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Richard Lansdown

The Riddles of *Mazeppa*; or, More Questions than Answers: Watermarks and Cohabitations, April 1817–September 1818

Abstract:
Byron's *Mazeppa* is an unusual case in his writing career. He was generally a quick writer, but this poem – an important link between his earlier melodramatic tales and his later comic ones – was started in April 1817 and completed only in September 1818, nearly eighteen months later. This essay uses various forms of evidence, in particular literary allusion and the various paper stocks on which the poem was drafted, to suggest when and where the poem was 'broken off' before being finally completed. It also considers in the poem in the light of other works written during the period (*The Lament of Tasso*, *Manfred*, *Childe Harold* IV, *Beppo*, and *Don Juan*) before considering its overall theme in contrast to Voltaire's *History of Charles XII*.

Keywords: Byron, *Mazeppa*, manuscript, watermarks, intertextuality, *Beppo*, *Don Juan*.

Even by the standards of his fellow Romantics Byron was, generally speaking, a prolific author. The first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* were drafted in two months (November and December 1809), the third in six weeks (from 25 April to 8 June 1816), and the fourth in less than a month (26 June to 19 July 1817). The first canto of *Don Juan* took two months (July and August 1818); the second only one (mid-December 1818 to mid-January 1819). *The Bride of Abydos* was written in fewer than ten days in November 1813, *The Corsair* in less than a fortnight in December of the same year, *The Prisoner of Chillon* in around a fortnight in the summer of 1816, and *Beppo* in just two nights on the ninth and tenth of October 1817. His neoclassical drama set in Venice, *The Two Foscari*, was done in a month in the summer of 1821; *The Vision of Judgment* took a fortnight in the autumn of that year; and the narrative poem based on the Bligh mutiny, *The Island*, was written between mid-January and mid-February two years later. Such writings were accompanied by all sorts of literary jetsam, furthermore, for which we have some evidence from the *Frankenstein* summer. Byron rented the Villa Diodati for a little under five months in 1816; upon his departure on 1 November the owner, an admirer, dashed to the property to see what the poet might have left behind as waste manuscript. 'I should lie to you, Sir', his housekeeper told him, 'if I didn't tell you that at least two days were occupied in burning all those scraps of paper'.[1]

But it was not always plain sailing. There was a lengthy gap between the publication of *Childe Harold* in March 1812 and *The Giaour*, sixteen months later – and that poem expanded from around 700 lines in its first edition to over

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1300 in its seventh as Byron kept adding to what he came to call that 'snake of a poem'.[2] *Parisina* lay about unfinished for six months in the second half of 1815, *Manfred* required a re-drafted third act, *Don Juan* was suspended for a year in 1821 for reasons that remain unclear, and two dramas were never finished: *Heaven and Earth* and *The Deformed Transformed*. But otherwise Byron was as fluent as any other poet in the language and claimed heartily to dislike what he called 'furbishing'. 'I am like the tyger (in poesy)', he told his publisher, John Murray: 'if I miss my first Spring – I go growling back to my Jungle. – There is no second' (*Letters and Journals*, vii. 229).

This facility has contributed to the Byron myth in a number of ways. He could be seen as a conduit of inspiration: one of the Heraclean stones Plato spoke of in the *Ion*, linking the gods to humanity in a magnetic sequence; or as himself a source of inspiration in the Romantic image, like Beethoven, Keats, or Pushkin; or, quite the reverse, as the Modernist -cum-New-Critical amalgam generally depicted him: an improviser who paid next to no attention to the meaning or quality of his work, a churner-out of mindless popular entertainments that are little more than what Philip Martin has called 'exercises in complete self-deception',[3] and so forth.

Byron himself contributed to this myth. 'I have lately begun to think my things have been strangely overrated', he wrote to Thomas Moore in March 1814:

> I may say to you, what I would not say to every body, that the last two were written, the Bride [*of Abydos*] in four, and the Corsair in ten days,—which I take to be a most humiliating confession, as it proves my own want of judgment in publishing, and the public's in reading, things which cannot have stamina for permanent attention.
>
> (*Letters and Journals*, iv. 77)

Lara, similarly, he told Murray in June 1822, was written 'while undressing after coming home from balls and masquerades in the year of revelry *1814*' (*Letters and* Journals, ix. 168). *The Bride of Abydos*, he confessed to William Gifford in November 1813, was 'scribbled "stans pede in uno" (by the bye the only foot I have to stand on)' (*Letters and Journals*, iii. 162; from Horace, *Satires* I. 4, 'standing on one foot', easily or carelessly). 'You may easily suppose', he wrote in the same month and with the same poem in mind, 'that I can have no great esteem for lines that can be strung as fast as minutes' (*Letters and Journals*, iii. 168). When Byron added that *The Bride* was the product of psychological elements that 'would lead me to St Luke's [hospital for the insane] if not disgorged in this manner' (*Letters and Journals*, iii. 168), or that it was composed to 'distract my dreams from' guilty passion, 'and had I not done something at that time, I must have gone mad, by eating my own heart' (*Letters and Journals*, iii. 208), the literary-critical picture hardly seems to need completion.

