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An enquiry into the appropriation of the Byronic hero in Brontë fiction.

SHIMWELL, Emily Erica.

Published version

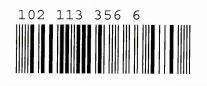SHIMWELL, Emily Erica. (2015). An enquiry into the appropriation of the Byronic hero in Brontë fiction. Masters, Sheffield Hallam University (United Kingdom)..

An Enquiry into the Appropriation of the Byronic Hero in Brontë Fiction

By Emily Erica Shimwell

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of English by Research

Sheffield Hallam University

October 2015

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ABSTRACT

Criticism upon the Byronic hero has previously focussed upon Romantic male authors that aimed to tantalise female audiences with their Byronic creations. However, the most enduring examples of Byronic heroes were arguably created by female authors of the Victorian period, in protofeminist texts. The most famous examples of these Byronic appropriations can undoubtedly be found in the works of the Brontë sisters. This thesis aims to examine why the Brontës adopted and modified the Romantic figure of the Byronic Hero, in the Victorian period, and utilised it for their purpose of reassessing female roles.

In order to do this, focus will be placed upon the metamorphosis of the Byronic prototype in the Brontë sisters' fiction. My study will commence by examining how the Brontës imitated the Byronic hero of the masculine Romantic tradition in their juvenilia, attempting to assess to what extent this proves problematic for a collection of female authors. My second chapter will consider the transmutation of the Byronic hero into a female form in their most popular works. In doing so it will outline how the Brontës used the form of the female Bildungsroman, regenerating the Byronic heroine for this genre, in order to sustain the difficult balancing act between individualism and socialisation. The final chapter concludes with a discussion of the possible limitations of the Byronic hero (within in the novel form) in *Shirley,* but examines how *Villette* attempts to resolve these constraints.

This research attempts to differentiate itself from other research within the field, with regard to the Byronic hero, as it aims to contextualise the character-type within both a Victorian setting and women's fiction. In doing so, this work situates itself within the newly emerging body of research which aims to consider female appropriations of Byronism, in connection with questioning the roles of women in nineteenth-century society. This study will interact with critical works from scholars such as Franklin, Lansdown and Wootton. The objective of this research is to explore two under researched areas of criticism: firstly, female appropriations of the Byronic hero (which have often been dismissed as a clichés), and secondly the possibility that the Byronic hero can exist in a female form.

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

The primary aim of this research is to examine why the Brontës hold on to the Romantic figure of the Byronic Hero in the Victorian period and adopt it for their purpose of reassessing female roles, particularly the role of the heroine in Victorian fiction. Critical material consulted includes overlapping fields of Nineteenth-century Feminist studies, Byronism and Brontë fiction. A complete listing of all consulted material can be found within the bibliography provided on page **62.** My research has been overseen throughout by a supervisory team, including a Director of studies, Dr Sarah Dredge, with contributions provided by Prof. Steven Earnshaw, in a supervisory capacity.

INTRODUCTION

The Byronic hero often stands in literary criticism as he does in fiction itself; as an outsider, an anomaly and an extremely problematic figure, to say the least. For years, criticism focussed on this character-type has drawn upon the Byronic hero's ability to dominate women, picturing him as the male predator who persecutes his victims with his own intense guilt-ridden (and often fatal) brand of Byronic love. Although the Byronic hero's destructive power is assumed to centre around inherent misogyny, common thought has suggested antithetically that the hero was created primarily with female audiences in mind, supposedly existing to seduce female readers with tantalizing visions of extreme human passion. Byron himself (according to Trelawney), both recognised and to some extent exploited this ability, confessing to Shelley that he conscientiously pursued his "'Corsair style', to please the ladies" (Trelawney 1968:29).

Until recently, criticism concerning the Byronic hero has focused primarily upon representations of this character-type in literature contributed by male Romantic authors, drawing particularly upon Lord Byron's writing and the seemingly symbiotic[1] relationship he shared with his hero. Such widespread critical interest of this particular focus, has meant that the Byronic character-type has often been considered in criticism as a fixed and isolated feature of male-sponsored Romanticism, anchoring the hero to both a specific time (the beginning of the nineteenth century) and literary style.

However, newly emerging criticism (particularly the work of Sarah Wootton, 2004 & 2007) has begun to problematise this theory, recognising that the more iconic, memorable and enduring examples of the Byronic prototype, have in fact been created and reproduced by female authors of the Victorian period. The most famous example of this is often considered to be Emily Brontë's Heathcliff, in *Wuthering Heights*. Franklin has suggested that these female appropriations of the Byronic hero arose after the character-types' initial popularity had subsided, arguing that the "lacuna

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[1] Poole and Elfenbein both outline the "symbiotic relationship" between Byron and his hero, arguing that that "public view of Byron's heroes was mediated at every stage, by the public's image of Byron" (Poole 2010:7).

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between the two literary periods" (Romantic and Victorian) produced a "golden age" of women's fiction, which centred around "answering, appropriating and rewriting Byron" (Franklin 2012:1). Wootton argues that it is undoubtedly through these later "female revisions, and adaptations" of the Byronic hero, in the Victorian period, "that Byron and his work retain a widespread appeal" (Wootton 2004:123), spanning almost a further two centuries after its initial surge in popularity. In suggesting this, Wootton establishes female reproductions of Byronism within the legacy of the Byronic hero, alongside male Romantic authors, expanding upon traditional focuses of criticism, or, as Lansdown remarks, "supplement[ing] them, at least" (Lansdown 2001:107). This study aims to situate itself within this newly emerging body of work dedicated to the exploration of female appropriations of the Byronic hero in Victorian fiction, progressing the critical agenda from established masculine Romantic thought to women's Victorian fiction.

Although this area of study has been critically justified by scholars such as Wootton, Lansdown and many others, female authorship of the Byronic hero has received little attention, labelled by Franklin as a "familiar but unexamined cliché" (Franklin 2012:1). This statement highlights the consensus that female adaptations of the Byronic hero are common and well known, yet remain largely uninvestigated due to the assumption that they are unoriginal, insipid and do not add value to the field of study. This thesis aims to inject new interest into this particular blind spot in literary criticism, by disputing such assumptions.

As Franklin suggests, formal enquiry into female appropriations of the Byronic hero in Victorian fiction has been scarce, yet numerous critics have made passing assumptions about these appropriations. These suppositions tend to speculate that the reproduction of the Byronic hero is no more than an example of commonplace mimicry and a continued homage to Byron. However, the consequence of these assumptions means that the many female creators of the Byronic hero are subsumed into the collective mass of female consumers (and dedicated followers) of the cult of Byron, disregarding the possibility of any wider aims. In light of this, these assumptions raise two interesting questions, which in turn expose an unchartered area of study.

Firstly, why would female authors devote their attention to reproducing a character-type that aims to destroy them? The answer to this question could be dismissed by the same assumptions placed

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upon female readers; which suggests that female authors were merely seduced by the sexual allure of the Byronic hero, with little regard for the female subjection involved. The second question, however, holds more importance, asking: why does the supposedly misogynistic Byronic hero also appear in many female texts, which are commonly deemed 'protofeminist'[2]? The answer to this conundrum is far more complex, as at face value the two ideas work antagonistically, with protofeminist texts frequently depicting the empowerment or rebellion of the very same female characters that the Byronic hero is said to destroy.

However, upon closer inspection, the aims of protofeminist texts and the aims of the Byronic hero may be more similar than initial impressions suggest. Victorian protofeminist fiction functions to critique dominant sexual and gender ideology of the nineteenth century, challenging social conventions and prescribed gender roles. McGann identifies similar revolutionary qualities in the Byronic hero, arguing that the hero works to shatter social boundaries and pose a "challenge to the comforts of undemanding and conventional ethics" (McGann 2002:26), by proving nothing in particular, but raising questions.

Viewing the similarities between the aims of the Byronic hero and nineteenth-century protofeminist literature in this way, could explain the hero's recurring presence within protofeminist fiction, suggesting that female authors did not react against the Byronic hero, but through him, aligning his revolutionary qualities with their own protofeminist aims. This thesis will explore this interesting relationship between the Byronic hero and protofeminist fiction, by examining the collective works of the Brontë sisters, who stand as the most famous (and successful) Victorian female appropriators of the Byronic hero, but are also widely accepted critically as protofeminist writers. The aims of this thesis are therefore relatively simple in that it will examine why the Brontës re-establish the Romantic figure of the Byronic Hero in the Victorian period and regenerate it for their purpose of reassessing female roles, particularly the role of the heroine in Victorian fiction.

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[2] This term is used in the context of its broader definition, when the terms and arguments of modern feminism are anticipated before the use of the term feminist was known, i.e. prior to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

But, before continuing with this line of enquiry, it is necessary to clarify the key assumptions of this study, beginning by outlining the 'female roles' with which the Brontë sisters' work took aim upon — those of the nineteenth-century complementary model of gender. Poovey suggests that the origins of gender complementary roles lie within the paradoxes of seventeenth-century English Puritanism, which introduced the possibility "of complete religious equality for the sexes, through the priesthood of all believers" (Poovey 1985:7). However, this doctrine also functioned by enforcing the "importance of the family, as a religious unit" (Poovey 1985:7), but a unit that nonetheless circulated around the Roman laws of coverture. As a result, women's roles were defined in terms of domesticity, limiting their activities to 'feminine' norms of behaviour (such as increased subservience and passivity towards their fathers and husbands), with the promise of a "spiritual and socially meaningful role" to compensate for this oppression (Poovey 1985:7). Poovey argues that in aiming to be feminine and virtuous, "women could emulate men's economic competition in 'feminine,' nonmaterialistic terms" (Poovey 1985:8), incentivising female propriety by offering women something that they could viably compete with men over. Tague reads the evidence of this ideology in conduct writing of the seventeenth-century, which "encouraged" self-scrutiny and self-monitoring of women in the family home (Tague 2002:30).

However, this encouragement didn't last long, before it transformed into outright enforcement. By the eighteenth-century women's 'more virtuous' capabilities became entrenched as an intrinsic part of their female nature, when ideological ideals began to be (supposedly) evidenced by biological studies, which aimed to exaggerate the biological difference between men and women in order to codify gender differentiation. Craciun argues that this grounded Puritan-sponsored feminine character traits, such as "passionlessness and domesticity in empirical science" (Craciun 2002:3), abandoning the conventional "one-sex model" (which relied upon the belief that "women's bodies were seen essentially as inferior versions of male bodies"), for a "two-sex system of complementary difference" (Craciun 2002:3). Poovey argues that the result of this meant that "by the end of the eighteenth century the terms 'female' and 'feminine' were understood by virtually all men and women to be synonymous" (Poovey 1985:6). Consequently, this ensured that many women were denied autonomy, instead radiating subscribed feminine passivity, modesty and chastity. As a result of

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this, Tague suggests that women had to "examine not only their actions but even their consciences with great care" (Tague 2002:30) as behaviours that acted against gender coding were deemed scientifically 'unnatural'.

The Evangelical rise of the nineteenth century continued to galvanise female self-effacement by introducing the ideology of the Angel in the House to society. The female myth of the Angel in the House stood to reinforce women's roles of self-sacrifice, drawing upon the similar precepts of moral superiority that the Puritans had established. However, women of this generation were encouraged to be virtuous not only because science dictated that they should be, but with the promise of 'influence' as a reward for pious behaviour. Homans argues that the nineteenth-century use of the term 'influence' meant the trade of a woman's "economic and social autonomy" (Homans 1999:3) for a symbolic measure of power in marriage, represented most famously by Sarah Lewis' rhetoric in *Woman's Mission*. This power focussed upon the Evangelical doctrine which encouraged women to be "the morally superior partner in marriage [...] claiming moral authority over religious and sexual matters" (Perkins 1993:87), in order to ensure the family's divine transcendence, their souls supervised and protected by the wife's angelic 'goodness'. In terms of the law, 'influence' meant that women had no real, solid, power at all, in comparison to men who had all of the legal power. Alternately, influence focussed upon women's potential, or promised, power; redeemable only in deathly transcendence. This womanly role ensured that female claims to authority were placed within the world of the imaginative (the symbolic); a world governed by mythological Angels, rather than earthly laws and privilege.

A further concern of this study that must be clarified is the classification of the Byronic hero himself. The primary foundation with which this thesis relies upon is Peter Thorslev's definition of the Byronic hero in his study *The Byronic hero: Types and Prototypes* (1962). This groundbreaking work can be used to define the origins, physiognomy and distinguishing characteristics of the Byronic prototype and, as such, is commonly relied upon in criticism for the purpose of classification. This thesis will propagate around the definition, which identifies the Byronic hero as:

> [I]nvariably courteous towards women, often loves music or poetry, has a strong sense of honour, and carries about him [...] a deep sense of guilt. He is almost invariably sympathetic in spite of his 'crimes', none of which involve unnecessary cruelty, as do the crimes of the

Gothic Villains. He has been ensouled and humanised, and this is the crucial difference. [...] Fatal the Byronic hero may be; cruel he is most decidedly not. (Thorslev 1962:8)

However, more importantly, Thorslev's work argues that the Byronic hero never stood as a truly original creation, but prevailed by evolving from existing Romantic prototypes. In this, Thorslev suggests that the hero originally spawned from the Romantic Child of Nature (the Noble Savage), which later became interweaved with the Hero of Sensibility and the Gothic Villain, producing a character with a well-established literary genealogy, before being considered in its own individual right. As a result of this evolution, the Byronic hero can be seen to emerge from a variety of different sources and works of literature, meaning that although, the hero bears the name of Lord Byron, the genesis of the Byronic hero actually occurred before his writing[3]. As such, this study doesn't aim to identify singular Byronic influences, but speaks of the Byronic hero as a character-type of three evolutionary waves[4], rather than a particular individual or character. As a result of this, this study will not be strictly limited to the Byronic hero of Lord Byron's works (as previous studies have), but his input will be frequently referenced to as the most prominent reproducer of this character-type.

In methodology this study is fairly simple, in that it considers the collective works of the Brontë sisters, in easily divisible groups that are based upon chronology. I have chosen to order the project in this way to compare how the sisters' work interacts with each other collectively, rather than considering their Byronic developments individually. This decision to view the Brontë sisters' work in this way is based on the assumption that, although the works of Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë are considered to be vastly different and unique in many respects, their texts blatantly engaged with each other, as Elfenbein comments that "Emily establish[ed] her originality against Charlotte's" (Elfenbein 1995:148), with Langland commenting that Anne "self-consciously critique[d] her sisters' work [...] establishing alternative standards and values" (Langland 1989:29). As a result of this the Brontë sisters' works tend to circulate around many of the same ideas and issues, tackling many of the same problems. Regretfully, Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* and Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor* have

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[3] The hero can be identified in many earlier pieces of literature, including the works of Shakespeare, but most prevalently Milton's *Paradise Lost*.
[4] Three waves of Byronic hero could be considered as the pre-Byron; i.e. Shakespeare's Byronic characters (Hamlet, Macbeth etc.), Byron's heroes (Manfred, Harold, Don Juan etc.) and Female Appropriations of the Byronic hero (Heathcliff, Mr Darcy etc.)

been omitted from this collection, due to a lack of space, but revisiting these texts at another point in time, may prove to be fruitful in the expansion upon this area of study.

