THE PROBLEMATIC BRITISH ROMANTIC HERO(INE):

THE GIAOUR, MATHILDA, AND EVELINA

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the

University of North Texas in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Craig A. Poston, B.A., M.A.

Denton, Texas

May, 1995
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Romantic heroes are questers, according to Harold Bloom and Northrop Frye. Whether employing physical strength or relying on the power of the mind, the traditional Romantic hero invokes questing for some sense of self. Chapter 1 considers this hero-type, but is concerned with defining a non-questing British Romantic hero. The Romantic hero’s identity is problematic and established through contrasting narrative versions of the hero.

This paper’s argument lies in the “inconclusiveness” of the Romantic experience perceived in writings throughout the Romantic period. Romantic inconclusiveness can be found not only in the structure and syntax of the works but in the person with whom the reader is meant to identify or sympathize, the hero(ine).

Chapter 2 explores Byron’s aesthetics of literary equivocation in The Giaour. This tale is a consciously imbricated text, and Byron’s letters show a purposeful complication of the poet’s authority concerning the origins of this Turkish Tale.

The traditional “Byronic hero,” a gloomy, guilt-ridden protagonist, is considered in Chapter 3. Byron’s contemporary readers and reviewers were quick to pick up on this aspect of his verse tales, finding in the Giaour, Selim, Conrad, and Lara characteristics of Childe Harold. Yet, Byron’s Turkish Tales also reveal a very
different and more sentimental hero. Byron seems to play off the reader’s expectations of the “Byronic hero” with an ambiguous hero whose character reflects the Romantic aesthetic of indeterminacy. Through the accretive structure of The Giaour, Byron creates a hero of competing component characteristics, a focus he also gives to his heroines.

Chapters 4 and 5 address works that are traditionally considered eighteenth-century sentimental novels. Mathilda and Evelina, both epistolary works, present their heroines as worldly innocents who are beset by aggressive males. Yet their subtext suggests that these girls aggressively maneuver the men in their lives. Mathilda and Evelina create a tension between the expected and the radical to energize the reader’s imagination.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE ROMANTIC HERO(INE)

Hath all the energy which would have made
A goodly frame of glorious elements,
Had they been wisely mingled; as it is,
It is an awful chaos—light and darkness,
And mind and dust, and passions and pure thoughts
Mix'd, and contending without order,—
All dormant and destructive . . .

(Manfred)

The Bloomian Hero: Male and Female Questers

Romantic heroes are questers, according to Harold Bloom and Northrop Frye. In the Anxiety of Influence, Bloom notes that “every poet quests for an impossible object [i.e., eternity, rejection of death] as his precursors quested before him.”¹ This paper, however, is concerned with defining a non-questing British Romantic hero. Attempting to identify this hero requires breaking from traditional views of what constitutes a hero. Romantic scholars seem to have allowed Joseph Campbell’s The Hero with a Thousand Faces (1949) and Thomas Carlyle’s “Heroes and Hero-Worship” (1840) define the heroic. These approaches have unfortunately limited Romantic criticism. Campbell establishes the hero as quester, while Carlyle insists that every age wants a real hero to represent the best of that age. As an alternative approach to thinking about Romantic heroics, this paper
takes into consideration the prose fiction and poetic tales of Romanticism to enhance our understanding of Romantic texts.

The primacy of questing for Romantic heroes is established in Harold Bloom’s theories of the poet’s actions in The Ringers of the Tower (1971), and also in Northrop Frye’s theories of the spiritual quest in The Secular Scripture (1973). Both works employ Campbellian conceptions of the mythic hero and apply them to the Romantic period, specifically to Romantic poetry. Such theories find that the hero must or is willing to undergo social isolation to attain his full potential and confront his original desires, before re-surfacing to bring his enlightenment to society. Whether employing physical strength or relying on the power of the mind, traditional Romantic heroism invokes questing for some sense of self.

Jack Stillinger plots this quest as an upward spiral graph of the Romantic progress pattern of flight and return: A → B → A. Stillinger notes that “characteristically, the speaker in a Romantic lyric begins with real world (A), takes off in mental flight to visit the ideal (B), and then . . . he discovers that he does not or cannot belong permanently in the ideal—returns home to the real (Â) . . . [with] a better understanding of a situation, a change in attitude toward it.”