One case stands out, however. Byron started his Polish/Ukrainian equine narrative, *Mazeppa* – a key step along the path from the melodramatic narratives of his English years towards the more complex works he wrote in Italy, comic and otherwise – in Venice on 2 April 1817. His immediate inspiration was 'a complete Voltaire in 92 volumes', purchased in Venice by the end of March (*Letters and Journals*, v. 199), containing the *Histoire de Charles XII*, the fourth chapter of which provided Swedish king's defeat at the battle of Poltava (in 1709), Charles' eponymous Ukrainian ally, and the 'Advertisement' to the poem. He had suffered from 'a kind of slow and low fever' throughout March (*Letters and Journals*, v. 185), perhaps read Voltaire while confined to quarters, and started *Mazeppa* once his health improved. On the day he did so he told Murray that, as a general principle, 'there should always be some foundation of fact for the most airy fabric – and pure invention is but the talent of a liar' (*Letters and Journals*, v. 203), but this new historical project was of sudden origin. On the last day of March he had made it clear that apart from *Manfred* 'I have nothing else' and indeed, 'I seriously think of giving up altogether' now that he had reached the age of twenty-nine, 'unless Rome should madden me into a fourth Canto' of *Childe Harold* (*Letters and Journals*, v. 196), which in due course it did. The great creative spasm that began with his departure from England in April 1816 seemed to have come to an end. 'I have not done a stitch of poetry since I left Switzerland', he wrote on 2 January 1817, '& have not at present the "*estro*" [inspiration] upon me' (*Letters and Journals*, v. 157).

But despite this strong and rapid start in April 1817, Byron completed *Mazeppa* only on 26 September 1818, eighteen months later. 'Of the poem's composition we know little', Jerome McGann writes,

> except that Byron did not hurry with it. *MS. M* [the first draft, held in the Pierpont Morgan collection at the New York Public Library] does not indicate when Byron might have left it off after beginning it in 1817. But his letters show that he returned to it in the summer of 1818. On 24 September he wrote Murray that it was still 'to finish', and two days later it was done.[4]

No other poem of Byron's was neglected for so long, and *Mazeppa* raises many questions as a result, not least what it might have to say about Byron's famous – perhaps dubious – rapidity in composition. Some of these I shall address here. For example, is it possible to establish when, in the conduct of the narrative, or in the passage of time, or both, Byron 'left it off', as McGann puts it – and took it back on, too? If that moment of narrative interruption can be discovered, does the poem demonstrate any change in style or content between its first part and its second or later ones? Did the poem once started influence the ones that shouldered it aside? And does *Mazeppa* once finished in turn show any signs of itself being influenced by the poetry Byron wrote while it was in suspension?

There is a good deal of such poetry to account for. Byron had begun *Manfred* in August 1816 at Diodati and completed it (with its original third act) by 15 February 1817. On 2 April that year he started *Mazeppa*, and two weeks after that he left Venice for Rome, via Ferrara, Bologna, and Florence. That, one would assume, was the point in time at which he put the poem aside, as other projects asserted themselves thick and fast. In two nights on the road after Ferrara (19–20 April) he drafted *The Lament of Tasso*, and on 29 April he arrived in Rome. Dissatisfied by the third act of *Manfred* he had by 5 May completed a revision of it, and by 28 May he was back in Venice. On 4 June he leased a villa at La Mira on the Brenta, and between 26 June and 19 July he drafted the fourth canto of *Childe Harold* there. On 17 August he met his future lover, Margarita Cogni, and within a fortnight he heard from her husband the story of a domestically latitudinarian Venetian merchant returned from the East that would form the foundation of fact for *Beppo*. That poem was written 9–10 October 1817, and on 3 July 1818, after a nine-month fallow period, he began the first canto of *Don Juan*, reporting to Murray a week later that he had 'two stories – one serious & one ludicrous (a la Beppo) not yet finished – and in no hurry to be so' (*Letters and Journals*, vi. 58–9). The ludicrous story having been completed on 6 September only then did he remind Murray and himself on the twenty-fourth of that month that the serious one (for the first time mentioned by name) was yet to be finished (*Letters and Journals*, vi. 71), which it was, two days later.

Mazeppa is a simple and powerful narrative, which is a good thing, as few other stories could have survived being put aside at some or various stages in its composition by *The Lament of Tasso*, *Manfred*, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, *Beppo*, and *Don Juan* – not to mention a tour of Florence and Rome, the advent of Margarita Cogni, the sale of Newstead Abbey in December 1817, a case of gonorrhea in February 1818, the relocation to the Palazzo Mocenigo and the installation of his daughter Allegra there in May, a visit from the Shelleys in August, and the composition of his memoirs in 'above forty four sheets of very large long paper' at around the same time (*Letters and Journals*, vi. 64). (We should remind ourselves that Byron's last mistress, Teresa Guiccioli, cannot be said to have added to these interruptions. Mazeppa falls for the young wife of an aged husband, and that young wife is named Theresa; Don Juan repeats his experience with Donna Julia. But Byron's affair with Guiccioli started in April 1819, when those two poems were with the publisher.) Sidelined as it was, does *Mazeppa* carry the impress of those textual and extra-textual events?

The first thing to establish, if possible, is when Byron set the poem aside before returning to it in 1818. Jerome McGann is right to note that the manuscript 'does not indicate when Byron might have left it off after beginning it in 1817' in terms of a date; but the paper stocks employed in that manuscript may contain a clue as to the hiatus dramatically speaking: as to when exactly in the narrative, if not in the passage of time, the poem was interrupted. I have not had the opportunity to consult those papers in the Pierpont Morgan Library at first hand, but McGann and Alice Levine's facsimile volume in the *Manuscripts of the Younger Romantics* series is enough to start a discussion of the possibilities.[5]

Byron's draft is written on ten sheets of paper, each folded in half to make four leaves – plus an added leaf containing four lines of verse. The first five sheets are on wove paper watermarked 'J Ruse' and countermarked 'Bondon 1808'. It would be tempting to take 1808 as an authentic date, and imagine that Byron had with him still, nearly ten years later, some sheets of a paper brought, say, in preparation for his Grand Tour of 1809–1811. But this seems highly unlikely. Byron's 'habit was', McGann notes, 'to use his paper soon after acquiring it' in any event (*Poetical Works*, iv. 464), and Tatsuo Tokoo's study of Percy Shelley's manuscripts at the Bodleian shows Shelley using a (presumably) identical paper in Italy at much the same time as Byron was drafting *Mazeppa*. Tokoo catalogues

> a group of eight letters in the Bodleian sample carrying the watermark names 'RUSE' and/or 'BONDON', all dating from the Shelleys' Italian period between June 1819 and June 1820, of wove paper with the same flimsy, soft texture. One of these. . . (Livorno, [*c.* 25] July 1819), has the watermarks 'J RUSE | 1808'.