In order to carry out this research, this study will focus upon the metamorphosis of the Byronic prototype in the Brontë sisters' fiction, charting the adaptations and revisions of the original Romantic Byronic model, and contextualising these changes with nineteenth-century debates of gender. My study will commence by examining how the Brontës imitated the Byronic hero of the masculine Romantic tradition, in their juvenilia, attempting to assess to what extent this proves problematic for a collection of female authors. My second chapter will consider the transmutation of the Byronic hero into a female form in the their most popular works, which outlines how the Brontës used the female Bildungsroman form and adapted their heroines to this in order to regulate the difficult balancing act between individualism and socialisation. This work will conclude with a discussion of the possible limitations of the Byronic hero within the novel form in *Shirley*, but examines how *Villette* attempts to resolves these constraints. All in all, this work will discuss how the Byronic hero belongs as rightfully within Victorian female works of fiction, as it does in the works of the male Romantics.

CHAPTER ONE:

Byronic Imitation of the Masculine Romantic Tradition in Brontë Juvenilia.

'Albion and Marina', 'Light up the halls', 'There shines the moon' and

'The Captive's Dream'.

In their cooperative study on literary juvenilia, Alexander and McMaster argue that the nineteenth-century was "rich in the juvenile writings of children who mock, cavil, exaggerate, and explore the adult attitudes that surround them and that they encounter in their reading" (Alexander & McMaster 2005:11). They argue that this makes juvenilia particularly useful, as it recognises a "young author's appropriation of the adult world" around them (Alexander & McMaster 2005:11), granting readers a culturally rich vision of nineteenth-century society that can be obtained by reading the works of child authors. Alexander and McMaster assert that "imitation is a major characteristic" of this writing, as a part of the "creative process", which involves "writing in the style of someone else [...] until we develop our own style" (Alexander & McMaster 2005:77). This process of imitation enables the young author to gain an assumption of power vicariously, as the powerless and silenced youth imitates and reworks the techniques of the powerful adult world, using adult influence to craft and develop creative voices of their own. The resulting juvenile material can then be regarded as both an example of young creative energy and imagination, but also as a measure of the influence of popular adult works of the time, as contemporary literary styles and trends percolate into the craft of the child author.

Although the disparity between literary periods has been extensively disputed[5], the period of writing that many young nineteenth-century authors tended to imitate was not necessarily the early works of Victorian realism, emerging in the world around them, but instead the Romantic style born at the final quarter of the previous century. A possible reason for this heightened interest could lie in the connection between Romanticism and the celebration of the child. For Rowland, the Romantic period is "characterised as infantile and childish" (Rowland 2012:4), symbolised by the Rousseauian

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[5] See Barfoot, C.C. (1999). *Victorian Keats and Romantic Carlyle: The Fusions and Confusions of Literary Periods.*

image of a child (untainted by the corruptive influence of society) and a language of simplicity and emotion. In light of this, the celebration of youth made the Romantic tradition an attractive source of inspiration for many young authors, on two different levels. Firstly, the tradition bestowed upon juvenile authors a feeling of literary inclusion by its focus upon youth, which Alexander and McMaster suggest is significant as "children were frequently denied quite basic human rights, let alone a voice" (Alexander & McMaster 2005:11). Secondly, the tradition offered an easily attainable mode for young authors in its fashionable simplicity of style, making it increasingly accessible for amateur authors with varying levels of education.

Although the Romantic poet Byron disputed this view, labelling Wordsworth's childish simplicity in *Lyrical Ballads* as "namby-pamby" (Byron 1807:294), he too embraced the celebration of youth in two of the most popular texts of the age; *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan*. In these poems Byron adopted (and popularised) the Romantic Bildungsroman[6], outlining the trials and tribulations of the Byronic hero, in the pursuit of total Romantic individualism. These Byronic individuals are pictured embarking upon their journeys in adolescence, Don Juan in particular being only sixteen years old[7] when pursuing his relationship with Donna Julia. Furthermore, both these characters, and the Byronic character-type more generally, could also be considered as existing in an eternal state of childhood due to their individualism, as their actions are depicted as solely based upon feeling and their own autonomous moral code, rather than the behaviours endorsed by society, in the same way that Rousseau's uncorrupt symbolic child was often viewed. This rejection of social convention, in favour of individual will, characterised the turbulent and rebellious nature of the Byronic hero, which, Wootton argues, appealed to "the deflated spirit of a generation who had witnessed the horrors of the French revolution" (Wootton 2004:122), casting the child-like Byronic hero as a representative for the overall spirit of the High Romantic age.

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[6]Both Singer and Franklin coin Byron's work as a Bildungsroman, although the 'growth' of such characters has been critically disputed: "In effect, Byron's Don Juan is the hero of a Romantic Bildungsroman, a young man whose faults are easily forgiven because we see him developing as a human being throughout his misadventures." (Singer 1985:428) "The story of Juan is a Bildungsroman which records the sexual history of a male individual from infancy to maturity" (Franklin 1992:102)

[7] "Young Juan now was sixteen years of age, /Tall, handsome, slender, but well knit" (Byron *Don Juan*, CantoI:LIV)

In proof of this, many of the young authors of the early nineteenth-century (that Alexander and McMaster refer to in their study) dabbled in the imitation of the Romantic mode, often critiquing and modifying it for their own personal development of style and authorial voice[8]. As a result, the Byronic hero frequently occurs in their early writings too, demonstrating the popularity of his influence. The juvenilia of the Brontë family offers no exception to this, as central figures in Alexander and McMaster's study. Their early writing reveals a vast imitation of Romantic literature from authors such as Byron, Scott and the journalism of *Blackwood's Magazine,* as they constructed their own literary market, based upon the reading available to them in the family home. This reading material has been extensively researched[9] and is evidenced in a document at the Brontë parsonage, which catalogues the sale of Patrick Brontë's household effects after his death in 1861. However, the juvenilia of the Brontë sisters provides its own evidence of their reading, as the siblings freely quote and reuse other pieces of Romantic literature within their own work. This includes a vast amount of references to Byron, the cult of Byron and the Byronic hero, to such an extent that Alexander has labelled their juvenilia as an "orgy of Byronism" (Alexander 1983:117).

These numerous representations of the Byronic hero in Brontë juvenilia have attracted a plethora of critical attention, with an abundance of studies dedicated to the pursuit of identifying and locating examples of Byronism in Brontë juvenilia. Many conclusions have been drawn about this material, with the most common train of thought assuming that the Brontës' numerous depictions of whimsical romances (with the Byronic hero at the centre), provide evidence of Byronic hero-worship and idolatry. However, this supposition fails to recognise what the Brontës attempted to imitate about the Byronic hero and the problems with which reproducing the hero caused in their early works. This chapter aims to readdress this interpretation, by arguing that the Brontë sister's juvenilia focuses primarily upon the quest to attain Romantic individualism, through the Byronic hero, and unlock the emancipatory quality of the Byronic role. However, it will also argue that the prominence of the Byronic hero in the Brontës' early fiction, alone, does not necessarily suggest that the sisters found

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[8] Other female appropriators of the Byronic hero in juvenilia within Alexander and McMaster's work include Jane Austen and Mary Augusta Ward.

[9] See Gérin, W. (1966). "Byron's Influence on the Brontës" in *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin. Volume* 17. pp 1-19.

immediate prosperity in selecting the Romantic Byronic hero as a means in which to access that individualism. It will argue instead, that at times the Brontës' juvenilia reveals the Byronic model to be as restrictive, as it is beneficial, as the sisters attempt to imitate a tradition (in order to tap into the individualism of the Byronic hero) the encompassing ideology of which works against them, as female authors. This chapter will then argue that the Brontës' Byronic imitation displays such mixed results, due to the gender politics at play in the creation of the Romantic Byronic hero and within the very foundations of Romanticism, itself.

The gender politics of complementary roles in the eighteenth and nineteenth century have been outlined previously in the introduction, but the main issue that this chapter will focus upon is how these ideologies of gender present themselves within Romantic literature. Both the Romantic tradition and the Byronic hero (as an integral part of that praxis) have been considered as characteristically masculine, due to the focus upon the importance of the representation of the individual and the imagination. Homans argues that it is these factors that made it increasingly difficult for women to become a part of the Romantic tradition as they were never allowed to be considered truly as individuals. This relies upon the doctrine of coverture, which insisted that women were not permitted mastery of the self as they could never truly be considered as autonomous individuals in a society that measured female existence in relation to male proprietorship. Homans continues, suggesting that these complementary roles dictated that women were considered as 'other' to the male poet, and that "male poets gained superiority over their female counterparts by dominating and internalising that otherness" (Homans 1980:13). She suggests that the consequences of revolving around this model meant that being "for so long the other and the object made it difficult for nineteenth-century women to have their own subjectivity" (Homans 1980:13), deeming female attempts at representing the self and accessing Romantic individualism as futile. Although there are examples of female authors who did successfully occupy the Romantic literary marketplace[10], Homans suggests that in order to become a successful poet, female authors must battle with "a valued and loved literary tradition to forge a self out of materials of otherness" (Homans 1980:12), producing

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[10] See *Romanticism and Women Poets: Opening the Doors of Reception* for a discussion of female presence in the literary marketplace; e.g. Mary Lamb and Charlotte Smith.

complementary work to the male poet, rather than competitive. She doesn't suggest this solution out of hardship for female authors, but acknowledges that women's identities in Romanticism are knitted within a tight web of ideology, which stems from the politics of the wider world, and prevents female authors from accessing male sponsored roles such as the Byronic hero, suggesting that the navigation of this web and the untangling of its strings can prove impossible for many female authors.

This chapter and line of enquiry then inserts a subsidiary to Alexander and McMaster's thoughts about juvenilia, highlighting that juvenilia is not just a mix of childhood creativity and popular literary styles but also stands to represent how the juvenile author receives and accepts the adult ideologies that propagate through adult literature. This chapter then aims to examine how the Brontë sisters imitated the masculine Romantic tradition in their reproductions of the Romantic Byronic hero, in the pursuit of Romantic individualism, identifying and addressing examples of imitation (as previous studies have done). However, this chapter will also consider the difficulties of this pursuit, as the Brontës negotiate with gender ideologies that their work encounters when imitating the Romantic Byronic hero. In order to do so, it will examine Charlotte Brontë's short story *Albion and Marina*, two of Emily's poems titled 'Light up the halls' and 'there shines the moon' and Anne's poem titled 'A Captive's Dream'.

Charlotte: 'Albion and Marina' (1830)

Charlotte Brontë mirrors Romantic representations of the Byronic hero as a means of gaining inclusion within the masculine Romantic tradition, as her short story functions as an example of experimental literary apprenticeship. In this she imitates typical Byronic characteristics in constructing her male protagonist in order to establish how the Romantic tradition grants the Byronic hero his Romantic individualism, focussing particularly upon the ways in which the Byronic hero is provoked into feeling and how he expresses those very feelings. However, in the process of learning the role of the Byronic hero, Brontë uses the subjectivity of the male hero as a vehicle for inserting her own female voice and individualism. Although Brontë finds some means of success by adopting

this model, in doing so she sacrifices female characters by reproducing the gendered ideology of Romanticism in order to maintain her imitated masculine stance.

Her Angrian short story, *Albion and Marina* offers what one might consider an obvious homage to the Byronic Hero in the characterisation of Albion, as she describes his physical appearance in terms of the Byronic model:

> His stature was lofty; his form equal in the magnificence of its proportions to that of Apollo Belvedere. The bright wreath and curls of his rich brown hair waved over a forehead resembling the purest marble in the placidity of his unveined whiteness. His nose and mouth were cast in the most perfect mould. But saw I never anything to equal his eye! O, I could have stood riveted with chains of admiration, gazing for hours on it! [...]He was a soldier, captain in the Royal Regiment of Horse-guards, and all of his attitudes and actions were full of martial grace. (Brontë, C. 2010:56)

Brontë constructs Albion's appearance by imitating the characteristics associated with preceding Romantic Byronic heroes, such as "a tall, manly, stalwart physique", "a pale ascetic complexion" and, "the most noticeable of his physical characteristics" (Thorslev 1962:53), the magnetic draw of his eyes. These physical traits are used to place Albion within the popular, and at times, saturated[11] canon of the Byronic hero.

It is the saturated nature of this male-sponsored canon that Brontë takes full advantage of by self-consciously linking Albion to other established Byronic characters, such as Don Juan, Manfred and Harold, by drawing upon their physiognomical similarities. This technique enables Brontë to use these established characters as a mould for the immaterial characterisation of Albion, constructing features, such as his identity and particularly his involvement in the plot, by mirroring the portrayals of preceding Byronic heroes, creating (what Burwick labels as) a "Byronic clone" (Burwick 2011:79). Gérin asserts that Charlotte Brontë "borrowed every Byronic attitude of mind and of person with which readers of 'Lara', 'Cain', 'Manfred', 'The Corsair', were familiar [with]" (Gérin 1966 :5), suggesting that she operated by exploiting the already existing cliché and market audience [12]of the

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[11] by Byron's own admission in the opening lines of Don Juan: "I want a hero: an uncommon want,
When every year and month sends forth a new one" (Byron 1972: Canto I:1)

[12] Although Charlotte Brontë's juvenilia was unpublished in her lifetime, she frequently refers to readers and an audience, throughout her juvenilia: "my reader will easily recognise the characters" (*Albion and Marina* 2010:55)

Byronic hero. The advantage of using this technique is that it grants her character, Albion, the depth of other heroes' stories by acting upon and exaggerating the shared genre that they occupy.

But, fundamentally, the effect that Brontë achieves from this is that it offsets the origins of Albion's characterisation, establishing him within the Cult of Byron and the work of other male authors, particularly the work of Byron himself. This capitalises upon the "symbiotic relationship" (Poole 2010:7) between Byron and the Byronic hero, creating an affiliation between the original author and Brontë's character, as Poole suggests "Byron the man was read, at every turn, through the lens of literary creations" (Poole 2010:8). But more importantly, the result of this for Charlotte is that her female identity, as the author, is distanced away from her short story, aligning Albion with masculine origins through imitation, rather than announcing him as a creation of the female imagination. This method of distancing the female author from the male subject is reinforced by the characterisation of the fictional narrator, Charles Wellesley (Albion's brother), who professes to tell "this tale out of malignity" against his brother (Brontë, C. 2010:55). In utilising the technique of a fictional male narrator, who tells a story driven by sibling machismo, any female presence, or attempts at gaining female subjectivity, is seen to be removed, or at least, filtered through Charles. Franklin suggests that this method of creating a fictional narrator stands as "an early version of the male persona Currer Bell" (Franklin 2012:136), which functioned to veil Charlotte Brontë's work with pseudo-masculinity, allowing her the opportunity to dismiss the restrictions which prohibit female authors from inclusion within the Romantic tradition and literary marketplace.

In abandoning these barriers, Brontë is then allowed to focus upon the primary aims of the Romantic tradition, exercising a claim to male subjectivity. Irigaray suggests that mirroring a masculine position in this way disrupts gender codes, by "demanding to speak as a (masculine) subject" (Irigaray 1985:76), allowing Brontë to briefly act beyond the boundaries assigned to female authors, by nineteenth-century society, and experience a notion of inclusion within the masculine Romantic tradition. However, Thomas argues that as a result of disrupted gender codes, once this masculine stance is taken, female representation is then compromised, stating that "a woman may mirror masculine subjectivity through a masculine voice, but her position collapses if she simultaneously asserts femininity" (Thomas 2007:76). This is particularly potent when examining

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how Charlotte Brontë mirrors the Romantic tradition upon constructing the Byronic pair, in which the dominant hero is paired with a "spaniel-like" (Thorslev 1962:10) female. This female fills the role of the "passive victim" (Franklin 1992:11) of the Romantic tragedy, famed as a token of exaggerated beauty, but also objectified as a consequence of this.