These concepts suggest that inward questing, changing, and teaching are part of the poetic tradition for the Romantic poet.

This paper’s approach to the Romantic hero offers an alternative to both the hero-as-quester and the “quiet hero” identified by Richard D. Jordan. Jordan’s hero achieves success “by merely waiting” and passively receiving action. The Romantic hero argued in this paper, however, exists in an energized threshold of possibilities. This hero-type does
not exist in one or the other polarities of a dichotomized identity, but in both simultaneously. Nor is it heroic through a successful quest for selfhood, because his self remains constant and non-progressive (though not static) through the work.

Male poetic questing traditionally effaces the female. Joseph Campbell’s concept of the hero seems to illustrate traditional Romantic criticism of the Romantic poets, scholarship, which in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s has equated “Romanticism” with the major male Romantic poets. In Campbell’s typology of “Hero as Lover,” the woman is the ‘other portion’ of the hero-lover himself, in which “the motif of the difficult task [is] prerequisite to the bridal bed.” Other chapter titles such as “Woman as Temptress,” “Atonement with the Father,” and “Hero as World Redeemer” imply a male hero who is diverted from his task by a tempting female, and who has some “influence” of the father to overcome, so that he can ultimately emerge whole to instruct his society. Northrop Frye’s examination of the romance hero reflects Campbellian typology: “Most commonly ... the hero is brought down by some form of froda [fraud]. ... Such power is often wielded, or symbolized, by a treacherous woman.”

In The Ringers in the Tower, Bloom notes that “the internalization of quest-romance made of the poet-hero not a seeker after nature but after his own mature powers and so the Romantic poet turned away, not from society to nature, but from nature to what was more integral than nature, within himself.” Bloom even notes that the role of Romanticism is “the search turn[ed] inward to explore the landscape of the poet’s own ego” (15). Of course, many feminists have countered this male-centered philosophy, which
in emphasizing the primacy of the male quest scripted, they say, “the story of women’s secondness.” In *Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar see in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* the “rewriting of *Paradise Lost* so as to make it a more accurate mirror of female experience.” Gilbert and Gubar’s re-oriented reading of Milton is a feminization of “the anxiety of influence,” and suffers from the same quest-structure as their male counterparts.

Many women-authored novels reflect this quest-structure as a female bildung. Specifically, Anne K. Mellor, in *Romanticism and Gender* (1993), points to the novels of Jane Austen and the Bluestockings which reveal a heroine who develops in intellectual and moral stature. Mellor states:

> In these didactic novels the author functions as moral teacher, tracing the development of her heroine from fallible youth to a mature acceptance of the status quo and the role of dutiful wife. Inspired by the conduct-books of female propriety . . . such female Bildungsroman [sic] as . . . Frances Burney’s *Evelina* (1778), portray the heroine as capable of learning the errors of her overly impulsive or selfish ways from her lover-mentor.

Limiting Mellor’s argument to her specific references to the bildung identity of heroines makes the point that, concerning Romantic heroines, feminists have merely “turned the tables” by applying male quest exegesis to female characters.

This critique of the hero is not new. Among others, Leslie W. Rabine’s *Reading the Romantic Heroine* (1985), Meredith A. Powers’ *The Heroine in Western Literature* (1991), and Rachel M. Brownstein’s *Becoming a Heroine* (1982) all question and oppose
traditional views of Romantic heroes. The tradition these women's works oppose is a masculine one, but instead support a separate spheres approach that allows women to be selfhood-questers, typically within the domestic sphere.