Joseph Ruse was a Kentish paper-manufacturer, but it does not follow that Byron's and Shelley's stock was English. On technical grounds Tokoo goes on to suggest that 'there are some indications which could suggest that the RUSE/BONDON paper was made in Italy, or at least specifically for the Italian market' and that 'the flimsy, soft feel of the paper seems generally closer to the Shelleys' Italian papers than to their earlier English stocks'. 'These papers', he concludes, 'must either have been made in England and exported to Italy, or more likely perhaps made locally at an Italian mill by English proprietors'.[6]

There is nothing surprising about Byron writing a poem in Venice on Italian paper that was used by Shelley at around the same period – and this discussion involves the riddles posed by *Mazeppa*, rather than other poems. But *Manfred* could be part of the equation. 'We know in fact', Jerome McGann writes, 'only that Byron began writing the play in Switzerland and that he finished it later in Venice: how much was written in each place at either period is uncertain'. (*Poetical Works*, iv. 463.) On the basis of Claire Clairmont's role as amanuensis, McGann establishes that the first scene of the poetic drama 'must have been begun and finished between 14 and 25 August' 1816 (*Poetical Works*, iv. 463). But further first drafts of *Manfred* (II. i. 35–92, II. ii 178-end, and the original third act) were written on ten sheets of paper (9 and 13–21) watermarked 'J Rus[e] Bondon 1808', with the same dimensions as the *Mazeppa* stock (41.2× 24.4 centimetres) (*Poems 1807–1818*, 24). The presence of the Ruse/Bondon stock suggests that a good deal of the drama was in fact written at Venice after his arrival on 10 November 1816, despite Byron's comment to Murray that he had 'not done a stitch of poetry since I left Switzerland'. That is to say, *Manfred* and *Mazeppa* may have been closer stable-mates than we originally understood.

Returning to *Mazeppa*, that poem continues in its draft un-interrupted from sheet five (Ruse Bondon 1808) to sheet six (white, laid, 39.1×28.2 centimetres, watermarked 'NR [lion, passant, gardant]'): from 'Perchance they did not hear nor heed:' to 'It vexes me – for I would fain…' (390–91) (*Poems 1807–1818*, 216–17).[7] It then continues down the first leaf and half way down the second, on the same sheet, to the end of its tenth section:

> And if we do but watch the hour,
> There never yet was human power
> Which could evade, if unforgiven,
> The patient search and vigil long
> Of him who treasures up a wrong.
> (418–22)

The number '11' follows in the same broad nib and dark ink, but then the manuscript visibly changes, to a more cramped lineation further to the left of the sheet, and to a markedly finer and fainter nib, which only fattens and blackens as the draft proceeds: 'Away, away, my steed and I, / Upon the pinions of the wind' (423–4), and so forth. The poem then continues into section twelve to the end of the fourth leaf of sheet six: originally, 'So cold and stark the raven's beak / Can hardly pierce each frozen cheek' (481–2; variant).

Sheet seven – the new sheet of paper Byron employed to go on with the twelfth section of the poem (''Twas a wild waste of underwood, / And here and there a chestnut stood'; 482–3) – is white laid, 34.6×23.8 centimetres, and watermarked 'crowned lion, passant, gardant'. This appears to be the same stock that was used for the first twenty-two stanzas of *Beppo* in October 1817 (*Poems, 1807–1818*, 196, 136). Indeed, more of the same paper ('lion with crown (?)': too small at 23.5×17.9 centimetres but 'cropped' according to Levine and McGann) may have been used to draft 'Julia's letter' in the first canto of *Don Juan*, written nine months later in July and August 1818, just before the completion of *Mazeppa*.[8] Putting aside the extra added slip of paper, the tenth and final sheet of the *Mazeppa* draft ('lion or cat, statant', 48.2× 36.3 centimetres) is also apparently similar to paper used in drafting 'Venice: An Ode' in late July 1818 (countermarked 'obscure, a lion statant', 47.3×35.5 centimetres) (*Poems 1807–1818*, 239).[9]

The paper trail thus appears to show a significant break between sheets six and seven of *Mazeppa* (sheets 1–5 of which appear to be written on paper employed in drafting *Manfred*, and sheet seven of which seems associated with *Beppo* and the first canto of *Don Juan*). So I would surmise that Byron suspended work on the poem at the end of its tenth section a week or so before 17 April 1817 (a week or so after starting work on it on the second of that month) when he left for Rome. Around or before 24 September 1818, we do not know when, but perhaps only once the *Lament*, *Manfred*, *Childe Harold*, *Beppo*, and *Don Juan* were all finally dealt with, we might imagine Byron re-reading his Polish tale and picking up from its tenth section a repeated