Charlotte Brontë's female character, Marina (also referred to as Marian by Charles Wellesley), justly fills this role, described as the bearer of "exquisite beauty" (Brontë, C. 2010:58), with eyes of "clear azure" (Brontë, C. 2010:58), and "silken tresses of hazel hair, straying in light ringlets down a neck and forehead of snow" (Brontë, C. 2010:58). Sadly, Marina's characterisation never moves beyond her visual description as Brontë censors the feminine, according to the conventions of the masculine Romantic tradition, by suggesting that Marina's existence is to be the object of the male gaze, living in a "state of perfect seclusion" (Brontë, C. 2010:57). The use of the word "seclusion" insinuates both a physical and an internal representation of Marina; who is prevented from activity by being trapped within the walls of her home (by her patriarchal father), but is also secluded within her own body as she is forbidden any form of self-expression, being described with neither a voice or emotion. Elfenbein argues that "keeping abreast of Byronic literary trends meant sacrificing female characters" (Elfenbein 1995:133), but, in this case, expressions of the feminine are sacrificed in order to maintain Charlotte Brontë's position of authorial power, achieved by mirroring the masculine voice.

In a continued attempt to subdue the feminine, Brontë's visual characterisation of Marina looks once more to the masculine Romantic tradition, mirroring the idyllic, and yet transparent, representations of womanhood present in many male works. These portrayals of femininity tend to focus upon the female ideal, which promotes the value of beauty and subservience, objectifying the female body and gazing upon it like a picturesque scene. It has been suggested (most prominently by Gérin), that Brontë's Marina is based upon Byron's 'Lady Jersey', featured in *Finden's Byron's Beauties*, a collection which claimed to represent "the impersonation of ideal beauty" (Finden 1836:2), and which, Elfenbein argues, "reshaped the standards" for the female aesthetic (Elfenbein 1995:55). This assumption is highly plausible as the Brontës' artwork features copies of Finden's

engravings[13], suggesting that they must have owned, or had access to a copy of the book. However, there are also startling similarities between Brontë's female character, (Marina/Marian) and Byron's lead protagonist in the poem 'Marion', from the same series[14].

The standards or characteristics of Marion's beauty are strikingly similar to Marina's, as she is described as a "a pretty picture" (Byron 1834:52) with eyes like "orbs" (Byron 1834:18), "flowing locks" (Byron 1834:47), enlivened with the occasional "blush" (Byron 1834:23), focussing primarily on the same etheial features Brontë draws upon for Marina. The poem centres around a discussion of what the male subject desires most in a female ideal, in which the solution, and the response addressed to the protagonist Marion, is "Animation!" (Byron 1834:56). This is defined, in a nineteenth-century context, by the OED as "the action of inspiring or filling with any impulse"/ "liveliness or enlivenment" (OED Online), Marion's beauty in particular being her animating and inspiring feature. The significance of this possible connection between Brontë's *Albion and Marina* with Byron's 'Marion' is two-fold, as Brontë imitates the poem in its depiction of gendered roles.

Firstly, Brontë models Marina upon Marion, imitating Byron's representations of the female ideal as a passive object of the male gaze, whose purpose is to inspire the subject (male protagonist), with her beauty, to become active and yet remain inactive herself, (adhering to complementary gender roles). In imitating this, Brontë utilises Byron's poem as an instructional guide on how to create the female muse, as a partner to the Byronic hero. She does so by mirroring the transparent construction of womanhood, which Byron promotes, by following his instruction of "animation" and recreating his passive object of male desire in her character, Marina. The result of this is that it distances her own femininity and gender identity from speculation by recycling and mirroring masculine representations of the muse, rather than aiming to represent a personal experience of female subjectivity. This maintains the relationship of the female object and masculine subject, which is a necessary concern if Brontë is to profit from the power achieved by mirroring the subjectivity of the male voice. Although this suits her purpose of developing an authorial voice, this method is problematic. This is because

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[13] Gérin comments upon "slavish copies" engravings stored at the Brontë parsonage. (Gérin 1966:4)

[14] 'Marion' was originally a part of the *Hours of Idleness* volume, released in 1807, but became more famously known by the production of *Finden's Byron's Beauties.*

Brontë reinscribes the same restrictive barriers that forbid her, as a female author, from inclusion in the Romantic tradition, in the first place, by perpetuating the objectification of women, which, Homans argues, denies them the power of the subject.

The second way in which Brontë makes educational use of Byron's poem is far more significant in terms of the Byronic pair, as she adopts the antipodes of Byron's resolution, exploring how the male poet should be inspired by the female muse; placing the role of the male subject under speculation. This becomes clear when considering how Charlotte Brontë casts Albion as a poet, describing him as the possessor of "genius" (Brontë, C. 2010:59) and "one of the greatest poets of the age" (Brontë, C. 2010:60). These titles were often said in homage to Byron, as the 'Romantic genius' of the nineteenth-century, revealing how Brontë once again draws upon the reciprocal relationship between Byron and his heroes. However, Engel also considers the role of the poet to hold vital significance as "the poet represents nothing but the highest level that the mind of man can reach in the development and active use of the imagination" (Engel 2008:279), exercising total subjective and imaginative power, the primary goals of both the juvenile and the female author.

In considering the representation of the inspired male poet in Byron's 'Marion', Brontë can be seen to imitate that role through Albion, as he becomes motivated to write by the inspiration provided by his muse, Marina, making her the subject of his work; "Amalthea, his heroine is but an impersonation of her" (Brontë, C. 2010:60). However, Brontë suggests that the inspiration of the female muse extends further than animation, as it becomes an act of complete possession. This is reaffirmed when Albion declares that his motivation for writing poetry is "to render himself worthy to possess such a treasure [as Marina]" (Brontë, C. 2010:60), colonising Marina's body through his creative writing. Homans suggests that authors such as "Byron and Shelley frequently created female figures of imaginative desire [that] embody the object of the poet's quest" (Homans 1980:28), suggesting that the ultimate goal of the Romantic poet is the appropriation of the feminine.

Brontë exaggerates Marina's role as the object of the poet's quest by outlining Albion's full bodily possession of her, as he frequently imagines her as dead, "haunting his thoughts" or "deadened" in his remembrance of her (Brontë, C. 2010:60). The repetition of her departed spirit in Albion's mind, could be interpreted as the final step to his possession of her, banishing her presence

from physical existence to live on in his mind and through his poetry, in a total subsumation of the feminine. Brontë commits this final step in the domination of Marina by making her a ghostly victim of Byronic love, transforming her into, what Gilbert and Gubar coin, an "image imprisoned in a male text [...] generated solely by male expectations and designs" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000:12). However, this denial of existence strips away Marina's ability to speak or to animate anyone other than Albion, as she is only permitted to exist within his mind, thus stripping her entirely of any subjectivity. This ensures that Marina is left utterly voiceless in comparison to her complementary partner, granting him full subjectivity and the "fatal, guilt ridden passion" (Gordon 1989:92) of a fully-fledged Byronic hero.

In allowing Albion to possess the feminine, Brontë is also granted some access to the same qualities, vicariously, speaking through him in an act of ventriloquism. In following Byron's instruction, she colonises the role of the male poet and, is consequently allowed to assert a small measure of female subjectivity into the narrative, as long as that vocalisation passes through Albion. She portrays this complicated mimicry by introducing a female character (Lady Zelzia) that sings Albion's poetry. When Lady Zelzia is introduced to the narrative Brontë focusses solely upon her vocality, describing her "discourse of lively eloquence" (Brontë, C. 2010:61) (which is never represented but reported by Albion) and the way in which she takes "a small volume of miscellaneous poems [...] she then set[s] it to a fine air" (Brontë, C. 2010:61), singing a song that "had been composed by Albion soon after his arrival at Glass Town. The person addressed was Marina" (Brontë, C. 2010:62). Kramer argues that "song is a partial dissociation of speech: a loosening of phonetic and syntactic articulation and a dissolving of language into its physical origin, vocalization. If speech is taken as a norm, song is a regressive form of utterance" (Kramer 1984:130), which Goodwin expands upon arguing that "because the non-linguistic and pre-verbal are associated in our culture with femininity, the challenge for the masculine poet, overt or tacit, is often to effect an appropriation of the feminine" through song (Goodwin 1996:65). He suggests that to effect this appropriation the Romantic poet must "relocate the woman's song, displace it and occupy its position" (Goodwin 1996:68), as Albion does by replacing Zelzia's subjective words with his own poetry, about Marina, subsuming the feminine voice and appropriating femininity. However, soon after Zelzia sings

Albion's poetry, the ghostly image of Marina is conjured in his mind and, for the first time, encouraged to speak, requesting of Albion: "Do not forget me" (Brontë, C. 2010:62). This ghostly encounter is interesting as it seems to reveal Marina's (and any other female characters', for that matter) first form of female subjectivity, voicing her thoughts through the medium of Albion's mind.

Although this does suggest the possibility that Charlotte Brontë's colonisation of the male Byronic poet grants her the ability to voice female subjectivity, this gain can only be measured as minor, in comparison to the overwhelming objectification of female characters, that Charlotte Brontë's experimentation exploits.

Emily: 'Light up the halls' (1838) and 'there shines the moon' (1837)

Emily Brontë attempts to counteract this problem of subjectivity in her juvenilia, whilst simultaneously attempting to gain literary inclusion in the masculine Romantic tradition, by the use of the Byronic hero. However, unlike Charlotte she attempts to write within the male tradition, whilst reshaping it for the female voice (a method which Homans recommends for Romantic female authors). But, in attempting to do so, she puts the lessons of Charlotte's literary apprenticeship into practice as she transforms the Romantic Byronic Hero into her own Byronic Heroine, endeavouring to access Romantic individualism by the use of a female character. She executes this gender reversal by projecting Charlotte's description of the cloned Byronic male onto the female body, as Albion becomes Augusta Geraldine Almeida (A.G.A.), in the poem 'Light up the halls'. She achieves the same Byronic vision by drawing upon typical Byronic features in constructing Augusta's physiognomy, in the same way that Charlotte does with Albion, equally establishing A.G.A. within the Byronic canon. In successfully doing so, she raises the possibility that the Byronic canon may not necessarily be strictly male, by showing how gender-neutral these physical attributes can be, such as the high marble brow and the magnetic draw of the eyes:

Thy black resplendent hair;
Thy glory-beaming brow, and smile how heavenly fair!
Thine eyes are turned away -- those eyes I would not see;
Their dark, their deadly ray would more than madden me

There go Deceiver, go! My hand is streaming wet,
My heart's blood flows to buy the blessing --To forget!
(Brontë, E. 2010:400:17-22)

In a continued attempt to oppose her sisters' work, Emily also reverses the gender roles of the Byronic pair, as the male narrator, F. De Samara, suggests that A.G.A. is the tyrant who rules his existence, having total control over his fate, through his love for her. This suggests that, in this case, the female heroine possesses the male victim, rather than being pictured as a victim herself, reconsidering traditional Romantic roles:

And yet, for all Her hate, each parting glance would tell
A stronger passion breathed, burned in this last farewell--
Unconquered in my soul the Tyrant rules me still
Life bows to my control, but Love I cannot kill
(Brontë, E. 2010:401:40-44)

However, Homans suggests that "there is no such thing as a simple reversal of roles" (Homans 198:105), as the ideology of gender roles proves to be far more complex and expansive than just the focus upon physical attributes. This is portrayed in this poem when Samara suggests that A.G.A. is the tyrant that rules him, yet he still remains in a far more superior position than Marina, due to his hegemonic male right. Samara is granted this pre-eminence as Brontë alludes to the fact that he consistently maintains the fate of his life in his own hands as "life bows to his control" (Brontë, E. 2010: 401:44), exaggerating his independence from female power and his individualism, whereas Marina's existence is completely within Albion's possession as an object of his control, passed to him from her father. Upon obtaining this independence, Samara is permitted the role of the subject of the situation, and as such is granted subjectivity, even if he thinks that this has been obscured by love. Thus, he stands as the male narrator, being granted the same ability to objectify A.G.A. as Albion objectifies Marina. This suggests that even when A.G.A. is the occupier of the Byronic role (assigned by her physicality), she realistically remains as voiceless and objectified as Marina, while ever she is the object of the poem. In this, Emily Brontë's experimentation with the Byronic model emphasises the importance of the role of the subject to the Byronic hero, as a means of

accessing Romantic individualism. In raising this issue Brontë highlights the solution to this problem, suggesting that if female characters were permitted a platform, which provided them the with the opportunity of accessing subjectivity, they would be granted the opportunity of becoming a truly Byronic heroine, and so they would be able to access a notion of Romantic individualism, through that role.

In the pursuit of this platform of subjectivity, Emily's work can be seen to continue the reversal of her sisters' imitation, by revising the Romantic assumption that women "existed to die and be remembered or annihilated by men" (Elfenbein 1995:134). She reverses this tradition by choosing to represent a woman remembering a man, in the poem 'there shines the moon'. In revising this tradition in such a way, the female character is granted the role of the subject, as the male character is beyond living existence, allowing female subjectivity to be represented without posing a competitive threat to gender hierarchies. In this poem Emily, once again, depicts the same female Byronic heroine, A.G.A., but represents a revised version of her, portraying her as the narrator, returning to the grave of her departed lover, Lord Elbë.

But this also proves problematic, as although A.G.A. is the subject of the poem, her subjectivity and means of expression are still not guaranteed, as Emily Brontë indicates that the role of the subject is worthless without a means of self-expression. This complicated issue is demonstrated when A.G.A. discusses her actions since Elbë's death insinuating that her life has moved past the point it was once at, suggesting that she has acquired personal history and memories, but is forbidden from contributing a description of these, instead merely stating:

> Bright moon - dear moon! when years have past
> my weary feet return at last [...]
> And Earth's the same but Oh to see
> How wildly Time has altered me!
> (Brontë, E. 2010:393:10-11&16-17)

Elfenbein argues that this gap in memory is intentionally exaggerated to suggest that women, according to the masculine Romantic tradition, were not granted the right to express any measure of personal history, demonstrating "how barren female subjectivity has become" (Elfenbein 1995:134)

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as a result of the gendered roles. However, it is noticeable that the gap in Augusta's history is occupied, but not by a human commentary. Instead the void is filled with a description of nature:

> And still the Fern-leaves sighing wave
> Like mourners over Elbë's grave [...]
> Not oft these mountains feel the shine
> Of such a day - as fading then,
> Cast from its found of gold divine
> A last smile on the heathery plain
> (Brontë, E. 2010:394:13-14 &22-25)

In selecting nature as a means in which to voice A.G.A.'s memories, her poetic voice is not lost, but deemed misunderstandable, as Homans argues that "nature's language is not human" (Homan 1980:160). This bears significance as the masculine Romantic tradition often considers nature as other to the male poet, in the same way that women are frequently deemed, implying that nature is a feminine convention in which women can express their voices. In attaching A.G.A.'s memories to nature, Brontë asserts that the female voice is not non-existent, but is misunderstood and beyond language, operating outside of the conventions of the masculine Romantic tradition. This creates a very different discussion of the female voice from Charlotte's, who characterises Marina's silence as a representation of blind obedience to gender complementary roles, electively animating her hero with her beauty, without any resistance towards her objectification. This lack of resistance, and complete conformity, situates Marina as the masculine ideal and Augusta as the rebel, in refusing to conform to this convention. It is through Emily's crafting a "self out of material otherness" (Homans 1980:12), (that otherness being nature) that A.G.A. gains a small measure of Byronic heroism and individualism, in her rejection of conventional norms and modes of expression.

