Learning Romance from Scott and Byron: Jane Austen's Natural Sequel

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The scene at Lyme Regis falls at the center of *Persuasion.* Occupying the two final chapters of volume 1, it serves simultaneously as climax of the narrative of Anne's withdrawal from life and Wentworth's wilful misconstructions, and as turning point from early winter to "second spring" (124), from passivity to action, from proud anger to generous uncertainty. The excursion's genesis is Wentworth's "justify[ing] . . . relation" of his initial visit, a tale which depends on his "anxiety to see" Captain Harville, the "lively interest excited for his friend, and his description of the fine country about Lyme" (94). This recital is "so feelingly attended to" that "an earnest desire" quickly develops: "The young people were all *wild* to see Lyme" (94, my emphasis), and after a hurried description of the replacement of "[t]he first heedless scheme" with the more "rationally considered" (94) details of schedules, carriages, accommodations, and meals, the narrative plunges into an uncharacteristically vivid description of the picturesque landscape with its "dark cliffs," "fragments of low rock," and "green chasms" (95). This scene vibrates between feeling and reason, the sublime and the mundane, romance and realism.

As Anne and Benwick sit "apart" from the group in Lyme, they talk "of poetry, of the richness of the present age," in particular of two "first-rate poets," Walter Scott and Lord Byron, "the tenderest songs of the one" and "all the impassioned descriptions of hopeless agony of the other" (100). Anne and Benwick compare the merits of *Marmion* and *The Lady of the Lake, The Giaour* and *The Bride of Abydos,* and later Anne anticipates a quotation of *The Corsair.*

When in this discussion Benwick's feelings "burst their usual restraints" as he repeats "with such tremulous feeling, the various lines which imaged a broken heart, or a mind destroyed by wretchedness" (100), Anne suggests that "it was the misfortune of poetry, to be seldom safely enjoyed by those who enjoyed it completely; . . . that the strong feelings which alone could estimate it truly, were the very feelings which ought to taste it but sparingly" (100-01). Here Anne's language, as transmitted by the narrator, takes on something of the character of minimum daily requirements for moral nutrition: she recommends "a larger allowance of prose in his daily study," "mention[ing] such works of our best moralists, such collections of the finest letters, such memoirs of characters of worth and suffering, as occurred to her at the moment as calculated to rouse and fortify the mind by the highest precepts, and the strongest examples of moral and religious endurance" (101). Feeling, sublimity, and romance are undercut by the recommendation of a daily allotment of sublime discourse of a different kind, and this exchange has often been read as an easy swipe at the indulgences of High Romanticism. Peter Knox-Shaw, for example, suggests that this passage "inevitably brings Dr. Johnson to mind" (52), but Austen's lack of particularity as Anne "particularize[s]" (101) suggests—at best—a half-hearted endorsement of her heroine's advice and turns us back to the discussion of poetry. What might these characters have learned from the romances of Scott and Byron? In citing romances by these writers, Jane Austen sets her novel in context of a mode with great cultural appeal. *Persuasion* uses familiar character types and generic elements to explore a world that might seem closer to home than the usual world of romance. Combining emotional engagement and critical detachment, its lyrical ironies evoke the dangerous power of love.

Romance offers its readers a world seen through a dark and somewhat distorted mirror. It is the world of dreams. The plots are simple—love, adventure, quest—as are the characters, who often represent a distillation of ideals and of what threatens those ideals. For Gillian Beer, this radical simplicity allows the romance to be "preoccupied with psychic responsibilities" of both its characters and readers: "By simplifying character the romance removes the idiosyncracies which set other people apart from us; this allows us to act out through stylized figures the radical impulses of human experience" (9). But the stylization that allows this identification also incurs a kind of detachment. Romance describes a world, in Northrop Frye's words, in which "the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended: prodigies of courage and endurance, unnatural to us, are natural . . . " (33). Further, that world is displaced from our own in time and/or space, sometimes, as Frye

puts it, marked "by its extraordinarily persistent nostalgia, its search for some kind of imaginative golden age" (186). As Beer has it, "The romance gives repetitive form to the particular desires of a community, and especially to those desires which cannot find controlled expression within a society" (13). Finally, and most intriguingly, romance often contains within itself the impulse toward realism. Stuart Curran's image neatly captures the connection: "traditional romance carries its realistic antithesis within an almost marsupial development" (139).