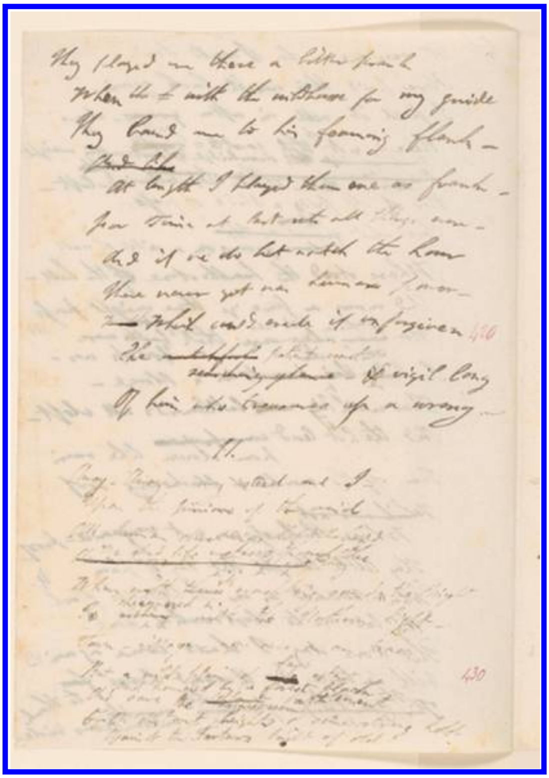

Figure 1. The Morgan Library & Museum. MA 60.3. Purchased by Pierpont Morgan, 1900.

expression – 'Away! – away! – and on we dash!' (373); 'Away! – away! – my breath was gone' (375) – that would help him initiate its second half on paper newly to hand: 'Away, away, my steed and I,/Upon the pinions of the wind,/All human dwellings left behind. . . ' (423–5). In moving ahead with the poem, he turned to paper at hand, which might be stocks associated with *Beppo* on the one hand, and *Don Juan* on the other.

Here is another riddle. A repetition like 'Away, away' is likely to recur in English verse and especially in English Romantic verse. It figures most famously in Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale', but it is present also Wordsworth's fragment, 'Away, away, it is the air', Coleridge's 'The Three Graves' ('"Away! Away!" the mother cried'), and Byron's own lyric, 'Away, away, ye notes of woe'. In Shelley it turns up in 'To Jane: The Invitation' ('Away, away, from men and towns') and 'Remorse' ('Away, away! to thy sad and silent home'), but more significantly in *Laon and Cythna/The Revolt of Islam*, canto three ('The scene was changed, and away, away, away! / Thro' the air and over the sea we sped') and canto six – where it relates to the heroine's rescue of Laon on 'A black Tartarian horse of giant frame', whose 'tameless tread' is alluded to much in the spirit of Byron's equine tale: '"Away! away!" she cried, and stretched her sword / As 'twere a scourge over the courser's head. . . . And still away! Away! / Thro' the desart night we sped'.[10] A potential allusion to the Shelley's poem could therefore enter the story of composition outlined above. Shelley arrived in Italy in April 1818, a year after Byron began *Mazeppa*. He wrote to Byron twice that month to mention 'some books for you.... Shall I send them to Venice?'[11] These included Leigh Hunt's *Foliage*, which Byron mentioned in a letter of 1 June (*Letters and Journals*, vi. 46): 'He sent out his "Foliage" by Percy Shelley'), as well as *Frankenstein*, and, surely, *The Revolt of Islam*, which had been published at New Year. Byron certainly read Shelley's poem, confessing to John Murray on 24 November 1818 that he barely understood it (*Letters and Journals*, vi. 83), but telling Richard Belgrave Hoppner two years later that it contained 'much poetry' nevertheless (*Letters and Journals*, vii. 174).[12] Presumably Byron had the poem by 1 June; he had certainly read it by 24 November: but when between those dates he actually took it up, and whether Shelley's 'Tartarean horse' reminded him of his own poem, and whether 'Away, away' is the clue to and residue of that encounter, I cannot say.

Still, it seems likely that Byron did put *Mazeppa* aside in the days leading up to his Roman foray in February 1817, and I would propose also – given his general habit of composition – that he finished the second half of the poem (that is, sections eleven to twenty, lines 423 to 869) in a limited period around the time he told Murray it was there 'to finish' in September 1818. But, as *The Revolt of Islam* echo suggests, it is also possible that he re-visited the poem on more than one occasion before completing it. First, the *Mazeppa* sheet seven, following the intermediary sheet six half way through which I think Byron stopped work in 1817, is paper that looks similar to *Beppo* paper used in October 1817: did he resume *Mazeppa* at section eleven at that time? Second, *Mazeppa* sheets eight and nine (white, laid, watermarked 'G [clover] B', countermarked '[figure obscure]', and 38.6×28.3 centimetres) bear a passing resemblance to sheets five to fifteen of the first canto of *Don Juan* (white, laid, watermarked '*P* clover *G*', countermarked 'three mortar and pestles', but 31.5×22.3 centimetres), written between 3 July and 6 September 1818. Did he re-open his Poltava poem then, instead – or as well? Do such incidents suggest an ongoing close acquaintance with the unfinished poem rather than a full-scale interruption? I do not know.

