later in the same scene: "You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is I

All that the others cannot, in such things
 As still are free to both, to compensate
 For stepdame Nature's avarice at first. (1.1.313-320)

When speaking to the Stranger, he states that it is only his physical form he would like changed, as his deformity has predisposed him to strive against those who attempt to marginalize him because of it. Nature's malformation of his body drives him to adopt a more aggressive approach to furthering his aims in spite of his physical differences. The Duke of Gloucester understands his apparent physical handicaps in a similar way. In the opening monologue of Shakespeare's play, Gloucester attributes the impetus for his malicious plans to create discord among the royal family—plans which will ultimately open the way for his usurpation of the throne—to his deformity. Having been “[c]heated of feature by dissembling nature, / [who made him d]eformed, [and] unfinished” (1.1.119-20), Gloucester fails to find pleasure, as his fellow countrymen do, in amorous pursuits during the peace following the Yorkist victory over the Lancastrian, Henry VI. “[T]herefore,” he explains,

since I cannot prove a lover

 Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous,
 By drunken prophecies, libels and dreams,
 To set my brother Clarence and the king
 In deadly hate the one against the other.... (1.1.28, 32-35)

Though, unlike Arnold, Gloucester does not explicitly own that his ambition is spurred by his deformity, his line of reasoning follows a more direct explanation for his desire to imitate the strength of those who have subjected others, which Arnold concisely expresses in the equation:

“Deformity is daring” (1.1.317). Like Arnold, Gloucester conceives of his limitations as driving him “to o’ertake mankind / By heart and soul, and make itself the equal” (1.1.318-19). Thus, as Knight notes, Byron bases the mode of Arnold’s ambition upon the form of desire Shakespeare represents in *Richard III*. In both Byron and Shakespeare the protagonist’s mode of desire is emulative, as Arnold and Gloucester model their desires on those of a more powerful other. Gloucester’s model-rival is the king, Edward IV; whereas, Arnold’s diabolical model-rival directs his subject to more universal objects of desire, as he wishes to overtake and subject all of mankind. The vehicle in which Arnold chooses to undertake this pursuit is the form of Achilles, which the Stranger makes available to him. Encouraging Arnold’s ambition to escape his abject situation, while continuing to antagonize and bait him in combative exchanges, the Stranger’s behaviour increasingly designates him as an avatar of rivalrous desire itself.

Arnold and Caesar meet Achilles and Thersites

Arnold’s choice of Achilles’s physical form further entrenches the association of the Stranger with the embodiment of mimetic rivalry as Shakespeare represents it in the character of Thersites. In *Troilus and Cressida*, the relationship between Achilles and Thersites enacts the rivalry with the plebeians that the patrician characters—even those as prestigiously distinguished as Achilles—engage in. In both Homer and Shakespeare, Achilles attempts to represent himself as standing outside of rivalry; by resentfully cloistering himself in his tent and refusing to fight on the Greeks’ behalf, he affects a posture of indifference to the mimetic influence of others. For this reason, it is appropriate that Arnold would take his shape, as he wishes to exist beyond the reach of the antagonisms that characterize his circumstances as a deformed and unwanted child. However, Achilles is not really as disengaged from the influence of his fellow soldiers and enemies as he would like to imagine himself to be, a fact which both Homer and Shakespeare

represent. In his reading of Achilles's self-aggrandizing pose through Thersites's taunting dialogue, Shakespeare reflects on the imitative bond that continues to hold sway over Achilles's resentments and rivalries. In his dialogue with, and about, the rivalrous relationship between Achilles and Ajax (the only warrior in the Greek camp who can compete with Achilles) the deformed Thersites illuminates these mimetic bonds through his combative, acerbic observations. Thersites's attention to the dynamics of mimetic rivalry in the Greek camp initially appears when—while being beaten by his master Ajax—he bitingly remarks: “Thou grumblest and railest every hour on Achilles, and thou art as full of envy at his greatness as Cerberus is at Proserpine's beauty” (2.1.32-34). He gives voice to his musings on the mimetic rivalry animating the entire Grecian campaign against Troy in his monologue before Achilles's tent, where he calls on the gods to thwart his own army's efforts, before characterizing the desire motivating the Greek's undertaking in this way: “After this, the vengeance on the whole camp—or rather, the Neapolitan bone-ache, for that, methinks, is the curse dependent on those that war for a placket. I have said my prayers and devil Envy say ‘Amen’” (2.3.17-20). Thersite's call for vengeance is an acknowledgement of the violent reciprocity and competitive mimicry that characterizes both individual combat and warfare generally. When unchecked, vengeance leads to increasingly extreme violence. Thersites casts the wasting of venereal disease, or “bone-ache,” as a related alternative to this escalating violence, as both the ruinous reciprocity of combat and the contagion of disease borne along through sexual desire bring about similar destructive outcomes. Thersites crassly expresses this relation when he says that “the curse [is] dependent on those that war for a placket,” which is an early modern euphemism for female genitals. Here he explicitly casts rivalry for a sexual object—the *raison d'etre* of the Trojan war—as naturally leading to the outcome he entreats from the gods in his curse. His curse on the Grecian army uttered, he enjoins

the “devil Envy” to “say Amen” thereby highlighting Shakespeare’s association of envy with its demonic embodiment. In expressing resentful sentiments and saying “Amen” himself, Thersites himself appears to be just such a manifestation of envy.

In *Troilus and Cressida*, Achilles and Thersites verbally spar in the same way that Arnold-turned-Achilles and the Stranger qua Arnold-Caesar strive to best each other in repartee, a similarity which further highlights the character of the Stranger as Byron’s version of Thersites and a manifestation of mimetic rivalry. As Achilles is preparing to feast Hector on the night before their single combat, Thersites appears to deliver a letter and Shakespeare depicts the two—who have insulted each other throughout the play—denominating one another in ways that reveal their characters’ equal subjection to emulous desire:

Achilles: How now, thou core of envy!

Thou crusty botch of nature, what’s the news?

Thersites: Why, thou picture of what thou seemest, and idol

of idiot-worshippers, here’s a letter for thee. (5.1.4-7)

Achilles perceives that Thersites is the avatar of envy that Thersites himself consistently performs, while Thersites characterizes Achilles as an idol—or inanimate and ineffectual representation of a false deity—which becomes the locus of attention through religious practices that depend on rituals ordered and maintained by unreflecting, imitative desire. Like a modern literary celebrity, whose prestige depends on the adulation of readers keen to imitatively align their interest with the author who is deemed by more prestigious readers to be worthy of attention, Achilles’s status depends upon the Greek army’s shared and widely unexamined faith in his abilities as they are sought after by Ulysses and Agamemnon. Thersites’s implication that Achilles occupies this position in spite of his simplicity of mind implies that Achilles falsely

imagines himself worthy of his worshipers' praise and foolishly believes in his own invulnerability—an hubristic flaw that, since Homer, has been inseparable from his character. As Eric Gans argues, classical tragic hubris, which Shakespeare parodies in the character of Achilles, emerges as an effect of the reciprocal play between the collective interest vested in the hero by the audience (who centralizes him) and the hero's belief in his own right to dominate the centre of the socio-political scene (Gans 137-38).

In Byron's play—having taken on the form of Achilles and confident in the force of his deformity-inspired ambition for equality with mankind—Arnold, like Shakespeare's Achilles, imagines himself to be ineluctably destined for the prestige his new physical attributes seem to promise him. However, Caesar (formerly referred to as the Stranger) tempers Arnold's self-confidence by drawing him into conflicts—both in conversation and by having him enlist with the Duke of Bourbon in his conquest of Rome—thereby exposing the dependency of his status as a respected warrior upon the violent imitative desires driving Bourbon's army. The night before they begin the siege of Rome, Arnold laments the fraught circumstances that his relationship with Caesar has led him into. When Arnold despairs that his “path [to martial prestige] / Has been o'er carcasses” (1.2.2-3), Caesar reminds him that he is

a conqueror; the chosen knight

And free companion of the gallant Bourbon,

Late Constable of France; and now to be

Lord of the city which hath been Earth's lord.... (1.2.4-7)

Unmoved by the success that has drawn him to the pinnacle of earthly power (as it has come at the cost of violence and suffering) Arnold takes Caesar's partial revelations of the future as a

provocation, which causes him to assert that he would rather trust his own senses than rely any longer on the supernatural capacities of his companion:

ARNOLD. I'll trust them [my own eyes, instead].

CÆSAR. Do! They will deceive you sweetly,

And that is better than the bitter truth.

ARNOLD. Dog!

CÆSAR. Man!

ARNOLD. Devil!

CÆSAR. Your obedient humble servant.

ARNOLD. Say *Master* rather. Thou hast lured me on,

Through scenes of blood and lust, till I am here.

CÆSAR. And where wouldst *thou* be?

ARNOLD. Oh, at peace—in peace! (1.2.16-22)

In conflict with the agent who allowed him to exercise his ambition to emulate and strive with the rest of mankind, Arnold symbolically repudiates his desire though he cannot act to extract himself from the pact he has made with Caesar. In the context of their exchange of insults, Caesar's presentation of himself as Arnold's servant echoes the taunts of Thersites by exposing the root of Arnold's dissatisfaction with this situation, which does not arise as much from Caesar's supernatural intervention as it does from the imitative desire that moves Arnold to acquire his new status. By rousing and facilitating this desire, Caesar personifies the imitative drive, a symbolic valence which is underscored by the designation of "master" that Arnold assigns to Caesar. In this exchange, Caesar—whose Thersites-like taunting forces Arnold to respond in kind—represents the interindividual movement of desire animating Arnold's actions.

Thus, the play's allegorical manifestation of emulous desire operates by aligning itself with the valued aims of a great mob, or the army, whose seemingly magnetic power is amplified in proportion to its size. Within the thrall of mimeticism, Arnold encounters increasingly intense conflicts—which escalate as desire for the object is mirrored back and forth between combatants—while experiencing the adulation that arises from the collective favour of Bourbon's soldiers. Arnold's newfound martial fame among the soldiers is further mediated and amplified through the prestige of the Bourbon's interest in his skill as a warrior.

Repeating Founding Rivalry: Romulus and Remus

The conflicting imitative desire between Rome's founding rival twins constitutes a governing theme in Byron's play. On the eve of the French siege, a chorus of singing spirits, the Bourbon, and Caesar all reference the narrative of the rival brothers, Romulus and Remus, that frames the founding of Rome in Titus Livius's (Livy's) *History of Rome* (27 BCE). The story goes that the aristocratic twins set out to found a city, but—after receiving conflicting auguries regarding which of two hills the city to build on—Remus was killed when the argument between the two brothers' factions escalated into violence. Livy provides two accounts of how this occurred, the first of which states that Romulus, Remus, and their respective followers “engaged in a battle of words, and angry taunts leading to bloodshed, [after which] Remus was struck down in the affray” (1.7). However, Livy also notes that

[t]he commoner story is that Remus leaped over the new walls in mockery of his brother, whereupon Romulus in great anger slew him, and in menacing wise added these words withal, ‘So perish whoever else shall leap over my walls!’ Thus Romulus acquired sole power, and the city, thus founded, was called by its founder's name. (1.7)

That we will fight as well, and rule much better. (1.2.274-84)

Figuring the city as a placeholder-object in duels of a long succession of rival combatants, who all repeat Romulus's desires to dominate the citadel, the Bourbon resembles Shakespeare's Brutus reading the invitation of the conspirators to join them in mirroring past acts of violence in order to rule Rome. Recalling his family's role in ousting the tyrannical Tarquins, Brutus too appeals to history: "Shall Rome stand under one man's awe? What, Rome? / My ancestors did from the streets of Rome / The Tarquin drive, when he was call'd a king" (*Julius Caesar* 2.1.52-54). The chorus's invocation of the founding twins casts the chain of imitative aggression in even sharper relief by figuring it as an act of revenge:

Shade of Remus! 'Tis a time
 Awful as thy brother's crime!
 Christians war against Christ's shrine:—
 Must its lot be like to thine?

 Ah! behold yon bleeding Spectre!
 Ilion's children find no Hector;
 Priam's offspring loved their brother;
 Roma's great sire forgot his mother,
 When he slew his gallant twin,
 With inexpiable sin.
 See the giant Shadow stride
 O'er the ramparts high and wide!
 When the first o'erleapt thy wall,

Its foundation mourned his fall.

Now, though towering like a Babel,

Who to stop his steps are able?

Stalking o'er thy highest dome,

Remus claims his vengeance, Rome! (*The Deformed* 2.1.37-40, 71-84)

The chorus's chant mixes classical and Judeo-Christian references highlighting the broad historical aestheticization of mimetic rivalry, which Byron's play couches in romantic terms. The passage focuses on the ancient trope of fraternal rivalry and fratricide in phrases like "thy brother's crime" and "inexpiable sin," which resonates with the biblical rivalry Byron had reflected upon a year before while composing *Cain*. Byron transforms the classical into the neoclassical aesthetic (as defined by Gans in chapter 2 of this dissertation) by making the vanquished Remus the centre of the scene and setting him up to triumph over his erstwhile victorious brother. The chorus's romantic re-reading of the classical rivalry proceeds via an oblique early modern (or, in Gans's terms, neo-classical) reference to the "Shade of Remus" as "yon bleeding spectre," which recalls Macbeth's encounter with bloody apparitions and, also, the vengeful spectre of Hamlet's brother-murdered father.¹⁶

Byron's romantic re-staging of the duel repeats Remus's gestures by presenting Arnold and his supernatural animator, who are key figures in the Bourbon's army, as central agents of this long awaited act of violent mimetic reciprocity. From the bird's eye view provided by the chorus, the reader is instructed to see the shadow of Remus over-leaping the wall in the form of a

¹⁶ Seeing Banquo's ghost "[a]pproaching ... like the rugged Russian bear" at the dinner gathering of 3.4, Macbeth tells his wife: "It will have blood" (3.4.99, 121). Also, in describing his vision of the spectral bloody dagger, Macbeth imagines a personification of murder arising to walk with the slain Roman tyrant Tarquin, who takes "ravishing strides, towards his design," while moving "like a ghost" (2.1.55-56). Just as Macbeth notes the aggressive nature of Banquo's approach, Horatio remarks on the martial raiment and aggressive mien of Hamlet's ghost: "Such was the very armour he had on / When he the ambitious Norway combated; / So frown'd he once, when, in an angry parle, / He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice" (1.1.59-62).

horde of French troops led by Arnold-Achilles and Caesar-Thersites. Loudly proclaiming his loathing of his part in the violence that he undertakes, Arnold will unwillingly breach the walls of Rome and thereby present himself as intellectually and emotionally resistant to the cycle of vengeance in to which he is forced by Caesar: the manifestation of mimetic rivalry. Reflecting the romantic scene in Gans's aesthetic history, Arnold and his supernatural companion are divorced from both the classical scene, which would require them to un-reflectively engage in the mimetic agon, and the neo-classical (or early modern) scene, which would figure them as resentful observers of those who dominate the play's centre. Instead, Arnold—who is empowered by the Stranger's supernatural transposition of his abilities and appearance—participates in the mimetic struggle of the siege, while continuing to engage the rivalry that structures his relationship to Caesar. Although a great historical event provides the context, Arnold's exchanges with Caesar constitute the main action of the play, and the fall of Rome is often a mere subplot to their antagonistic dialogue.

Though Arnold resists the Mephistophelic figure of Caesar by rescuing and attempting to court the patriotic maiden Olympia, he is ultimately drawn back into rivalry with Caesar via his jealous craving for her affection. Arnold's struggle—combined with Caesar's appearance in Arnold's form—illustrates the internalization of mimetic reciprocity that has animated his character from the play's outset. Like Hamlet unsuccessfully resisting the vengeful spectre's imperative to kill Claudius, Arnold's complaints against the mimetic imperative to reciprocal violence—which he voices as he and Caesar move through the scenes of pillage after the city's fall—appear futile. However, for a time, Arnold is able to salvage a sense of freedom from mimetic violence by rescuing Olympia—who, threatened with rape by French soldiers on the high altar of St. Peter's, represents the embattled spiritual core of the city. After Arnold kills the

soldiers who menace her, Olimpia will not believe his promises of safe conduct and attempts to kill herself in order to avoid rape by her ostensible protector. However, she is revived by Caesar and carried to Arnold's tent. The water tinged with blood that Caesar combines with his magic to heal her recalls how he first appeared from the blood-tainted spring to transform Arnold before donning his discarded form (1.1.151-61). This detail suggests that Olimpia, like Arnold, is now within the Stranger's mimetic thrawl. The play broaches the possibility of open rivalry over Olimpia in the final exchanges of Part II as Arnold and Caesar carry Olimpia's unconscious body:

CÆSAR. [...]

I am almost enamoured of her, as

Of old the Angels of her earliest sex.

ARNOLD. Thou!

CÆSAR. I. But fear not. I'll not be your rival.

ARNOLD. Rival!