The autumnal lyricism that many readers recognize in *Persuasion* is a function of its search for a golden age. The specificity of *Persuasion*'s temporality seems to militate against romance even as it sets it apart from Austen's other novels. Dates of principal events are defined: for births, deaths, and marriages of Sir Walter's dynasty; for the first courtship of Anne and Wentworth; for significant moments in Wentworth's naval career; and, of course, for the commencement of the novel's plot, the summer of 1814. To some degree, such definition is called for by the necessity of locating the narrative at a moment when naval officers will realistically be turned on shore, a break in the action of the Napoleonic wars. Austen develops her picture of a historically precise moment through her characters' reference to current and highly popular works of literature.

Tied to the eighteenth-century's exploration of British national identity was a new scholarly interest in medieval literature, particularly in medieval romance. In 1754, the poet and antiquarian Thomas Warton published *Observations on the Faerie Queene*, revising and enlarging it in 1762, the same year Richard Hurd published *Letters on Chivalry and Romance.* Thomas Percy, collector of ballads and romances, in 1765 wrote his "Essay on the Ancient Metrical Romances." Thomas Chatterton and James Macpherson imitated (or faked) medieval forms in poems that purported to be the productions of, respectively, the medieval monk Thomas Rowley and of Ossian, a third-century Scots bard. By the turn of the century, according to Stuart Curran, romance was recreated "as a central genre of British poetry" (129). Between 1802 and 1810, Joseph Ritson, Walter Scott, George Ellis, and Henry Weber published collections of medieval romances while, as Marilyn Butler points out, "Welsh, Spanish, Teutonic, oriental, and Mexican romances, pastiche, burlesque, or allegedly genuine, vied with one another for the market, and recruited readers to narrative poems, preferably located in exotic places and times" (337).

With Robert Southey, Walter Scott was the principal promulgator of the metrical romance in this first decade of the century. Scott dominated the poetic scene with *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), *Marmion* (1808), and *The Lady of the Lake* (1810). The romances by Scott that Anne and Benwick discuss are displaced in time and space to sixteenth-century Scotland. In his romances, courage and love are threatened by the lust for money or power. The eponymous and fictional hero of *Marmion: A Tale of Flodden Field* is sent in 1513 as an emissary from England's Henry VIII to Scotland's James IV to warn against Scottish incursions across the border. Marmion, though a brave and respected warrior, has earlier used forged documents to discredit another knight, De Wilton, in order to marry for her lands De Wilton's betrothed Clare. The poem's plot involves the unsuccessful mission for peace that results in the bloodbath of Flodden, the exoneration of De Wilton and his marriage to Clare, and the death of Marmion. Gothic trappings, including a nun walled up alive and a prophecy (with its apparent fulfillment) that Marmion will fight an Elfin Foe, add the texture of romance to the tale. *The Lady of the Lake* is set in the next generation, amidst a brewing rebellion of the Highland Scots against King James V. The plot involves the reconciliation with the king of the wronged Douglas, the prevention of the rebellion and death of its leader Roderick Dhu, and the steadfast love of the Douglas's daughter Ellen for Malcolm Graeme. Again, courage, honor, and love are tested and triumph over wild violence, brutal exercise of power, and instinct for revenge.

Sales were excellent. *Marmion*, according to John Gibson Lockhart's *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* (1837-38), "was first printed in a splendid quarto, priced one guinea and a half. The 2000 copies of this edition were all disposed of in less than a month, when a second of 3000 copies, in 8vo, was sent to press" (qtd. in Millgate 193). By 1815, according to Lockhart, the ninth edition was published and 23,000 more copies had been sold. In 1817, a reviewer from *Blackwood's* remembered: "'The Lay' converted thousands, and 'Marmion' tens of thousands, and the *whole* world read poetry. . . . Mr Scott gave to the world a series of brilliant romances, and turned into this new-made channel all who ever in their lives read and relished fictitious compositions. All the poets, good and bad, forthwith wrote metrical romances . . . " (qtd. in Curran 241, n. 20).

There were voices that resounded with less enthusiasm. Francis Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review* offered a challenge to Scott's second romance, *Marmion*: "To write a modern romance of chivalry, seems to be much such a fantasy as to build a modern abbey, or an English pagoda. For once, however, it

may be excused as a pretty caprice of genius; but a second production of the same sort is entitled to less indulgence, and imposes a sort of duty to drive the author from so idle a task, by a fair exposition of the faults . . . " (37). Jane Austen wrote from Godmersham to her sister in June of 1808, "Ought I to be very much pleased with Marmion?—as yet I am not.—James reads it aloud in the Even^{g}" (20-22 June 1808). And Samuel Taylor Coleridge rather splenetically objected in a letter to his friend William Wordsworth, "In short, what I felt in *Marmion*, I feel still more in *The Lady of the Lake*—viz. that a man accustomed to cast words in metre and familiar with descriptive Poets & Tourists, himself a Picturesque Tourist, must be troubled with a mental Strangury, if he could not lift up his leg six times at six different Corners, and each time p—a canto" (57). It is, he argued, "PROSE IN POLYSYLLABLES, surely the worst of all prose for chivalrous Poetry" (57).