There is one more possible piece of evidence. In the fifth section of *Mazeppa*, surely written before Byron's Roman holiday, the eponymous hero describes his mistress Theresa in typically Byronic terms. 'She had the Asiatic eye', he says, 'Such as our Turkish neighbourhood / Hath mingled with our Polish blood' (208–10):

> Dark as above us is the sky;
> But through it stole a tender light,
> Like the first moonrise at midnight;
> Large, dark, and swimming in the stream,
> Which seem'd to melt to its own beam;
> All love, half languor, and half fire,
> < ~~But something which was not desire~~
> ~~But would have been save for the soul~~
> ~~Which gently chastened down the whole~~ >
> Like saints that at the stake expire,
> And lift their raptured looks on high,
> As though it were a joy to die.
> (211–19, including variant)

When Byron came to describe Julia in the first canto of *Don Juan*, he recycled the same lines that he had cancelled in *Mazeppa*:

> Her eye (I'm very fond of handsome eyes)
> Was large and dark, suppressing half its fire
> Until she spoke, then through its soft disguise
> Flash'd an expression more of pride than ire,
> And love than either; and there would arise
> A something in them which was not desire,
> But would have been, perhaps, but for the soul
> Which struggled through and chasten'd down the whole.
> (i. 473–80)

So here is another *Mazeppa* riddle. The emendation in the earlier poem would appear to be a necessary and immediate part of the drafting process. There is a piling-up of subordinate clauses in the earlier part of the passage that leads it towards a syntactic impasse that Byron resolved by introducing his 'Like saints…' construction. And in the facsimile, accordingly, the replacement lines are visually consistent with the cancelled ones: they do not look like a later addition. But how are we to explain the re-appearance of three jettisoned lines, not particularly memorable in themselves, in the comic epic drafted around fifteen months later, in the summer of 1818? Byron had a prodigious memory for poetry and prose, as his letters and journals demonstrate. Either he remembered those lost lines and inserted them in *Don Juan*, or he had *Mazeppa* in his mind and at his elbow some months before completing it in September of that year, rather than, as we might surmise, put aside in a desk drawer, out of sight and out of mind.

On the basis of conflicting evidence of these kinds I am not sure we shall be able to prove that Byron absolutely put *Mazeppa* away in February 1817 only to return to it in September the following year, though my hunch is that is what he did, given his dislike of 'furbishing' and his habit of writing *stans pede in uno*. But it must be acknowledged that the second half of the poem is written on three different papers rather than one, the first of which might relate to *Beppo* in October 1817 and the third to the Venice ode of July 1818. Another way of coming at the process may be to address a question posed at the beginning of this piece: what impact might the first half of *Mazeppa* have on the poems that stood between it and completion between April 1817 and September 1818?

It is hard to see the first half of the poem having much effect on either the third act of *Manfred* or the fourth act of *Childe Harold*. But it might have contributed to *The Lament of Tasso*. Once more we have a forbidden love: in this case Tasso's for Leonora, sister of Alphonso, Marquess of Este – though involving punishment by imprisonment, Chillon-style, rather than by an involuntary horse-ride. Tasso imagines taking revenge on his imprisoners: 'thou Ferrara! when no longer dwell / The ducal chiefs within thee, shall fall down, / And crumbling piecemeal view thy hearthless halls' (222–24); but Mazeppa actually does level the count Palatine's castle to the ground: 'I saw its turrets in a blaze, / Their crackling battlements all cleft', and so forth (402–3). Tasso looks back to a younger self – 'I once was quick in feeling – that is o'er' (208) – just as the aged Mazeppa does: 'I had strength, youth, gaiety, / A port, not like to this ye see, / But smooth, as all is rugged now' (187–9). Tasso's courtship of Leonora – 'I told it not, I breathed it not, it was / Sufficient to itself, its own reward' (124–5; itself lifted from the 1814 'Stanzas for Music': 'I speak not, I trace not, I breathe not thy name') – is as humbly circumspect as Mazeppa's is of Theresa: 'I saw, and sigh'd – in silence wept / And still reluctant distance kept' (244–5). Most of all, perhaps, the Polish poem lent its *form* to the Italian one. The former is in octosyllabics, the latter in pentameters, but both employ a flexible rhyme-scheme of mingled couplets, triplets, and quatrains in all sorts of combinations, suited to both Mazeppa's retrospective narrative and Tasso's bitter 'canker in its savage mood' (4).

Where *Beppo* is concerned the obligation is deeper yet. Both poems involve adulterous love-triangles, but each goes in a different and complementary direction with the basic material: *Beppo* into culture, as it were, *Mazeppa* into nature. (*Beppo* is the study of a wife and of marriage, *Mazeppa* the study of a lover and of passion.) *Beppo* is a comparative study in moral and sexual ethics, involving Italy and England, Catholicism and Protestantism, privacy and publicity – with a reference to Muslim Turkey thrown in as a sidelight. In that poem the difference between the lover and the husband is dissolved by a pragmatist relativism the English could never tolerate. In *Mazeppa* there is no such relativist intention, and the difference between the married Polish countess at the start of the story and the Cossack maiden at its end – 'With her black eyes so wild and *free*' (812) – is absolute. In *Beppo* 'a woman is virtuous (according to the code) who limits herself to her husband and one lover' (*Letters and Journals*, v. 155), exactly as Byron had found the situation in Venice, personally speaking. In *Mazeppa* 'The Count was something more than wroth' to discover his wife's affair, as the hero tells us: 'I felt – but cannot paint his rage' (327, 357). What Byron called his 'foundation in fact' was in the one instance documentary, modern, and directly to hand, in the person of Margarita Cogni and the story her husband told; in the other instance it was patriarchal, feudal, historical, and romantic. The two poems are studies not simply of adultery, or even of love, but of the ways in which love can or cannot be socially interpellated, mediated, and controlled.

