



Allameh Tabataba'i University
Faculty of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages
Department of English Language and Literature

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts (M.A.) in
English Literature

Lord Byron's *Don Juan* in the Context of Authority

Advisor: Dr. Seyed Mohammad Marandi

Reader: Dr. Kamran Ahmadgoli

By:
Susan Poursanati

September, 2010

Tehran, Iran

In the Name of Allah,

The Most Merciful,

The Most Beneficent



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We Hereby Recommend that the Thesis by

Susan Poursanati

Entitled:

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Be Accepted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in English Literature

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چکیده

الف. موضوع و طرح مسئله (اهمیت موضوع و هدف): این تحقیق بر شاهکار جرج گردون لرد بایرن تمرکز دارد که در ایران کمتر به آن پرداخته شده است، و می‌کوشد تا پاسخ‌های بایرن به نهاد‌های اجتماعی-فرهنگی سلطه‌گر، چگونگی مقاومت بایرن در برابر این نهادها، و چگونگی هماهنگی بایرن با آنها را بحث و بررسی کند.

ب. مبانی نظری شامل مرور مختصری از منابع، چارچوب نظری و پرسش‌ها و فرضیه‌ها: نگاه بایرن به نهاد‌های ادبی، دینی، و قدرت‌های سیاسی بررسی شده است، تا موضع بحث برانگیز شاعر در برخورد با این نهاد‌های سلطه‌گر در *دن ژوان* نمایان گردد. با اینکه بایرن چهره‌ای انقلابی بود که از انواع قدرت‌های ستمگر ابراز تنفر می‌کرد و از آنها دوری می‌جست، در بعضی موارد در برابر این قدرت‌ها سر تعظیم فرود می‌آورد. این موضوع را می‌توان با نمایاندن او به عنوان شاعری در دام افتاده که هیچ راهی برای فرار از بافت‌گفتمان غالب نمی‌یابد، توجیه کرد.

نویسندگان بزرگ گذشته، که سنت‌های ادبی آنان هنوز توسط هم‌عصران بایرن احیا می‌شد، اسطوره و مفهوم قهرمان‌پروری مربوط به آن، شاعران رمانتیک و گونه‌های شعری آنها، شخصیت‌های مذهبی، احزاب سیاسی و راه و رسمشان، حکومت بریتانیا، ایتالیا، منتقدان ادبی که شاعر را به جامعه پیوند می‌دادند، از جمله موضوعاتی هستند که بایرن در منظومه بلند خود به آنها پرداخته است. علیرغم اینکه بایرن و علیه‌جو ظالمانه سیاسی حاکم بر انگلستان طغیان کرده بود، در *دن ژوان* به خدمت برخی سیاست‌های ظالمانه در می‌آید. نحوه برخورد او با روش حاکم بر شرق شناسی و نمایش او از امپراطوری عثمانی و یونان، نمونه‌هایی از هم‌آوایی بایرن با گفتمان معاصر خود است، که در آنها به شیوه نادرستی آفات سیاسی انگلستان را به شرق فرا می‌فکند.

در *دن ژوان* سر خوردگی جهان پس از انقلاب فرانسه بازنمایی شده است. ضدیت با مسیحیت، کفر و تمسخر بخش بزرگی از واکنش بایرن را به نهاد دین که به عنوان ابزاری سیاسی-اجتماعی که برای کنترل رفتار مردم عمل می‌کرد، تشکیل می‌دهد.

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روش‌های نمونه‌گیری، ابزار اندازه‌گیری، نحوه اجرای آن، شیوه گردآوری و تجزیه و تحلیل

داده ها: مفهوم سلطه در بافت اثر بررسی شده است، به گونه‌ای که نگاه شاعر در هر جامعه‌ای که به آن وارد می‌شود و تعریف اواز سلطه در آن بافت معرفی شده‌اند. تعریف بایرن از رمانتیسیسم و تفاوت او با تعریف هم عصرانش از این سبک ارایه شده است. دانش شرق شناسی به نمایاندن شرق از دیدگاه غرب می‌پردازد. رابطه شاعر با سبک‌های نمایاندن شرق در اوایل قرن نوزدهم تحلیل شده است.