However, the union with nature does not necessarily grant Augusta (or Emily Brontë for that matter) any more subjectivity, as she becomes marginalised in her own narrative, when her subjective voice is intruded upon by the ghostly masculine thoughts (then voice) of Elbë.

> No — never more! That awful thought
> A thousand dreary feelings brought
> And memory all Her powers combined
> And rushed upon his fainting mind
> (Brontë, E. 2010:394:37-40)

The transition between Augusta's narrative voice to Elbë's occurs gradually at points where the speaker's identity is blurred, by the use of verbs without pronouns, such as "Shuddering to feel"

(Brontë, E. 2010:394:32) and "sickening to think" (Brontë, E. 2010:394:33). This interruption is achieved as Elbë's memories are successfully signified through language, granting them the power to overwhelm Augusta's otherness and connect with the reader, in ways Augusta is not permitted, by the shared medium of language. Significantly, Elbë's interruption of the narrative occurs at moments when emotions and feeling are dramatically represented, to the extent that his deathly emotions echo Byron's Manfred:

> I do defy this, — though I feel my soul
> is ebbing from me [...]
> But all things swim around me, and the earth
> Heaves as it were beneath me. Fare thee well —
> (Byron *Manfred* Act III Scene IV:115-116&168-169).

Emily Brontë depicts and exaggerates this representation of feeling, to express that Elbë (and other canonical male Byronic heroes) are given a medium through which to voice their passionate expressions through. But this medium is denied to Augusta, through her voicelessness as a female character. This means that the relationship between Elbë and the reader is based upon an emotional level, in which he is permitted to appeal to the reader's sympathies, whereas Augusta's mourning is devoid of sympathy and clouded by silence. The effect of this, is that even in death Elbë is granted more life, soul and subjectivity than Augusta, gifting him the Romantic individualism of the Byronic hero through his ability to express feeling.

Anne: 'The Captive's Dream' (1838)

Anne Brontë's imitation of the Romantic tradition is arguably the most successful in terms of individualism and the strength of female voice. Anne chooses to neither emulate the role of the male Byronic poet, nor cast a female character as a Byronic heroine, through physiognomy, but instead focusses upon occupying the proscribed role of the Romantic female passive victim. However, she modifies and animates this proscribed role of traditional male-sponsored Romanticism with the Byronic expression of feeling.

Anne Brontë draws upon the characteristics attached to the conventional Romantic passive victim, by picturing a woman trapped in a prison cell, stripped of her subjectivity, with "no power to

speak" and unable to "rise from [the] dark dungeon floor" (Brontë, A. 2010:455:9;19). This description aligns the female protagonist with both Charlotte's Marina and Emily's Augusta, as Anne exaggerates her heroine's inability to be active. However, Anne outlines her heroine's desire to "speak one word of comfort to his mind", to "clasp him to my heart" or "hold his trembling hand in mine" (Brontë, A. 2010:455:17;15;16), suggesting that she wishes to be the active character in the Byronic pair, performing upon her loved one, but is prevented from doing so. In this, her dreams assert her wish for subjectivity, a quality which separates her from Charlotte's Marina and draws her closer to Emily's Augusta. But, like Augusta, her voice is misunderstood, dying "in a voiceless whisper on my tongue" (Brontë, A. 2010:455:21). Anne Brontë draws upon this loss of voice from her tongue to articulation, in order to suggest that the words and feelings are there within the individual, but she is prevented from articulating them, by the Romantic tradition, that either represses them to a whisper, or deems them misunderstandable, as Emily's poetry portrays.

However, rather than merely highlight this feature (as Emily's work does), Anne depicts her character as responding in desperation to this muteness, by presenting the captive turning "wild" (Brontë, A. 2010:455:18) with frustration, as she refuses to be silenced. In this depiction Anne portrays the way in which her protagonist is caught in a struggle, the circumstances of which she has no control over (and inevitably cannot win), yet she maintains a rebellious willfulness to defy them. When the captive suggests that she "struggled wildly but it was in vain" (Brontë, A. 2010:455:18), she is aligned with the fatal Romantic Byronic hero, who attempts to defy the inevitable. This exposes the "naked heart"[15] and soul of the victim in her expression of desperation, disregarding the traditionally submissive role of the passive-victim. Instead, the captive shares qualities that are aligned with the Byronic hero. Anne Brontë creates this effect by animating her heroine with the traditional emotion and passion of the Byronic hero, using emotive language to describe the protagonist's actions, such as "longed", "struggled" and "strove" (Brontë, A. 2010:455:15;18;20). This language takes the same tone of desperation, that Lord Elbë is given by Emily, who in turn imitates the original Byronic hero, Manfred, as Anne's struggle mimics his refusal to comply: "I do defy/ Spurn back, and scorn ye! — [...] 'Tis over" (Byron *Manfred* Act III Scene IV). In this, although Anne's character is the victim-

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[15] Elfenbein labels the Byronic passion as an overflow of the "naked heart" (Elfenbein 1995:19).

figure, she is granted Byronic individualism through this alignment with the Romantic Byronic canon. In doing so, the struggle for female voice is deemed comparable with the fatal Byronic struggle of Manfred and Elbë, identifying the pursuit for female subjectivity as a Byronic struggle. Irigaray argues that assuming the female role deliberately "converts a form of subordination into an affirmation" (Irigaray 1985:76), which Anne fulfills by revealing the heroine's subscribed powerlessness, as her means of accessing Byronic individualism.

However, the most useful effect of Anne's captive's display of emotion is that it grants her a vision of humanity. In drawing upon the traditional Byronic hero's emotional capacity for feeling, Anne is allowed to challenge the assumptions of gender complementary roles (which argued that women were biologically incapable of showing passion) by revealing her heroine's ability to feel pain as acutely as a Byronic hero (like Manfred) does. In this the reader is forced to reconsider the assumptions of the two-sex model of gender, as Anne's depiction of the wild captive asserts that female characters do have the same torrent of raging emotions within, but it is their expression of these emotions that is limited by both society and the convention of Romanticism. In representing this expression of feeling, the character is no longer restrained by the role of victim, as she is viewed by the reader as a human individual, capable of feelings and emotion. This engages the reader's sympathy and feeling for the oppressed heroine, as they are granted a vision of her emotional turmoil and humanity, rather than being blinded by her gendered role of victim.

It is Anne's engagement with the reader's sympathies that allows her to tap into the most useful quality of the Byronic hero; the ability to question and reconsider prescribed norms. McGann suggests that it is the Romantic Byronic heroes' ability to evoke sympathy from the reader, which proves the most effective means of gaining Byronic power, as "to the reader the Byronic hero whispers and threatens a self-revelation" (McGann 2002:27), provoking the reader to rethink the way in which they view gendered roles in literature. He suggests that the contents of Byronic hero's whisperings function to draw upon instances of humanity and human ineffectuality and separate them from cultural signifiers, distinguishing between social roles and the laws of nature, as the hero gets the reader to consider "all of the circumstances of the case" (McGann 2002:25). Beneficially, in exaggerating the captive's humanity, prescribed gender codifiers are removed from the character,

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releasing her from the web of ideologies attached to her as a woman, by showing her operating by a own code of human instinct and feeling. As a result, readers are encouraged to view the Byronic characters' expressions based upon the principles of basic humanity, and not gendered expectations. This has the effect of undoing codified representations of gender ideology attached to female existence, by drawing upon a shared notion of human fallibility between the Byronic hero and the passive victim. It is this relationship between the character and the reader that makes Anne's Byronism so striking, as she also focusses upon the shared humanity of between the reader and the character, unlike her sisters' work. In this relationship the victim is pictured as both animated, but also animating, gaining sympathy from the reader.

In accessing the emotional propensities of Romantic individualism of the Byronic hero, Anne Brontë is then allowed to draw upon the emancipatory qualities of the character-type, which allow her to persuade the reader to reconsider the conventional roles and boundaries of the Romantic tradition, particularly the roles of the tyrant and the passive victim. She does so by getting the reader to acknowledge the shared pain between the victim and the Byronic hero, causing them to reconsider their preconceived ideas about the victim-tyrant relationship. In this, she depicts the lack of female voice to be the source of pain in the poem, for both characters, proportioning guilt and blame with the female victim as well as the Byronic male, as her inability to speak damages both herself and him:

> And raised his haggard eyes to Heaven, and prayed
> That he might die - I had no power to speak
> O heaven I could bear
> My deadly fate with calmness if there were
> No kindred hearts to bleed and break for me!
> (Brontë, A. 2010:455:8-9:25-27).

In doing so Anne makes the captive both passive victim and tyrant, and the Byronic male the injured and helpless victim, blurring and deconstructing linear roles. Anne depicts this role reversal by portraying the wounds of pain upon the Byronic hero by describing him with exaggerated frailty, as "woe-worn" and "haggard", with "hollow wandering eyes" (Brontë, A. 2010:455:3;5;8). This characterisation doesn't correspond with the glamourised symbols of Byronism that Emily and Charlotte have portrayed, but functions to describe a vision of weakness, rather than strength or tyranny. This reimagining can be seen most clearly in Anne's depiction of the "grief [...] printed on

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his marble brow" (Brontë, A. 2010:455:6), scarring the traditional Byronic symbol with pain, that both Charlotte assigns to Albion (his "forehead resembling the purest marble" (Brontë, C. 2010:56)) and Emily to Augusta ("Thy glory-beaming brow" (Brontë, E. 2010:400:17)). In doing so Anne Brontë delinates and destabilizes the gendered roles of the tyrant and victim, deeming these roles as interchangeable between the hero and heroine, due to their shared access to feeling, which extricates the power dynamics of that gendered relationship. This complicates and challenges the complementary nature of gender roles, by offering an equal representation of power for both characters, rather than the traditional complementary delegation of it.

To summarise this section of study, Romantic Byronic imitation in Brontë juvenilia, reveals that the Romantic model of the Byronic hero proves to be equally problematic, as it is fruitful, revealing that this model must to be adapted, deconstructed and reconfigured, in order for female authors to use the role of the Byronic hero progressively, to address female gendered roles. Charlotte's imitation resembles the Romantic Byronic mode most closely out of all the Brontë sisters' works, by adhering to the basic foundations of the established Romantic Byronic model; including the physiognomy of the hero, his zeal to appropriate the feminine and the effect that this has upon female characters Although Charlotte Brontë, as an author, is given a notion of inclusion within the masculine Romantic tradition, her work actually reproduces the ideologies that oppress her as a female author in the first place, suggesting that her mimicry needs further development in order to be progressive. Emily, on the other hand, modifies the Byronic model, reversing the gender roles of the Byronic hero, in order to create the Byronic heroine. However, her implementation of the Romantic Byronic model, in creating that heroine, proves to be as equally fruitless in its pursuits, as it highlights the notion that women are forbidden subjectivity in the Romantic mode, by conceding that her heroine's Byronism is only achieved by physiognomy. Although she highlights the necessity of picturing the heroine as the Byronic subject, she deems that role as useless without a means of accessing subjectivity and expressing female emotions. Emily's work does not find a resolution to this problem, but presents a female representation of Byronism which alienates the reader by operating outside of language. Anne's work, on the other hand, proves to be most successful in adopting the Romantic Byronic model, but her poetry deviates from that model the most, as her heroine is barely

recognisable against the original Romantic Byronic prototype. However, her work reveals that the prototype of the hero is not as relevant, as the Romantic individualism that he operates around, promoting the value of female expression as a Byronic pursuit, in order to create a heroine that is aligned with the emotional capabilities of Byron's Manfred.

Nevertheless, the Brontës' juvenile experimentation does succeed, collectively, in one area, in that it reveals the three conditions of the Romantic individualism of the Byronic hero. Although Charlotte and Emily never overcome these conditions, in the creation of their female characters, Anne's work suggests that the Byronic heroine is an achievable pursuit, asserting that the Byronic role could be a viable option for female authors to adopt, for their female characters. However, in order for this to be a reality the Brontës' juvenilia dictates that the heroines must, firstly, be granted the role of the subject, secondly, have the means to express emotions, which grants the third condition, the ability to connect and communicate with the reader, evoking their sympathy through a shared vision of humanity. The Brontës' early work suggests that if the heroine can meet these conditions, she can then be granted the individualism of the Byronic hero. With this individualism comes the Byronic hero's emancipatory quality, which functions by casting aside social signifiers of gender, as the Byronic individual is viewed as a "naked heart", rather than a gendered individual. In accessing this capability, Anne Brontë is permitted to reconsider and destabilise gendered roles and the power dynamics of those roles.

The following chapter will discuss how the Brontës take the knowledge developed in their juvenilia and attempt to integrate it within the Victorian novel form. In doing so it will focus upon the Brontës' implementation of two generations of Byronic heroines (the Romantic and the Victorian) in their three major works, *Wuthering Heights, Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. This chapter will discuss the ways in which the Brontës regenerate the Byronic role, in order to use to it to reconsider and destabilise the dominant Victorian ideology of the Angel in the House. It will also discuss how the female Bildungsroman form proves to be a successful means of sustaining the Victorian Byronic heroine, by enforcing the necessary balance between Romantic individualism and socialisation.

CHAPTER TWO

Byronic Regeneration: The Fatal Romantic Heroine and the Victorian Byronic Heroine

Wuthering Heights (1847), *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848)

Emily, Charlotte and Anne Brontë's *Wuthering Heights, Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* all represent the development from the Romantic style of writing to the Victorian. Although criticism has attempted to classify all three of these texts within a particular literary body of work, all of the Brontës' most famous works have resisted such definitions (to a greater or lesser extent) by being situated in an ambiguous realm, which covers the spectrum from Romantic to Victorian literature. In considering the Brontës' work within this spectrum, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* could be considered as situated towards the more Romantic end of scale, whereas Anne's *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is often considered as a more Victorian novel, leaving Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* sitting somewhere in the middle of the two[16].

However, all three texts, to some extent, display an array of Romantic themes and modes, yet disconnect these features from their revolutionary context, casting them against the background of Victorian society. As a result, Bradshaw argues that these texts challenge "the simplistic historical demarcation of literary periods" (Bradshaw 2013:122), as the vestiges of Romanticism are visibly ingrained within the realism of these texts, which themselves are highly concerned with Victorian ideologies, features and debates. This chapter will consider the implications of attempting to insert Romantic features, such as the Byronic model, within the Victorian Novel form.

One example of Romantic debris, present in all three of the Brontës' major works, is the inclusion of the Romantic Byronic hero. In these novels, the stereotype of the Byronic hero is reflected at full strength in Emily Brontë's Heathcliff and Charlotte's Rochester, with Anne's heroes Arthur Huntingdon and Gilbert Markham also exemplifying the Byronic stereotype with occasional fits of Byronic passion, to a lesser extent. Despite their varying degrees of commitment to this role, these characters all closely resemble the original Romantic Byronic prototype, as the Brontës draw

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[16] Engel argues that Jane Eyre functions as a Romantic text, gaining its Victorian visage through "a thin Christian disguise" (Engel 2008:287).

upon the Byronic model, depicting tall, brooding, troubled heroes, with a dangerous habit of possessing and destroying women. As a result, each of these Byronic characters bear resemblances to preceding Romantic Byronic heroes, such as Don Juan and the Corsair, yet they also strongly mirror one another. This makes them easily identifiable as a new generation of the Brontës' Byronic clones.