Which brings us to *Don Juan*, the sexual ethic being its master-motif. The detailed case of Theresa's 'Asiatic' eye and Julia's in *Don Juan* is one thing, but others have noticed the larger and deeper relation: that, as McGann succinctly puts it, the Polish poem 'in fact parallels the first three incidents' in the epic: 'Julia, shipwreck, meeting with Haidée' (*Poetical Works*, iv. 494). There is another adulterous affair with the wife of an older man; another punitive exposure to the forces of nature; and another act of resuscitation by an unmarried girl amidst conditions of nature versus culture: Cossack 'cottage wall' (807) versus 'court of jousts and mimes' (151) in *Mazeppa*, Cycladic island versus Spanish city in *Don Juan*. The sixth and seventh sections of *Mazeppa* directly anticipate what we find in the 'first and passionate love' of Juan and Julia: 'sighs, the deeper for suppression, / And stolen glances, sweeter for the theft, / And burning blushes, though for no transgression', and so forth (*Don Juan* i. 585–7). Mazeppa speaks of loving 'in fierce extremes' (227), and of the 'involuntary sparks of thought' (236) thrown up by doing so; the narrator of *Don Juan* asks 'who, alas! can love, and then be wise?' (i. 933.) The first couple understand each other over a game ('A frivolous and foolish play'; 253); the second couple comes to grips one evening in a bower. Mazeppa 'was resolved to speak; / But on my lips they died again, / The accents tremulous and weak' (249–51); Juan becomes 'Silent and pensive, idle, restless, slow, / His home deserted for the lonely wood' (i. 689–90) in much the same fashion. The 'capricious power' of love in *Don Juan* (ii. 169) is paralleled by that 'strange intelligence, / Alike mysterious and intense' that draws the lovers together in *Mazeppa* (238–9). Juan reaches the shore of Haidée's island in the second canto of *Don Juan*, after *Mazeppa* had been completed, 'half senseless, from the sea' (ii. 855); Mazeppa comes close to death, too, on the far side of his river: 'An icy sickness curdling o'er / My heart, and sparks that cross'd my brain – / A gasp, a throb, a start of pain, / A sigh, and nothing more' (792–5). Each awakes to a similar female presence: 'A slender girl, long-hair'd, and tall' in Mazeppa's case (806), a 'gentle girl…distinct, and tall, and fair' in Juan's (ii. 914, 920): Haidée's eyes being 'as black as death' (ii. 930) as are the nameless Cossack girl's – as indeed Laura's are in *Beppo*. Mazeppa's rescuer 'watches me with a gentle glance' (802), and Haidée does just the same where Juan is concerned (ii. 1567).

So there is a network of connections between *Mazeppa* and the poems that interrupted it, but surely the profoundest are those with *Beppo* and *Don Juan*. All three works involve adultery, but the connection goes deeper than that dramatic one, into Byron's developing vision of humanity at large. For Enlightenment intellectuals like Voltaire in his biography of Charles XII ('perhaps the most extraordinary man who has ever lived on earth')[13] and Samuel Johnson in 'The Vanity of Human Wishes' ('A Frame of Adamant, a Soul of Fire /

No Dangers fright him, and no Labours tire'), the Swedish king was a puzzling icon. 'Such is the wretched weakness of men', Voltaire suggested in the introductory Dissertation of his biography, 'that they admire those who have done evil brilliantly, and are often more inclined to talk of the destroyer of an empire than of him who founded it' (27). When we learn that the Archbishop of Upsala 'held up the crown to as to place it on his head', and that 'Charles snatched it from the archbishop's hands, and crowned himself' (Voltaire, 39), or that the King was brought down on his Russian campaign by 'the memorable winter of 1709, which was even more terrible on those frontiers of Europe than it was in France' (Voltaire, 127), Byron could hardly avoid making the connection to Napoleon: an imaginative, moral, and historical fixation for him since the start of his poetic career. No wonder Charles' escape after Poltava as Voltaire described it struck his imagination:

> The carriage he was in broke down on the way, and he was put back on a horse. To crown his misfortunes, he got lost one night in a wood. In this plight, his courage could no longer make up for his exhausted strength, and fatigue made the pain of his wound even harder to bear. Finally his horse fell, too tired to rise, and he was forced to dismount and rest it. He lay down for some hours at the foot of a tree, in danger of being surprised at any moment by the Russians who were searching for him everywhere.
>
> (Voltaire, 135)

But the Enlightenment passion for balance in Voltaire's conclusory panegyric leaves more to be done in imaginative and moral terms:

> Thus perished, at the age of thirty-six and a half, Charles XII, King of Sweden, after having experienced the greatest prosperity and the cruellest adversity without being softened by the one or slaked for one moment by the other. Nearly all his actions, even his private life, had far exceeded the bounds of probability. He is perhaps the only man, and hitherto the only king, who has never shown weakness; he carried all heroic virtues to an excess where they are as dangerous as the opposite vices. His firmness which developed into obstinacy caused his disasters in the Ukraine and kept him ten years in Turkey; his generosity, which degenerated into extravagance, ruined Sweden; his courage, pushed to foolhardiness, caused his death; his justice sometimes went as far as cruelty, and, in his last years, he exerted his authority to the point of tyranny. His great qualities, any one of which might have immortalized another prince, were a calamity to his country. He never attacked without provocation but he was immoderate and implacable in his vengeance. He was the first king who had the ambition to be a conqueror without wishing to enlarge his dominions; he wanted to win empires in order to bestow them. His passion for glory, war and vengeance prevented him from being a good politician, which a conqueror has always needed to be. Before a battle and after a victory, he was invariably modest, after a defeat invariably undaunted. As hard on others as he was on himself, as reckless of his subjects' lives and sufferings as of his own, he was a unique, rather than a great man, and to be admired rather than imitated. His life should teach kings that a peaceful and prosperous reign is infinitely preferable to so much glory.
>
> (Voltaire, 237)

The carefully placed oppositions here – between prosperity and adversity, virtue and vice, firmness and obstinacy, generosity and extravagance, courage and foolhardiness, justice and cruelty, authority and tyranny, uniqueness and greatness, admiration and imitation, and peace and glory – suggest themselves in Charles' case, no doubt. Voltaire and Johnson are not wrong. But they also begin to simplify a case that *Mazeppa* would complicate, using dramatic juxtaposition and irony. Via Voltaire and Napoleon, therefore, Charles XII became the first in a series of studies in authority in Byron's verse, in particular in his neoclassical dramas: Marino Faliero, Francesco Foscari, and Sardanapalus.