Walter Scott wrote three more (somewhat less successful) romances. In 1812, however, Lord Byron published the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, to such overwhelming critical and commercial acclaim that Scott turned to another genre, beginning work on *Waverly*. Byron meanwhile began his Eastern or Turkish tales. Byron's Eastern tales depict a contemporary but exotic world of pachas, harems, pirates, and highly-charged emotion, "Where the rage of the vulture—the love of the turtle—/ Now melt into sorrow—now madden to crime" (*Bride* 1.3-4). More than Scott's, Byron's romances lead their readers from fragrant gardens and dark blue seas into interior worlds. The action explores the extremes of psychic as well as geographic space. *The Giaour* is a tale told in fragments, from multiple narrators with differing degrees of knowledge, perspectives, and judgments. The Giaour (the word means *infidel*, here signifying a non-Muslim) has won the love of Leila, one of the harem of the emir Hassan. Hassan discovers the betrayal, sews her into a bag, and casts her into the sea. In revenge, the Giaour kills Hassan and spends the rest of his life in monastic solitude, agonizing over the loss of Leila. In *The Bride of Abydos*, Selim, the supposed son of the pacha Giaffir by a slave, reveals his love for Zuleika, Giaffir's daughter, who is betrothed to the wealthy Osman. Selim rebels against the pacha's tyrannical power and is killed, while Zuleika, who has also pledged herself to Selim, dies at the moment he leaves her. *The Corsair*, too, presents a tale of absolute love that persists even beyond death. Conrad, leader of the pirates, leaves behind his wife Medora while he attacks the hall of "the turbaned Seyd" (2.29-30). Setting fire to Seyd's court, Conrad insists that the women be rescued from the harem and himself saves Gulnare, Seyd's chief concubine. When Conrad is captured, Gulnare (now in love with him) kills Seyd in order to set Conrad

free. They flee, but Conrad learns that Medora has died while he has been away, and the tale ends with the disappearance of both the mourning Conrad and Gulnare.

The tales were wildly popular. The first edition of *The Giaour*, a poem of 685 lines, was published by Murray on June 5, 1813; subsequent editions, fourteen by 1815, more than doubled its length. *The Bride of Abydos*, published on December 2, 1813, ran through five editions that month. Five more were published in 1814 and an eleventh in 1815, the first six editions totaling 12,500 copies. On February 1, 1814, the day of *The Corsair*'s publication, 10,000 copies were sold. The poem ran through four editions in the first two weeks of February, a fifth edition appeared on February 18, and four more followed (McGann 3.413, 434-35, 444-45). William St. Clair calculates that about 36% of the people who could afford the disposable income for such works purchased *The Corsair* (6). So when Jane Austen, on March 5 of that year, in a London "nasty" with "Thickness & Sleet," apologized for beginning a new letter after an interval of only one day with the excuse that "I have read the Corsair, mended my petticoat, & have nothing else to do," she was identifying herself as part of that community of readers.

What could account for such enthusiasm? In an unsigned review of *The Bride of Abydos* and *The Corsair*, Francis Jeffrey argued that romances such as Scott's and Byron's satisfy "a growing appetite for [strong and natural emotion] which may be regarded as the true characteristic of this age" (56-57). These narratives "feed the craving of a race disgusted with heartless occupations" (58).

> The passion itself must now be pourtrayed—and all its fearful workings displayed in detail before us. The minds of the great agents must be unmasked for us—and all the anatomy of their throbbing bosoms laid open to our gaze. We must be made to understand what they feel and enjoy and endure;—and all the course and progress of their *possession*, and the crossing and mingling of their opposite affections, must be rendered sensible to our touch; till, without regard to their external circumstances, we can enter into all the motions of their hearts, and read, and shudder as we read, the secret characters which stamp the capacity of unlimited suffering on a nature which we feel to be our own. (58-59)

Such intense, even sensible, popularity for a genre that, in Beer's terms, encourages an identification with stylized characters acting out the "radical impulses of human experience" (9) invites, then, some attention to those characters and their actions. In a mode highly dependent on archetypes, one useful

way to sort these characters is by gender. As Austen's novel suggests, these narrative poems were popular among both male and female readers. What then do Benwick and Anne or indeed Austen's readers see in the masculine and feminine figures of romance?