However, the Brontës' approach towards these Byronic clones is remarkably different from that of their juvenilia, as they focus less upon the subjectivity of the Byronic heroes, and draw upon them instead for romantic purposes, situating them at the centre of passionate and guilt-ridden love affairs, in conjunction with an equally Byronic partner. In doing so, this suggests that in these texts, the Brontës' focus has moved beyond the Byronic hero as an unquestionable locus of interest and ceaseless value, as they place less significance upon the contributions of the hero, and reveal a more ambivalent attitude towards him. Wootton has interpreted this change in attitude in Charlotte's reproduction of the Romantic Byronic model by describing the characterisation of Rochester as an oscillation between "homage" and "parody" (Wootton 2007:232), suggesting that the hero is as much satirised, as he is heroicised. She argues that this can be read in Charlotte Brontë's "coyly self-referential recycling of a predictable literary type" (Wootton 2007:229), a quality that can also be seen in both *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. This is prevalent throughout these works as Byronic characters ironically comment upon their own character-tropes and roles within the narrative exaggerating their clichéd nature of existence. One example of this is the way in which Heathcliff questions how Isabella is guilty of "picturing in me a hero of romance" (Brontë, E.1981:99), alluding to the legacy of his own clichéd Byronic character. Similarly, Gilbert jests upon his own romantic role within the novel, stating "'I was not indifferent to her', as the novel heroes modestly express it" (Brontë, A. 2010:94), parodying traditional lines from the very heroes of romantic fiction that he, as a character, is modelled upon.

However, as the attraction to the Byronic hero in *Wuthering Heights, Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* gradually begins to dwindle, the Brontës can be seen to turn their gaze upon a different focus. In this, the heroines of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* prove to be more compelling examples of Romantic residue, as both Cathy I (from *Wuthering Heights*) and Bertha Mason (from *Jane Eyre*) become the focus of the Brontës' Byronism. In this, these heroines encompass elements

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of the Romantic Byronic prototype, being described as rebellious "wild" (Brontë, C. 1999:257) individuals, "full of ambition" and "double character" (Brontë, E. 1981:47), whilst also being identified as "intemperate" (Brontë, C. 1999:271), "mad" (Brontë, C. 1999:270) and yet "strong" (Brontë, C. 1999:268).

Unlike the Byronic heroes, the construction of these heroines focuses completely upon the emotional capacity of the Byronic character, drawing upon the knowledge gained in Anne's juvenilia, rather than the clichéd visual characteristics of the prototype. As a result, these heroines epitomise the child-like mantra of actions based upon feeling, raw emotion and instinct, rather than social convention, attempting to live their lives as "half savage and hardy, and free" (Brontë, E. 1981:84). As a result of this focus, purely upon Byronic individualism, Felicia Gordon comments that the Byronism of these characters is "arguably even more striking than that of Heathcliff or Rochester" (Gordon 1989: 93).

However, Cathy and Bertha can be seen to disregard society and social convention to such an extent, that these heroines are often described using inhuman terms. This can be read in Jane's description of Bertha, which suggests that she is more animal than human due to her prioritisation of feeling. Jane remarks that:

> whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face (Brontë, C. 1999:259).

Similarly, Nelly comments upon the effect of Cathy's individualistic behaviour, commenting that she did not feel as if she "were in the company of a creature of my own species" (Brontë, E. 1981:106). In doing so she suggests that Cathy's Byronism has been achieved at the cost of her femininity, contrasting Cathy's gender identity against Nelly's own. By suggesting that these two women are of a separate species, Brontë highlights that Cathy's rejection of society also disputes the expected norms of femininity as she is contrasted with another female character (Nelly) and remarked upon for her biological difference. This is interesting as it alludes to Victorian notions which, at the time, suggested that women were biologically meant to be passionless, but when Cathy displays the violence of her emotions Nelly deems her as biologically different to herself, suggesting that she is

somewhat unnatural, or even monstrous, because of this. However, when Nelly deems Cathy biologically different, she can only be insinuating one thing, that Cathy is more similarly aligned with male conventions of gender because she does not belong on the feminine side of the two-sex model.

Furthermore, Emily Brontë exaggerates the similarities between the Romantic Byronic heroine and the Romantic Byronic hero, as Cathy asserts "Heathcliff and I are one [...] "he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same [...] "I *am* Heathcliff!" (Brontë, E. 1981:57), once again aligning the Byronic heroine with the gender conventions of the Byronic male. However, unlike Cathy's comparison with Nelly, which draws upon the biological body, Brontë alludes to the equality between Cathy and Heathcliff as functioning upon a spiritual level, drawing them together by means of shared Romantic Individualism and capacity for feeling. This shows that the Byronic hero and heroine function around the same Romantic Byronic model, as Brontë exaggerates their similarity, asserting they "are the same", they are "one". This suggests that the Romantic model is indeed a plausible reality for women, as a means of refuting conventional complementary roles. In agreement, Barbara Hill Rigney suggests that "Bertha is as much as a doppleganger Jane as she is for Rochester" (Rigney 1978:16), also commenting upon the equality between the Byronic heroine and the Byronic hero, in Charlotte's *Jane Eyre.*

But, unfortunately, this equality between the Romantic Byronic hero and heroine is shown to be short lived and problematic, as Elfenbein argues that the Romantic Byronic heroine frequently leaves the narrative prematurely through "mysterious disappearance or death" (Elfenbein 1995:21). The Byronic hero, on the other hand is permitted a lengthy existence throughout the novel. The fatality of these female figures is of particular interest as their deaths are often examples of self-destruction in order to maintain a grasp on Romantic Individualism. For example, Cathy's death in *Wuthering Heights* is interesting as it comes at the precise moment at which she realises she will not be able to love Heathcliff, as the weight of her marriage to Linton weighs too heavily upon her, and her feelings take second place to her role of committed wife. In this Cathy is depicted in a tussle between convention and emotion, which becomes a struggle that she cannot overcome. As a direct response to this she locks herself in her bedroom to starve and catch fever, in a passionate display of

suicide. Similarly, Bertha Mason's suicidal tendencies are also triggered by her unhappy marriage to Rochester, which ends in her jumping from the roof of Thornfield Hall.

The depictions of suicide and the self-destruction of the Romantic Byronic heroine, within these texts, could lead to suggest that the Byronic existence of these women is incompatible with bourgeois realism. The main concern for women within this bourgeois realism (and many Victorian novels) is that women must marry in order to fulfil the role of their existence, as Victorian female worth is often typified by the social transaction of marriage. Charlotte Brontë herself reveals her commitment to this train of thought by arguing (in her short-story *The Spell: An Extravaganza!,* 1831) that: "A novel can scarcely be called a novel unless it ends in a marriage"(Brontë, C. 2010:149). However, marriage, for these women proves incompatible with their Romantic individualism as it means that the Byronic heroines must compromise their independent positions, as subjective individuals, as their identities become defined, instead, in relation to their husbands. This shows that these characters, regardless of their Byronic power, are still confined within a system of material transfer when they exist within the Victorian novel, as their individualism is stripped from them and passed onto their prospective husbands, leading Stein to comment that "they remain defined by their gender no matter how hard they try to escape it" (Stein 2009:197). Consequently, the only way out of this scenario for the female Romantic Byronic heroines, in order for them to maintain their Byronic individualism, is for these females to self-destruct, removing themselves from the material world.

The Byronic hero, on the other hand, isn't shown to have this problem within bourgeois realism as the marriage plot doesn't compromise his individualism. This is because Victorian society persistently defined men as individual beings, regardless of whether they married or not because this privilege remained independent from matrimony. This does however highlight an important issue, suggesting that it is easier to supplant the Byronic hero from the Romantic mode, into the Victorian novel. The reason behind this is that his Romantic individualism remains uncompromised by the material world, meaning that he can slot within that world or outside of it, as a matter of personal preference rather than a socially enforced feature. The Romantic Byronic heroine, on the other hand, proves more difficult in this pursuit as the convention of marriage compromises her Romantic individualism by codifying her gender within the material world. Bradshaw summarises this argument

by suggesting that "bourgeois realism and imaginative Romanticism sit uncomfortably together, both ideologically and stylistically" (Bradshaw 2013:122). This means that an experimental character-type, such as the Byronic heroine, proves impossible to transport from a dilettante form of Romantic literature (such as the Brontës' Romantic poetry and short stories in juvenilia), to a form like the Victorian novel, without distorting or compromising the emancipatory qualities of that heroine. As a result, the Romantic Byronic heroine in the Victorian novel, becomes an inevitably fatal figure, being destroyed by the Victorian narrative form.

Furthermore, even though these female acts of self-destruction free Cathy and Bertha from the constraints of bourgeois realism, it has the effect of compromising their Byronic capabilities as the reader cannot sympathise with the fatal heroine. This is because the fatal heroines are shown to be too destructive, envisioned as monsters within the text, due to their complete lack of integration within the Novel form. Charlotte Brontë achieves this effect by envisioning Bertha Mason as a "monster in the vessel", "a wild beast" in a "goblin's den" (Brontë, C. 1999:278) and Emily Brontë pictures Cathy as "possessed with a devil" (Brontë, E. 1981:105), dehumanising both female characters as much as possible by making them inhuman and satanic. As such the reader is not encouraged to sympathise or understand these figures, but fear them, villainising Romantic Byronic rebellion in the same way that Heathcliff or Rochester do, suggesting that Cathy "deserve[s] this. You have killed yourself" (Brontë, E. 1981:106) and that the reader instead should sympathise with the Byronic hero: "I pity him, for my part" (Brontë, C. 1999:378).

Without the sympathy of the reader the actions of these women are utterly pointless and their rebellion is stifled and vilified, meaning that we cannot learn much from these characters as their power only exists in a Romantic vacuum. As a result of this, readers don't connect with the fatal female characters, as they do with the Byronic heroes and are left questioning: "who are you" and "how can I" let you in, in the same way that Lockwood does with Cathy's spirit at the window (Brontë, E. 1981:19). As such these heroines reinscribe strict gender codes, by being pictured in stagnating roles. This is symbolised by the metaphor of Bertha Mason running backwards and forwards in the attic but getting nowhere. As a reader we see an active figure, which gives the impression that they are achieving something, but in reality they are deemed powerless in their

expressions of physical power. As a result, they are disconnected from the reader and the narrative as their only movement forward is towards death or backwards towards oppression. Although these heroines adopt the recommended quality (individualism) of the Byronic heroine, established in juvenilia, they prove to be unprogressive, meeting the same fate as the Romantic Byronic passive victim, in that they end up being destroyed. This suggests that the quality of Byronic individualism is simply not enough, in the representation of a heroine who attempts to reassess female roles.

However, within Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë's most popular works we see another heroine emerging, a heroine of a second generation, created as a response to the Romantic Byronic heroine's fatality. Examples of all of three of these Byronic heroines within *Wuthering Heights, Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, include Jane Eyre, Helen Huntingdon and Catherine II. The difference between the second generation of the Byronic heroine and the first lies in their ability to re-socialise and operate within the Victorian novel and bourgeois realism. This effect is achieved by granting the heroines, on face value, typical characteristics of the Byronic prototype by envisioning them as rebellious individuals, with "a strong display of unchastened, misdirected passions" (Brontë, A. 2012:52), having an often "wild" (Brontë, E. 1981:31) and "wayward" (Brontë, E. 1981:31), "heterogeneous" (Brontë, C. 1999:73) character. However, these characters also have the ability to step out of this role by also being described as "good" (Brontë, C. 1999:58), "half angelic" (Brontë, A. 2012:350) and "soft and mild as a dove" (Brontë, E. 1981:123), reinscribing typically feminine behavioural traits.

This duality of character allows the heroines to balance their Romantic individualism with the ability to re-socialise within society, as they have the capacity to both dispute gender ideology, but also reinscribe it themselves, as a weapon against their male counterparts. However, this weapon is as defensive as it is aggressive as the Byronic heroines are permitted to disrupt gender codes but also to survive past the limitations of the Fatal Romantic Byronic heroine by successfully fitting into the Victorian marriage plot. As a result of this, the second generation Byronic heroine is pictured as not reacting against the constraints of the Victorian novel, but operating from within them, in the same way that Anne's heroine assumes a role deliberately to dismantle it in juvenilia. In this, the Brontës don't attempt to change the form of the novel within these texts, (clearly establishing the Victorian

context) but address the role of the Byronic heroine, adapting and remodelling her so she fits and thrives within the Victorian form. The benefit of this technique is that it situates the rebellious female character within the narrative, allowing the reader to connect with them and show empathy, which then permits the Brontë sisters access to the emancipatory qualities of the Byronic heroine, once more.

This section will examine how the Brontës produce the second generation of Byronic heroine (the Victorian Byronic heroine), that has the ability to reconsider and undermine the Victorian gender ideology of the Angel in the house. This heroine does so by oscillating between (the) reinforcement and refutation of Victorian gender ideology. It will argue that the female Bildungsroman holds central importance in the survival of this Byronic heroine, allowing her to complete her aims of contesting dominant gender ideology (and her individual journey of self-formation) unscathed by creating and maintaining the balance between individualism and socialisation.

McGann suggests that the primary aim of the Byronic hero is to instil "in the reader a dislocated and melancholy intelligence [that] threatens to expose the observer to his own hidden heart" in a moment of clarity (McGann 2002:25-26). He suggests that this intelligence is achieved "by forcing the reader to consider all the circumstances of the case", and become emotionally sympathetic to the tragic hero, rather than placing blame upon him, as "the reader is asked not to excuse but to seek understanding." (McGann 2002:24). Byron, himself, commented upon such a stance in *New Monthly Magazine*, arguing that:

> It is my respect for morals that makes me so indignant against its vile substitute cant, with which I wage a war, and this good-natured world chooses to consider as a sign of my wickedness. We are all the creatures of circumstance, the greater part of our errors are caused, if not excused, by events and situations over which we have had little control; the world sees the faults, but they see not what led to them: therefore I am always lenient to crimes that have brought their own punishment, while I am little disposed to pity those who think they atone for their own sins by exposing those of others, and add cant and hypocrisy to the catalogue of their vices. (Byron 1833:148)

McGann argues that this makes the Byronic hero a key device in Byron's ethos of morality in the "war against cant" (McGann 2002:25), suggesting that "to the reader the Byronic hero whispers, [and] threatens a self-revelation" (McGann 2002:27). This revelation attempts to function on an emotional level by causing readers to reconsider their initial prejudices and judgements of others based on feeling, rather than cant. It is this quality of whispering in the ears of the reader, and placing

the power of a well-balanced and all-seeing judgement in their hands, that arguably makes the

Byronic hero so compelling as it promotes a common human ineffectuality, rather than prejudice

steeped in social convention. It is also this quality that makes it such a useful tool for female authors

to adopt, as readers are encouraged to sympathise with female characters and view all sides of their

actions, including circumstances beyond their control - such as the law, before making a judgment

upon their behaviour. In suggesting that sympathies should be engaged, judgement of female

characters goes beyond strict social conventions, unravelling instances of cant or hypocrisy that

restrict Victorian female existence, opting instead for 'truths' based on basic humanity, not gendered

expectations. This allows the second generation of Byronic heroine to outline their actions and

suggest that it is society and social convention which is at fault rather than oppressed female

characters, exonerating wronged women from villainized roles, ultimately correcting the previous

failures of the Romantic Byronic heroine. In the preface to the second edition of *The Tenant of*

Wildfell Hall Anne Brontë echoes this sentiment, by wishing to impart the "truth" to the reader:

> I wish to tell the truth, for truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive
> it [...] Let it not be imagined, however, that I consider myself competent to reform the errors
> and abuses of society, but only that I would fain contribute my humble quote towards so good
> an aim, and if I can gain the public ear at all, I would rather whisper a few wholesome truths
> therein than much soft nonsense. (Brontë, A. 2012 Preface to the Second Edition of *Tenant of*
> *Wildfell Hall: xi*)

Anne Brontë achieves the effect of whispering such truths in the ears of readers by adopting

the Bildungsroman narrative; however, the framework of the novel is not conducted through her

character, but through Gilbert, who gives his friend Halford a "sketch" (Brontë, A. 2012:4) of his

involvement with the "improbable history of the mysterious lady" (Brontë, A. 2012: 9). This sketch

involves both Gilbert's own testimony, and his reports of the contents of Helen's personal journal,

given to him as an explanation of her actions and supposed crimes. Caroline Franklin has argued that

"the act of Gilbert reading this testimony and later Helen's letters to her brother are foregrounded to

present the evidence that a femme couverte was not allowed to give in court" (Franklin 2012:131).