CÆSAR. I could be one right formidable;

But since I slew the seven husbands of

Tobias' future bride (and after all

Was smoked out by some incense) I have laid

Aside intrigue: 'tis rarely worth the trouble

Of gaining, or—what is more difficult—

Getting rid of your prize again; for there's

The rub! at least to mortals. (2.3.177-87)

Revealing elements of his demonic past, Caesar references his previous experiences in stirring up imitative desire, which E.H. Coleridge notes are recorded in the biblical book of Tobit 3:7-8, 8:2-3 (11.527). Having mirrored in his own desire Arnold's interest in Olimpia, Caesar launches a subtle, desire-provoking attack on his companion by diminishing the prize of the conquest he briefly contemplates, when he says "'tis rarely worth the trouble / Of gaining." This gesture is calculated to exacerbate the movement of desire joining Arnold, Caesar, and Olimpia together. As Arnold's model in intelligence and power, Caesar's ambivalence towards Olimpia serves to make both Caesar (as a mediator of desire) and Olimpia (as an object of desire) all the more fascinating to Arnold, who cannot help imitating both Caesar's interest in the woman and the demon's self-interested wish to avoid all entanglements with mere mortals. Further, Caesar's expressions of desire echo Hamlet's reflections upon the uncertainty of what may happen after death when he finds the most problematic part, or "rub," of winning an amorous conquest comes with how best to dispose of the lover once the chief object—the abstraction of victory in an emulous pursuit—has been achieved. Rewriting Hamlet's sentiments through Caesar's musings and partial quotation, Byron suggests the difficulty mortals have in discarding their longed for human objects, which implies that the value of these objects depends upon the rivalrous interests that are directed towards them. Caesar's provocation sets the stage for Part III, where the three live together in a romantic landscape isolated from the scenes of violence they have thus far participated in. This arrangement misleadingly seems to realize the romantic aesthetic, which, Gans argues, supposes itself completely removed from the central agon of the classical and neo-classical that Byron has been referencing in his extension of Shakespeare's characterization (Gans 162-63). Though the play remains unfinished, ending abruptly in Part III, the self-contained scene of fulfilled romantic desire that Arnold imagines for himself it already beginning

to collapse. It becomes apparent that Olimpia is unhappy in their union and is increasingly interested in the intellectual charms exhibited by Caesar. In the last part of the play, the Stranger continues to lead Arnold ever further into a rivalry haunted by the possibility of vengeful violence, which Byron likely would have (had he finished the play) modeled on that of Shakespeare's *Othello*.

Murderous Imaginings from *Othello*

In her reading of a memorandum Byron wrote for his play, Barton demonstrates how Byron appropriates the dynamics of Part III's murderously fated love triangle from *Othello*. Othello's tendency to imitate Iago by responding to, and imaginatively elaborating upon, his suggestions of Desdemona's infidelity with Cassio is the flaw that makes Shakespeare's Moor a tragic hero. Othello imagines himself as Cassio's rival, but this misperception derives from the reciprocity of imaginary production that characterizes Othello and Iago's relationship. In the play's first exchange between Iago and Rodrigo, the audience learns that Iago's motivation in making his misleading suggestion derives from his imitation of the desires of Othello, Cassio, and the people of Venice. All of Venice is interested in Othello, who defends their economic interests abroad. Othello prefers Cassio for the position of his lieutenant based on Cassio's merit as "a great arithmetician" (1.1.18), and—as Cassio occupies a position closest to the city's favourite—Iago imitates Venice's desire for proximity to Othello. The position of lieutenant itself is an object of rivalry between Othello and Iago, as Iago has expressed his interest in it (1.1.25-30), but Othello (with his power as the commander) elects to give it to another. Thus, his imitated desire thwarted, Iago plays upon Othello's suggestibility out of his resentment, which leads, ultimately, to Desdemona's murder and Othello's suicide. Reflecting on the section of *The Deformed* where Caesar reassures Arnold that he will not be his rival, Barton focuses on the

demonic figure's reference to Achilles's murderous love for Penthesilea, the Queen of the Amazons, suggesting that this allusion foreshadows the unwritten tragic conclusion of the play which was revealed in Byron's notes:

In the memorandum published in 1901, Byron made it clear that he meant Olimpia, after her marriage to Arnold, to be attracted to Caesar, despite his distorted appearance, 'owing to the power of intellect', and that Arnold was to become jealous of his own repudiated form. Byron's note to himself goes no further than this, but in the section which follows Arnold, already agonisingly aware that Olimpia, coldly dutiful and patient, 'endures my Love—not meets it' ... is being taunted in his misery by Caesar. Byron must have intended Arnold, in a jealous fury, to kill Olimpia and then follow this act of violence with another in which, by striking down his mocking doppelganger, he would in effect commit suicide, and be damned forever. (*Don Juan Transformed* 216)

In this analogy, the Stranger is Shakespeare's Iago, who is animated by thwarted mimetic desire to suggest an idea for Othello qua Arnold to imitate, an idea which will lead to Arnold and Olimpia's destruction. Barton bolsters her argument for *Othello*'s influence over Byron by observing that, in February 1822, Byron had played Iago in rehearsals of Shakespeare's play for a production that the Pisan circle was arranging. Further, in her examination of the original manuscript of the final section of *The Deformed*, Barton discovered that "Byron originally ... found himself allowing Arnold to respond to Caesar's accusation of jealousy at line 69 with Othello's disclaimer: 'Not a jot'" (217). However, "[h]e hastily crossed out Shakespeare's words, replacing them with the neutral 'And of whom?'" (217). Barton's characterization of the Stranger (who significantly wears his companion's discarded body) as Arnold's "mocking doppelganger" reflects how Byron adopts Shakespeare's representation of Othello and Iago's

shared interior life for the unfinished final section of his play, wherein the interindividual quality of desire finally precipitates the play's tragic conclusion. Noting other fragments of dialogue from *Othello* in Byron's final scene, Barton states "[n]ot only do they prefigure Olimpia's death but (dizzily yet appropriately in a play about doubles) they allow this Iago [the Stranger] to corrupt Othello [Arnold] with Othello's own words" (217).

Mimetic Desire and the Diabolical Double

By envisioning Arnold and the Stranger as doubles, whose desire reciprocally communicates itself via shared representation, Barton's reading suggests Byron's Iago-derived Stranger figures the violent, diabolical potential of mimetic desire. In this formulation, Arnold's decision to take another form is motivated by the desire to flee his deformity, a desire which he imitates from the social milieu of his family, who reject him because of his appearance. Jealous of the favour his brothers have in his mother's eyes, covetous of the physical advantages of the historical figures that pass before him, and ambitious to succeed to a universally valued position, Arnold—even without the appearance of the Stranger at the play's beginning—is subject to the action of interindividual desire, which, in the West, has long been understood in mythical terms as demonic or diabolical. In *The Puppet of Desire*, Jean-Michel Oughourlian analyzes a well documented early modern case of demonic possession in order to interpret the movement of interindividuality which animated the culturally instituted misperception of desire's behaviour and led to the period's notions of demonic possession. Drawing on a variety of historical accounts, including Michel de Certeau's *La Possession de Loudun*, Oughourlian relates the story of the apparent possession of Ursuline nuns in a Loudun convent in 1632. In his reading of the histories, Oughourlian concludes that the chronicled behaviours—which the prioress, Jeanne des Anges and her spiritual adviser interpreted as diabolical possession—were in fact a violent

psychological reaction to thwarted imitative desire that was communicated among the nuns via mimetic suggestion. The case began with Des Anges's ambition to secure a prestigious cleric, the visiting Urbain Grandier, as her convent's rector (Oughourlian 85). The history of the event indicates that Jeanne became intrigued by Grandier via the local excitement over his visit, and—becoming fixated on the possibility of establishing a relationship with him, a possibility which she communicated to the other nuns in the convent—she was devastated and humiliated when he declined her invitation: “Mother Jeanne des Anges's desire for Urbain Grandier was *purely mimetic*,” writes Oughourlian, “[t]he movement that bore her toward Grandier was copied from ... the surrounding culture, or if you prefer, fashion” (85). Jeanne's fixation on Grandier did not subside. He appeared to her in dreams in which—she claimed during interviews with her confessor—she “was tormented by Grandier and incited by him to evil” (87). “[T]o credit the problem to diabolic possession was,” Oughourlian observes, “to cast Grandier as a sorcerer, to accuse him of making pacts with the Devil, and to condemn him to death” (87). After standing trial for the accusations levelled against him by Jeanne, Grandier was burned at the stake for being in league with the Devil, a personage who—Oughourlian maintains—is a culturally constructed mythologization of the interindividual phenomenon of desire.

Understanding representations of the demonic as an interpretation of the effects of desire illuminates both the early modern references that Byron's play extends, as it draws on both Shakespeare's mimetic antagonists and Goethe's dramatization of the relationship of Doctor Faust and Mephistopheles. The influence of Goethe's *Faust* on Byron's *The Deformed* is well known (Cochran 2-3). In Goethe, the demon offers the doctor a panorama of objects highly valued by the culture he inhabits, the acquisition of which would allow Faust to occupy a position of power over his ostensible rivals. Thus, Mephistopheles's conjuring of various

positions and powers for Faust's aggrandizement serves the desire for prestige he has imitated from his community. The multitude of possible desires reflects the multiplicity of potential rivalries available to any particular subject who is surrounded by models of desire. The same principle is illustrated in de Certeau's account of the exorcism of Jeanne, where he notes the variety of different demons that the exorcist supposed to have inhabited the prioress based on her various behaviours: "she specified ... through her contortions and successive masks, the leitmotifs and personal 'style' of each of them [the demons] (such as, blasphemy, obscenity, or mocking laughter). In this way one could spy out, through the expression or words of the nun, their different 'entries' onto the stage" (Certeau qtd. in Oughourlian 90). Glossing Certeau's account, Oughourlian observes that

[e]ach of these masks, each of these names, each devil clearly represents a sin or a vice: envy, jealousy, luxury, wrath, pride, and so on. Each demon personifies an avatar of mimetic desire. Their number is equal to the number of forms of rivalrous mimesis; there are as many of them as there are types of rival-model and model-obstacle. That is, they are innumerable. (90)

The psychological disturbances that Jeanne and the other Ursulines experience are (in the theological assessment they precipitate) assigned a spiritual cause, for which the rendering of mimetic desire proffered by literature—and particularly drama—provides a more satisfactory explanation. To assist his analysis of the case, Oughourlian appeals to dramatic literature by making comparisons between the imitated desire represented in Racine's *Pyrrhus* and the memory of Hector for the love of Andromache in *Andromaque* (Oughourlian 86). In the same way, Byron's play sheds light on the movement of circulating interindividual desire that resembles demonic possession. Like Jeanne, who imitates the desire of Loudon for Grandier, Byron's

Arnold—similarly to Faust—imitates the desires of his culture, as it is mediated through a demonic figure, who—within the symbolism of the play—embodies the mimetic impulse to be the physical equal of his brothers.

Diabolical Precedents in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*

Shakespeare provides a version of the embodiment of mimetic desire in the figure of *Hamlet's* Ghost, whose opaque supernatural origins cause the palace guard, Horatio, and Hamlet such trepidation. Coming from the liminal space of purgatory, the ambiguous spiritual status of the Ghost—taken with the disastrously violent outcome of Hamlet's engagement in the reciprocity of revenge undertaken on its behalf—seems to align its spectral intervention with that of demonic forces. However, as Stephen Greenblatt notes in *Hamlet in Purgatory*, “[n]one of Shakespeare's ghosts (or even the illusions of ghosts) is a demon, disguised as the wandering soul of the departed,” but “[t]he ghost ... as the shadowy embodiment of deep psychic disturbance” is one of “the principle ways that Shakespeare brought the dead onto the stage” (195). Still, when Hamlet decides to accede to the Ghost's request for a private interview, Horatio's uncertainty regarding the apparition's spiritual provenance appears in his concern for his friend's well being:

What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
That beetles o'er his base into the sea,
And there assume some other horrible form,
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason
And draw you into madness? Think of it. (1.4.50-55)

Horatio's suspicions about the possible diabolical intention of the spirit to tempt Hamlet are mostly allayed over the course of Hamlet's dialogue with it, which reveals its human interest in exacting revenge for the wrongs done it—as Claudius's asides later verify—within the course of its lifetime. Horatio's fear of self-destructive madness resulting from Hamlet's engagement with the spectre adds to its association with reciprocal violence. Combined with its vengeful injunctions, the monstrous shape is a metaphor for the monstrous force of unrestrained reciprocal violence. The threat that Hamlet may lose his balance on the edge of a sea-bordered cliff and fall to his death figures the dangers inherent to his rivalrous relationship with Claudius. In his emulous desire to dominate Claudius in order to revenge his father, Hamlet is caught in the vertiginous reciprocal play of vengeance that will ultimately lead to his psychic and material disintegration. The Ghost (as the soul of a human being) is not Marlowe's Mephistopheles or Byron's Stranger. However, in its transmission of desire for revenge to Hamlet, it embodies the imitative impulse that leads to escalating and, ultimately, destructive rivalry. In this way, the Ghost is similar to *Doctor Faustus's* and *The Deformed's* demons, which—to the detriment of their play's protagonists—also embody the culturally ubiquitous desire for power and prestige.

The Witches of *Macbeth*, a troop of similarly spectral, inciting figures, represent another Shakespearean precedent for Byron's rendering of a diabolical source for mimetically-motivated, murderous ambition. The Witches' and Hecate's ambiguous prophecy prompts the Thane of Cawdor to usurp Scotland's throne and all the prestige the position entails. Shakespeare's representation of Macbeth's ambition is ultimately another example of mimetic desire prompting a tragic hero to action, a desire which is irreducible to an essentialized, autonomous impulse towards self-aggrandizement. In his discussion of Michael Bristol's "vernacular criticism," which analyses texts by focusing on transhistorical moral sensibilities, Richard van Oort recounts

Bristol's assessment of Macbeth's decision to kill Duncan. According to van Oort, "[i]t is not enough to say that Macbeth is ambitious because Macbeth himself has argued clearly and insightfully against his own ambition" (8). Thus, as Bristol observes, Macbeth's "assent in doing exactly what he has decided not to do is an instance of incontinence or *akrasia*, acting in contradiction of his own lucid sense of what it would be best for him to do" (Bristol 644). Bristol's designation of Macbeth's violence as "incontinence" indicates that Macbeth does not consider his efforts to secure the throne as arising spontaneously from within his own person. He has, as van Oort points out, deceived himself regarding the desire that drives him to act (8). Instead, within the play, the supernatural figures function as allegorical representations of the imitative—that is interindividual or social—desires that move Macbeth to act against his scruples and kill the king. In his reading of the play, Girard notes that the intrusion of the spirit world into Shakespeare's plays often signals a transition from relatively peaceful forms of mimetic desire to monstrous rivalry and mimetic violence.¹⁷ Girard defines the mimetic crisis as the frenzy of imitative rivalry that brings subjects into conflict and tends towards an act of surrogate victimage, which would restore order by re-establishing the hierarchical differences that social order depends upon (*Violence and the Sacred* 65-66).

The Witches' appearance at the aftermath of a struggle between rivalrously doubled armies at Forres, combined with their own account of their activities, confirm Girard's assertion regarding the role of the supernatural in *Macbeth* as an allegorical rendering of mimetic desire; early modern interest in those who claim supernatural powers to manipulate others' desires verify the self-characterizations that associate the Witches with the play of mimetic desire. When questioned by one of her sisters on her whereabouts prior to her appearance at the battlefield, the

¹⁷ In *A Theatre of Envy*, Girard explains: "Supernatural apparitions in the tragedies are assimilated to monsters; ...they are all rooted in the context of the mimetic crisis and the hallucinations that go with it. This is true of ... the Weird Sisters and other apparitions in *Macbeth*" (70).

first weird sister relates her thwarted desire to appropriate the objects of a sailor's wife she has recently happened upon:

A sailor's wife had chestnuts in her lap,
 And munch'd, and munch'd, and munch'd:—
 'Give me,' quoth I:
 'Aroint thee, witch!' the rump-fed ronyon cries.
 Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o' the Tiger:
 But in a sieve I'll thither sail,
 And, like a rat without a tail,
 I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do. (1.3.3-9)

The desire that she imitates from the sailor's wife frustrated, and her resentment piqued, the first sister promises to seek out and vengefully seduce the husband of the woman who refused her the chestnuts. In the subsequent lines her fellow witches promise to help her. The first weird sister's lascivious intention appears in the words "I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do," which William C. Carroll glosses as "[s]uggestive of the witches' ... sexual insatiability. Witches were thought to seduce men sexually" (28). Frustrated in her attempt to appropriate the sailor's wife's immediate, trivial objects (the chestnuts), desire leads the witch to fixate upon her rival's sexual and economic object with the intention—we learn in the following lines—of preventing him from ever returning to his wife. Thus, in this excerpt, which appears early in the play, when the character of the witches is still being established, the interdividuality of sexual desire and the mimetically reciprocal logic of vengeance are intimately linked to the semi-supernatural beings who mediate Macbeth's desire for the crown.