روش تحقیق به صورت کتابخانه‌ای بود. متن شعر با استفاده از داده‌های جمع‌آوری شده از کتاب‌ها و مقالات تحلیل شده است. به دلیل ماهیت کتابخانه‌ای تحقیق، جامعه مورد تحقیق، نمونه‌گیری، روش‌های نمونه‌گیری، و ابزار اندازه‌گیری برای آن تعریف نشده‌اند.

ت. یافته‌های تحقیق: بایرن در عین مخالفت و سرپیچی از نهادهای اجتماعی سلطه‌گر به آنها وابسته است و خود در خدمت آنها در می‌آید. شیوه شعری او با وجود تفاوت‌هایی که با شاعران گذشته و هم عصرانش دارد، در بسیاری موارد با آنها اشتراکات فراوان دارد. همچنین در زمینه شرق شناسی بایرن قادر نیست از متون و گفت‌وگوهای دوره خود قدمی فراتر گذارد.

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Abstract

This study focuses on George Gordon Lord Byron's masterpiece *Don Juan*, and tries to discuss and analyse Lord Byron's responses to the authoritative socio-cultural institutions. Byron had an ambivalent manner in his treatment of the authorities; he both rejected and adopted them. Byron's treatment of the literary and Christian institutions and the political authorities is scrutinised to represent that the poet's problematic stance in his dealings with the authorities in *Don Juan*. Though Byron was a revolutionary figure who despised all forms of oppressive power and quested to be detached from them, he sometimes conforms to some modes of such authorities. Byron is an entrapped poet who finds no way out of the dominant context of which had been weaved like a strong net around him.

The literary authorities of the past, whose tradition was still being revived at the time of Byron by his contemporaries, the epic enterprise and its notion of heroism, the Romantic poets and their modes of poetry, Biblical and religious figures, political parties and their practices, the British establishment, the Italian influences, the reviewers who linked the poet to the society are subjects which Byron has dealt with them in his long poem *Don Juan*. Though Byron was a political reactionary, who raged against the oppressive political climate of England, in *Don Juan* he shows subservience to some oppressive policies. His treatment of the Orientalist practice and his addressing of the Ottoman Empire and Greece are examples of his submissiveness to his contemporary discursive practices, in which he falsely projects the political vices of England to the East.

The disillusionment of the post-French Revolution world can be traced in *Don Juan*. Anti-Christianity, blasphemy and mockery shape a huge part of Byron's reaction to the institution of Christianity which was acting as a socio-political device to monitor the behaviour of the people.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	viii
Abstract	ix
1. Chapter I: Introduction and Review of the Related Literature	1
1.1. Introductoion	2
1.2. Review of the Related Literature	7
2. Chapter II: Byron and Authority	13
2.1. Byron and Authority	14
2.1.1. Spain	14
2.1.2. Greece	15
2.1.3. Turkish State	16
2.1.4. England	18
2.2. Byron and Politics	19
2.3. Byron's Religious Heritage	19
2.4. The Grand Tour	20
2.5. Orientalism	26
3. Chapter III: Byron and Literary Authorities	29
3.1. Byron	30
3.2. About <i>Don Juan</i>	31
3.3. <i>Don Juan</i> and the Reviewers	40
3.4. <i>Don Juan</i> and Literary Authorities	45
3.4.1. <i>Don Juan</i> and the Literary Authorities of the Past	46
3.4.2. Byron in Constructing an Epic	51
3.4.3. Byron, Hero, and Heroism	59

3.4.4. Byron and Romantic Practice	64
4. Chapter IV: Byron, Christianity and Resistance	75
4.1. Christianity as a Means of Social Control and Byron's reaction to it	76
4.2. Byron's Resistance, Flaws and Paradoxes	88
5. Chapter V: Conclusion	104
5.1. Orientalism as an Example of Byron's compromise with the Political and Romantic Literary Authorities	106
Bibliography	114

Chapter I

Introduction and Review of the Related Literature

1.1. Introduction

“I have always been a friend to and a Voter for reform . . . I cannot but approve of a Constitutional amelioration of long abuses” (Byron qtd. in Bevis 84-85).