This emphasises the lack of public voice that many women had to explain the circumstances

surrounding their actions, particularly in instances of domestic hardship and child custody law suits.

The whispering narrative technique attempts to correct this, by promoting the effect of showing the

reader the full picture of Helen's story, as Helen, the artist, conducts Gilbert's hand into painting the scene before us, sidestepping the restrictions placed on women's freedom of speech by telling the story through Gilbert, a male character. The result of this technique is that Helen is distanced from reader, as the reader receives her history at the same time as Gilbert, and is invited to "take it home with you" (Brontë, A. 2012:131), to be absorbed and understood, and "to find that you [reader and Gilbert alike] are mistaken in your conclusions" (Brontë, A. 2012:131). In being granted this opportunity to revaluate our assumptions, along with Gilbert, we are led to understand Helen's actions, rather than condemn them, as our sympathies are engaged by the whispering voice of the Victorian Byronic heroine.

Wuthering Heights also adopts the same technique as the Gilbert-esque narrator, Mr Lockwood, guides the reader through the web of histories of Wuthering heights, led himself by a variety of testaments and letters in the chopping and changing of narrative framework. The Victorian Byronic heroine, Catherine II, in this case, is initially introduced as to the narrative as Heathcliff's wife "Mrs Heathcliff "(Brontë, E. 1981:11) in a case of mistaken identity. However, she similarly exits the novel as Mrs Heathcliff upon marrying Hareton. As such her identity is displaced throughout the narrative by her predecessor Cathy. However, we are encouraged to distinguish between these figures right from the start as Lockwood misidentifies the original Cathy as "Catherine Linton [...] why did I think of Linton?" (Brontë, E. 1981:19), using Catherine II's maiden name, in which he asks "who are you" (Brontë, E. 1981:19). This has the effect of distancing the female protagonist from the narrative, by confusing her with someone else, yet maintains a certain level of presence and endurance in the reader's ear, as the name Catherine encompasses the whole novel.

Like her sister Anne, Charlotte Brontë's preface to the second edition of *Jane Eyre* also wishes to "remind them [critical readers] of certain simple truths" (Brontë, C. A Preface to the Second Edition 1999: xxvii) as Jane Eyre's circumstances consume the reader by addressing them and asking for their attention and understanding. Bloom identifies Brontë's repetition of addressing the audience by demanding: "Reader!" as the primary means of cudgeling that reader into understanding "things are as far as she is concerned" (Bloom 2007:4). However, this assertive narrator stands less as a whispering voice and more as a shouting one, as Charlotte Brontë seeks to possess the reader's

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sympathies by exposing them to as much of Jane's condition (that which is in her control and that which is not) as possible. We can see the extent to this possession in Jane's control over Rochester's vision. Initially, Rochester asks to look at Jane's artwork "deliberately scrutinise[ing] each sketch and painting" (Brontë, C. 1999:109), as a means of making a judgement upon her character. Mink argues that "Rochester is interested in seeing them [her paintings] in order to learn about her [Jane], which is why the paintings are described in such detail. Through discussion of them Rochester becomes a sympathetic listener to Jane's views of the world." (Mink 1987:14). However, later in the novel when the narrator has engaged the readers' sympathy and understanding of Jane's condition, Rochester's vision is translated through her, rather than presented by her.

> He [Rochester] saw nature- he saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words the effect of a field, tree, town, river, cloud sunbeam - of the landscape before us; of the weather around us - and impressing by sound on his ear what light could no longer stamp on his eye. Never did I weary of reading to him: never did I weary of conducting him where he wished to go: of doing for him what he wished to be done. (Brontë, C. 1999:399)

All three narrative frameworks share this same necessity to show and to reveal, placing in front of the reader a well-rounded narrative focussed on the Byronic heroine, through the eyes of another, in order to engage sympathy. This is deemed a pivotal part of the Bildungsroman narrative as Redfield argues "Bild means 'to show', 'image', 'painting' (Redfield 2006:192).

The benefit of this technique is that the reader isn't allowed to condemn the rebellious female character, but is clearly shown the extraneous circumstances which have influenced their decisions and is led to understand them, if not excuse them. The advantage of this is that the behaviours of the Byronic heroines, if not condoned or condemned, are accepted, sympathised and possibly forgiven, leaving the reader to reconsider their initial presumptions about female rebellion. This allows the author to expose the reader to subversive strands of thought, which poses a challenge to "the comforts of undemanding and conventional ethics" (McGann 2002:26) without being accused of immorality, as Charlotte suggests in her preface: "Conventionality is not morality [...] to attack the first is not to assail the last" (Author's Preface to the Second Edition). In imitating Byron's Byronic aims, in such a way, the Brontë sisters are then permitted to continue his "war against cant" (Byron1833:148) for their

own purposes. But what truths are the Brontë sisters exposing, what cant are they defying and why is the Victorian Byronic model appropriate for this pursuit?

The common interest of all three Brontë Byronic heroines is a single pursuit; the pursuit for individual wants. Jane Eyre's biggest personal pursuit is that of freedom: "I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer" (Brontë, C. 1999: 72). Similarly, Helen's desire is to be financially independent, "free and safe" (Brontë, A. 2012:440), meaning that "what little I possess is legitimately all my own" (Brontë, A. 2012:441). Catherine's wish is far more vengeful, in that she wants to gain wealth and property back from Heathcliff "you have taken all my land [...] And my money" (Brontë, E. 1981:191). These desires are all significant as they challenge the hegemonic nature of Victorian society, disputing male-favouring property rights and ultimately revealing the female character's desires to achieve equal rights to men. Rich argues that aligning women's interests "as equal to and with the same needs as a man- is next door to insanity in England in the 1840's" (Rich 1979:98), as "Women were not allowed to wish for such rights much less demand them" (Mink 1987:9). However, all three heroines audaciously do. It is this desire for personal choice and freedom that sets Catherine, Helen and Jane apart from other Victorian heroines as their selfish demands work antagonistically with Victorian models of femininity, particularly the female myth of the self-sacrificing Angel in the House[17]. It is with this female mythology that the Brontës wage their "war on cant" (Byron 1833:148) and achieve their Byronism.

Although Vickery questions "the extent to which women accepted, negotiated, contested or simply ignored, the [...] precepts" (Vickery 1993:414), of such ideology, all three Brontë novels seem preoccupied with this myth, depicting their heroines stuck in a tussle between adhering to feminine norms (in order to be accepted within society) and striving for their individual wants, as each forbids the other. The war-wounds of such conflicting values can be read in the heroines' oscillations between

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[17] Although the phrase "the Angel in the House" was made famous by the Patmore poem in the 1850's, the ideology of the Angel ideal was circulating through England in the 1840's, established most prominently by Sarah Lewis' *Woman's Mission,* which Helsinger, Sheets and Veeder suggest was acknowledged for its popularity by George Eliot in 1840 (Helsinger, Sheets & Veeder 1989:3). Helsinger, Sheets and Veeder also suggest that "The controversies in which Brontë, Stanton and Mill participated form the context for prescriptive writers like Sarah Ellis" (Helsinger, Sheets & Veeder 1989: xi) linking both works together. This suggests that although the phrase the 'Angel of the House' may not have been in use, the ideology of the ideal was certainly a concern of the Brontës' writing.

adopting the ideology of the angel and the annihilation of it, resulting in a breed of heroine that is at once both angel and demon. Gilbert and Gubar suggest that to exist in such a state, the Brontës' heroines "must have experienced the same paradoxical double consciousness of guilt and greatness that afflicts both Satan and, say, Manfred" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000:203), aligning such women with Byron's Byronic heroes. The Brontës adopt this vision of the fallen angel, but instead transmute it into a critique of the Victorian construct of the Angel in the house, showing the fall of the angel ideology, rather than the fall of the angel herself. The result of this is that the Brontës' Heroines are updated versions of the Romantic Byronic clones, reborn as examples of a regenerated Victorian Byronic Heroine.

The sisters' method of doing this has the effect of exaggerating and disarming cant which oppresses women, as they depict not the fall of the angel, but the pushing of her, as each Byronic heroine's fall from grace is at the hands of her male counterpart. Significantly it is the heroines' male counterpart that initially promotes the angelic ideal and uses it as a means of controlling and grooming the Byronic female into 'wifely' good behaviour. However, when this ideology doesn't suit their aims they manipulate it and cast it aside. The Brontës highlight this inconsistency and subvert the oppressive power of the angelic ideal, reclaiming that power for their heroines, by promoting the continued use of the ideology in order to destroy the male characters. This taints the angelic ideal with pursuits of selfish female desires, ultimately revealing the paradoxical fall of that ideology, rather than the fall of female characters from grace. This can be interpreted by examining the Brontës' oscillation between angel and demon.

Initially all three Byronic females attempt to adopt the ideology of the Angel in the House as they epitomise self-sacrifice, domesticity and the power of womanly 'influence'. In *Jane Eyre* Rochester wishes to marry Jane in the hope that she will be his "comforter", "rescuer", "redeemer", as his "better self" and "good angel" (Brontë, C. 1999:266), buying into the ideology of the angel in the house, as he hopes she will cleanse his soul after a lifetime as a "commonplace sinner" (Brontë, C. 1999:117). Jane's initial response is to "soothe him; save him; love him" (Brontë, C. 1999:270), until his actions compromise her Christian beliefs, as he attempts to trick her into complying with his bigamy. Rochester's deception is interesting as it represents the hypocrisy of the angel ideology as he

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attempts to cleanse his sins by sinning once more, transforming his angel into a demon by making her fall from grace, besmirching her Christian character. As a consequence of this deception Jane leaves Thornfield out of concern for her own soul, prioritising her angelic goodness and Christian morality over Rochester's redemption, compromising self-sacrifice for self-preservation. Although we are left with a vision of Rochester in agonising despair, Jane's behaviour and decision to leave promotes the same Christian morality of the Angel in the house that Rochester originally subscribed to, suggesting that it is her angelic goodness that is seen to destroy him on her departure. Significantly, as Jane flees from Rochester she descends into self-elected exile, and it is from this sanctuary of St John Rivers' house she achieves her goal of freedom; "I am an independent woman now." (Brontë, C. 1999:384).

Catherine also adopts the Angel of the House ideal in that she marries Linton (although she is forced into this). However, she remains self-sacrificing and committed to him stating 'Linton is all I have to love in the world" (Brontë, E. 1981:183). However, Linton barricades her within the house until she falls ill "She never shall! —she may cry, and be sick as much as she pleases!" (Brontë, E. 1981:179), forcing her to sneak out of the window. However, Catherine persists with the Angelic ideal, until Linton's death, in which she is rewarded with a claim to his money, removing it from Heathcliff. In this Catherine uses the earthly ideal to get her one desire, exploiting the ideology for her own selfish wants.

Similarly, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Helen initially encompasses the angel ideal by her self-sacrificing duty of redeeming Arthur's soul, "believing that she can deliver him from his faults" (Brontë, A. 2012:165). Arthur, like Heathcliff and Rochester buys into this ideology stating that "the very idea of having you to care for under my roof, would force me to moderate my expenses and live like a Christian—not to speak of all the prudence and virtue you would instil into my mind by your wise counsels and sweet, attractive goodness" (Brontë, A. 2012:163). But when this Christian ideology conflicts with his profligate lifestyle he finds it a difficult pill to swallow, abusing his wife to the extent that she leaves him and opts for self-exile. Although, as sympathetic readers, we are invited into understanding Helen's circumstances, leaving her husband in such a way epitomizes Helen's fall from grace, in terms of Victorian morality.

Helen seemingly returns to the angelic ideal as she leaves her sanctuary of Wildfell Hall and goes back to Grassdale on hearing of Arthur's illness. Although the ideology of the Angel is endorsed in that Helen returns to her husband in a Christian act of self-sacrifice, she uses this ideology to plot his downfall. Her explanation to Arthur is that "'your conduct was such as to oblige me to leave you; but I heard that you were ill and alone and I am come back to nurse you'", to which he responds "'Oh I see,' said he with a bitter smile, 'it's an act of Christian charity, whereby you hope to gain a higher seat in Heaven for yourself and scoop a deeper pit in hell for me'" (Brontë, A. 2012:47). Laura Berry argues that:

> [I]n Huntington's decline we witness an almost perfect reversal of the gendered power relations that dominated courtship. The literal restraints he [Arthur] placed upon Helen becomes Huntington's own, as he increasingly feels marriage to be a prison. As much as he attempts to make Helen a captive, it is finally his imprisonment that we witness. (Berry 1996:44)

Arthur's interpretation of Helen rising and himself falling, taints the ideology of the Angel as a pursuit of selfish wants. Helen is shown to confirm Arthur's very fears by making him sign an agreement that means she can leave when she wishes with the total legal rights of her child in hand, a concept opposing the angel ideology in favour of rebellious female independence.

However, the Victorian Byronic heroines cannot be left in this independent state of individualism, or they will meet the same fate as the Romantic Byronic heroine and lose the reader's sympathy by removing themselves from society. Instead these female character all re-endorse the Angel of the House ideology in order to both continue disputing prescribed norms and be granted the prize of a completed Bildungsroman. Catherine marries Hareton, once again signing her money over to another man, yet also secures both the Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange estates. Jane similarly marries Rochester, leading him to comment ironically "you delight in sacrifice" (Brontë, C. 1999:394), yet she revels in the circumstances that Rochester "would have given me half his fortune, without demanding so much as a kiss in return" (Brontë, C. 1999:391), suggesting that her financial freedom remains untarnished in marriage. Helen also marries Gilbert, yet does so from a position of strength persuading him to marry her, reminding him of his financial insufficiency in "rank, birth and fortune" (Brontë, A. 2012:520). As such all three marriages function by offering a surface level

submission of the Byronic heroines, in order for them to maintain their connection to bourgeois society, but they also actually secure the Byronic heroines in a position of superiority, maintaining their female rebellion covertly. As such, Ellis argues that the benefit of the female Bildungsromane for female characters is that it allows them to manipulate appearances to "gain autonomy" (Ellis 1999:15), using their socialisation as a means of obtaining and sustaining individualism, rather than relinquishing it.