As Carroll's note suggests, the association of witches with the production of jealousy and envy—as species of desire that ultimately leads to violence—was part of a broad set of cultural assumptions at the time of *Macbeth*'s composition. The literal belief in—rather than the allegorical representation of—witches as inciters of inimical desire had, in the late medieval and early modern period, lead to the very acts of surrogate victimage that Girard interprets in his examinations of the phenomenon of imitative desire. Reginald Scot's *The Discovery of Witchcraft*, written twenty-seven years prior to *Macbeth*'s first performance, presented a critique of the belief in witches and “offers an example of classic scapegoating ... which contemporary theorists might find exactly congruent with modern sociological explanations of the witchcraft phenomenon” (Carroll, “Witchcraft and Prophecy” 302). The occasion for the instances of scapegoating produced by the accusation of witchcraft came about due to interpersonal conflicts, where resentments arose due to the thwarting of the supposed witch's desire. As Keith Thomas explains in *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, typically those who had imagined themselves to have suffered from an act of witchcraft and subsequently levelled an accusation against some member of their community

had been guilty of a breach of charity or neighbourliness, by turning away an old woman who had come to the door to beg or borrow some food or drink, or the loan of some household utensil.... The overwhelming majority of fully documented witch cases fall into this simple pattern. The witch is sent away empty-handed, perhaps mumbling a malediction, and in due course something goes wrong with the household, for which she is immediately held responsible. (553-54)

Focusing on the old woman's frustrated desire for the other's object, the pattern described here illustrates how the structure of imitative desire gives rise to the resentment supposedly

motivating the accused's supernatural act of revenge, which the "victims" superstitiously discover in their (in fact, unrelated) misfortune. Thomas's description of the typical structure of accusation, along with the insights and assumptions made by those involved, mirrors the account the first weird sister gives of herself in *Macbeth*. Thus, the perception of desire and resentment bound-up with the early modern belief in witches and witchcraft informs Shakespeare's construction of Macbeth's tragic flaw, as it arises from the cultural mediation of desire (as performed by the weird sisters) for the position held by the Scottish monarch.

Arguing that traditional societies have long interpreted the phenomena of interindividual desire in terms of supernatural, or mystical, theories of influence, Oughourlian cites Michel Foucault's discussion of "The Four Similitudes"—or the reciprocal influence of bodies observed by traditional societies in terms of *convenientia* (the adjacency of bodies or places), *aemulatio* (emulation), *analogy*, and *sympathy*—as evidence of the transcultural preoccupation with imitative relationships, which are immediately observable in the uncanny impact of one individual's desires on another (Oughourlian 40-42). Illustrating the historical force of these observations of sympathetic relations in a section titled "Magical Culture: The Discourse of Sorcery," Oughourlian explores how these pre-modern beliefs in the capacity of one social body to affect another sustained the widely held belief that a subject may intentionally direct the desires of others through magical means (49-50). This belief in a certain individual's ability to control sympathy for his or her own benefit became the basis for the accusations of witchcraft and association with the demonic, which Girard has explored in terms of desire in *The Scapegoat*.

In his study of the phenomena of the scapegoat mechanism (as it acts as a social adaptation for releasing the violent tensions of a group's mimetic rivalries), Girard demonstrates

how, within the Western tradition, cultures—as a means of designating and proscribing the sometimes socially deleterious effects of highly imitative behaviours—align (via myth, ritual, and prohibition) imitative desire with the diabolical. Analyzing the multiple references to demons that appear in the Gospels, Girard notes that “[f]ar from destroying magic superstitions and vulgar forms of religious beliefs the Gospels seem to reintroduce this type of belief in a particularly pernicious form. The witch-hunters of the late Middle Ages ... based the justification for their activities on the demonology and satanism of the Gospels” (*The Scapegoat* 167). Girard goes on to show that these early Christian accounts do not set out to reinforce superstitions, but instead lay the basis for an anthropological explanation for the figure of the demon and the possessed. In a reading that focuses on the story of the Demons of Gerasa (Mark 5:1-17), Girard demonstrates that the story’s depiction of a possessed man metaphorically represents the effect of mimetic reciprocity between the man and his community. Drawing on Jean Starobinski’s study of the demoniac autolapidation (or self-stoning), Girard hypothesizes that—as a member of a society which “inflict[s] [stoning] on criminals whom they consider completely defiled and irredeemable”—the possessed was “the object of real threats,” and, in fact, “may have survived an aborted attempt at stoning ... or is [experiencing in the narrative] ... a purely imaginary fear” of stoning by his community (170). In this reading, the man’s self-harming behaviour is a mimetic attempt to wrest control of his destiny from the collective other by pre-emptively inflicting their violence upon himself. This gesture sets up a circular reciprocity with the community who restrain the man with chains, which he in turn breaks before returning to the local necropolis where he again cuts himself with stones:

The possessed does violence to himself as a reproach to the Gerasenes for their violence.

The Gerasenes return his reproach with a violence that reinforces his own and somehow

verifies the accusation and counteraccusations that circulate endlessly within the system. The possessed imitates these Gerasenes who stone their victims, but the Gerasenes in return imitate the possessed. A mirror relationship of doubles links the persecutors who are persecuted and the persecuted who persecutes. This is an example of the reciprocal relationship of mimetic rivalry. (171)

Girard's analysis of the demonic indicates that one of Europe's most crucial texts—a text which directly informs the figure of the demon as it appears in the imagination of the demonologists writing in Shakespeare's time—represents the diabolical as the cultural manifestation of a shared awareness of the mimetic reciprocity of desire. Shakespeare's rendering of the diabolical impetus for Macbeth's emulous violence—which Byron's double characters, Arnold and the Stranger, repeat and adapt—locates the demonic as the site of a society's collective effort to comprehend the seemingly supernatural quality of interindividual desire and its capacity to generate social discord and violence.

In *The Deformed*, Byron's idea of the demon as a mimetic double—which represents the interindividual nature of desire with its capacity to create resentment—appears most starkly in the fragment that makes up Part III. Early in the fragment, Byron includes a memorandum on the jealous nature of the relationship between Arnold and Caesar. The memorandum reads: “Jealous—Arnold of Caesar Olympia at first not liking Caesar—thus Arnold jealous of himself under his former figure, owing to the Power of Intellect &c. &c. &c.” (Part III, Text of Fragment, 16-18). The phenomenon of jealousy as an interior experience instigated by external mimetic relations is a highly Shakespearean feature of Arnold's character, who like the characters in *Hamlet* confront an apparition of desire (a vengeful ghost) stirred up by their country's internal and external rivalries. Hamlet's soliloquies reflect at length on the significance

of this spectre in the shaping of his own desires. In Byron's *Cain*, which presents the Genesis account of Cain's murderous envy as the result of a dialogue between Cain and Lucifer, the diabolical appears as a force approaching its subjects from without, but—in the final section of *The Deformed*—Byron situates the demonic impetus to envy within his tragic hero's own body. The interiority implied by the literalization of a self-reflexive dialogue occurring between Arnold and his deformed body aligns it with the imaginative interiorized speech of Shakespearean soliloquy more than the discourse between the supernatural agents in Marlow's *Doctor Faustus* or Goethe's *Faust*. Though in his taunting repartee *Cain*'s Lucifer bears a resemblance to Caesar and, therefore, Mephistopheles (651), the completed *Cain* contains half as many references to Shakespeare's plays and poems as does the manuscript of the unfinished *Deformed*.¹⁸ This difference is to be expected since, as McGann notes, the "chief sources for the events of *Cain* were ... the Book of Genesis and *Paradise Lost*" (*Complete Poetical Works* 6:649). As Iago and Othello's shared imaginings of a non-existent rivalry presages Leontes's seemingly autonomous fall into jealousy in *The Winter's Tale*, *Cain*'s Biblical and Miltonic Lucifer prefigures Byron's Stranger, who is a shadow of the protagonist and inhabits the protagonist's skin. Just before effecting the transformation, the Stranger explains: "I will be as you were, and you shall see / Yourself for ever by you, as your shadow" (1.1.444--45). The dialogue between Arnold and Caesar may thereby be read as an extended soliloquy, wherein the protagonist wrestles with the way his imagination makes his desire seem to originate from within himself.

Accompanied by a shadow of himself, Arnold becomes his own interlocutor. It is his own imagination's mimetic responses to social relations which spurs his desire and ultimately his resentment. The structure of Arnold's interior scene of desire appears in dialogue with the

¹⁸ McGann notes six direct references to Shakespeare's works in the completed *Cain* and sixteen direct references in incomplete *Deformed* (*Complete Poetical Works* 6:649-64, 726-48).

personification of imitative desire, who both manifests and explains what he represents. In this way, Arnold's demon companion resembles the various foils of protagonists in Shakespeare's plays, who embody aspects of the hero's inner life that correspond to their *hamartia*. Othello's latent jealousy appears embodied in Iago, as Hamlet's passion for Ophelia and desire for revenge appear in Laertes and Fortinbras. Thus, Byron's adaptation of *Faust* takes up—as Goethe does—Shakespeare's use of foil characters to manifest psychic elements of the protagonist. In the plays of Shakespeare, Goethe, and Byron, doubles imitatively strive with one another to dominate the stage. However, Byron takes Shakespeare's and Goethe's structure of doubling a step further by having the source of the protagonist's resentment of the socius (that is, his deformed body) accompany him in his pursuit of acceptance and prestige. Because of this plot point, Arnold never escapes the traumatic difference that casts in relief the contingency of his resentful desire on the desire of the social other for power and prestige.

When, in the final fragment of the play, Caesar draws from Arnold the source of his discontent, which he identifies as Olimpia's cold ingratitude towards him despite Arnold having assisted in saving her life, the demon takes up the metaphor of the sun as an exemplar of the universal nature of the desire prompting both Arnold's passionate love and—due to the illusions of his autonomy—his jealous resentment. First, Caesar states that Arnold's desire is to be “*Self-loved*” or “loved for *yourself*.” Then, Caesar—echoing Iago—suggests that Arnold's desire depends on the jealousy he feels towards his own image, which Caesar adopts by virtue of the interindividual phenomenon of desire:

ARNOLD. Ah! could I be beloved—

 Would I ask wherefore? —

CÆSAR. . Yes! and not believe

providing him with tantalizingly partial explanations for his enduring experience of unsatisfied longing, or resentment. Manifesting his reticence to admitting the non-autonomous quality of the desire that animates him, Arnold continues in contentious dialogue with Caesar, who recognizes the contingency of Arnold's ostensibly individual desires on others' desire. Arnold's response to Caesar's figure of the relation of the sun to the earth feebly objects to the doppelganger's interindividual characterization of desire by introducing the possibility of real rivalry between two, materially separate individuals:

ARNOLD. Not so always—

 There is a cause at times.—

CÆSAR. Oh, yes—when atoms jostle—

 The System is in peril—but I speak

 Of things you know not.... (Part III, Text of Fragment, 83-85)

Caesar is prepared for Arnold's suggestion of causes and suggestively parries Arnold's attempted refutation by indicating that planets—or social bodies in orbit around the unifying space of desire (the sun)—may contend with each other, or “jostle,” for precedence. As usual, Caesar does not feel the need to elaborate, but reminds Arnold of his limited understanding of desire before baiting him with the inaccessibility of the model-object who currently most strongly mediates Arnold's attention: “This precious thing of dust—this bright Olimpia— / This Marvellous Virgin—is a marble matron— / An Idol” (86-88). Caesar's characterization of Olimpia, whom Arnold has taken as spoil—wresting her away from multiple would-be rapists—during his victory in Rome, highlights how persons, as well as objects, are fetishized through the multiple mediations of desire. Responding to Arnold's epithet “Slave!,” which comes in response to his description of Olimpia as an idol, Caesar continues to taunt Arnold for his helplessness before

the forces of desire, which Caesar himself represents and which drive Arnold's longing and resentment: "In the Victor's Chariot—when Rome triumphed— / There was a Slave of yore—to tell him truth— / You are a Conqueror—command your Slave" (90-92). This piece of historical information would be a useful clue to Arnold regarding the nature of desire only if he knew what truth the ancient Roman slave would speak to the conqueror and only if the demon had enjoined Arnold to heed the slave's words, which consisted of reminding the triumphant warrior that—though he currently seemed godlike and immortal—he in fact was (like the throngs of soldiers and citizens who have made his fame possible) subject to death (Beard 272–5). Like all mortals, Arnold is subject to the influence of the desires of others and, as a conqueror of Rome and saviour-captor of Olimpia, his success is contingent upon the desire of those who followed him into Rome after the Bourbon fell.

Though his apparently godlike being depends upon the desire of others (a fact that is made painfully obvious to the audience via Caesar's taunts and insinuations) the play's final fragment ends with Arnold prosecuting his obsession with Olimpia, who—with her self-sufficient indifference to her suitor's attention—displays a key characteristic of the Byronic hero. "Teach me the way to win this woman's love—" pleads the needy, un-Byronic Arnold (Part III, Text of Fragment, 93). "Leave her," responds the self-aware avatar of mimetic desire (94), who perceives that Olimpia's Promethean austerity is itself a strategy of desire that renders her supremely fascinating. Arnold cannot hear the wisdom in the taunts of the demon driving his amorous ambition, who, in mock frustration, asks in the penultimate line of the fragment: "You have possessed the woman—still possess— / What need you more?" (98-99). Arnold's answer betrays the tragic hopelessness of his misunderstanding, while still suggesting some latent knowledge of his current situation as the thrall of the spirit that wears his form: "To be myself

possessed— / to be her heart as she is mine” (100-1). Irrevocably possessed, animated, and tormented by interdividual desire, Byron’s protagonist’s incomplete tragedy consists of his inability to comprehend the flows of desire that move him. If the play had been completed, these flows of desire would continue to manifest in his doppelganger’s cryptic provocations, leading eventually to Arnold’s self-destruction.

Conclusion

Byron’s demonic figure transforms Arnold’s life into a performance of imitated desire’s capacity to elevate and destroy the subject who mistakes him or herself for an utterly autonomous agent. In this sense, the Stranger is—like Byron himself—a creative expositor of desire’s nature. As a play that derives many of its elements from the works of others, *The Deformed* is a textual analogy for Byron’s acceptance of the fluidity of influence. Goethe, Pickersgill, and Shakespeare are obvious influences. However, the appearance of Arnold as a disfigured outsider, who cuts wood at the beginning of the play, bears a striking resemblance to Frankenstein’s monster—a figure who emerged through a competitive story writing experiment that involved Byron and the Shelleys. As Peter Cochran notes, Mary Shelley, who transcribed *The Deformed* into fair copy for Byron, was exceedingly fond of the play (1), and it is unlikely that she did not see the influence of her 1818 character working upon Byron’s Arnold. It is also unlikely that Byron did not anticipate her apprehension of the derivative quality of his work. All this to say, when he was writing *The Deformed*, which he did alongside the far more eclectic *Don Juan*, Byron was unselfconsciously open to the aesthetic manifestations of others’ creative desires. This openness during the composition of the play is perhaps most evident in the fact that he was not fully aware of it, which led to a certain amount of embarrassment when—sharing some of his drafts with a few members of the Pisan circle—Shelley pointed out that he had

cribbed a few lines directly from a poem by his rival Southey. Byron immediately dropped the offending lines into the fire (Cochran 6). Thus, in *The Deformed*, having distanced himself from the faulty notion that his desires existed beyond the influence of others, Byron's developing ability to accept and play upon his interdividuality still had its limits.

Caesar's embodiment of a more Shakespearean self-reflexivity than that which appears in the earlier *Cain* makes *The Deformed* an important transition from Byron's representation of desire's social contagion (as it appears in Byron's earlier tormented heroes: Childe Harold, Manfred, and Cain) to the confident, knowing discussions of desire carried on by *Don Juan*'s whimsical and self-mocking narrator, who takes the movements of interdividual desire as a matter of course. Discussing how the Stranger's relationship to Arnold resembles that between *Don Juan*'s narrator and Juan, Barton remarks on the scope of the Stranger and narrator's worldly experience: "The same mythical and historical territory over which, in *Don Juan*, the mind of the narrator ceaselessly ranges, the Stranger has actually traversed" ("*Don Juan Transformed*" 215-16). The knowledge displayed in *Don Juan*'s narrator and *The Deformed*'s rendition of *Faust*'s Mephistopheles is a corollary of the restless mimetic desire afflicting the naive characters they attend. The incomplete, Shakespeare-indebted *Deformed*—which was drafted while Byron was beginning work on Canto VI of *Don Juan* (208)—shows Byron reframing his poetic voice in terms that embrace the multiplication of appropriations, echoes, and derivations the narrator of *Don Juan*'s later cantos will revel in. By splitting his central character into a naive desiring subject and a worldly instigating critic of desire, Byron echoes the inciting Lucifer of *Cain*, while grounding desire in his protagonist's real-world body and relationships. Repeating *The Deformed*'s concretization of the worldly reality of desire's movements in *Don Juan*'s socially and historically bounded settings, Byron's narrator recognizes imitative desire as

an inescapable element of the human condition, which may be both enjoyed and mocked for the folly it precipitates.

The voice of the Goethean Stranger in *The Deformed* echoes that of the narrator in *Don Juan*. “For my part,” says the narrator early in Canto XIII, “I am but a mere spectator, / And gaze where’ere the palace or the hovel is, / Much in the mode of Goethe’s Mephistopheles” (13.7). If the Stranger does, as I have argued, constitute a personification of interindividual desire, Byron’s conception of the poet-narrator, which he refines in *Don Juan*, is as a self-conscious imitator. This narrator strives to serve the reader by making himself a conduit for multifarious desires with as little resistance as possible. Imitating yet another voice in his reflections on Juan’s predicament, *Don Juan*’s narrator asserts the ineluctable nature of the desire that leads to human vice and malfeasance:

If I sneer sometimes,
 It is because I cannot well do less,
 And now and then it also suits my rhymes.
 I should be very willing to redress
 Men’s wrongs, and rather check than punish crimes,
 Had not Cervantes in that too true tale
 Of Quixote, shown how all such efforts fail. (13.8)

The eclectic and vast scope of *Don Juan*, which appropriates and adapts a great deal of Shakespeare’s own reflections upon desire, further confirms that Byron’s last long poem expanded upon the great playwright’s understanding of mimesis in a polyphonically derivative textual exemplum of the phenomenon that had—within the context of the emerging modern literary market—buoyed his and Shakespeare’s rise to fame.