George Gordon Lord Byron, in a reactionary iconoclastic movement, raged against established authorities (Schock 173) and the institutions of authority. Schock has marked Byron’s posturing as a revolutionary leader in his works (157). But, there are some ambiguities in Byron’s masterpiece, *Don Juan*, that shadow this revolutionary pose. Though Byron wanted to play the role of the rebel in *Don Juan*, in it he *assimilated* the authorities whom he much despised.

Discussing Michel Foucault’s ideas about power and knowledge, Stuart Hall assumes that knowledge is established by power (34). Thus, people who live in a specific era get their knowledge from the dominant and authoritative context of knowledge which prevails that era (35). However revolutionary and rebellious the Romantic poet, Byron, was, he shared the same context of knowledge with the authorities and could not live out of or escape from that context. As a result, his treatment to the authorities in *Don Juan* is ambivalent. His shared knowledge with the authorities can be regarded as a reason of his sometimes loss in converting, taking back at or toppling down the authorities in the poem.

This dissertation will focus on George Gordon Lord Byron’s masterpiece *Don Juan*, and observes and analyses Lord Byron’s dealings with the authorities and institutionalised authority. The main goal of the study is to prove that it was almost

impossible for Byron to stand against the authorities and its authoritative institutions.

Strong literary works creatively misread and misinterpret a precursor text or texts in an act of poetic misprision (Bloom, *The Western* 8). *Don Juan* is such a misinterpretation and misrepresentation in which Byron has set a dialogue with his precursors to his contemporaries, from Homer to Robert Southey. Epic Poetry, Italian poets and poetical conventions (Banderia and Saglia 8), the works of Byron's contemporary poets, the reviewers who were the link between the poet and the mass public (Franta 18), and the up- rising dominance of the novel as a literary genre (Felluga 2) are among the literary authorities which are addressed in *Don Juan* and have influenced it.

The first and most important poetic enterprise which Byron opts to converse with is the epic. Bloom has classified *Don Juan* as a mock epic poem (Bloom's Classic 221) which reverses the epic traditions and conventions. For example, his treatment of the Muses is different from the traditional epics, his Muse is a pedestrian Muse. He also chooses a hero far distinct from the ones of his precursors. He begins his epic in the beginning instead of the *Medias res*, and interestingly compares his heroes and their problematic conduct to the admired actions of the well-known heroes of the epics written before his.

Byron deplored the degeneracy in the political, poetical and moral condition of his country which was being propagated by ideologues such as Robert Southey. Alongside the authorities the voices of these ideologues determined right and

wrong, good and evil, angelic and satanic. Byron's voice undercuts every voice which assumed this kind of authority (McGann 49).

Byron's contemporary poets are treated contemptuously in *Don Juan* and are belittled by the poet. Especially, Robert Southey (1774-1843), the poet Laureate and historian, who represented the voice of conservatism (Bloom, *Bloom's Classic* 225) is harshly attacked by Byron. Throughout his long poem Byron has never forgot to sting Southey, Coleridge, Wordsworth and other poets of the Romantic trend, English or continental. But, the poet himself is under their influence, though unconsciously.

In *Don Juan*, Byron calls all poets liars (3, 87, 875-92). He is a poet himself and he may lie too to his readers:

Thus sung, or would, or could, or should have sung,
The modern Greek, in tolerable verse;
If not like Orpheus quite, when Greece was young,
Yet in these times he might have done much worse:
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.¹

¹ All poetry is quoted from *Selected Poems of Lord Byron*, Introduction, Bibliography, Notes and Glossary by Paul Wright (2006 edition). For more information refer to Bibliography.

Such a resolute irresolution is typical of Byron's poetry: the affirmation of the power of poetry on the one hand, and the pronouncement of its unreliability on the other (McGann 49).