Like the male characters valorized in *Persuasion*, the heroes of Scott and Byron are men of action—knights, pirates, sympathetic outlaws. They are not defined in terms of inheritance of land or power; instead they act in problematic relationship—covert loyalty or open revolt—to those who do hold power. Marmion and Roderick Dhu, the rebellious Highland Chieftain, for example, are presented as models of bravery, pride, and will. Marmion is "a stalworth knight, and keen, / . . . in close fight a champion grim, / In camps a leader sage." His physique proclaims his character: "His eyebrow dark, and eye of fire, / Show'd spirit proud, and prompt to ire" (*Marmion* 1.5). While Roderick Dhu, "stung" by the "anguish" of unrequited love, can sob "Convulsive" (*Lady* 2.33), he more typically breaks out in fiery passion:

> As flashes flame through sable smoke . . . ,
> So the deep anguish of despair
> Burst, in fierce jealousy, to air. (2.34)

But at the same time these characters are less than heroic: Marmion has forged documents in order to discredit his rival; Roderick is an outlaw and homicide, terrorizing the lowland Scots in retributive attempt "To spoil the spoiler as we may, / And from the robber rend the prey" (5.7).

Scott's critique of the warrior code extends to heroism itself. The romantic heroes of these poems are less vivid than the flawed warriors. While De Wilton and Malcolm Graeme are rewarded in love, they are almost marginal figures. For much of *Marmion*, De Wilton is concealed beneath a pilgrim's cloak, existing chiefly as the object of Marmion's guilt and Clare's constancy. Although proclaimed "the living soul" of the battle (6.38), his heroism is not depicted. Ellen's love Malcolm is "Lively and ardent, frank and kind" (*Lady* 2.25), but his youth is emphasized, and his release from captivity comes as a result of the king's beneficence rather than his own heroism. Perhaps the most heroic figure of these two poems is a man whose unreality is underscored by his fictive context: young Lochinvar, the hero of a song sung by the poem's seductress. "So faithful in love, and so dauntless in war," young Lochinvar "come[s] out of the west" and in defiance of her family carries off the bride he has been forbidden (*Marmion* 5.12).

Like Scott's heroes, Byron's are characterized by bravery, pride, and the capacity for violent action, but, unlike Scott, Byron refuses to balance these

qualities with any of Malcolm's sunny openness. The Giaour is "young and pale, . . . scath'd by fiery passion's brunt" (194-95). Conrad's "dark eye-brow shades a glance of fire"; "And oft perforce his rising lip reveals / The haughtier thought it curbs, but scarce conceals" (*Corsair* 1.196, 205-06). Even Selim, who is first presented in almost feminine terms as he "downcast looked, and gently spake," is "sadly changed" to a pirate king:

> That dagger, on whose hilt the gem
> Were worthy of a diadem,
> No longer glitter'd at his waist,
> Where pistols unadorn'd were braced.
> And from his belt a sabre swung . . . .
> . . . [H]igh command
> Spake in his eye—and tone and hand . . . (*Bride* 1.49, 385; 2.135-48)

As Curran argues, the threatening ambivalence of these heroes has political resonance: "Behind the scenes stalks the spectre of the modern warrior-chief, Napoleon Buonaparte, and a war to subdue his adventurism that had, when *The Giaour* was published, lasted twenty years" (144).

Indeed, Byron's location of his romances in the interior spaces of the psyche produces heroes who are more solitary, more turned in upon themselves and in opposition to social structures than are Scott's. Peter Thorslev has pointed out that "Both Scott's and Byron's heroes are Noble Outlaws, but Byron's have much more in them of the Hero of Sensibility . . . , and consequently their passions are far more subjective, and far more intense" (148). The Giaour, like all Byronic heroes, is possessed of "A spirit yet unquelled and high / That claims and keeps ascendancy" (840-41). Given temporary freedom, Selim's spirit "pierce[s]" through "Earth—Ocean—Sun and Sky!" (*Bride* 2.346, 345). Conrad is "a man of loneliness and mystery" whose "power of Thought" subdues others to him (*Corsair* 1.173, 182).