Chapter Six:

Don Juan: Rivaling Shakespeare's Mimetic Theory

In *Don Juan*, Byron presents himself as he is: a celebrity who once galvanized the literary market's attention via his poetic self-representations but who ultimately recognizes the contingency of fame on the ephemeral phenomenon of mass mimetic contagion. Throughout the poem, Byron contrasts his position and voice with those of Shakespeare. At times he treats Shakespeare as an authority, but a sardonic challenge to the older poet's privileged status is never wholly absent from Byron's most ambitious work. Though the seventeen canto poem distils many of the insights into human behaviour Byron had collected over the course of his career, these insights often appear in glosses and digressions that bear on the imitative nature of the desire driving Juan through the events of the poem. In elaborating these insights, he occasionally makes direct reference to Shakespeare and frequently cites his plays. As already noted, for Jonathan Bate and Anne Barton, Byron's famous indifference to Shakespeare is a pose. This posture constitutes a challenge to the jingoistic nationalism animating the popular interest Britons took in Shakespeare during the early nineteenth-century. However, Byron's ostensible lack of interest in Shakespeare served his ambition to maintain a celebrity status, as he used his verse to figure a fascinating virtual mimetic antagonism between himself and the Bard.

Accordingly, Byron's references to Shakespeare throughout *Don Juan* reflect an ambivalence towards the great playwright, which is manifest in the younger poet's alternation between approbative borrowing of Shakespeare's insights into desire and the irreverently dismissive tone of many of his allusions to the older poet. Byron's references to Shakespeare are often part of explorations of the phenomena of celebrity and fame, as these depend on social prestige in a martial, political, or literary realm. In these discussions, Byron often extends

Shakespeare's observations on the contagious nature of collective desire. *Don Juan* references Shakespeare in its critique and interpretation of the status European society afforded to figures such as the Duke of Wellington, Catherine the Great, and Walter Scott, while illuminating the way that the interest that elevated these individuals moves from subject to subject through imitation. In his references to *Hamlet*, a play which is important throughout *Don Juan*, Byron foregrounds the question of material and social being in terms of a totalizing conception that includes the socio-cultural fact of desire and challengingly contrasts his formulation with the dualism of Hamlet's "to be or not to be." Byron's engagement with Shakespeare on Hamlet's question is framed in terms of the enduring existence afforded by fame, which Byron claims to reject, while also rejecting the dichotomy of life and death upon which Hamlet muses. Byron's speculative and universalizing vision resonates with the unified conception of desire's fluid "interindividual" quality. Despite what this chapter will argue is Byron's abstract formulation of a non-conflictual, unified life and death, rivalrous tensions between *Don Juan*'s more concrete social subjects abound. Mimetic rivalry often leads to violent conflict in the poem, but, in its English cantos, resentment generated by imitative desire drives conflict in Juan's amorous relationships and directly involves Shakespeare, as he is personified in Aurora Raby. The allure with which Byron vests Aurora-cum-Shakespeare resembles that which characterizes the Byronic heroes of his earlier works. Further, the rivalry prefigured between Aurora and Adeline Amundeville for Juan's affections sheds light both on how Byron reads Shakespeare on desire and how he understands desire's role in the emergence of literary celebrity. Ultimately, in its nine explicit allusions to Shakespeare, *Don Juan* links its reflections on desire to musings on the nature of fame; Byron elaborates his understanding of Shakespeare's depictions of desire—

particularly as they pertain to literary celebrity—through the adaptations of, and oblique attacks on, the playwright in this last, highly personal poem.¹⁹

Byron's familiarity with Shakespeare's renderings of desire appears in his account of Juan's experience of the slave market at Constantinople in canto four, which reflects an ironic treatment of the subject that closely resembles Shakespeare's own description of desire and particularly that given in his last real tragedy *Coriolanus*. Confronted with the paltry quality of desire's outcomes manifest in Constantinople's dark market realities as they compare to the apotheosis of Juan and Haidee's fulfilled desire in the previous canto, the reader of *Don Juan* watches as "Byronic desire retreats into the austere invulnerability of death and elegy" (Dennis 154). Having renounced all longing that does not reflect the purity of Juan and Haidee's exclusive, reciprocal experience of desire, the Byronic speaker relates the tasteless, optimistic jokes made by Raucocanti, Johnson, and Baba about the recirculation of desire in the value assigned to the market's human wares and the money that purchases them (154). Reflecting on Byron's self-conscious irony in this treatment of desire, Ian Dennis assesses Byron's representation of desire as it manifests in Juan's attitude towards the Constantinople slave market:

Desire has died, for *us* [those who adopt the attitude of the Byronic hero by sympathizing with Byron's characters]. We know that optimism about the operation of the market is unacceptable and that it is tasteless to make jokes about slavery.... We know this, Byron knows we know this, Byron must also know this. His irony here must be recirculating such knowledge in ways that enable us all to agree and to enjoy agreeing. Together, from

¹⁹ Noting that Byron began writing *Don Juan* at the same time he began writing his *Memoirs*, Jerome McGann asserts that "an important fact about the poem ... [is] that the basis of its political and literary attack was deeply personal" (*Complete Poetical Works* 5:668).

within the fastness of loss, we mock at desire, at its smallness. We mock at the indestructibly vulgar thing that keeps the market humming along. (155)

Byron's invitation to ironically mock the inescapability of desire extends Shakespeare's insight into the ubiquity of desire portrayed in *Coriolanus*—a play with which (as we have seen in the youthful Byron's correspondence) he was extremely familiar. Coriolanus strives to transcend the reciprocity of desire between the plebeians of Rome and the patricians. Unable to master his desire to dominate Rome without making a show of his wish to please the people, Coriolanus—in his petulant renunciation of the city and its inter-class politics—displays his warrior-ruler identity's contingency upon the desire of his political rivals among the common people, whose provocations he cannot leave un-reciprocated. Unable to hide and disgusted with the mimetic reciprocity that binds him to the mob of Rome, Coriolanus refuses to participate in the public scene of reciprocal representation that would allow him, by the plebeians' assent, to occupy the society's centre. As Richard van Oort explains in his reading of the play's tragic conclusion:

Coriolanus is sacrificed for this act of resentment [that is his refusal]. By taunting the plebes in the scene of his own centralization, he paradoxically invites his expulsion from the adulated center to the ignominious periphery. In this gesture, one senses a romantic desire to be free of the center altogether in order to find the peace of the solitary wanderer far from the demands of the public realm. But in tragedy this private desire never achieves the romantic resolution in which the individual triumphs over the tyranny of society. (para. 3)

Thus, Coriolanus's tragic flaw manifests in his blindness to his own subjection to desire, a blindness which—at certain moments—slips into a comic mode and verges on an ironic caricature of the convention of the hubristic tragic hero. “Coriolanus's perverse refusal to

participate in any scene in which his significance must be designated beforehand borders on the ridiculous,” writes van Oort (para. 18). “Such eccentric behavior,” he goes on to observe, “seems more appropriate to the comic figure than to the tragic hero (one thinks of Moliere’s misanthrope)” (para. 18). Shakespeare’s comic rendering of Coriolanus’s naive thralldom to desire is echoed and ironically extended in Byron’s depiction of Juan’s desire, which would like to imagine itself free of its own contingency upon the vulgar imitation animating the brutal realities of the Constantinople slave market. Extending Coriolanus’s eccentric refusal to participate in his rendering of Juan’s reaction to the crass jokes about the slave market, Byron elaborates upon Shakespeare’s proto-romantic Coriolanus by arranging a circumstance in which the audience clearly apprehends the subject’s powerlessness before the forces of desire. As slaves, the joker “Raucocanti and Juan will be on the same block, and readers sense perfectly well that Juan ... will not finally be equal to his Byronic calling,” which was briefly manifest in the utopic reciprocity of mutual desire he experienced with Haidee (Dennis 154). Juan “is too small for the dimensions of his experience. [...] He may not sell out” in the vulgar market of desire he is forced to engage, “but he will *be* sold out” (154).

Byron’s ironic treatment of the ugliest corners of modern market society addresses the unwillingness of the subject to recognize his or her involvement in reciprocal desire by building on Shakespeare’s depiction of the same unwillingness of Coriolanus, who is expected to engage the rituals of reciprocity in his pre-modern society. Byron’s irony regarding the vulgarity of the marketization of desire has often been received by readers as a sensationalizing provocation, which is itself a transparent manipulation of desire. By using shock and offence to express contempt for his readers’ faith in the autonomy of their individual desires, Byron explicitly owns the dependence of his success in the literary market place on the malleability of his readers’

imitative desires and thereby undercuts his readership's illusions of self-containment. Byron's seemingly vulgar and callous reflections on the slave market exemplify this type of provocative irony. For example, his reference to the impact of the period's abolition movement on price variations in the slave market appears to vaunt a cold disregard for human suffering:

Twelve negresses from Nubia brought a price
 Which the West Indian market scarce could bring;
 Though Wilberforce, at last, has made it twice
 What 'twas ere Abolition.... (4.115)

As Dennis observes, sentiments like this were received by critics like Francis Jeffrey as an effort “to demonstrate the author's ... cold masterful immunity to the common feelings that affect the rest of us” (155). Thus, at the slave market—and in other sections of *Don Juan* such as the descriptions of the rapes at Ismail (156)—Byron adopts a Coriolanian pose of austere detachment from sympathy and empathy, which—through the provisional difference affected by his ironic abstention—illuminates the interindividual reality of desire and, thus, threateningly exposes the contingency of individual selves-of-desire on the desire of others. Byron's effort to goad the readers and attract their attention while scorning their values resembles the Roman general's desire to dominate his countrymen without observing the ritualized symbolic forms of mimetic reciprocity that make the socius of Rome desirable in the first place. Both Coriolanus's and Byron's desires are on display. However, unlike the serious and honour-obsessed Coriolanus—who un-ironically proclaims his rivalrous contempt for the Roman people—Byron periodically figures himself as having a greater capacity for resisting desire's movement by ironically and implausibly pretending to possess no desire at all.

In a similar and related gesture, Byron's feigned indifference to Shakespeare's ability as a poet and observer of social realities constitute another means to upset assumptions regarding the autonomy of desire among Britain's literate patriots; by presenting himself as immune to Shakespeare's literary power, Byron casts a spotlight on the often blindly imitative fervour of approbation Britons heap on their leading literary saint. Though Byron was extremely familiar with Shakespeare, he enjoyed pretending he was not; recalling one instance of this behaviour, George Finlay relates that, during a visit to the poet, a young English gentleman was so disturbed by Byron's criticisms of Shakespeare that he left the room "and afterwards entered his protest most anxiously against such doctrines. Lord B. was quite delighted with this, and redoubled the severity of his criticism" (qtd. in Bate 229). When he was alone with Finlay, Byron confessed: "I like to astonish Englishmen: they come aboard full of Shakspeare [sic], and contempt for the dramatic literature of other nations; they think it blasphemy to find a fault in his writings, which are full of them" (qtd. in Bate 229-30). Byron's effort to undercut Shakespeare—in its ostensible attempt to teach overly patriotic Englishmen a lesson—constitutes a rivalrous bid to triumph over others by exposing the derivative nature of all desire, while ironically and disingenuously figuring his own desire as uniquely self-contained. While exhibiting the imitative nature of desire by contrasting it with his own performance of autonomy, Byron's behaviour functions as a strategy for gaining prestige that could potentially attract more desire from others who might imitate Byron's pose or create a more magnetic scene of collective attention by attempting to expose his error through debate. The effect of Byron's performance of heterodox literary taste, echoes the pose Hermia strikes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when she renounces her social ties to Athens and elopes with Lysander, a gesture which only further secures Helena and Demetrius's desire for her love and friendship. Coriolanus achieves the same effect when he

renounces Rome by declaring: “there is a world elsewhere” (3.3.139), which eventually inspires Rome’s citizens to beg him to renew his love for them. In Hermia’s and Coriolanus’s actions, which are essential to whipping up desire in their plays’ other characters, Shakespeare illustrates how imitative desire is piqued by indifference to commonly held ambitions and aims. Such Shakespearean characters prefigure Byron’s romantic pose by detaching themselves from the communities of shared desire that have heretofore underwritten their identity as it subsists in their original social and political allegiances.

In the direct references to Shakespeare that appear in *Don Juan*, Byron stages a mimetic conflict between himself and Shakespeare in order to create an attractive aesthetic scene; the draw of Byron’s unpopular position on the issue of Shakespeare’s relative greatness mirrors the dramatic conflicts at the centre of Shakespeare’s plays. Byron’s ambivalent relationship with Shakespeare sets up a fanciful, transhistorical duel between poets that attracts onlookers or, in market terms, paying readers. Just as Helena and Demetrius pursue Hermia into the woods and Rome attempts to placate Coriolanus, Byron lures the period’s readership towards his poem by irreverently representing Shakespeare as something less than the literary demi-god his countrymen set him up as. Nevertheless, Byron allows his respect for Shakespeare—and particularly the older poet’s insights on the subject of desire—to add nuance to his antipathetic performance.

The Bard at Haidee and Juan’s Feast

Throughout *Don Juan*, the speaker’s antagonism is directed both towards Shakespeare’s admirers and the mediocrity he finds in the playwright’s works, yet this attitude does not always lead Byron to undermine the Bard’s prestige; rather, at different moments, Byron’s speaker deploys Shakespeare’s authority to reinforce elements of his narrative pertaining to desire. For

instance, in the third canto Byron describes Juan and Haidee presiding over a feast, which is interrupted by her father, Lambro. Both the young people are arrayed in oriental finery, which Byron describes to highlight the intensity of the pleasure they take in each other's mutual love and admiration. The effect of this description serves to heighten the dramatic tension accompanying Lambro's unexpected return. In his description of Haidee's appearance, Byron reflects that the cosmetics she has applied—particularly the henna—is unnecessary given her natural beauty, which requires no application of other materials to create a contrast accenting her youthful features. In this description, he appropriates Shakespeare's words to underscore his observations:

The henna should be deeply dyed to make
 The skin relieved appear more fairly fair;
 She had no need of this, day ne'er will break
 On mountain tops more heavenly white than her:
 The eye might doubt if it were well awake,
 She was so like a vision; I might err,
 But Shakespeare also says 'tis very silly
 “To gild refined gold, or paint the lily.” (3.76)

In these lines, Byron quotes Shakespeare as an authority on the value of authenticity, which should take precedence when there is no need to mimic excellence or beauty. As Byron wishes his audience to recognize Haidee as a paragon of desirability he appeals to Shakespeare, who he knows is trusted by his reader. The Shakespearean text that Byron quotes in this stanza's final line comes from *King John*'s Salisbury, who is commenting on John's rightful return to the throne and the superfluousness of ceremonially re-crowning him given that he has remained king

despite the dispute over the crown that led him into a conflict in France. The line comes from a list of examples enumerating the folly of emulating that which is ineluctably powerful:

Therefore, to be possess'd with double pomp,
 To guard a title that was rich before,
 To gild refined gold, to paint the lily,
 To throw a perfume on the violet,
 To smooth the ice, or add another hue
 Unto the rainbow, or with taper-light
 To seek the beauteous eye of heaven to garnish,
 Is wasteful and ridiculous excess. (4.2.9-16)

These observations illustrate Shakespeare's understanding of competition, which is futile when the supposed rival exists outside the sphere of the desiring subject and would-be competitor. In Salisbury's mind, King John—being in a class above his rivals—has no reason to assert himself with a ceremony; he is an utterly inaccessible and unrivaled model. Efforts to compete with overwhelming greatness are doomed to failure and so constitute a kind of folly, which many subjects nevertheless succumb to. Thus, Shakespeare's observation on desire serves to elevate the desirability of Juan and Haidee's mutual desire in the eyes of the reader, who is enjoined with Shakespeare's phrase to recognize the superlunary quality of the couple's relative beauty and contentment. The feast scene on Juan and Haidee's island—which are some of the final stanzas describing their utopian love affair—represent the poem's sharpest rendering of idealized-desire-realized. Accordingly, in order to effectively convey the sublimity of the lovers' pleasure, Byron dilates upon Juan's and, particularly, Haidee's beauty by appealing to one of Shakespeare's comments on the deleterious effect of attempting to improve that which is already supremely

sought after. Thus, giving way to the aptness of the great playwright's observations on desire, Byron follows the advice implied in the line he quotes and gives precedence to Shakespeare's sentiment. In this allusion to *King John* and in his explicit recommendation of Shakespeare as an expert on the subject, Byron mobilizes the older poet's fame to achieve his desired effect in a way that his Bardolatrous audience would have responded to.