The horrific aftermath of the French Revolution suppressed the wind of change which the Romantic poets had longed for. In *Don Juan* Byron shows this disillusionment and void by representing the hopeless mood of the political climate of the post-Waterloo world (Schock 144). As Terry Eagleton has noted in his book, *Literary Criticism: An Introduction*, in the Romantic era England has been governed like a police state (19). In such a repressive climate in which the poets were under the vigilant eye of the State, Byron in a self-conscious act quested for distance from the politics of the oppressor (Schock 144). Byron's contempt, frustration or bewilderment from a culture which repelled all reforming movements are mirrored in his *Don Juan* (Schock 144). But, despite his revolutionary postures, *Don Juan* sometimes becomes a picture of Byron's political paralysis. In a recent authoritative study of Byron's politics, Malcolm Kelsall has represented Byron as a trapped figure (156). In *Don Juan* Byron's responses to the English political authorities remain in a state of ambivalence and controversy. While in some instances he is critical of the King, the government and their policies, in some other occasions he is subservient to them. Being a Lord and a one-time member of the House of the Lords, Byron is not a reliable political rebel, however he tries to be; and it is this controversy which this study tries to represent.

One aspect of controversy in Byron's politics is Orientalism. Instead of rejecting the dominant ideas about the Orient, which gave a corrupted image of the Orient and the Oriental peoples, Byron found homage for such false ideas in *Don Juan*. In fact, in his treatment of the Orient we can see only a pale shadow of Byron's reactionary figure. The British Empire is redefined via the image of the Ottoman Empire in the East (Turhan 3). The Ottoman Empire is manipulated by Byron for his political purposes. He projects British despotism into its Eastern *Other*. Also, the picture Byron paints of the Greece is far from reality and Greece has a long way to get rid of the Oriental identity ascribed to it by Byron (Roessel 113).

Byron certainly publicized and made glamorous the stance of the solitary individual somehow ennobled by his exclusion from a Christian order (Priestman 238). In *Don Juan*, Byron goes beyond attacking on Christianity and is engaged in the mock-serious act of ideological identification of the religious figures (Schock 3). At that period, Christianity was an authoritative institution to control and shape the behaviour of the individuals. Roessel notes —Byron's insincere positioning of a traditionally defined God (243). St. Paul and other religious authorities are ridiculed in the poem. Byron looks sceptically on doctrinal matters and shows no respect to institutions such as marriage, confession and preaching; he also damns prayer as hypocrisy. Today, Byron's protagonists are known by their moral transgressiveness (Schock 3). But Byron does not stop at this point; he has identified his heroes' and heroines' sins and vices with the virtues of the main religious characters, in a vast scale.

1.2. Review of the Related Literature

A number of books and articles which are related to the Romantic poets in general, Byron's life, works, and their characteristics are analysed and studied in this dissertation. Here, these scholarly works are briefly reviewed.

Some books explore the lives and works of the great poets of the Romantic era including Byron. *Romantic Consciousness: Blake to Mary Shelley* deals with the idea of consciousness and the Romantic poets' revolutionary treatment of the idea. The book is written by Beer. Bennett surveys the transformation of the relationship between poet and audience in the works of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley and Byron, in his, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity*. *English Romanticism and the Celtic World* is edited by Carruthers and Rawes. The main theme of this book is the British Romantic poets' responses to the national and cultural identities. Romantic form and Orientalism is among the subjects also studied in this book. *Romanticism* written by Day surveys the reception of the Romantic writers; it analyses various readings of the English Romantic poets by various critics and critical approaches, from Edmund Burke to Post-Structuralism.

Atheism in the works of Romantic poets which was affected by politics, mythology and science is the subject of Priestman's book *Romantic Atheism: Poetry and Freethought, 1780-1830*. In *Romantic Satanism: Myth and the Historical Moment in Blake, Shelley, and Byron*, by way of contextualising the major works of Blake, Byron and Shelley within their milieu, Schock claims that these poets' Satanism is the result of the hopes and fears prevalent in their age.