The following chapter will discuss the limitations of the Byronic character type, as *Shirley* shows the destruction of a celebrated regenerated Victorian heroine, descending into self-annihilation, in the same way that the Fatal Romantic Heroine does. It will also discuss how Brontë's *Villette* attempts to right these wrongs by utilising a subversive narrative, which typifies the Byronic voice, expanding the Byronic hero into a narrative mode.

CHAPTER THREE:
Byronic Subversion
Shirley and *Villette* by Charlotte Brontë

Charlotte Brontë's 1849 novel *Shirley* is frequently considered as "the odd one out" (Argyle 1995:741), tarnishing her otherwise celebrated protofeminist record, with an ending that critics have found hard to accept. Many judge the novel as a "narratively flawed - protean, feminist experiment gone awry" (Vanskike 1996:447) and frequently label it as "an error in artistic judgement followed by a consequent correction" (Argyle 1995:741) in her later novel, *Villette*. Critically, both contemporary and modern reactions towards Brontë's novel tend to express disappointment, confusion and, more importantly, intense frustration. But, why are we so severe against this novel?

Modern negative reactions towards *Shirley* tend to be based upon Brontë's final treatment of the protagonist of its namesake. Shirley outweighs any of the Brontë's preceding heroines, by encompassing a subversive wilfulness that defies every patriarchal barrier placed in her way, with ease. However, controversially, Brontë ends the novel with Shirley succumbing to a marriage of disappointment, as she is wed to an authoritative and paternalistic husband, who wishes "to tame first, and teach afterwards; to break in" (Brontë, C. 2012:622), which ultimately leads to the fall of Shirley. This ending is a common feature of nineteenth-century literature, in that the final resolve is marriage, yet many readers find it a particularly bitter pill to swallow to see Shirley, the "Pantheress!", gnawing at "her chain", reduced to a "pale" and "spirit-like" shadow of her former self (Brontë, C. 2012:637-638), after displaying such feminist potential throughout the majority of the novel.

Although many critics have also defended the novel, and its author, labelling it a neglected masterpiece (Bock 1992:110), the mounds of negative criticism aimed at *Shirley* do raise some interesting questions, such as; why do readers particularly react so vehemently to Shirley's nuptials, when Jane Eyre ended in the same way (but was well received), what has changed since Jane Eyre and how did Brontë's succeeding novel, *Villette,* pick up the pieces and right Shirley's wrongs?

In this chapter, I wish to argue that Brontë's novel *Shirley* provokes such harsh criticism, and stands distinctly alone on Brontë's otherwise successful record, because it reaches the limits of female Byronic appropriation within the Victorian Novel. I will argue that *Shirley,* as a novel, is indeed a

feminist experiment, which attempts to use the emancipatory traits of the Byronic model as a means of readdressing female roles by picturing an independent Byronic figure, in female form.

However, I will argue that Brontë's *Shirley* shatters this feminist illusion, by proving the Byronic model to be a fruitless mode in its aims of tackling the two-sex model of gender difference and appealing for total equality, as it proves to be too expansive an aim for the Byronic model. This chapter will argue that this aim is far too broad while ever the model poses as a Bildungsroman, as it struggles to offer an acceptable resolve, in its connection to the marriage plot; just disappointment, confusion and intense frustration, reflected in the vehemence of its readers' opinions. This novel can then be viewed as bittersweet; both a success, in that it completes its aims of creating a fully functioning independent Byronic heroine, and a failure, in that Shirley is not granted a means of successful re-socialisation within the marriage plot, and so is left to be pictured as a spirit-like entity in the same way as the fatal Romantic Byronic heroines of the previous chapter. I will also argue that, on realising this failure, Brontë's *Villette* attempts to reconfigure the Byronic model and readdress the problems which *Shirley* exposes, nursing the wounds of disappointment with a covert attempt at Byronism.

SHIRLEY (1849)

Bradshaw argues that Brontë's protagonist, Shirley Keeldar embodies "the visionary qualities of the Byronic hero" (Bradshaw 2013:123), in her defiance of authority and demarcation of social boundaries. Brontë creates this effect by subverting traditional norms regarding the boundaries of gender, attributing Shirley with a juxtaposition of both womanly and manly qualities. The benefit of using this technique is that Shirley is allowed to straddle both sides of the gender binary, embracing a subversive duality, which challenges Victorian monolithic conceptions of gender by questioning their legitimacy. In this Shirley develops further than the heroines of the previous chapter as her rebellion doesn't target a specific gender ideology, like the Angel of the House, as such, but instead questions the two-sex complementary model of gender as a whole, representing a radical assault on Victorian norms.

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We are initially introduced to this subversive technique on learning Shirley's full title, "Miss Shirley Keeldar" (Brontë, C. 2012:198). In yoking the words "Miss" and "Shirley", Myer suggests that the reader is exposed to the uneasy mix of masculinity and femininity that Shirley embodies, as Shirley was not traditionally considered a female name in the nineteenth-century "until Charlotte made it so" (Myer 1987:174). However, the significance of naming only comes into fruition when it is interpellated, which Brontë demonstrates by outlining the origins of Shirley's male name and the subsequent masculine behaviour that that name bestows upon her:

> her parents, who had wished to have a son, finding that, after eight years of marriage, Providence has granted them only a daughter, bestowed on her the same masculine family cognomen they would have bestowed on a boy, if with the boy they had been blessed (Brontë, C. 2012:203).

In choosing to extend the male tradition of naming onto a female heir, Shirley's behaviour, and position in reference to society is ultimately shifted, as the prerogative of male right is passed onto a woman. This, from the offset, marks a refusal to conform to nineteenth-century norms, defying the Victorian convention which dictated that women were only defined in relation to men, through their fathers, their husbands and their sons. Significantly, Brontë uses Shirley's cognomen as the title of the novel, inscribing this outward disregard for Victorian customs as the main focus of her work, even though Shirley's character only dominates about a quarter of the central plot. Anthon asserts that "cognomina were derived, by the Romans, from a variety of mental or bodily peculiarities, or some remarkable event" (Anthon 1843:661), which suggests that Shirley's rebelliously unfeminine name is her defining and remarkable feature. This establishes the foundation that the novel relies upon, distinguishing Shirley as out of the ordinary and an outsider due to her name, giving her a Byronic platform of otherness. In Shirley's parents' opposition of cognominal tradition, her identity is freed from female constraints by being defined independently (without male attachment), as her father symbolically offers her her own social significance by treating her as if she was the male heir, granting her the right to behave as a son would be expected to:

> I am an esquire! Shirley Keeldar, Esquire, ought to be my style and title. They gave me a man's name; I hold a man's position. It is enough to inspire me with a touch of manhood (Brontë, C. 2012:206).

Significantly, when Shirley identifies her own name she electively replaces the "Miss" that Helstone originally assigns to her with the word *"Esquire"*, voluntarily defeminising herself and opting for masculine representation by situating herself in a male role. Brontë exaggerates this elective choice in order to distinguish a split between the fixed notion of sex and the culturally dependent concept of gender, as a female character opts for a traditionally masculine title by personal choice, rather than biological compulsory.

Brontë suggests that Shirley's title as an Esquire is the driving force behind her gendered behaviour, as she takes on the inherited masculine role of the defensive landowner with a flair for violence, shown through her revolutionary language. Craciun argues that this is a subversive concept, as in the nineteenth-century "women as a class eschew violence, destructiveness and cruelty" (Craciun 2002:22), yet Shirley revels in it, urging it by stating:

> "I tell you, my brother's blood will someday be crying to Heaven against me. For, after all, if political incendiaries come here to kindle conflagration in the neighbourhood, and my property is attacked, I shall defend it like a tigress—I know I shall... If once the poor gather and rise in the form of the mob, I shall turn against them as an aristocrat; if they bully me, I must defy: if they attack, I must resist, and I will."
> [in which, Caroline responds] "You talk like Robert'... 'I feel like Robert, only more fierily" (Brontë, C. 2012:269)

This violent outburst is particularly Byronic as it represents a passionate and glorified vision of the traditional Byronic model; depicting a rebellious aristocratic individual, othered and endangered by an aggressive mob, who equally wish to rebel, yet cannot comprehend, or value, each other's fractious pursuits. However, the unruly and wronged aristocrat is traditionally carved in a male mould. Shirley's presence in this passage is significant as it begins by drawing upon the image of her non-existent brother, who would have been the bearer of her name and position, yet she has been transplanted onto the scene in his absence, placing her in the role of the male Byronic aristocrat.

However, Brontë pictures Shirley's brother's blood being spilled as a consequence of her violence, as she is portrayed as being more masculine and destructive than the other biological men in question, particularly, in this case, more tempestuous than Robert. The result of this is that Shirley is not merely standing in her brother's place, but usurping male representations of masculinity by outdoing them, representing a more intense version of the Byronic hero as a woman.

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Although Brontë does exaggerate the importance of female masculinity in creating the Byronic heroine, she refuses to present Shirley as an entirely masculine individual trapped in a female body. Instead, she represents Judith Butler's claims, that gender operates as "a free-floating artifice" (Butler 2011:9), by frequently alternating the gender with which Shirley assigns herself; labelling herself at times as a woman; "I am a woman; I know mine [her 'place']" (Brontë, C. 2012:625) and yet actively encouraging Helstone to refer to her with masculine pronouns; "Don't let him exert himself too much; don't let him break his neck in hunting; especially, let him mind how he rides down that dangerous hill near the Hollow." (Brontë, C. 2012:208). In encouraging Helstone to view her as manly, Shirley is allowed to control his behaviour, coercing him into being led by her, as she is released from the oppressive gender hierarchies which place women in subordinate roles to men. Helstone submits to this practice, yet reaffirms that he does so because Shirley is not feminine; "you are neither my wife nor my daughter, so I'll be led for once [...] This is quite a gentleman's affair" (Brontë, C. 2012:274), ultimately respecting her as his equal. Fundamentally, because Brontë so frequently reminds the reader of Shirley's ties to femininity, in her various gender alterations, the reader is led to observe the inherently misogynistic Helstone submitting to the female Shirley. This is an obvious subversion of gender roles as the female character is seen to overpower the male, asserting her masculinity over him and placing him in a submissive role, a role which is often assigned with Victorian femininity. In representing Shirley's power in this way Brontë cements her position as the Byronic heroine, which Stein argues, provided the reader "with a satisfying vicarious experience of power and empowerment, autonomy, mastery and defiance of oppressive authority" (Stein 2004:2), which is a particularly beneficial result for a novel which aims to represent the oppressed sex.

This marks the largest benefit of Shirley's both masculine and feminine gender identity; as readers are allowed to voyeuristically view a woman fulfilling culturally masculine roles, such as the role of 'leader', a practice that women were often considered incapable of participating in because of their biological difference. Brontë's subversive exaggeration of this foreshadows John Stuart Mill's groundbreaking arguments in his 1869 essay *The Subjection of Women*, in which he argues that women can fulfil typically masculine tasks, but are prevented from doing so by cultural convention, stating "What women by nature cannot do, it is quite superfluous to forbid them from doing." (Mill

2006:32). As a result, Shirley is pictured successfully thriving in a variety of masculine roles, such as "cavalier" (Brontë, C. 2012:207), "captain" (Brontë, C. 2012:274), "magistrate", "churchwarden" and "squire" (Brontë, C. 2012:208). This earns her the right to engage with the public sphere of work, an environment that women were otherwise forbidden from, once again demarking traditional patriarchal boundaries.

However, in order to complete the process of breaking boundaries of gender, Brontë must acknowledge those boundaries and, to a certain extent, reproduce them. At this point, Brontë is faced with an irreconcilable difficulty using the Byronic model to reassess female roles. This occurs because in grafting masculine traits upon Shirley (to make her Byronic), Brontë must burden her with the reproduction of masculine ideology, so that she can perform the culturally constructed role of being a man, successfully. Whereas the previous Victorian heroines were seen to both dispute and reinforce gender ideology, Shirley cannot be seen in such a way, as she is not doing so by her own will, but by the force of her new gender identity. Moore argues that this holds paramount importance, as Shirley's "outward appropriation of male power" depends "on male-sponsored traditions" (Moore 2004:479), that make that power accessible for her to replicate, suggesting that Captain Keeldar props patriarchal expectations in order to claim them, rather than dispute them. We can read this interpretation in Shirley's corruption of Caroline's idyllic scene, which she transforms a peaceful scene into a site steeped in male ideology:

> [Caroline] "I long to hear the sound of waves—ocean-waves—and to see them as I have imagined them in dreams, like tossing banks of green light, strewed with vanishing and reappearing wreaths of foam, whiter than lilies. I shall delight to pass the shores of those lone rock-islets where the sea-birds live and breed unmolested" (Brontë, C. 2012:247)

> [Shirley] "I show you an image, fair as alabaster, emerging from the dim wave. We both see the long hair, the lifted and foam-white arm, the oval mirror brilliant as a star. It glides nearer; a human face is plainly visible—a face in the style of yours—whose straight, pure (excuse the word, it is appropriate)—whose straight, pure lineaments paleness does not disfigure. It looks at us, but not with your eyes. I see a preternatural lure in its wily glance. It beckons. Were we men, we should spring at the sign—the cold billow would be dared for the sake of the colder enchantress; being women, we stand safe, though not dreadless. She comprehends our unmoved gaze; she feels herself powerless; anger crosses her front; she cannot charm, but she will appal us; she rises high, and glides all revealed on the dark wave-ridge. Temptress-terror! monstrous likeness of ourselves!" (Brontë, C. 2012:247)

> [Caroline]"But, Shirley, she is not like us. We are neither temptresses, nor terrors, nor monsters."

[Shirley]"Some of our kind, it is said, are all three. There are men who ascribe to 'woman,' in general, such attributes."(Brontë, C. 2012:247-248).

Shirley's depiction of the scene draws upon the patriarchal ideology that demonises female sexual desire, as the mermaid is portrayed as enchanting, dangerous and threatening to men, and yet Shirley asserts that it bears a resemblance to Caroline. Although Caroline disputes this as fantasy, drawing Shirley out of the myth narrative, Shirley imbeds the imagined scene within their reality, by the use of the word "our", consigning the image of the monster as a shared female norm. Significantly, Shirley also accuses men of doing the same, registering oppressive male views as her own. This offers an inconsistency in Shirley's characterisation as she is envisioned as both the protofeminist (because she has defied patriarchal boundaries) and yet also the patriarch, as she reinscribes the male ideology which enforces restrictive conventions upon women, particularly those that stifle and distort female sexuality. Vanskike argues that "Shirley seems to possess two inconsistent selves" (Vanskike 1996:484), however, he fails to imagine that these selves are in a perpetual state of conflict, as the burden of male ideology ultimately becomes Shirley's downfall. Brontë demonstrates this by outlining the crux of Shirley's characterisation that relies on the paradox that in order to grasp male power, Shirley must enact male ideology, which thrives on the domination of women. However, at the same time, she must also maintain her attachment to womanliness, in order to represent herself as a female participating in male practice. Complexly, this role means that she must submit to male power, which situates her in a position of both domination and yet submission.