Slightly further on in Juan and Haidee's feast, Byron again directly references Shakespeare, as he—in a moment of self-reflexive irony—characterizes all poets' ambivalence towards fame, which depends on maintaining an amicable relationship with their audiences. Poets, Byron suggests, simultaneously crave the status that mirroring their audiences' desire affords. However, he admits that such efforts often occlude the truth they would otherwise sing, in a contradiction which thereby undermines the fame they ultimately enjoy. In the feast section's reference to Shakespeare, Byron moves away from treating the playwright as a privileged authority and casts him as one poet among a field of competing talents who have achieved similar levels of renown. Shakespeare's position in this field is prefaced by a case study of the poet at Haidee's feast, who occasions Byron's digressive reflections on poets more generally. Byron observes of this Greek bard's song:

His strain display'd some feeling—right or wrong;
 And feeling, in a poet, is the source
 Of others' feeling; but they are such liars,
 And take all colours—like the hands of dyers. (3.87)

Byron recognizes the poet's power to affect his audience, while theorizing his mimetic capacities as proficiency in dissimulating his true feelings in order to more effectively transmit represented emotions to his auditors via language. Here, Byron acknowledges Plato's classical definition of

mimesis as an imitation of nature. His rendering of mimesis appears to apply to the poet's communication of an affective state, a communication which occurs through imitative identification. As Byron's reference to hand's of dyers indicates, Shakespeare also notes this tendency in poets in Sonnet 111, in which the poet speaker's "nature is subdued / To what it works in, like the dyer's hand" (6-7). Reflecting more deeply on this process of affective communication, Byron embarks on a digression that considers the mimetic capacities of poets and their relative fame in general terms, while using specific English authors as examples. "Glory has long made the sages smile," Byron notes before comparing it to the ephemeral: "'T is something, nothing, words, illusions, wind" (3.90). Even as they strive to please their audiences, poets recognize the passing nature of the acclaim they seek. In so far as glory depends on the collectively shared opinion of an audience (an opinion that is repeated and learned through language, as Byron says), it lacks physical presence; however, the result of this representation is the virtual, shared, social reality of enduring fame.

Constructed via the representation of imitable affects, the great poet's renown as a virtuoso of artful representation exists in tandem with the often ignominious details of his or her life. This is the case with Milton (3.91). Initially participating in the promulgation of Milton's literary "glory," Byron immediately undercuts it by referencing those personal humiliations and failings most often noted in Milton's personal biography (3.91). In the next stanza, he continues to list the less flattering facts of authors' personal lives beginning his list with a reference to the rumour of "Shakespeare's stealing deer" (3.92). However, Shakespeare's alleged youthful poaching is quickly forgotten, as Byron goes on to mention Bacon's propensity for graft alongside the foibles of Burns, Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. Such "amiable descriptions," while "most essential to their hero's story, / ... do not," Byron says, "much

contribute to his glory” (3.92). Byron suggests that poets’ fame depends on their “words [which] are things” that fall “like dew, upon a thought” and “makes thousands, perhaps millions, think” (3.88). Byron’s reflections on the contagious dissimulation of poetic production and the imperfect lives of those who produce poetry serve to abase ostensibly great poetic figures. By highlighting their quotidian weaknesses, Byron brings great bards down to his and his readership’s level in order to suggest the possibility that true excellence is only achievable in the symbolic realm of poetry. Having wielded vast influence in his plays, Shakespeare, Byron indicates, is among the famous and influential authors, but—in certain respects—he is not especially distinguished from them or his audience. This point is further underscored in the relative brevity of his reference to Britain’s Bard among his general discussion of the nation’s poets. Thus, far from drawing on Shakespeare’s authority (as he did earlier in elaborating Juan and Haidee’s perfection), Byron makes the great national poet a supporting player in a self-accusation, wherein Byron like all poets throughout history admits to being moved by an emulous desire for fame despite his awareness that such a pursuit is vainglorious and inevitably undermined by the infelicities of his ordinary humanity. It is finally not the authenticity of any poet’s intentions in producing his verse, but the enduring resonance of the poet’s rhetoric that matters. Comparing this version of Shakespeare to that implied in his earlier direct reference, Byron’s subjection of the playwright to a levelling standard of rhetorical excellence can hardly be better expressed.

Battling for Prestige: Fame and Hamlet’s Question

In canto seven, which describes the siege of Ismail, Byron assesses the capacity of literary publication—as it depends on the imitated desires of readers—to generate celebrity by referencing one of Shakespeare’s observations on renown as it pertains to the prestige acquired

through martial exploits. In his reflections on the losses at the siege of Ismail, Byron ironically refers to Hamlet's soliloquy upon the martial pursuit of a delusive idealization of honour (*Hamlet* 4.4), in which the Danish prince self-castigatingly compares himself to Fortinbras upon encountering the Norwegian prince's army on route to avenge the slain elder Fortinbras in Poland: "Rightly to be great / ... / [is] to find quarrel in a straw / When honour's at stake. How stand I then" (4.4.44, 46-47)? Taking up Hamlet's valorization of the appropriateness of trading violent death for fame, Byron—while considering the common English soldiers fighting at Ismail—engages with the ideal of honour expressed by Shakespeare's most famous tragic hero:

I wonder (although Mars no doubt's a God I
 Praise) if a man's name in a *bulletin*
 May make up for a *bullet* in his body?
 I hope this little question is no sin,
 Because, though I am but a simple noddy,
 I think one Shakespeare puts the same thought in
 The mouth of some one in his plays so doating,
 Which many people pass for wits by quoting. (7.21)

The doggerel rhymes combined with the crude pun contrast with the elevated position *Don Juan*'s first readers would have afforded the *Hamlet* soliloquy that McGann's commentary notes as referenced in the stanza (*Complete Poetical Works* 5:724). Further, Byron's vulgar versification juxtaposed with the mimetic draw to martial honour exhibited in Hamlet's shame vis-à-vis his model-rival Fortinbras constitutes an analogy between the grossly, destructive material consequences of mimetic violence and the mimetically engendered ideals of fame and honour. In Byron's modern world, such honour increasingly depends upon both print culture's

production of ephemera (such as bulletins listing deaths and honours) and the rising popular interest in phrases borrowed from Shakespeare's works. By reminding the reader that the modern phenomenon of mass reading—be it of Shakespeare, casualty bulletins, or *Don Juan*—often determines the values individuals base their action and determine their identities upon, Byron reproduces Shakespeare's sentiment in order to reinvigorate and add an ironically critical gloss to a conceit increasingly evacuated of its meaning because of rival wits' emulative deployment of memorized Shakespeare as a form of cultural capital. Though exposing the clamouring ambitions of those who wish to "pass for wits by quoting," Byron's own—at first glance—trite references to Shakespeare make him liable to the same accusation of attempting to pass for a wit by appropriating the great playwright's words. However, in this instance, Byron hedges his critics' opportunities to censure him by presenting Shakespeare in a deliberately coarse style, a gesture which displays indifference to the common literary values of his readership and implies he possesses a rarefied aesthetic perception that may incorporate, but does not worship, Shakespearean genius.

In such self-implicating and self-aggrandizing references to well known plays, *Don Juan*—as Susan Montag notes of the poem's Shakespearean allusions— "brings to the surface the interplay between author and audience, foregrounding the role of reader as accomplice to the poem's discursive procedures" (29). Thus, Byron simultaneously raises and ironizes the fact of literary celebrity for both himself and Shakespeare, allowing the reader to examine the role of imitative mediation and adaptation, while offering—through Byron's ironic stance vis-à-vis the Bard—the opportunity to become like Byron, a critical connoisseur rather than a common enthusiast of the older poet. Thus, through *Don Juan*, the reader may virtually appropriate Byron's exceptional celebrity status, which itself derives in part from his critical pose contra

Shakespeare. In this way, the poem takes up and extends Shakespeare's lessons on the emergence of modern society, which appears as a desiring periphery—or reading audience—focused on ever-shifting centres of mimetic attention occupied by the social, political, or literary celebrity *de jour*. As Byron begins to elaborate these Shakespearean lessons in desire, his treatment of them functions as an extension of the playwright's observations on the mechanisms that produced social and political centrality in the early modern period and the historical periods his plays are set in. However, Byron uses Shakespeare's explorations of mimetically engendered prestige as lenses to further his own understanding of the celebrity he and some of his contemporaries have achieved in their own period.

For example, Byron draws on Shakespeare to consider the Duke of Wellington's celebrity and ultimately uses it as vehicle to reflect on the contingent and passing nature of the acclaim that accompanies mimetic fervour directed towards acts of violence. Byron's contempt for the prestige of those who wrest power with brute force appears near the end of the eighth canto as he describes the horrific human suffering accompanying the Russian conquest of Ismail:

All that the mind would shrink from of excesses;
 All that the body perpetrates of bad;
 All that we read, hear, dream, of man's distresses;
 All that the Devil would do if run stark mad;
 All that defies the worst which pen expresses;
 All by which Hell is peopled, or as sad
 As Hell—mere mortals who their power abuse,—
 Was here (as heretofore and since) let loose. (8.123)

Equating Hell's misery with the perennial abuse of power, Byron avoids using much of his otherwise ubiquitous irony in describing the violence Russia's imperial might visits on the inhabitants of the city. He goes on to link the abuse of power to power's prestige, as it is manifest in General Suarrow's communication of Russia's victory to Catherine, which reads: "Glory to *God* and the Empress! ... / ... 'Ismail is ours'" (8.133). Responding to this, Byron scornfully and emphatically exclaims: "*Powers / Eternal!! Such names mingled!*" (8.133). In Byron's estimation, to incite the imitative response of awe in the masses through the use of overwhelming physical force is an ignominious means for the powerful to acquire even more prestige. In the ninth canto's treatment of Wellington, Byron continues his examination of mimetically engendered celebrity by suggesting that—when, as in the general's case, violence undertaken for a popular national cause is the medium through which celebrity is acquired—such fame conceals not only the turpitude of ambition for prestige, but the abuse of the power and prestige already afforded the actor by his relative social position. Byron finds an apt comparison for Wellington's desire in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, when, early in the same canto, he ironically invokes the Bard's nationally auspicious name to justify his appropriation of *Macbeth*'s macabre compliment to his hired assassins as a sardonic expression of approbation for Wellington's actions during recent continental conflicts:

You are "the best of cut-throats:"—do not start;
 The phrase is Shakespeare's, and not misapplied:—
 War's a brain-spattering, windpipe-slitting art,
 Unless her cause by Right be sanctified.
 If you have acted *once* a generous part,
 The World, not the World's masters, will decide,

And I shall be delighted to learn who,
 Save you and yours, have gained by Waterloo? (9.4)

As he does in his *Hamlet* reference during the Ismail episode, Byron juxtaposes what many in Britain treat as literary scripture with the raw material facts of Wellington's "brain-spattering, windpipe-slitting art" and, thereby, contaminates the scene of English victory with the brutal realities of the violence it depends upon. Indulging, to a certain extent, his moral vanity at Wellington's expense, Byron ironically honours the general by using Shakespeare's language to characterize his exploits before suggesting that the Duke's violence is deployed solely to make a name for himself and secure wealth more than to defend his nation and its principles. Carrying on his critique in the next stanza, Byron again references *Macbeth* when he accuses Wellington of having "supped full of flattery" from conservative authors (such as Southey) in the same phrasing as Macbeth admits: "I have supped full of horrors" (5.5.13). Byron's use of Macbeth's language functions to indict Wellington of less self-awareness than the morally debased Thane. Thus, Byron ironizes Wellington's self-satisfaction by comparing it to Macbeth's self-critique for the purpose of criticizing the complacency of Wellington and the British establishment, who fail to apprehend the new tyranny the poet perceives in the Concert of Europe. According to Byron, Wellington is "[c]alled 'Saviour of the Nations'—[that are] not yet saved,— / And Europe's Liberator—[while it is] still enslaved" (9.5). Thus, Byron invokes the national bards name to sanctify the critique and denigration of one of England's greatest contemporary heroes' ostensibly honourable actions. By presenting the reader with Shakespeare's rendering of traitorous villainy, while implicitly counterposing it with his contemporary countrymen's jingoistic nationalization of the playwright, Byron mocks nationalist Britain's attempt to make patriotic cant out of Shakespeare's vivid renderings of political ambition's most ingloriously

violent outcomes. It is Wellington's ambition for mimetically engendered celebrity, Byron suggests, that has made him into a violent tyrant, who enjoys a social status supported by sycophantic literary flatterers, who trade on the general's use of brutality to strut and fret his hour as a national icon.

Byron's musings on the inappropriateness of Wellington's popularity lead him into reflections on the type of celebrity that endures into posterity and becomes fame—reflections which are partially framed in terms borrowed from Shakespeare—and to consider how fame immortalizes individuals while remaining an abstraction contingent upon the desire circulating in the society of the future. Throughout *Don Juan*, Byron draws on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for a variety of purposes, one of which is to contextualize and reflect upon the immortalization accomplished by fame. Indeed, as Anne Barton has remarked, "*Hamlet* is a play of great overall importance to *Don Juan*, not only for the number of specific verbal echoes but because—especially in Canto IX—it can be seen to colour the climate of long stretches of the poem" ("*Don Juan Reconsidered*" 16). Byron's estimation of Shakespeare's status as an expositor of desire's circulation appears when Byron directly invokes Shakespeare's name while reframing the Danish's prince's famous existential question after a discussion of the inevitability of death:

"To be, or not to be? *that* is the question,"

Says Shakespeare, who just now is much in fashion

I am neither Alexander nor Hephaestion,

Nor ever had for *abstract* fame much passion;

But would much rather have a sound digestion,

Than Buonaparte's cancer:—could I dash on

Through fifty victories to shame or fame,

Without a stomach—what were a good name? (9.14)

Posing Shakespeare's question again, Byron offhandedly highlights Shakespeare's current popularity thereby subtly echoing his often repeated sentiment—once expressed in a letter to James Hogg—that the playwright was only enjoying passing fame. Here too, Byron presents fame as a function of fashion thereby claiming that renown depends on a mimetically engendered estimation that sweeps like a senseless contagion through society. Byron goes on to involve his own literary reputation in this discussion by comparing his relatively lowly status to that of Alexander the Great and his comrade in arms Hephaestion. Having self-deprecatingly demonstrated the relative nature of celebrity, Byron disingenuously claims he has never had much interest in the abstraction of fame, a claim which he illustrates by comparing Napoleon's socially constructed popularity to the concrete reality of the general's infirm corporeality. Byron's distinction between the abstract body of a famous person and the grounding facts of material human existence seems to devalue mimetically generated acclaim and, instead, aggrandize enduring biological life, which Hamlet's query is more commonly understood to refer to. By including Shakespeare in this critique of fame as a relatively unimportant abstraction, Byron acknowledges the contingency of all literary celebrity upon the audience and rhetorically menaces himself—and all other literary celebrities past and present—with eventual obsolescence. Thus, in Byron's framing, "To be, or not to be?" is asking as much about the possibility of being that is bestowed by collective desire—that is celebrity and fame—as it is asking about the value of enduring as a living biological entity.

This concept of the mimetically, or socially, constructed body that attends the "too too solid flesh" (*Hamlet* 1.2.129)—which Hamlet repudiates in an earlier soliloquy—is initially raised in stanza thirteen, which immediately precedes Byron's consideration of "To be or not to

be?”. In this stanza, the socially constructed and biological subject is threatened with subsumption into the superior, oceanic power of personified Death. Setting up a binary, antagonistic opposition between the particularity of human lives and the vast totality of all existence, Byron writes:

And thus Death laughs,—it is sad merriment,
 But still it *is* so; and with such example
 Why should not Life be equally content,
 With his Superior, in a smile to trample
 Upon the nothings which are daily spent
 Like bubbles on an Ocean much less ample
 Than the eternal deluge, which devours
 Suns as rays—worlds like atoms—years like hours? (9.13)

In this image, Byron imposes a hierarchy on the dichotomy of life and death, suggesting that personified Death is aligned with the totality of existence and that—because of its oceanic size—it inevitably subsumes particular lives, which he images as bubbles on an “eternal deluge.” In this formulation, all lives are one with—and generated from—Death. Byron’s vision of Death eventually encompassing “[s]uns as rays—worlds like atoms—year like hours” suggests a universal totality comprised of a multitude of different bodies that make up both the material and social universe. In this context, the status of celebrity—or a pre-eminent social being—is ultimately subject to the totality of Death. Positing a hierarchical sympathy between personified Death (the superior) and personified Life (the subordinate), Byron suggests that Life imitates Death in laughing contentedly at the processes of generation and subsumption that characterize their relation: “Why should not Life be equally content” (9.13). The image of laughing Death

that leads up to this reflection borrows from Hamlet's consideration of the infinitely jesting Yorick's skull. "Death laughs—Go ponder o'er the skeleton" (9.11), writes Byron before adding "the Antic long hath ceased to *hear*, / But still he *smiles*" (9.12). By asserting that "Death laughs at all you weep for," Byron casts the "hourly dread of all" towards death's "*threatened sting*" as ironically incongruous with the accord that actually exists between the two personified states (9.11-12). In stanza thirteen, he goes on to surmise that Life is—despite the anxious lamentations of humans—contented with Death's ascendancy and echoes its joy (9.11). Thus, Byron acknowledges a reciprocal mimetic relationship between the doubled personifications he postulates, wherein Life unresentfully mirrors back to the eternal deluge its pleasure.