But Byron's kings, doges, and emperors, like Shakespeare's, are not only figures of authority. *Mazeppa*, William Marshall suggested long ago, 'is at once a more serious and more humorous poem than has been suggested':

> Mazeppa's story is in fact a dramatic monologue, of which the emotional intensity becomes the object of satire that implies the essential question of the poem, whether experience can yield an organized moral view of the universe such as Mazeppa has appeared to develop.[14]

Marshall goes on to contrast the fatalistic moral view of Charles XII, brought down by 'fortune' and the 'the hazard of the die' (2, 15), with the providential delivery of the poem's hero, 'rebaptized' (589) after crossing his personal Jordan. Here are two incompatible moral views of the universe, and it is no wonder therefore that Mazeppa finishes his story to find 'the royal Swede' (2) fast asleep.[15] Thus it is, Marshall suggests (121), that the poem has come 'to be regarded as a narrative work that generally has a place in the transition from the kind of poetry represented by *Childe Harold* to that exemplified by *Don Juan*. *Mazeppa* is very close to *Don Juan*, for the essential question in the short poem is always present in the longer work, and the point of view toward this question is the same in both works'.

And in *Beppo*, I would add. All three poems pose and ironize an essential question about our 'point of view' towards the riddle of fortune versus providence, contingency versus pattern, and the extent to which 'pangs' such as Charles feels in defeat can ever be 'vassals to our will' (*Mazeppa*, 40). In each poem the conventional love triangle is an objective correlative for volition and desire more generally understood, both within and outside the sexual sphere. The six heroines of *Don Juan* respond to him sexually, just as Laura makes her socially sanctioned arrangement with her count in *Beppo*, just as Mazeppa transits from the forbidden partner to the free one via a climactic taming of sexual impulse. The *dramatic* element is sexual, therefore; but the *philosophical* question and the point of view towards it is a larger phenomenon. In these poems sexual desire is the icon or signifier for everything that we want in life.

The fact that individuals cannot get everything that they want breeds Marshall's 'point of view', shared by three ironizing narrators. Stoical, equable, unflappable, experienced, dispassionate, the Ukrainian hetman who has seen it all in terms of war and love ('They tell me, Sire, you never knew / Those gentle frailties'; 283–4); the 'broken Dandy lately on my travels' who narrates *Beppo* (410); and (if Byron's remarkable unincorporated preface to the poem is to be taken seriously) the 'Spanish Gentleman in a village in the Sierra Morena on the road between Monasterio and Seville' who narrates *Don Juan*, 'sitting at the door of a posada with the curate of the hamlet on his right hand, a segar in his mouth, a jug of Malaga or perhaps "right Sherris" before him on a small table containing the relics of an olla podrida' (being overheard by John Cam Hobhouse back in 1810, 'an hour ago dismounted', while Byron himself 'having sauntered further, is watching the beautiful movements of a tall peasant girl whose whole soul is in her eyes and her heart in the dance of which she is the magnet to then thousand feelings that vibrate with her own'; *Poetical Works*, v. 82–3): these three storytellers are to all intents and purposes the same person, orchestrating and commenting upon 'the controlless core / Of human hearts' (*Don Juan*, i. 924–5) that manifests itself from Ukraine to Venice, and Seville to the Cyclades.

The deepening and the extension of this vision took place alongside the long gestation of *Mazeppa*, whether it was left alone entirely in the spring of 1817 and only returned to in the autumn of the following year, or whether it was re-visited more frequently in that period. The poems that temporarily shouldered *Mazeppa* aside also contributed to its success. There is no radical change in style or attitude in the poem; everything that happens after sheet six in the manuscript is latent in the first half of the narrative. The ease with which Byron continued the poem, so that the join or joins it must contain are dramatically invisible, is testimony to that fact, and to the organic unity of the composition. But the poem's moral and intellectual climax, delivered in the second part of its seventeenth section, is, I think, a profounder affair than what might have been written in the spring of 1817, with only Voltaire and Napoleon's invasion of Russia behind it, and before the other masterpieces – from the *Lament* to *Don Juan* – had combined to place Byron at the final eminence of his career, ready for the comic epic and the dramas. (The seventeenth section is also much the most complex in its employment of rhyme, where nests and groups of triplets and quatrains are almost impossible to separate, and sometimes build into five-, six-, and even nine-line units.) The issue as to 'whether experience can yield an organized moral view of the universe' is concentrated here by the lens of death as Mazeppa, still bound to his dying horse, considers its inevitability and its meaning, whether 'the worst and last of fears' or in fact 'a boon',

> Nor more unkind for coming soon;
> Yet shunn'd and dreaded with such care,
> As if it only were a snare
> That prudence might escape:
> At times both wish'd for and implored,
> At times sought with self-pointed sword,
> Yet still a dark and hideous close
> To even intolerable woes,
> And welcome in no shape.
>
> (725–35)