Until 1816 when his separation from Lady Byron and the reasons for it became the subject of public scandal, Byron, as William St. Clair has pointed out, was the "poet of love and constancy" (12). The Giaour, Selim, and Conrad are defined by their constancy in love and their despair at the loss (or imminent loss) of the beloved. Two examples may suffice. The Giaour's love is defined in passionate extremes manifested on the body; it is

> . . . like the lava flood
> That boils in Aetna's breast of flame . . . .
> If changing cheek, and scorching vein—
> Lips taught to writhe, but not complain—

> And daring deed, and vengeful steel—
> And all that I have felt—and feel—
> Betoken love—that love was mine,
> And shewn by many a bitter sign. (1101-11)

Despite what seems like a self consumed by its own turmoil, the Giaour sees his love as his link to the divine. "Heaven itself descends in love" (1136). For Conrad, Medora's death merely changes the character of his constancy: "The sun goes forth—but Conrad's day is dim; / And the night cometh—ne'er to pass from him" (3.666-67).

It is easy to imagine the attraction such representations might have for a reader like Captain Benwick (or perhaps Captain Wentworth), whose "great" prize-money suggests an active and arduous naval career, who is consumed by strong feelings of love and loss and possessed of habits of reading and re-reading (as indicated by his "tolerable collection of well-bound volumes" [99]), and a simultaneous taste for the "grandeur" of the landscape and "retirement" from the world that Lyme offers (97). Indeed, Wentworth's description of Benwick reveals the influence of such romances. In "a little history of his private life, which render[s] him perfectly interesting in the eyes of all the ladies" (96), Wentworth describes Benwick as a hero of sensibility, explicitly comparing him to the generic *man* and *woman*: "Captain Wentworth believed it impossible for man to be more attached to woman than poor Benwick had been to Fanny Harville, or to be more deeply afflicted under the dreadful change. He considered his disposition as of the sort which must suffer heavily, uniting very strong feelings with quiet, serious, and retiring manners, and a decided taste for reading, and sedentary pursuits" (96-97). As the audience for this tale acknowledges, Benwick fits the part: "He had a pleasing face and a melancholy air, just as he ought to have, and drew back from conversation" (97).

Discussion focuses, of course, on Benwick's supposed constancy. Although he has "all the *appearance* of being oppressed by the presence of so many strangers," he "venture[s] among them again" (99-100, my emphasis). He is, in fact, "not pained, but pleased with [Anne's] allusion to his situation" (101). Captain Harville's generous concern for "the poor fellow" (107) and his "deep sigh" (108) when Anne asks about his sister's death seem to display more actual feeling than does Benwick's tendency to "abstraction" (100). And certainly Benwick's constancy is called into question when before February (not six months after learning of Fanny's death) he has engaged himself to Louisa. Indeed, Austen's focus on Benwick in these chapters seems almost a

narrative sleight of hand, designed to distract Anne and the reader from understanding the real hero of romance.

Frederick Wentworth, even more than Benwick, seems designed to help Anne learn romance, both its attractions and its threats. Like the heroes of Scott and Byron, Wentworth is brave, willful, and proud. The hazards of his naval exploits are, significantly, downplayed: he recalls "'[h]ow fast I made money'" in the Laconia "'on a lovely cruise . . . off the Western Islands'" (67). His pride is generally under good control, but "a certain glance of his bright eye, and curl of his handsome mouth" (67), which Anne detects, show the genetic link to his predecessors. Moreover, there is even to his sociability an element of the romantic solitary. Though he acts generously and feelingly toward Benwick and Harville, he keeps his own counsel and increasingly—around Lyme, in Bath—appears alone.

Wentworth articulates the Byronic hero's commitment to constancy in love. He speaks for it in terms that evoke his earlier narration of Benwick and Fanny's romance:

> "A man like him, in his situation! With a heart pierced, wounded, almost broken! Fanny Harville was a very superior creature; and his attachment to her was indeed attachment. A man does not recover from such a devotion of the heart to such a woman!—He ought not—he does not." (183)

Although he wavers between the imperatives of romance and the empirical evidence, his commitment to absolute constancy triumphs. Three days later, "under the irresistible governance" of his hopes, he "seize[s] a sheet of paper, and pour[s] out his feelings" (241) in language as highly charged as that of any Romantic hero:

> "You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope. . . . I offer myself to you again with a heart even more your own, than when you almost broke it eight years and a half ago. Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman, that his love has an earlier death. I have loved none but you. Unjust I may have been, weak and resentful I have been, but never inconstant. You alone have brought me to Bath. For you alone I think and plan." (237)

Like the heroes of Byron and Scott, Wentworth defines his identity in language that proclaims the strength and all-sufficiency of his passionate fidelity.