In the subsequent stanza (stanza fourteen), Byron's extends the image of a reciprocity between particular forms of life and totalizing death to describe his interest in the socially contingent phenomenon of fame; Byron's treatment of fame as subordinate to the play between universal forces resonates instructively with Oughourlian's rendering of the ubiquity of interindividual desire as constitutive of potentially famous subjects, whose selfhood and notoriety depend upon the larger universal processes of imitation in space, repetition in time, and reproduction in biology. Since, as Oughourlian explains, imitation governs the social processes that shape the subject in its relation to particular others and the larger social Other, the generation of celebrity status and posthumous fame depends on the communication of interest (or desire) between other subjectivities, who are themselves constituted by a set of imitative social relations. Considering why human beings from an early age take an interest in and imitate those around them, Oughourlian posits a "force, as fundamental for psychology as gravity is for physics," which he calls "mimesis" (2). "Taking as a model the theory of universal gravitation in physics," he "propose[s] the hypothesis that there is a single principle at the foundation of all the human

sciences: *universal mimesis*” (3). Oughourlian goes on to suggest that “[u]niversal mimesis, like gravity is polymorphous in its manifestations: mimesis is *imitation* in space, *repetition* in time, and *reproduction* in species” (4). Thus, mimesis operates as a principle both in the material and social worlds, which are interpenetrating fields composing a unified totality comprised of physical and social bodies that are ultimately continuous with the vast unity Byron imagines. According to Oughourlian, subjects are generated by desire aqueously circulating between individuals and the greater social other throughout the course of their lives (16-17). In this formulation, the mimetically generated material that sustains the mimetically generated social subject eventually changes its state, and—like the bursting bubbles that represent human subjectivities on Byron’s eternal deluge—the universal totality subsumes it. The radical interconnectivity in Byron’s eternal deluge resonates with the interindividual quality of desire. Imitative desire unites the constituent subjects of the substance by rapidly moving from one subject to another. Viewed as an element of such a structure, the phenomenon of Byron’s fame is merely another element in the totality.

It remains for Byron to create a true universalist vision by collapsing the dichotomy he has suggested in stanza thirteen. The situation of famous social subjects in Byron’s totalizing vision appears in his continued meditation upon fame in terms of Hamlet’s question on being, which leads him to read the two universal elements (life and death) as engaged—like human beings striving against one another for relative prestige—in an imitative rivalry for pre-eminence. Byron refuses to align himself with either side in this conflict because he recognizes the doubling that ensures their equivalence in their duel for pre-eminence. Troubling the binary he has constructed, Byron introduces to the conflict his sense of uncertainty about the supremacy

of either element and suggests that, given their imitative reciprocity, the twin principles may in fact be one in the same:

“To be, or not to be?”—Ere I decide,
 I should be glad to know that which *is being?*
 ’T is true we speculate both far and wide,
 And deem, because we *see*, we are *all-seeing*:
 For my part, I’ll enlist on neither side,
 Until I see both sides for once agreeing.
 For me, I sometimes think that Life is Death,
 Rather than Life a mere affair of breath. (9.16)

After calling into question the nature of being, Byron points out the hubris of attempting to sum up all of being within humanity’s limited capacity for empirical observation: We falsely think, he says, that “because we see, we are all-seeing.” Byron then positions himself as a critical observer of the reciprocal antagonism between Life and Death that he has posited earlier by using diction that highlights the martial nature of the conflict: “For my part, I’ll enlist on neither side.”

Ultimately, Byron’s totalizing vision persists in his statement that “Life is Death,” which finally unites the dualistic elements he has been characterizing. Thus, to Hamlet’s question, Byron responds: It is impossible “not to be” as Life and Death are the same in their mirroring of each other’s bid to establish pre-eminence over the other. Within this answer to Hamlet’s question, Byron both presents an awareness of the imitative antagonisms that drive desire and posits a totality that obviates the need to engage the rivalry that mimeticism often gives rise to. By resisting this fundamental mimetic opposition often accepted as a given in philosophical discussions of its day, *Don Juan* illustrates that, in his reading of *Hamlet*, Byron echoes and

extends the sensitivity to the structures of mimetic rivalry that Shakespeare—through Hamlet’s equivocation and delay—displays over the course of the famous play. Seething with resentment for his father’s murder and his lost inheritance, Hamlet defers the rivalrous conflict with his uncle, towards which his spectral father has urged him. Thus, *Hamlet* becomes a meditation on the sources of violent conflict arising from the ubiquity of desire. Counterposing himself against Claudius, Fortinbras, and Laertes, Hamlet resists being drawn on to action by representing in his soliloquies his desire for the embattled objects of honour and the crown. Having again ironized the conventional notion of an antagonism between personified Life and Death by forecasting their reconciliation, Byron’s refusal to enlist with either abstract entity repeats Hamlet’s dilatory attitude towards vengeance. In Hamlet’s delay, as it is aided by his withdrawal into the rhetorical constructions of his musings and soliloquies, the prince distracts himself from imitating Claudius’s ambitious and violent appropriation of the throne, which is urged on him by the conventions of his nation’s history and the revenge tragedy he inhabits. Similar to Hamlet’s in their morbid scope, Byron’s digressive musings present the paradox that life may be in fact a kind of death (or mere breathing) when compared with death, an event and condition which initiates the ostensibly more real “life” of posthumous fame.

In canto three, the echoes of *Hamlet* throughout *Don Juan* appear in Byron’s discussion of fame that survives death. Reflecting on the influence of an author’s “small drop of ink” to make “thousands, perhaps millions, think” (3.88), Byron figures the poet as a potential wielder of power on par with the greatest kings and emperors of history. Byron acknowledges the contingency of the poet’s fame when he writes: “’Tis strange, the shortest letter which man uses / Instead of speech, *may form a lasting link / Of ages*” (3.88 italics mine). He goes on to note that a poet’s works might, over time, sink into oblivion only to one day be found on a “graven stone

... in a barrack's station" (3.89). These sentiments regarding the degradation to which even the most acclaimed figures are subjected, bear a striking resemblance to those expressed by Hamlet to Horatio in the play's graveyard scene, when, as he considers "to what base uses we may return," Hamlet fancifully "trace[s] the noble dust of Alexander, till he find[s] it stopping a bung-hole" (5.1.199-200). Byron's language reflects Hamlet's here, as he imagines the discovery of the poet's name in the excavation of some barracks "closet, /... turn[ing] ... up [the poet's name], as a rare deposit" (3.89). The term "deposit" here recalls Hamlet's vision of Alexander's body turned into an insignificant deposit of loam (5.1.206). Byron's vision is more optimistic in its recognition that an author's name may be salvaged from obscurity and rise to fame in the literary marketplace even after his death and temporary disappearance. However, Byron's description of this oblivion resembles Hamlet's diction when he conveys the loss of identity that the poet may suffer over time:

And when [the poet's] bones, his grave a blank,
 His station, generation, even his nation,
 Become a thing, or nothing, save to rank
 In chronological commemoration,
 Some dull MS oblivion long has sank.... (3.89)

Here, Byron makes another foray at collapsing the binary of material and socio-symbolic existence by echoing Hamlet's words in a subtle parallelism that hints at a congruence between the social prestige afforded to kings and that which is sometimes posthumously conferred on poets. When baiting Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in the aftermath of Polonius's murder, Hamlet banteringly makes reference to the legal language attending the early modern concept of the king's division into a body natural and body politic. When Rosencrantz asks Hamlet to direct

them to the body he has recently killed and hidden, Hamlet responds: “The body is with the King, but the King is not with the body. The King is a thing— /... / Of nothing” (4.2.26, 29). Hamlet is referring to the legal apparatus designed to separate the King’s personal interests from those of the state, a convention which Ernst Kantorowicz explains in *The King’s Two Bodies*. Kantorowicz’s study recalls how crown jurists of the early modern period protected the king’s personal affairs by arguing that the king had both a “Body natural” (his personal, corporeal body) and a “Body politic,” which is a metaphysical body, managing the kingdom’s laws and policies (9). Thus, there is a separation between the two bodies that allows Hamlet to make his paradoxical statement regarding the king’s presence and absence from the body. In his feigned madness Hamlet raves that the material fact, or “thing,” of the king’s “Body natural” is shadowed by the metaphysical fact, or “nothing” of the “Body politic.” Accordingly, the political entity—which is constructed out of the imitative interests of the society subject to the king’s political body—is a mirror of the social existence Byron designates for the forgotten poet, whose existence becomes wholly contingent on the socio-institutional constructions of “[h]is station, generation, [and] even his nation” (3.89). The collective imaginary, as it depends on the imitative desire of readers throughout history, is similarly responsible for the emergence and endurance of a poet’s posterity. By using the language Hamlet uses to describe the high public profile of a monarch to describe a long forgotten then (perhaps) remembered poet, Byron subtly figures modern celebrity as a version of the social phenomena that institutes a monarch, who is—through the contagion of imitated opinion—deemed to have authority over a given set of peoples and lands. In this way, Byron’s rediscovered poet is—like Hamlet’s early modern king—a thing of nothing, which exists only because of the collective interest of readers.

Within the context of this reflection on the author's social being as it depends on the ubiquity of mimetic reciprocity, Byron's rendering of the constructs of celebrity and fame reflect his own mature acceptance of popular renown's ephemerality, which is subject to the vicissitudes of struggles that may or may not result in success or ignominy. This understanding of the processes that bring about celebrity and posthumous fame derives from the poet's personal experience and observations. In his lifetime, Byron underwent both a meteoric ascent to celebrity and eventually endured the disappointment of widespread derision and contempt. As William St Clair notes in his analysis of Byron's publishing history, by 1817 "the falling-away of interest in Byron can be seen in the production figures" of the printing houses carrying his work ("The Impact of Byron's Writings" 13). Making this case by examining the reading practices of ladies in the period, whose albums and commonplace books contain numerous transcriptions of Byron's love poems, St Clair speculates that "[t]he British public's most famous periodic fit of morality" over the circumstances of Lady Byron's separation from Lord Byron led ultimately to the waning of interest in his work, which—when contrasted with the accusations made during the separation—had violated his public's expectations (12). Over the course of writing *Don Juan*, which Byron began in 1818, the poet's sense of the contingency of celebrity on the imitated desires of others motivated him to reinterpret the antagonistic cast of his early literary efforts, experience of celebrity, and the socially and financially disastrous publicization of his personal life at the end of his marriage. In his reading of *Don Juan*'s ambivalence towards fame and posterity, Andrew Bennett suggests that "Byron's success ... is to deconstruct Romantic posterity, which is to say that his writing both questions and disturbs the logic of posthumous fame and, at the same time ... performatively inscribes that logic within this very rejection" (198).

References to desire as the basis of prestige in *Hamlet* appear again when Juan has been dispatched to St Petersburg to inform the Russian Empress, Catherine the Great, of her army's victory at Ismail. Byron charges the scene of Juan's entrance to the Czarina's court with the imminent threat of sexual rivalry, which is manifest in Catherine's favourite male courtiers' reaction to Juan's appearance. The play of desire between sexual rivals and lovers dominates *Don Juan*'s description of the Russian court, and Byron makes the central object of desire in these episodes the oft sexualized figure of Catherine herself. In two stanzas dedicated to the generative and destructive forces of female sexuality, Byron invokes Horace's hobbesian claim that sexual rivalry is the chief cause of all strife and is therefore also the source of laws prohibiting adultery, as adultery tends to incite rivalrous behaviour and social discord (9.56). Accordingly, a sexual rivalry for Catherine's favour is the source of tension between Juan and his rivals. In an aside, Byron refers to the female sex organ as the "great Cause of war, or peace" and designates the Empress as "the Epitome / Of that great Cause" (9.57). It is upon this backdrop of violent sexual rivalry—wherein combatants imitate each other's gestures as they strive to appropriate the contested object—that Byron presents Shakespeare's rendering of the antagonism between the elder Hamlet and his younger brother Claudius to characterize how Juan first gains Catherine's notice:

Shakespeare talks of "the Herald Mercury
 New lighted on a Heaven-kissing hill;"
 And some such visions crossed her Majesty,
 While her young Herald knelt before her still. (9.66)

The lines, "the Herald Mercury / New lighted on a Heaven-kissing hill," which describe how Juan approaches Catherine with news of the Russian victory, are taken from Hamlet's words to

his mother when he denounces her marriage to Claudius and demands that she compare the likenesses of her late and newly acquired husbands in order to apprehend the former's godlike superiority over the later. The fact that the two brothers were engaged in a rivalry that was brought to its crisis by Claudius's violent envy and poisoning of Hamlet forms the basis for the play's action. Thus, when Hamlet the younger demands that Gertrude acknowledge that his father had "[a]station like the Herald Mercury / New-lighted on a Heaven-kissing hill" he carries on the same struggle for pre-eminence that the play suggests his father and Claudius were in engaged in up until Hamlet's murder. By characterizing Juan as the slain Hamlet in the still-striving son's terms, Byron suggests the ambiguous position of Juan at the moment that he captivates the Empress's attention; he has succeeded in redirecting the desire of an extremely powerful social and political entity towards himself, an experience which does not make him fall in love but

into that no less imperious passion,
 Self-love—which, when some sort of Thing above
 Ourselves, a singer, dancer, much in fashion,
 Or duchess, princess, empress, “deigns to prove”,
 ('T is Pope's phrase) a great longing, tho' a rash one,
 For one especial person out of many,
 Make us believe ourselves as good as any. (9.68)

Juan's self-love mirrors the Czarina's desire, which makes him temporarily famous, as her desire galvanizes the imitative desire of millions. Catherine's “temporary passion” for her various lovers “was quite flattering,” as “each lover looked a sort of king, /.../ A royal husband in all save the *ring*” (9.70). Juan thrives on this position of prestige for a time, but, in the tenth canto, he

begins to feel the deleterious effects of being “the focus of such glory,” whereupon “He felt like other plants called Sensitive, / Which shrink from touch” (10.37). In an allusion to the “sensitive plant” which “is slang for penis” (McGann, *Complete Poetical Works* 5:774), Byron indicates that Juan suffers from surfeit of the Empress’s much sought after sexual favours, which are a corollary of her imitatively engendered social prestige. The court interprets Juan’s sensitivity and accompanying loss of interest in dominating the pinnacle of Russian society as an illness, which the narrator suggests stem from his longing “for climes / In which the Neva’s ice would cease to live / Before May-day” (10.37). The court ratifies this misguided opinion in stanza forty-four: “The climate was too cold they said for him, / Meridian born, to bloom in” (10.44). Proof of the faultiness of this assessment is that—upon his arrival at the Russian court—Juan at first thrived and immediately began to enjoy the most central position in the land. Indeed, having followed all the country’s lines of imitative desire to their focal point, Juan no longer has a mediator of desire in Russia who can inspire further ambition in him. There is no one left whose desire he may imitate, a situation which “bring [the] blue devils” (10.38), or despondency, which the narrator and court interpret as longing for another, warmer land. The self-love Catherine’s proximity has engendered in him has led to surfeit, which leaves him without a desire to imitate and, therefore, without his usual “bloom” and “dazzling eye” (10.44). Though he has bested his rivals and (in Shakespeare’s terms) lighted on the pinnacle of Catherine’s favour, Juan cannot occupy the position of fame forever and—like Byron, whose extreme celebrity status waned in the aftermath of the separation and departure from England—Juan experiences the ravages accompanying self-love, which is actually a reflection of the interest others vest in him. Thus, in invoking Shakespeare to describe Juan’s success, Byron associates the older poet’s literary fame with Juan at the moment of his elevation to the glorified state of imperial consort; however, in

the following canto, Byron draws on his own experience of celebrity's inimical impact to colour Juan's encounter with widespread imitative desire as it functions to produce fame in English society.

Amorous Desire in the English Cantos

In *Don Juan's* English cantos, Byron addresses himself to the author of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to animate and illuminate the triangular desire uniting Juan, Adeline Amundeville, and Aurora Raby. In canto fourteen, Byron recalls and adapts Shakespeare's enchanted flower from the *Dream*, "Love in Idleness," by suggesting that the attractions that cause two subjects to gravitate towards one another derive from a lack of other employment. His digression on the causes of amorous entanglements appear as an appendix to his reflections on the relationship between the lady and lord of Norman Abbey, where most of the English cantos are set. This gentle couple is composed of Lady Adeline Amundeville and her husband Henry. The reader quickly learns that, due to Henry's lack of "soul"—which derives from his preoccupation with the duties he carries out as a minister in cabinet—the lord leaves his spouse unsatisfied and thus marks her out as a potential lover for Juan (14.71-72). This circumstance allows Byron an opportunity to dilate on the nature of desire as he understands it operating between the different sexes, "[n]either [of whom] can show quite *how* they would be loved" (14.73). To introduce his adaptation of Shakespeare's "Love in Idleness" as an analogy for amorous desire, Byron first directs his readers to consult the original description of the flower as it appears in the work of the playwright he irreverently denominates "his British Godship," while begging Shakespeare's pardon for appropriating and adapting the magical flower to depict his own observations on love and desire (14.75).