The effect of which is a character verging on Byronic self-destruction, as Shirley's two selves ultimately battle for power, concluding with the dominating 'manly' self in triumph, as the 'womanly' self submits. In light of this, the discouraging marriage at the end of Shirley aligns her with the fatal Romantic Byronic heroines in that they are not saved from the brink by the balance of socialisation, and are forced to self-destruct.

Although Shirley's marriage is disappointing, for Shirley as a character, her husband Louis and Brontë's readers, it is not inconsistent with the Byronic model, as it follows the same path of self-

destruction that the traditional Byronic hero walks. Sadly, this reveals that the Byronic model can provide some benefits, as it questions the legitimacy of social constructions of gender, by offering a vision of a female fulfilling male roles, but, wistfully does not offer any concrete solutions, as the Byronic mode always ends in self-destruction or fatality. This highlights the issue of using the Byronic model as a tool for liberation, as the Byronic character has the capability to defy boundary after boundary (as Shirley does with a string of subversive acts), but ultimately her rebellion is restricted by the fatal conclusion, that the hero/heroine must resign themselves to the oppressive authorities that they fought so hard to defy, as they are cast as both the oppressor and the oppressed. Brontë resigned herself to this problem, in 1848, writing: "One can see where the evil lies but who can point out the remedy?" (Brontë, C. 2000:66), suggesting that the Byronic model is indeed a fruitless pursuit for addressing gender roles.

VILLETTE (1853)

However, fruitless as it may be, Charlotte Brontë's later novel, *Villette,* contains many of the same subversive messages that *Shirley* and her previous novels assert, questioning the legitimacy of Victorian constructions of gender. However, it does so in a different manner, by abandoning the pursuit of a singular Byronic character, after exhausting the liberatory benefits of the Byronic heroine. Instead, Brontë adopts the same subversive duality that the Byronic hero/heroine encompasses, but covertly injects this into her narrative style. In this Brontë attempts to achieve the same effect of whispering in the ear of the reader and provoking them to reconsider prescribed norms, but achieves this by doubling scenarios in order to enforce allegorical displacement. In this Brontë selects and exaggerates moments of symbolic practice laden with negative gender codifiers of femininity within the narrative and subverts them, applying them to both male and female characters in order to show how these characters do not respond in 'biologically different' ways, but actually retort in the same manner. As such Brontë highlights the falsity of the two-sex model of gender, as both male and female characters react in the same way, the human way. This delineates the gender signifiers that are attached and neutralises the negative connotations attached to them. The benefit of this is that it

overcomes the restriction that individual Byronic characters tend to face, by evading the Byronic self-destructive/ fatal ending and opts instead for an author that's rhetoric, ingrained within her writing, could be considered Byronically subversive. As such, these rebellious instances operate within a sub-level of the Bildungsroman narrative, allowing the heroine Lucy Snowe to complete her narrative without annihilation, yet the reader is left with the same moment of realisation.

In *Villette,* Brontë adopts the positive elements of the experimental style in *Shirley,* such as the ability to distinguish a separation between sex and gender, by masculinising a female character. However, rather than represent a persistently masculinised female like Shirley, which is prone to be problematised by the reproduction of male ideology, Brontë, instead, electively represents a short moment of masculinisation by using the technique of theatrical transvestitism. Brontë's protagonist Lucy is urged to don a male costume and (reluctantly) perform the role of a man, in a school production. For this role she consents "to take a man's name and part" (Brontë, C. 2004:154), as Shirley does, but also applies a few items of male garb over the top of her normal clothing, such as "a little vest, a collar, and cravat, and a paletôt of small dimensions; the whole being the costume of a brother of one of the pupils." (Brontë, C. 2004:154). The commonalities between this revision and Shirley are unmistakable, as Brontë, once again, draws upon the imaginative presence of a brother, whose role is assumed by the female protagonist, in his absence.

However, in *Villette* Charlotte Brontë doesn't depict Lucy as stepping into the male role, subsequently becoming manly (and exiting her female role), but instead exaggerates how Lucy simply applies men's clothing over the top of her female clothes, and, as a result, is liberated from the restraints attached to female clothing. In doing so, Brontë exaggerates gendered clothing as social signifiers, as the application of masculine dress allows Lucy to "recklessly alter the spirit of the rôle" (Brontë, C. 2004:155), as she is granted access to masculine traits (such as a thirst for competition) by putting on male attire; "I rivalled and out-rivalled him. I knew myself but a fop, but where he was outcast I could please. Now I know I acted as if wishful and resolute to win and conquer" (Brontë, C. 2004:155).

Vanskike argues that "in short, the intent of the transvestite role was not to conceal the actress' actual gender but to juxtapose her femininity with the dress, mannerisms, and societal

position of a man" (Vanskike 1996:482), as Brontë symbolically layers Lucy with male clothes, which exaggerating her femininity, yet allows her to interrupt the boundaries of expected female behaviour and perform with masculine vigour. The result of this is a critique of the artificiality of gendered boundaries, by keeping the audience acutely aware of Lucy's femininity, but granting her the access to masculine roles, by something as simple of men's clothes. Litvak argues that theatrical transvestitism is a successful technique for subverting prevailing cultural values as it allows the "subtle diffusion [of subversive ideas] throughout the culture that would appear to have repudiated it" (Litvak 1992:x), as Brontë covertly normalizes the image of women in a masculine role, by the use of theatricality and the subversion of gendered clothing. This method offers a successful challenge to Victorian gender boundaries as it simply represents the application of culturally constructed items, rather than ideas, like in Shirley, representing the real fluidity of gender.

However, Brontë goes further in querying the social signification of clothing by representing the same technique of theatrical transvestitism, but for the opposite sex, as Genevra's love interest Hamal dresses in female clothing, masquerading as the ghostly Nun. The clothing of a Nun functions as a signifier for the pinnacle of female self-sacrifice and devotion, as two of the most prized traits of the Victorian female ideal (the Angel in the House). In wearing this uniform the signification of female piety is juxtaposed onto a man's body, delineating the gendered implications attached.

However, Hamal misconstrues these principles by wearing this clothing in order to secretly visit his lover and avoid detection[18], taking advantage of the artificial signification of this convention. Significantly the nun's uniform becomes stigmatised as the ghostly sightings are kept a secret, by both M.Paul and Lucy, as she is told by Dr John to "say nothing, and keep your resolution of describing your nun to nobody" (Brontë, C. 2004:278), granting Hamal a cloak of invisibility. This exaggerates the social invisibility that is assigned to many Victorian women, as they are considered absent from society, due to their lack of accurate representation and invisibility in the eyes of the law. In placing these qualities onto a male body, which is then made invisible as a consequence, Brontë critiques this convention by exaggerating how the ideology of the female ideal functions.

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[18] This moment in the narrative offers a reimagining of Byron's *Don Juan* Canto XVI in which Don is faced with a vision of a ghostly monk, who is revealed to be the Duchess of Fitz Fulke, using the costume as a disguise to sneak into her lover's chamber.

Significantly the ghost then passes her clothes back to Lucy, "The nun of the attic bequeaths to Lucy Snowe her wardrobe" (Brontë, C. 2004: 519), but Lucy tears it up in an act of defiance: "And down she fell—down all around me—down in shreds and fragments—and I trode upon her." (Brontë, C. 2004:518). This gifting of the costume to Lucy is significant as Mayer argues that in Victorian theatre the transvestite would be replaced by an actor of the true sex, towards the end of the performance, as the hero reaches their goal (Mayer 1974:61-62). Symbolically Hamal gifts the Nun's uniform to Lucy for her to wear and accept the role of the female submissive ideal, and its subsequent social invisibility, but Lucy rejects this, tearing up not only the outfit, but the signified role that it stands for. This can be read through the way in which Brontë personifies the clothes by referring to them as "she" and "her", alluding to the role that the clothes represent rather than the items respectively.

Another subversive message that Brontë remodels from *Shirley* is the male ideology which restricts and distorts female sexuality, as Brontë reconsiders negative and distorted connotations of sexuality through the symbolism of jewellery. Arnold argues that jewellery, in the nineteenth-century, indicated underlying social values, particularly about gender roles, as embellishment worn by women was used to express wealth and status and yet men were spared from this practice, by electively wearing none. He argues that "the lack of significant jewelry worn among men argues an immense disjunction in gender roles" (Arnold 2013:4) as men typically gave "jewelry as gifts to women in a show of privilege and prerogative" (Arnold 2013:5). The signification of this is that jewellery was offered as a courting gift to win women over, as a prize for marriage, ultimately weighing female worth and the physical body against a material object. Brontë depicts this practice in *Villette* by chastising Genevra's acceptance (and often encouragement) of such gifts, accusing her of being materialistic and dishonest in receiving gifts of jewellery, without the intention to marry: "I believe you are doing very wrong—seriously wrong. Perhaps, however, you now feel certain that you will be able to marry M. Isidore; your parents and uncle have given their consent, and, for your part, you love him entirely?"(Brontë, C. 2004:98). In the chastisement of Genevra, Brontë highlights her immaturity in her disregard for consequences, as Genevra shrugs off responsibility in order to "enjoy [her] youth" (Brontë, C. 2004:99), which Lucy condemn as "coquettish, and ignorant, and flirting, and

fickle, and silly, and selfish" (Brontë, C. 2004:99). This is interesting as jewellery then becomes a social signifier for sexual licentiousness, as Genevra is accused of coquetry by accepting gifts.

Lucy's character is also tarnished by the social signifiers attached to jewellery, as M. Paul criticizes the embellishment of her wardrobe with trinkets, stating: "He could not, he was sorry to say, be so particular on this theme as he could wish: not possessing the exact names of these 'babioles'... He would merely say, in general terms—and in these general terms he knew he was correct—that my costume had of late assumed 'des façons mondaines,' which it wounded him to see" (Brontë, C. 2004:369), condemning and sexualising her wardrobe. Both of these female accounts share the same conclusion that jewellery functions as a social signifier for encoding female sexual boundaries, as outward symbols of licentiousness.

However, Brontë subverts and critiques this practice by delineating the sexualising signification of jewellery, as Lucy gifts a watch on a chain to M. Paul. M. Paul initially exercises his male privilege by making it well known that he wished to receive "No article of value... he distinctly gave it to be understood, that he would accept neither plate nor jewellery" (Brontë, C. 2004:373), but when Lucy breaks this wish he is pictured as reacting in exactly the same way as Genevra: "He took out the chain...glossy with silk and sparkling with beads. He liked that too—admired it artlessly, like a child." (Brontë, C. 2004:384). In reconsidering the act of giving jewellery, the childish response that both M.Paul and Ginevra display is seen to be a universal reaction, rather than an intrinsically female one, transforming the negative tone of Genevra's gift, into a neutrally accepted one, as M.Paul's reception is sentimentalised. This raises an interesting point, as M. Paul is in no way obligated to return Lucy's affections or marry her, on receiving this gift, but is viewed with authorial tenderness. The result of this event is that it actually softens M. Paul's outward appearance, to the reader, transforming him from an aggressive masculine Napoleon figure, which he is often referred as (Brontë, C. 2004:386 & 419), to a gentle and childlike picture of innocence, which arguably feminises him.

Significantly, as Brontë subverts the convention of receiving jewellery, the effect is once more assigned as a feminine convention, but this time as positive and sentimental one, rather than one that aims to enforce sexual boundaries and stereotypes upon women. This highlights the main benefit

of doubling scenarios in order to enforce allegorical displacement, as it not only exposes gendered signifiers as being artificial, but it ultimately aims to revise them and recast them in a positive light.

To conclude, *Villette* is depicted as the antidote to the poison that *Shirley* inflicts as it moves on from the pursuit of representing the emancipatory qualities of the Byronic hero, by taking those "visionary qualities" (Bradshaw 2013:123) and injecting them into the narrative framework. The triumph of this technique in Villette operates by its ability to act below the surface, correcting patriarchal thought processes and normalising these revisions by covertly subverting social signifiers. Brontë's Byronism, in this way, undergoes a huge transition from being represented as a rebellious peculiarity in *Shirley*, who operates as an outsider that is exaggerated for her difference, to being centralised within the structure of the novel as a means of reconsidering patriarchal conventions as false and peculiar. As such Brontë's *Villette* has the ability to critique the two-sex model of gender and suggest equality between male and female characters, yet does so covertly in order to avoid the repercussions of such radical thought. As a result the covert narrative style in *Villette* performs far more successfully than in *Shirley* as Brontë is permitted to critique and attempt to reconsider gender roles within society as a whole, making the Byronic narrative an incredibly subversive tool.

CONCLUSION

The initial aim of this research was to examine why the Brontës sustain and modify the Romantic figure of the Byronic Hero, in the Victorian period, and adopt it for their purpose of reassessing female roles. The simple answer to this query lies in the Byronic heroes' emancipatory capability of highlighting and questioning instances of cant. The Brontës utilise the Byronic model as a means of question the cant of Victorian gender roles, which circulate around the two-sex complementary model. In adopting the Byronic role the Brontës admonish this ideology of gender, by drawing upon the shared notion of feeling, common in every living individual. In accessing the Byronic heroes' representation of feeling (by looking to the Romantic Byronic model) the Brontës construct a relationship between the reader and the character, based upon sympathy. In doing so they expose the reader to a notion of 'truth', a vision of the disparity between human nature and social convention, dispelling the illusion that they are one in the same, attempting to change the way in which readers interpret the world and particularly women's place within that world.

However, the trials of accessing the Byronic model for a set of female authors suggest that the Byronic hero is both useful and problematic, evasive and engaging, but susceptible to change and manipulation. For each step forward that the Brontës literature takes, the Byronic model gains a new a face, evolving along with the Brontës' authorial craft. As such, this thesis has demonstrated the different ways in which the Brontës take advantage of the Byronic hero's fluid nature, modifying and altering the Byronic model at each step in their development to suit their own particular aims.

Matthew Arnold's poem titled 'Memorial Verses, April 1850' suggests that the Byronic hero, "taught us little; but our soul/ Had *felt* him like the thunder's roll." (Arnold 1850:8-9). However, this thesis has disputed this assumption, by outlining the usefulness of the Byronic character-type and the value of examining such a figure in relation to women's fiction. Although this study has highlighted the numerous problems that the Byronic hero delivers in literature, and the limitations of his use, this work has shown that the Byronic model has the power to teach, the power to raise questions and the power to change minds, making the character-type an obvious choice for a set of female authors, like the Brontë sisters, to utilise as a means of questioning nineteenth-century gender roles.

Although this thesis has focussed particularly on Brontë fiction, the Byronic heroes presence in other works of female fictions, whether that be in the juvenilia of authors such as Jane Austen and Mary Augusta Ward (highlighted in Alexander and McMaster's study) or other works of nineteenth-century authors, such as Eliot and Gaskell, the presence of the Byronic hero (and occasionally the heroine), in female works, proves to be far more than a cliché, but a subversive tool for protofeminist engagement.

However, this wealth of value has only recently begun to receive notice. As a result, one of the most important issues that this research has raised is that the Byronic hero should never be confined, strictly to an isolated area of study, like the male Romantic poets, again. He should maintain his outsider status in criticism as he does in life, moving beyond boundaries, through different bodies and through different times, as a fluid and regenerating vector for political motive. Criticism instead should focus upon expanding this field and engaging with the Byronic hero as a character-type in numerous conditions, whether that be nineteenth-century literature, modern literature, film or art, because the potential of the Byronic hero knows no bounds.

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