Women in romance are as stylized as the men. During the eighteenth century, the cultural function of the daughter had taken on a political valence, her meaning defined through father and family, her fate that of the nation. In

different ways, both Scott's and Byron's heroines complicate that definition. Scott's heroines are identified with cultural heritage, either through the transmission of lands or the identity of the father. Both are also defined in terms of their constancy, but in both cases such constancy entails resistance to patriarchy. When Clare's "kinsmen [bid] her give her hand / To one, who lov'd her for her land" (*Marmion* 2.5), she takes refuge in a convent. Ellen resists the pressure to marry either of the two powerful men, Roderick Dhu and the king, who love her, remaining true to Malcolm Graeme.

In *Marmion* women are limited in agency, and that very passivity is tied to virtue. Clare moves at the convenience of others from convent to convent and then as a part of Marmion's train, as Jeffrey puts it, "daggled about . . . for no purpose . . . but to afford the author the opportunity of two or three pages of indifferent description" (42). Besides her initial retreat, her only moment of choice is her acceptance at the battlefield of the archetypal role of "ministering angel" (6.30). *Marmion* also presents the obverse: two women, Constance and Lady Heron, who, as Nancy Goslee argues, are "pawns in Marmion's—and other men's—plotting for property" (42), but who wield an equivocal and ambiguous power through language. Allied to the enchantress figure (Goslee 52), they are defined in terms of seductive and potent speech and unlicensed sexuality. As Caroline Franklin argues, that sexuality is "a secret power: dangerous, predatory, and to be regulated strictly" (30).

Women in *The Lady of the Lake* seem to have more agency. The interpolated narratives suggest the range of possibilities. Women's potential to be victimized by male power is emphasized in the story of mad Blanche of Devan, whose husband has been murdered by Roderick Dhu on their wedding day and who herself is killed by one of Roderick's men (4.23-26). The ballad "Alice Brand," however, suggests the possibility of overcoming victimization. When Alice's husband kills her brother in a fight "all for thine eyes so blue" and is exiled from his native land, she makes the best of their new life in a forest and, a "woman bold," protects her husband from a dwarf sent by the "moody Elfin King." Her courage transforms the dwarf back to the human: he is her brother (4.12-15). Although subject to (even held responsible for) male violence, a brave woman can redeem and restore the family.

As heroine, Ellen is notable for her activity, moving around Lake Katrine in a skiff, traveling to Stirling in order to redeem her father. Her speech can be playful, but it also has power. When a soldier attempts to exact a "fee" of a kiss from her, Ellen moves "boldly" between the soldier and the old retainer who would defend her (6.7) and speaks "[b]oldly" to defend herself

(6.8). That defense, however, is predicated on her identity as daughter: "My father was the soldier's friend; / . . . Not from the valiant, or the strong, / Should exile's daughter suffer wrong" (6.8). While she is prepared to ask the king for her father's life and does ask for Roderick's, her modesty is emphasized: she is unable to ask for Malcolm's freedom. She turns to her father "As if she wish'd her sire to speak / The suit that stain'd her glowing cheek" (6.39). Modesty and reticence in love, then, define the romance heroine.

Rather than simply adopting, Byron revises what he takes from Scott, changing both the heroine's definition and her fate. In conversation with Thomas Medwin, Byron emphasized the ideal nature of his heroines: "My writings, indeed, tend to exalt the sex; and my imagination has always delighted in giving them a *beau idéal* likeness, but I only drew them as a painter or statuary would do,—as they should be" (*Medwin's Conversations* 73). Jeffrey too points, with admiration, to the ideal quality of Byron's women, to

> the gentleness and submission of the females of these regions, as contrasted with the lordly pride and martial ferocity of the men: and though we suspect he has lent them more *soul* than of right belongs to them, as well as more delicacy and reflection; yet there is something so true to female nature in general, . . . so much of the Oriental softness and acquiescence in . . . particular . . . , that it is scarcely possible to refuse the picture the praise of being characteristic and harmonious, as well as eminently sweet and beautiful in itself. (60)

Gentleness, *submission*, *delicacy*, *reflection*, *softness*, *acquiescence*: Byron confided to Lady Blessington that these heroines "are the bright creations of my fancy" (96). They are characterized by "extreme refinement, joined to great simplicity and want of education. . . . [H]ere again, . . . I am forced to have recourse to imagination; and certainly it furnishes me with creatures as unlike the sophisticated beings of civilized existence, as they are to the still less tempting, coarse realities of vulgar life" (96-97).