In the *Dream*, the fairy king Oberon wishes to use the flower to punish his queen Titania for refusing to give him the child of one of her devotees, so he sends his minion, Puck, to collect the flower for him. If the juice of the flower, called “Love in Idleness,” is applied to anyone’s “sleeping eye-lids ... / [it] Will make ... man or woman madly dote / Upon the next live creature that it sees” (*Dream* 2.1.170-72). Oberon has Puck use the flower to make Titania look foolish by falling in love with Bottom, but the flower’s juice is also the supernatural agent supposed to be responsible for the changing preferences of lovers. As noted in Chapter 3, the conflict among the midsummer lovers is explicable not as the result of supernatural intervention but as the consequence of mimetic rivalries referenced in the play’s opening scenes. These scenes suggest that the fickle desire of these lovers is due to the mediation of desire through model-rivals. Shakespeare presents the fairies’ intervention as a fanciful representation of the British midsummer festival, an ancient cultural mechanism which served to exacerbate the tensions caused by desire in order to expatiate them through ritual. In this light, Oberon’s magical flower is a symbol for the impetus for discord inherent to desire, an analogy which is reinforced by his vengeful motivation in sending Puck to retrieve it. Indeed, when Titania refuses to give him the Indian boy, Oberon calls after her: “Well, go thy way: thou shalt not from this grove / Till I torment thee for this injury” (2.1.146-47). The logic of vengeful mimetic reciprocity animating the two spritely monarchs’ conflict over the Indian boy spurs Oberon’s decision to use the flower and, thereby, associates its amorous effects upon the human lovers with the mimetic rivalry of the two fairy sovereigns; “Love in Idleness” is a compressed analogy for the imitative desire that gives rise to sexual and sexually rivalrous tensions.

Byron proposes to pluck and trim this flower from “Shakespeare’s ever-blooming garden” by observing that idleness is an accessory of love (14.75). Byron’s adaptation both

extends the metaphor's possibilities as a comment on the nature of desire and extends Byron's ambitions for *Don Juan* by building on Shakespeare's thriving posthumous fame. Unsatisfied with Shakespeare's flower as a means of illuminating the shift of Adeline's desires from her husband to Juan, Byron re-fashions the playwright's device:

What I mean

To say is, not that Love is Idleness,

But that in Love such Idleness has been

An accessory, as I have cause to guess.

Hard labour's an indifferent go-between;

Your men of business are not apt to express

Much passion.... (14.76)

In his reference to business, Byron is alluding to the contrasting style of life represented in Adeline's status as an idle socialite and Henry's preoccupation with politics. Where Henry, a member of cabinet, already has numerous model-rivals to mediate his desire towards political objectives, Adeline remains in the social context of their country estate and is susceptible to imitating the self-regarding desires of interesting young diplomats, like Juan. Juan—having fascinated Donna Julia, Haidee, Gulbeyaz, and the Empress, among others—models his desire for himself on the interest of all those who have wanted him over the course of his life. Because of the force of these remembered desires, he appears to those around him as virtually self-sufficient, a quality which makes him extremely attractive: "His manner was perhaps the more seductive, / Because he ne'er seem'd anxious to seduce" (15.12). Such self-regard is often described as satiety or corruption. Nevertheless, it is typically accompanied by fascinating displays of self-confidence. Juan's self-love lends him an aura of prestige among the other guests

at Norman Abbey. Following Juan in his *amour-propre*, Adeline—through her idleness—undertakes to dominate Juan’s romantic life by playing matchmaker for him (14.60-61); thus, under the influence of Byron’s version of “Love in Idleness,” Adeline is drawn to Juan and, through her efforts to direct his amorous interest, she seeks to appropriate the selfhood that dominates Juan’s inward attention. Accordingly, Byron’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s infatuation-inciting flower presents a variation on the mimetic themes represented in Shakespeare’s play. By appropriating and adapting Shakespeare’s figure of amorous desire for his own purposes in a comically hyperbolic deferential tone, Byron—like Adeline in her attempt to appropriate Juan’s beloved selfhood for her own purposes—capitalizes on the older poet’s literary fame and makes a bid to appear to be Shakespeare’s intellectual equal as a theorist of desire.

In canto fifteen, Byron begins to suggest that Adeline is not simply interested in subduing Juan by co-opting his desire for her own social agenda, but—given her barely masked jealousy of Aurora Raby’s charms and suitability as a potential mate for Juan—is herself attracted to him. Byron presents the envy Adeline exhibits towards Aurora by enumerating the latter’s coolly seductive qualities and illuminating them by a comparison to Walter Scott’s literary genius, which he estimates against that of Shakespeare. Signalling that Aurora is a likely candidate for Juan’s next serious affair, Byron compares her to Haidee with a slight caveat: “each was radiant in her proper sphere: /... / the difference in them / Was such as lies between a flower and gem” (15.58). Byron expands upon the comparison by transforming it into a compliment to his friend Scott and making a display of his respect for both Voltaire and Shakespeare:

Having wound up with this sublime comparison,
Methinks we may proceed upon our narrative,

And, as my friend Scott says, “I sound my Warison”;
 Scott, the superlative of my comparative—
 Scott, who can paint your Christian knight or Saracen,
 Serf, Lord, Man, with such skill as none would share it, if
 There had not been one Shakespeare and Voltaire,
 Of one or both of whom he seems the heir. (15.59)

In this flourish, Byron self-consciously assures his reader that he will continue to elaborate the chain of events binding Juan, Adeline, and Aurora ever closer in a triangular complex of reciprocal desire. In the following stanza, he will refer to this proto-anthropological study of the complexities of human desire as his literary “play upon the surface of Humanity” (15.60). That Scott was perhaps at the time the greatest literary celebrity (next to Byron himself) suggests that Byron continues to compare himself to the literary figures he digresses from his analysis of human desire to laud. There is no superlative in the comparison Byron makes between Haidee (a flower) and Aurora (a gem), each of whom he deems to be “radiant in her proper sphere” (15.58). Thus, when Byron exuberantly designates Scott “the superlative of my comparative,” he is calling him both a literary jewel and flower, which is equal in talent to both Shakespeare and Voltaire. Again drawing on Shakespeare’s literary fame to gild his verse, Byron uses the playwright as a means to cultivate mimetic interest in Aurora and also himself, as he affirms his status as a friend to Europe’s literary elite. By making such lofty comparisons, Byron elevates Aurora Raby—the original subject of the digression—to increasing heights of prestige and sets the stage for reciprocal interest to grow between her and Juan. By presenting Aurora’s fascination as an effect of her own version of Juan’s self-love (14.47), Byron marks her as a potential seducer of Juan. As the two characters attract imitative attention in the same way, it

remains uncertain which one of them (if either) will follow the other in imitating his or her self-directed love, and Byron further complicates the question by setting the stage for a rivalry between Aurora and Adeline.

In the English cantos, while incrementally raising the potentially rivalrous tension between the two ladies, Byron takes care to enumerate the favourable attributes of Adeline alongside those of Aurora, a technique which presages a looming conflict for Juan's affection between the two women. Highly competent in the musical accomplishments that young women of the eighteenth-century were expected to display at social events (16.42), the literary minded Adeline, who is versed in composing poetry and holds a preference (16.47), as Byron often professed of himself, for the works and style of Alexander Pope (16.47). Though talented and distinguished, Adeline has the discretion not to frequently make a show of her abilities (16.42), which allows her to "throw into the shade" other women, who squandered the novelty of their skill by displaying it too often (16.44). These attributes are presented in contrast to those of Aurora, who resembles "a young star" that is "too sweet an image" for "life" (15.43). After noting that she is "Rich, [and] noble, but an orphan" (15.44), Byron further relates that she is "Early in years, and yet more infantine / ... / ...with an aspect beyond time" (15.45). Her alienated status as an orphaned heiress is augmented by the outsider quality bestowed by her Catholic faith (15.46). In her bereft aloofness and capacity for insight, she manifests some of the characteristics of a Byronic hero, while—in her lack of worldliness—she exhibits a disinterested contempt for the world, which has the same fascinating effect on the guest of Norman Abbey as Juan's self-love:

She gazed upon a world she scarcely knew
As seeking not to know it; silent, lone,

As grows a flower, thus quietly she grew,
 And kept her heart serene within its zone.
 There was awe in the homage which she drew;
 Her Spirit seem'd as seated on a throne
 Apart from the surrounding world, and strong
 In its own strength—most strange in one so young! (15.47)

With her ethereal star-like quality, isolation, wealth, childlike inwardness, and exotic religion, the overpowering effect of Aurora's attributes designate her as austere self-sufficient, commanding, and perspicacious. In these respects, Aurora becomes a focus of desire, which resembles the centre of attention produced by Adeline's efforts to master Juan's self-love. However, Aurora's posture promises to have a more powerful effect, as it appears to proceed from a more genuine indifference to the desires of others, an indifference which nevertheless seems to comprehend her fellows' motivations. Byron expresses Aurora's mournful insight into the tragic dangers inherent to human desire in a simile that associates all such desire with moral failings exhibited in the biblical Fall:

Radiant and grave—as pitying man's decline;
 Mournful—but mournful of another's crime,
 She look'd as if she sat by Eden's door,
 And grieved for those who could return no more. (15.45)

It is because of her knowing mournfulness that Aurora is an ostensibly inactive participant in the triangular configuration of desire Byron is establishing amongst Juan, Adeline, and herself. In canto sixteen, after his description of Adeline's accomplishments and calculated modesty, Byron reminds his reader of the nascent jealousy she feels towards Aurora, whose insightful, self-

contained, passivity vis-à-vis the influence of others' desires Byron aligns with Shakespeare's qualities as a thinker and poet:

Aurora—since we are touching upon taste,
 Which now-a-days is the thermometer
 By whose degrees all characters are classed—
 Was more Shakespearian, if I do not err.
 The worlds beyond this world's perplexing waste
 Had more of her existence, for in her
 There was a depth of feeling to embrace
 Thoughts, boundless, deep, but silent too as Space. (16.48)

This description of Aurora as “Shakespearian” in character complements observations on her character from canto fourteen, which highlight her—and Shakespeare's—capacity for detachment from, but insight into, the underlying impetuses for human behaviour. In his description of Aurora, Byron gives a sense of his opinion of Shakespeare's mind and makes, as Anne Barton suggest, Aurora the playwright's avatar in *Don Juan*. Barton examines the figure of Aurora-cum-Shakespeare in light of Adeline's preference for Pope, which Byron mentions with her literary propensities (16.47):

Byron tantalizingly brings Pope and Shakespeare face to face, in the form of Adeline Amundeville and Aurora Raby. [...] Not surprisingly, the two women do not get on. Adeline pointedly omits Aurora from her list of suitable matches for Juan. [...] Aurora, for her part, listens to Adeline being brilliantly satirical about her guests ... with silent distaste. (“Byron and Shakespeare” 235)

Aurora's quiet impatience with Adeline's self-aggrandizing, Pope-like satire serves to reinforce the assessment of Shakespeare's qualities that Byron outlines in his characterization of the orphaned heiress, who, as has been long speculated of Shakespeare, came from a Catholic family. However, the attribution of uncommon insight—the ability to see “worlds beyond this world's perplexing waste” (16.48)—indicates Byron's profound reverence for Shakespeare's abilities as an expositor of the underlying principles animating social realities. Byron puts no limits on Aurora-Shakespeare's capacities as a profoundly sensitive analyst of desire: “There was a depth of feeling to embrace / Thoughts, boundless, deep, but silent too as Space” (16.48). For Shakespeare, the quality of silence is not literal, as it seems to be in Aurora, who rarely speaks. Rather, the reference to silence indexes Byron's sense that Shakespeare is a philosopher whose descriptive examination of human behaviour takes the origin and structure of human conflict in the pursuit of pre-eminence as one of its central subjects. Seeing too clearly the mimetic mechanisms that give rise to vice and rivalrous discord, Byron's treatment of Shakespeare draws on the playwright's insights regarding desire while suggesting—in his self-referential digressions—that he himself has begun to grow beyond the clamorous tragedies and comedies such desires bring about.

Conclusion

In these final cantos of *Don Juan*, Byron stages a scene in which Shakespeare's apparent ascendancy over the forces of desire he explains will be tested, as the ability of his female avatar to resist the agonistic reciprocity inherent to the network of interindividual desires animating the social world of Norman Abbey is an open question. This network is a miniature rendering of the movements of desire that buoyed Shakespeare and Byron himself to unprecedented fame, a fame which Byron explores in the flows of desire that raised political, military, and other literary

figures to statuses exceeding or rivalling his own. Applying Hamlet's question on being to the elevated status mimetic interest may afford, Byron illuminates the ephemerality of the acclaim that he and other celebrities experience by collapsing Hamlet's dualistic categories of "being" and "not being" into each other to posit a monistic totality where no subjectivity is ultimately wholly distinguishable from another. In these reflections, Byron highlights the interindividual nature of desire as it constitutes social beings, who—depending on the force of the mimetic processes that lead to enduring fame—may or may not continue in popular memory. As a being who has endured, Shakespeare becomes an important presence in the final cantos of *Don Juan*, where Byron sets out to explore the interest he continues to attract by representing his character in Aurora. Though this representation remains incomplete, the capacity of Aurora to detach herself from mimetic conflict suggests that Byron understands Shakespeare's descriptive renderings of typically rivalrous manifestations of desire as tending to exempt him from their often fraught scenes. Thus, Byron's depiction of Aurora's alluring ostensible detachment from desire taken with the poem's suggestion that her interest in Juan will eventually lead her into conflict with Adeline implies that, had he finished the poem, Byron would have allegorically excavated—through Aurora's loss of composure—Shakespeare's much speculated upon ambitions as a playwright.²⁰ In all of *Don Juan*'s direct references to Shakespeare, Byron

²⁰The competitive world of playwriting that Shakespeare entered when he began his career in London has recently been treated by Bart van Es's *Shakespeare and Company* (2013) in a chapter titled "Imitation and Identity," wherein van Es explores Shakespeare's emulation of his contemporaries' work. After describing relationships and circumstances that would have forced any new "upstart" (as Shakespeare's antagonistic contemporary Robert Greene described him [qtd. in van Es 23]) to adopt a competitive and therefore ambitious posture, van Es writes that "Shakespeare was like many grammar school men who came into the theatrical profession" (54). The emulous dynamic shaping Shakespeare's work, van Es notes, has been explored by Marjorie Garber in an essay titled "Marlovian Vision/Shakespearean Revision" (1979) and James Shapiro in *Rival Playwrights: Marlowe, Jonson, Shakespeare* (1991) (van Es 22). It seems likely Byron would have been familiar with these rivalrous relationships and circumstances surrounding Shakespeare, as during one of his many conversational attacks on the English belief in Shakespeare's unique genius, he cites the multiplicity of competing playwrights active during Shakespeare's career and states: "he had but little fame in his day" (Medwin 93). Attempting to dismiss the Bardolatry of his period in a conversation with Medwin, Byron asserts that "[i]t is but lately people have been satisfied that Shakespeare was not a god, nor stood alone in the age in which he lived" (93). It is possible that, had Byron begun to elaborate on

indicates his apprehension of the older poet's insight into the nature of desire. The quality of desire that Shakespeare illuminates is its imitative communicability. Byron does not miss this lesson in human behaviour, and he appropriates it for his own purposes, which typically involve reflecting on the new phenomenon of literary celebrity and its posthumous corollary, fame. However, Byron rarely praises Shakespeare's insights directly, adopting instead an arch pose towards his forbearer and instructor in the nature of desire. He does this to distance himself from the uncritical celebration of literature as a function of British nationalism, a nationalism which does not understand the dangerous contagion of the often violent desire it depends upon. In its direct references to the older playwright, *Don Juan* stages a scene of antagonism between two colossal literary figures: Byron himself, who was famous in his lifetime, and Shakespeare, whose posthumous fame endures unabated.

Aurora's latent resentment towards Adeline, the resulting stanzas may have illuminated Byron's thoughts on the emulation and resentments Shakespeare likely exhibited as a poet striving to establish himself in his day.

Conclusion

In his prose, drama, and poetry, Byron's direct engagements with Shakespeare's language are typically oblique and passing. Byron is a mobile author, who draws from a variety of sources in a rapid and seemingly indiscriminate way. It may indeed seem at times that Shakespearean themes and words are merely tossed off as Byron hurries to incorporate other voices into his work, but taking Byron's promiscuous references as evidence that he does not value the insights contained in Shakespeare's plays would be a mistake. As his easy identification with Shakespeare's tragic heroes in his prose demonstrates, Byron intuitively identifies with the dynamics of desire that determine the motivations of Shakespeare's tragic figures.²¹ The playwright's works are deeply inculcated on Byron's mind and integral to his understanding of the social world. The very fact that Shakespearean lines emerge at moments when similarities in plot or character appear indicates the importance of Shakespeare's plays to Byron's understanding of social, political, and amorous relationships. To communicate the logic of vengeance—which is characteristic of his emotional state as he expresses it in many of his letters—Byron resorts to lines from *Coriolanus*, *Macbeth*, and *Richard III*. Likewise, when he wishes to attribute envy to his characters in *The Deformed Transformed*, he has recourse to echoing the rhetoric of those Shakespearean characters (Iago and Thersites) that arguably most embody this emotion. Although his Shakespearean references are brief, even passing, they are deeply interwoven within his poetic voice, plots, and characterization.