The reflection recuperates the suicidal Manfred, but also Childe Harold on 'man's ravage' seen in the context of the Mediterranean, 'When, for a moment, like a drop of rain, / He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan, / Without a grave, unknell'd, uncoffin'd, and unknown' (iv. 1608–11). 'What is left me now?' Mazeppa might ask, as Tasso did (43): 'oh! would it were my lot / To be forgetful as I am forgot!' (80–81). A man like Charles, living according to the hazard of the die, is in fact trapped by time:

> And Death, whom he should deem his friend,
> Appears, to his distemper'd eyes,
> Arrived to rob him of his prize,
> The tree of his new Paradise.
> To-morrow would have given him all,
> Repaid his pangs, repair'd his fall;
> To-morrow would have been the first
> Of days no more deplored or curst,
> But bright, and long, and beckoning years,
> Seen dazzling through the mist of tears,
> Guerdon of many a painful hour;
> To-morrow would have given him power
> To rule, to shine, to smite, to save—
> And must it dawn upon his grave? (749–62)

As to whether there really is a divinity that shapes our ends, and a special providence in the fall of a sparrow or (as Hamlet also says) 'a man's life's no more than to say "One"': that is the 'essential question' in these poems of Byron's, and his point of view towards that question shifts its centre of gravity, from the tragic in Tasso to the reflective in Childe Harold, to the arenas of action sampled by *Beppo* and *Mazeppa*, to the panorama of *Don Juan*. As such, exactly when and how *Mazeppa* was interrupted, and when and how it was re-visited and completed, matters less than its place in a flow and evolution of imaginative and intellectual ideas 'in the transition from the kind of poetry represented by *Childe Harold* to that exemplified by *Don Juan*': a transition that involved the elaboration of the earlier works, and by no means their supercession.

NOTES

1. Leslie Marchand, *Byron: A Biography* (London, 1957), 659. This essay was delivered as a paper at the Wordsworth Summer Conference in August 2018; I am grateful to the audience for their suggestions, and to Alice Levine for her kind support.
2. *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie Marchand (13 vols, London, 1973–1994), iii. 100.
3. Philip W. Martin, *Byron: A Poet Before his Public* (Cambridge, 1982), 147.
4. Byron, *Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (7 vols, Oxford, 1980–1993), iv. 493; all references to Byron's poetry are from this edition.
5. Alice Levine and Jerome J. McGann (eds.), *The Manuscripts of the Younger Romantics. Lord Byron, Volume One: Poems in the Autograph of Lord Byron Once in the Possession of the Countess Guiccioli: Poems 1807–1818: A Facsimile of the Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library* (New York, 1986).
6. Tatsuo Tokoo (ed.), *Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts Volume 23: A Catalogue and Index of the Shelley Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library and a General Index to the Facsimile Edition of the Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts* (London, 2002), 78, 79. On some occasions a watermark date on paper is a reliable indicator, at least of a *terminus a quo*; but as wire manufacturing moulds were often re-used, re-acquired, or even forged, a paper marked 1808 could be in production for years thereafter, and/or in another country.
7. I can find no more of this paper stock ('sheet six') among the McGann/Levine Gale facsimile volumes. Of course, poems were not the only things Byron wrote; his correspondence from the period could well shed light on the various paper stocks used at various times, but that would involve a major investigation, given the hundreds of letters written over the eighteen-month period and the numerous collections in which they are held.
8. Alice Levine and Jerome J. McGann (eds.), *The Manuscripts of the Younger Romantics. Lord Byron, Volume Two: Poems in the Autograph of Lord Byron Once in the Possession of the Countess Guiccioli:* Don Juan, *Cantos I–V: A Facsimile of the Original Drafts, Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library* (New York, 1985), xxviii.
9. Byron's first draft of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto Four, in the John Murray collection at the National Library of Scotland (*MS. B*), 26 June to 19 July 1817, is unlikely to shed much light on the *Mazeppa* drafts. Fifteen of its thirty folios contain what appears to be a lion watermark, but it is very obscure; the other two stocks employed bear no physical relation to those used in *Mazeppa*.
10. Shelley, *Complete Poetry*, ed. Donald H. Reiman, Neil Fraistat, and Nora Crook (vol iii, Baltimore, 2012), 171, 224–5.
11. Frederick L. Jones (ed.), *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (2 vols, Oxford, 1964), ii. 5 and 13.
12. For the affiliations between Shelley's poem and Byron's work (and life), see Charles E. Robinson, *Shelley and Byron: The Snake and Eagle Wreathed in Flight* (Baltimore, 1976), 62–8.
13. Voltaire, *The History of Charles XII King of Sweden*, trans. Antonia White (London, 1976), 35.
14. William H. Marshall, 'A Reading of Byron's *Mazeppa*', *Modern Language Notes*, 76.2 (February 1961), 120–21.
15. Though Jerome McGann can see that 'Charles is... Mazeppa's foil in the story', he domesticates the poem by simplifying the contrast between the 'grand but pathetic illusion[s]' Charles indulges himself with, his inability 'to submit to the will of *Fortuna*', and the 'fundamental weakness of unmoderated passions and willfulness' (on the one hand), and 'the calm but bold Mazeppa, who has... become resigned to the "hopeless certainty" of human life and death' (on the other) (*Fiery Dust: Byron's Poetic Development* (Chicago, 1968), 178, 181, 183). Mazeppa's Wordsworthian 'wise passiveness' (McGann, 184) is certainly a human value, but it is not an ultimate one, and Charles' military ambition, however destructive, is a variety of ambition – which is a human value, too.