As this idealization removes his heroines *from* the human *into* the realm of the ideal, it is also tinged by a kind of premature mortality. The description of *The Giaour*'s Leila, for example, aims at an ideally immortal, even unearthly quality.

> . . . through her eye the Immortal shone—
> On her fair cheek's unfading hue
> The young pomegranate's blossoms strew
> Their bloom in blushes ever new—

> Her hair in hyacinthine flow
> When left to roll its folds below, . . .
> Hath swept the marble where her feet
> Gleamed whiter than the mountain sleet
> Ere from the cloud that gave it birth
> It fell, and caught one stain of earth. (492-503)

Despite the statement of her untainted, unfallen nature, the imagery also suggests the opposite: woman as faded, fallen, stained. Leila, of course, is dead before the poem begins; she exists only in memory. Zuleika, Medora, even the pre-liberated Gulnare, are defined similarly. Zuleika is "Fair—as the first that fell of womankind," "Soft—as the memory of buried love," and "Pure—as the prayer which Childhood wafts above" (*Bride* 1.158, 166, 167). Medora too is defined in deathly terms. When Conrad leaves, "Scarce beat that bosom where his image dwelt"; her forehead is "cold," her face "still, pale," and her eye "frozen with its gaze on vacancy" (*Corsair* 1.472, 481, 491, 494). Conrad sees Gulnare first as "some seraph sent to grant him grace," then as "an earthly form with heavenly face!" (2.396-97).

This deathly quality is partly the marker of female sexuality. For Scott, sexual experience is the sign of the seductress; for Byron it is responsible for her death. Leila's death arises from her sexual inconstancy—her escape from Hassan's harem for the Giaour. Zuleika declares her love for her supposed brother Selim, but given her loyalty to her father it's a love with no chance for fulfillment: she dies as soon as he leaves her. Medora, though embedded in a domestic context, can only wait, barely alive, for the roving Conrad. And Gulnare's murder of Seyd (motivated by her love for Conrad) marks her: "That spot of blood, that light but guilty streak, / Had banished all the beauty from her cheek!" (3.426-27).

Byron's women are defined by men and, even more clearly than Scott's, suffer at their hands. Leila, of course, exists only through the masculine voices that tell her tale. Although Zuleika speaks her love to Selim, after hearing his story she is "mute and motionless, / Stood like that statue of distress" (2.491-92), and is essentially written out of the narrative. The confusion Conrad feels, his inability either to trace the resemblance between or to clearly distinguish Medora and Gulnare, indicates the troublingly ambivalent image of woman in these romances: "He thought on her afar, his lonely bride: / He turned and saw—Gulnare the homicide!" (3.462-63). The couplet's rhyme of *bride* and *homicide* underscores this oppositional connection.

Though Austen's women are more complex, more vocal, more active, there are resemblances between them and their romance counterparts. Like

Byron's Leila, Fanny Harville is dead before the story begins, constructed through the male voice, introduced as an extraordinarily minor character in the romance of Benwick. Wentworth's account retails Benwick's fortune and prize money, hardly pausing on "Fanny Harville did not live to know it" (96) before moving on to Benwick's affliction. Harville and Anne avoid mentioning her name, instead defining Benwick as "'a young mourner'" whom "'the news must follow'" (108). Wentworth, in the shock of Benwick's engagement to Louisa, seems to restore life to Fanny Harville, but his definition is sketchy: "'Fanny Harville was a very superior creature.'" Immediately, the focus is back on Benwick: "'A man does not recover from such a devotion of the heart to such a woman!'" (183). In Anne and Harville's conversation at the White Hart, Fanny again begins to assume human shape. She is "'my poor sister,'" who has asked Benwick for his picture; "'Poor Fanny! she would not have forgotten him so soon!'" (232). To Anne's assent, Harville provides a specific characterization: "'It was not in her nature. She doated on him.'" Anne, however, moves the conversation from the personal to the generic, where it stays: "'It would not be the nature of any woman who truly loved'" (232). And there Fanny Harville remains, an icon of untested and forsaken constancy.