As the *Faust*-like plot of *The Deformed* illustrates, Byron was not fastidious when borrowing from other artists, and he likely would not have been surprised to find that many of Shakespeare's words had crept into his own works; however, as this dissertation has frequently

²¹ Byron claimed a particular aversion to the style of Shakespeare's comedies (Medwin 94).

noted, Byron's public commitment to a neoclassical opinion of Shakespeare's merits forced him to maintain an oppositional posture towards the playwright. Byron's explicit references to Shakespeare often appear at the margins of his writing—in the throw away quotations of his prose, an addendum to the preface of *Childe Harold*, *Faliero*'s faint echoes of *Julius Caesar*, an unfinished play's characters, and the passing digressive remarks of *Don Juan*. Had Byron's works borrowed as explicitly from Shakespeare as he sometimes does from Goethe's plots, he would have undermined the anti-Shakespearean pose he so frequently struck before visitors and friends. As Lady Blessington's comments on Byron's character and opinions indicate, Byron's pose with vis-à-vis Shakespeare was an important, if quixotic, element of his public self-presentation:

Byron is so prone to talk for effect, and to assert that he does not believe, that one must be cautious in giving implicit credence to his opinions. My conviction is, that, in spite of his declarations to the contrary, he admires Shakspeare as much as most of his countrymen do; but that, unlike the generality of them, he sees the blemishes that the freedom of the time in which the great poet lived led him to indulge in in [sic] his writings, in a stronger point of view, and takes pleasure in commenting on them with severity, as a means of wounding the vanity of the English. I have rarely met with a person more conversant with the works of Shakspeare than was Byron. I have heard him quote passages from them repeatedly; and in a tone that marked how well he appreciated their beauty.... Could there be a less equivocal proof of his admiration of our immortal bard than the tenacity with which his memory retained the finest passages of all his works? [...] Byron takes a peculiar pleasure in opposing himself to popular opinion on all

points; he wishes to be thought as dissenting from the multitude, and this affectation is the secret source of many of the incongruities he expresses. (Blessington 358-59)

Lady Blessington's appeal to the evidence of Byron's extensive memory of Shakespeare's language supports the view that Shakespeare's plays were always available to him when he was composing his own works and that the strength of the playwright's influence seeped into and shaped his own poetic vision. Her account of the reasons for Byron's combativeness towards contemporary champions of Shakespeare aligns well with Byron's assessment of himself as one born for opposition. Taken together, Byron's evident desire to retain Shakespeare's works in his memory and his anti-Bardolatrous posture indicate why much is made of the younger poet's passing references to Shakespeare in the present study. Byron did not wish to be seen overtly praising Shakespeare's skill or insights, yet Shakespeare remained a significant presence in the cultural milieu Byron strove to define himself against. In this sense, Byron's resistance to his contemporaries' assertions of Shakespeare's exceptionality ironically repeats the imitative rivalry both he and Shakespeare so frequently represent in their most ambitious characters. The apparently conventional or passing deployment of Shakespearean characterization and language are part of a wider engagement with the playwright, which reflects the interest both poets had in the fundamental nature of human behaviour, or desire, that their works generate and respond to.

As major literary figures, Byron and Shakespeare are far from unique in their interest in the fundamentals of human nature. Their depictions of and comment upon the imitative quality of desire appear in the works of many other great literary figures whose insights have informed those of numerous generations of authors. These authors present readers with anthropologies of desire—aesthetically pleasing renderings of human motivation that explore the impetuses for behaviour and proffer insights that are repeated and adapted in the innovations of succeeding

authors. Take for example *The Deformed*. In it Byron participates in the ongoing literary representations of desire by drawing together an eclectic melange of its past literary renderings. As it echoes those of Marlow's Faustus, Goethe's Faust, and these characters' medieval antecedents, Arnold's animus in *The Deformed* adapts earlier representations and commentaries on the nature of desire. The dialogue between the protagonist and his demon function in all these works as a means to explore what finally motivates the central character's bottomless ambition. In each version the reader learns again that it is the collective interest others display towards certain positions or objects that spurs the protagonist on. As already demonstrated, Byron's rendering of this theory of desire's source in the other is inflected with Shakespeare's representations of envy and ambition. Thus in *The Deformed*, Shakespeare, Marlow, Goethe, and Byron all contribute to the reader's understanding of ambition's—that is human desire's—nature. As the historical circumstances that contain an author's observation on desire change, so do the particulars of a given narrative. Nevertheless, certain fundamental similarities remain. Byron's Arnold values the physical prowess he see his family members value, just as Shakespeare's Iago and Marlow's Faustus long for the positions of prestige and power sought by others in their respective communities. Though formal theories of desire—those of Spinoza, Freud, and Girard—repeat these authors' observations, the aesthetic representations of desire made by literary observers of human motivations continue to speak for themselves. Popular interest in literature and the arts represents our wish to understand how we are constituted by desire. For this reason, Shakespeare's and, to a lesser degree, Byron's works continue to draw readers to them.

The fascinating aesthetic draw of both Shakespeare's and Byron's works is an effect of their exploration of the phenomenon of collective interest itself. As aesthetic objects making the

structure of desire their central concern, these poets' texts present readers with a paradoxical complex of mediation and remediations, which foreground the capacity of repetition and representation (or imitation in time) to establish communities that create enduring and evolving collective imaginaries. The continuing influence of Shakespeare and Byron on contemporary aesthetics—with all their ethical and political effects—demonstrates this. The texts that embody the Shakespeare-influenced Byron are manifold and continue to proliferate. One instance of this appears in the common association of Byron with the popularization of Vampire stories, which persists in contemporary culture and functions as a touch point for discussions surrounding race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.²² The desire that generates the resentments, creativity, and social criticism in these areas is in part a cultural aftershock of Byron's meteoric rise and scandalous fall, as it is represented in his and his contemporaries' reflections on his career, life, and work. As Clara Tuite has recently demonstrated, it is the scandalous quality of Byron's prototypical modern celebrity—the ambivalence celebrity arouses in the publics which engender and are themselves shaped by it—that raises more interesting questions about the homology between centers of power arising from mass interest and the nature of power in the modern world (Tuite xx-xxi). Shakespeare and, to a lesser degree, Byron continue to be famous and the contagion of desire that feeds their fame is an effect of the same imitative interest that they experienced and, through their experiences, learned to represent.

In his prose, Byron's habit of turning to the voices of Shakespeare's most emulous characters indicates that, from early on in his career, he intuitively identified his own behaviour with that of figures like Macbeth, Richard III, and Hamlet, who mirror the desires of their rivals but fail to realize them. In the early years of his fame, Byron's recognition of how his emulous

²² In *Loving Vampires: Our Undead Obsession* (2016), Tom Pollard explores the extent to which the modern figure of the vampire derives from the perception of Byron as a demonic, rapacious seducer depicted in John William Polidori's *The Vampyre: A Tale* (1819).

desire resembles that of Shakespeare's tragic heroes is not paired with a capacity to critique his often vengeful ambition. However, in the aftermath of the separation scandal, Byron colours his identification with Macbeth's rivalrous ambition by acknowledging its potentially damaging effects in a critique that does not attempt to evade the inevitability of reciprocal desire, but softens its damaging effects by offering forgiveness instead of vengeance to his estranged wife qua rival. Using Shakespeare's depictions of desire to characterize the imitative quality of his own ambition, Byron acknowledges his resentment, which he mitigates by directing his competitive impulses into the realm of poetic production for a burgeoning literary market place.

Byron's highly successful *Childe Harold* ironically plays upon a variety of historical aesthetics, in a way that creates a unique sense of intimacy between the author and the poem's readership. As Gans demonstrates, social structures shift their configuration over time in order to reflect the new modes by which aesthetic representation manages desire by galvanizing popular attention around ever more peripheral elements of the collective imaginary. By taking these changes into consideration, Byron's *Childe Harold* created a sense of complicity and intimacy with its readership, who wished to mirror Byron's posture of knowing urbanity vis-à-vis the clichés of England's poetic tradition. The figure of Childe Harold—whom Byron links to both the classical and early modern aesthetics as a modern Timon of Athens—becomes a vehicle through which to examine and critique past aesthetics with their respective understandings of desire. These various modes of desire are manifest in the different historical Timons Byron's characterization of Harold references. Shakespeare's Timon differs from the classical Timon in his actively rivalrous relationship to Athens, which contrasts with the classical Timon's outright renunciation of the city; Byron's modern Timon cultivates an ironic distance from both of his forbearers and affects to remain utterly unmoved by the mimetic centres of social and aesthetic

attention that he abandons. Self-removal and disaffected, backward-looking critique are common features of the Romantic aesthetic that typify Childe Harold and appeal to many of the period's upper class readers, whose desire for innovation reflected the widespread impatience with the political and aesthetic hegemonies of the past. Byron's persona manifest in Harold offered his readers an intimate traveling companion through whose eyes they could survey the ruins of time with a sophisticated boredom, which builds upon—before departing from—the early modern expression of active resentment typified in Shakespeare's Timon.

In his lyrics, Byron's verse resembles Shakespeare's Sonnets by positing an underlying animating drama of vast historical dimensions, wherein the poet-speaker reads a part that expresses a momentary manifestation of desire's interindividual quality in humanity's aesthetic and political history. Thus, Byron's treatment of desire differs from that undertaken in Shakespeare's Sonnets only in the wider historical scope of its apprehension of past aesthetic strategies for deferring the readers' desire to dominate socially constructed centres of imitative attention. Byron further adapts the Sonnet's vision of literature as a memorial for desire's flow, which—in so far as a given lyric endures through history in its structural capacity to represent common experiences of desire—constitutes the basis of the poem's and poet's fame.

Byron represents the desire operative in political history in terms of his own experience by figuring it directly. He does this lyrically in *On this Day I Complete my Thirty-Six Year* and dramatically in *Marino Faliero*, which is largely modeled on Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Faliero's circumstances resemble Byron's insofar as the young poet understood himself to have been elevated by his peers to a position of privilege through his literary celebrity only to suffer the calumny and scorn of his nation's elite. In this sense, he may be said to identify with Shakespeare's assassinated Caesar and Brutus, who suffer for their emulous desire, or ambition,

as it is a function of their nobility. Confronted by the political landscape of Europe in the aftermath of the French Revolution, Byron's Whig belief in the usefulness of the nobility was at odds with the radicalism inherent to his abstract ideals of individual and popular freedom. Departing from the sacralization of generative violence in the conclusion of *Julius Caesar*, Byron's play concludes with a mob scene, in which the uncertain outcome of the plebeian crowd's transgression of the Doge's palace symbolizes the openendedness of the revolutionary movements that were—in the time of *Marino Faliero*'s composition—agitating against the Concert of Europe's increasingly nationalistic and conservative imperatives. Byron's play does not reflect Shakespeare's confidence in the capacity of ritual to reestablish hegemonic centres of power in the aftermath of widespread mimetic violence. As an anachronistic, proto-modern observation on nineteenth-century events in Europe, *Marino Faliero* displays Byron's sense of desire as a volatile generative force that (in his period and the future) would continue to overleap the bounds imposed on it by the ritual centres of attention that enforce the cathartically pacifying conclusions represented in Shakespeare's plays.

In *The Deformed Transformed*, Byron builds upon Shakespeare's understanding of mimetic desire by folding features of Shakespearean characters—who manifest desire's effects in socially inimical and self-destructive ambition—into the doppelganger that is Arnold and the Stranger. The Faustian supernaturalism of the play allows Byron to employ folk concepts of sympathetic relation as metaphors for the mimetically generated resentments that fuel ambition within the individual imagination and between rival bodies within the larger context of history. In the Stranger and Arnold, Byron unites Shakespeare's diabolical manifestations of mimetic rivalry, such as the Ghost and weird sisters, to the older playwright's most resentful, ambitious, envious, and jealous figures, which include Caliban, Richard III, Thersites, Achilles, Iago, and

Othello. This combination—along with the play’s focus on the relationship between the central figures—makes the fragmentary play an important study of the desire operative in the individual psyche. As noted above, *The Deformed* creates a variety of intertextual linkages between Shakespeare’s representations of mimesis and those of Goethe, Pickersgill, Roman-cum-European histories of rivalry, and the diabolist metaphors for antagonistically reciprocal desire found in the Western tradition. Finally, the play—in its rendering of Arnold’s ambition as a function of the particular mimetic impulses accompanying his Richard III-like deformity—autobiographically refers to the insecurities that fueled Byron’s own efforts to achieve notoriety as a poet, while exploring, through Arnold-Achilles’s anxieties, the often inimical psychic impact of his hypermimetic tendencies within the context of realized literary success.

Employed as a means to further explore Byron’s experience of success and notoriety, *Don Juan*’s references to Shakespeare depict the phenomena of celebrity and fame as arising from mimetic desire insofar as a subject is aggrandized to either of these statuses through the imitative tendencies of a large consumer audience. Byron complicates his renderings of celebrity and fame by considering the role of modern markets in determining the course of his protagonist’s journey with famous figures taken from literary and political history and drawing further examples from his popular contemporaries. Byron turns to Shakespeare to give his intuitions of desire’s imitative nature authority, but he also challenges and adapts Shakespeare’s insights based on his own apprehensions of how particular subjects attract desire and so become centres of attention capable of enduring in memory, or cultural history. Byron’s abstract, digressive musings on how the mimetic reciprocity existing between personified Life and Death pertain to Hamlet’s question of “being”—as a synecdoche for celebrity and fame—eventually lead him to return to more concrete considerations of desire’s mimetic movement as it appears in

the amorous triangle at Norman Abbey. In the English cantos, the popular figure of Shakespeare as a nationalist literary demi-god—or “his British Godship”—provides him licence to reconsider the structure of desire allegorically depicted in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The English cantos thereby extend Shakespearean observations on desire by applying the playwright's observations to new circumstances. In this endeavour, Shakespeare's avatar, Aurora Raby, projects a grave yet radiant pity for “man's decline” (14.45), “a depth of feeling to embrace,” and “[t]houghts, boundless, deep, but silent too as Space” (16.48), all of which combine to establish an aura of awe around Shakespeare's insights into human nature—an aura which Byron, had he finished *Don Juan*, likely would likely not have left un-ironised. Nevertheless, in *Don Juan*, Byron's respect for Shakespeare's rendering of desire's imitative nature appears most starkly in his discussion of fame and celebrity, his adaptation of Shakespeare's “Love in Idleness,” and the profound allure of Aurora-Shakespeare's austere appraisal of humanity's often troublesome imitative nature.

Byron's definition of Shakespeare's character, as manifest in Aurora, focuses on its depth, or its awareness of a fundamental causality located well below the epiphenomena of “this world's perplexing waste” (16.48). Shakespeare's insights, Byron suggests, comprehend the substrate of desire that constitutes a crucial undergirding impetus for all human endeavours. For Byron, the profound movements of the sea often serve as an analogy for these complex flows of longing, ambition, and resentment. This habit of drawing on the ocean as a metaphor for desire appears at the end of *Childe Harold* when Byron proclaims his ostensibly unique elemental attachment to the natural world in an apostrophe to the sea—a force which he figures, like desire itself, beyond the control of humanity's will: “Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean—roll! / Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain” (4.179). Shakespeare too employed such metaphors

in his dramatization of humanity's tumultuous interdividually determined behaviour. For example, *The Rape of Lucrece* draws a similar parallel between the movement of violent human passion in a passage which self-consciously considers its own mimetic quality as metaphorically figuring the reciprocal antagonism animating the Trojan war through reference to the sea:

And from the strand of Dardan where they fought
 To Simois' reedy banks the red blood ran,
 Whose waves to imitate the battle sought
 With swelling ridges, and their ranks began
 To break upon the gallèd shore.... (1436-40)

Within the context of *The Rape of Lucrece*—a poem describing how Collatinus incites Tarquin's rapacious lust by vaunting his high estimation of his wife—the reference to the mimetic duel between the Trojans and the Greeks over the ideal of honour figured in Helen is an inevitable poetic analogy. In this instance, its appearance in the aqueous metaphor illustrates Shakespeare's sense of the historical predictability of mimetic rivalry. Observed across cultures and throughout history, comparisons like those made in *The Rape of Lucrece* become part of an anthropology that is taken up by future poets.

In Byron's verse, the signal example of such a metaphor—which expresses the continuity between what are often supposed to be individually willing agents instead of subjects linked by desire—appears at the end of *Don Juan's* Canto XV:

Between two worlds life hovers like a star,
 'Twixt night and morn, upon the horizon's verge:
 How little do we know that which we are!
 How less what we may be! The eternal surge

Of time and tide rolls on, and bears afar
 Our bubbles; as the old burst, new emerge,
 Lash'd from the foam of ages; while the graves
 Of Empires heave but like some passing waves. (99)

The stanza concludes the canto that foreshadows a conflict for Juan's conflicted position as the object of Aurora and Adeline's rivalry, but also prepares the way for the appearance of the Ghost, which will eventually be revealed as a ploy by yet another competitor for Juan's amorous interest. Byron also references the words of Shakespeare's Ophelia: "How little do we know that which we are! / How less what we may be" (*Hamlet* 4.5.42-43). In her insanity, Ophelia distractedly indexes each individual's subjection to the inconstant and un-willed movements of the passions, which lead to Hamlet's murder of her father and deepen the play's reflection upon mortality. Taking these sentiments along with the preceding simile of life as the setting morning star, Byron's stanza begins as a condensed reflection on the shared human experiences that unite the characters of the English Cantos, the poet, and his readers before turning again to the sea as a metaphor for the interindividual quality of desire operating in history. In this image, individual subjects are bubbles in roiling masses of foam, which emerge from oceanic-time buoyed upon swells that memorialize fallen empires. By figuring the individual's finitude within a radically interconnected and dynamic totality, Byron's lyrical image follows Shakespeare by embedding the desire-bound subject within the broad, fluid sweep of history.

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