Fanny Harville's replacement is Louisa Musgrove, an unlikely heroine for a romance. She has "brought from a school at Exeter all the usual stock of accomplishments, and . . . like thousands of other young ladies, [is] living to be fashionable, happy, and merry" (40). Her "spirits [are] extremely good, [her] manners unembarrassed and pleasant" (41). But Louisa's "little fever of admiration" (82) for Wentworth leads to her own statement of romantic constancy, "spoken with enthusiasm": "'If I loved a man, as she loves the Admiral, I would be always with him, nothing should ever separate us, and I would rather be overturned by him, than driven safely by anybody else'" (85). Louisa's fall in pursuit of "sensation" (109) has a sexual component and, in the tradition of the romantic heroine, is mortal. "There was no wound, no blood, no visible bruise; but her eyes were closed, she breathed not, her face was like death" (109). That mortality is emphasized: she is "taken up lifeless," a "poor corpse-like figure" (110), "a dead young lady" (111) displayed for public enjoyment. Although restored to life to be married to her rescuer, the reader of Scott and Byron, Louisa "'is altered: there is no running or jumping about, no laughing or dancing'" (218). She never speaks or appears in the novel again: she has been Byronized and like the romance heroine now lives in a space apart from the world.

And what of Anne? She too shares qualities with the Byronic heroine. Knox-Shaw points to her "standards of constancy," her "mental landscape . . .

dominated, as severely as the Giaour's, by a single landmark, her renunciation of Wentworth in the distant summer of 1806" (50). Benwick is attracted to "the engaging mildness of her countenance, and gentleness of her manners," which encourage him to recite poetry and look "entirely as if he meant to be understood" (100), to her "'[e]legance, sweetness, beauty'" (131). Even more than Benwick, Wentworth sees Anne through the chivalric perspective of romance. His repeated rescues—lifting little Charles from her back, placing her into the Crofts' carriage—are suffused with erotic awareness but, like Conrad's rescue of Gulnare, cast her as distressed damsel. As Benwick is taken by Louisa's new, receptive passivity, Wentworth discovers that Anne is more than the heroine of Scott or Byron—that she can act and speak with "decision and firmness." "Her character was now fixed on his mind as perfection itself, maintaining the loveliest medium of fortitude and gentleness" (241). Finally, like the heroes and heroines of romance, Anne and Wentworth occupy a space that is somehow apart: "no landed estate, no headship of a family" (250), a space characterized by time, chance, and "the dread of future war" (252).

What do *Persuasion*'s characters and Austen's readers learn, then, from their readings in romance? If romance allows for individual and communal desires to be effected, what kinds of desires are being acted out here? One of the strongest impulses of *Persuasion* is its drive toward intense emotional and erotic feeling and the expression of that feeling. As Mary Waldron argues, "What we are seeing here is not the anxious internal debate about what is *right* . . . but the unstructured reactions of strong emotion" (143). Francis Jeffrey, in defining Byron's success, pointed to the "heartless occupations" (58) of the contemporary world, and Knox-Shaw traces in the novel evidence of "an existence drained of freshness and specificity" (50). Romance, then, offers a medium for emotion, a way of evoking, recognizing, and validating it.

Romance also offers an entry into the exotic, that golden, imaginative world, and in so doing demonstrates the ability to transcend time and space. While for Scott and Byron that transcendence of time and space meant a movement to sixteenth-century Scotland or to the Orient, in *Persuasion* the transcendence of time and space is emotional. Throughout *Persuasion* Anne and Wentworth enact again, after an eight-year gap, the processes of love, affirming its power and constancy. As they search for a place apart, "the comparatively quiet and retired gravel-walk," this emotional transcendence of time and space is realized.

> There they exchanged again those feelings and those promises which had once before seemed to secure every thing, but which

> had been followed by so many, many years of division and estrangement. There they returned again into the past, more exquisitely happy, perhaps, in their re-union, than when it had been first projected; more tender, more tried, more fixed in a knowledge of each other's character, truth, and attachment; more equal to act, more justified in acting. And there, as they slowly paced the gradual ascent, heedless of every group around them, seeing neither sauntering politicians, bustling house-keepers, flirting girls, nor nursery-maids and children, they could indulge in those retrospections and acknowledgements, and especially in those explanations of what had directly preceded the present moment, which were so poignant and so ceaseless in interest. (240-41)

Although Anne and Wentworth, wrapped in the wonder of their own conclusion, are heedless of the mundane, the readers are not—and are. The novel moves its readers back and forth, in and out of romance: evoking the impassioned strains of Scott and Byron followed by the stringencies of prose moralists, describing the grandeur of the sea and then the particularities of Dr. Shirley's possible retirement. *Persuasion*'s anti-romantic tendencies, its continual deflation of romance through irony, comedy, or even the dailiness of the characters' lives, is an integral part of its identity as romance. In *Persuasion*, the elements of romance—adventures, tests, magical powers, the improbabilities of chance, time, emotion—are naturalized by the novel's realistic texture. And yet, this story, these characters, the world Austen evokes are still matter for continuing wonder, "the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning" (30).

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