In an attempt to by-pass such theories of "differentness" that are as one-sided as the masculine Romanticism they try to correct, one can apply a theory of Romanticism that is more gender-balanced, a trend noticeable in current feminist criticism of eighteenth-century fiction.\footnote{Susan Morgan's view strikes this balance well when she states "that many Nineteenth-century novels written by women are deeply and positively intertwined with many written by men," (Sisters in Time, 1989). Conversely, many novels written by men are linked with fiction written by women. This view counters the two dominant strains of feminist criticism which have successfully forced a revaluation of the Romantic canon to include marginalized poems and novels written by women. Morgan refers to Sexism and Literary Women to plot the progression of feminist criticism from the 1970s "woman-as-victim" to "separate sphere's ideology" of the 1980s, respectively. For all its insistence on gender-balancing, Sisters in Time attempts to define the "feminine hero's" function as unmasking the masculine hero's destructive, aggressive force, to privilege the (feminine) values of love and community. This Romantic theme of community orientation, she notes, is available to both male and female authors (say, Henry Mackenzie and Jane Austen) and male and female protagonists (say, Henry Crawford and Emma Woodhouse). Yet, Morgan's argument still subordinates the masculine (aggressive) values to her privileged feminine values of domestic affection.}
In The Feminization of Quest-Romance (1990), Dana Heller attempts to avoid the traditional connotations in the term “heroine.” She argues for the application of “hero” to both males and females:

Emerging from her entrapment in subservient roles, the woman who rejects the passive term ‘heroine’ and adopts the active term ‘hero’ for her own identity appropriates power from the masculine sphere and accepts the active disobedience of patriarchal law and language.¹²

Like Morgan, Heller seeks to efface gender distinctions. In an effort to equivocate gender roles, though, Heller’s argument is founded on the binary “spheres” ideology that recognizes only the masculine as active and powerful.

Burney and Shelley and “Beyond Gender”—The Female Hero

In identifying a Romantic hero, it may appear an odd pairing to connect the protagonists of Byron with those of Burney and Mary Shelley. This pairing would undermine an ideology of gender “difference” which Anne Mellor speaks about in Romanticism and Gender. That is, one assumes that the protagonists of Byron could not be paired with Burney’s because the gender of the writers informs their “separate spheres” ideologies: Mellor’s dichotomy of “masculine” versus “feminine” Romanticism. Mellor notes:

To the extent that the masculine Romantic ideology entails a commitment to the creative process, to erotic love, to the exploration of self-
consciousness, and to an ethic of justice which acknowledges the value of rights of the common man, it also entails a gender ideology which subtly denies the value of female difference. (29)

Such heterogeneous approaches, though overcompensatory, have re-invigorated interest in eighteenth-century women's texts. However, the Romantic hero does not compromise one gender's characteristics to inflate the other's; the Romantic hero is "beyond gender."

Feminist criticism of the 1980s sought to find power in women in the domestic sphere. By dividing women of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries from the public world of men, these critics created a separate sphere for women that, paradoxically, emphasized community orientation. Leslie W. Rabine notes that the feminine voice seeks "the desire to heal the division of society into the separate spheres of the feminine domestic and the masculine sociopolitical." Judith Newton and Patricia Meyer Spacks have persistently read eighteenth-century literature according to separate sphere theories. Newton sees the female in literature being suppressed beneath overwhelming masculine presence and aggression. Patricia Meyer Spacks' 1980s feminist view allows the feminine hero some identity and power, but then negates that power by finding it isolated in the domestic arena, separated from the real world that would affect males. Today's critics of eighteenth-century fiction are beginning to recognize the limitations of both of these interpretations and are attempting to broaden them to apply equally to male and female authors and masculine and feminine protagonists.

One of the shortcomings of "separate spheres" theory is that much female-authored fiction was not overtly suffering from the influence of patriarchy. In fact, the
novels with lead female characters have very limited male influences, such as *Evelina* and *Mathilda*. As Judith Wilt points out in *Ghosts in the Gothic* (1980), in a more mediating awareness of Bloomian anxiety than Gilbert and Gubar present, many women writers were burdened by the anxiety of the influence of other women writers, Austen by Radcliffe, for example. New Historicist works such as Ruth Perry’s *Women, Letters and the Novel* (1980), Sylvia Harcstark Myers’ *The Bluestocking Circle* (1990), Heidi Hunter’s *Rereading Aphra Behn* (1993), and Cheryl Turner’s *Living By the Pen* (1992) reconfirm the absence of male influence on women writers by noting the prodigality of eighteenth-century female writers. The fact that women writers reacted to other female writers works against the separate spheres ideology and the need to protect the female sphere from the influence of the male realm. *Evelina* and *Mathilda*, moreover, incorporate domestic ideologies passed from mother to daughter. In these novels, women even actively instruct men.

In thinking “beyond gender,” David Rosen’s very recent *The Changing Fictions of Masculinity* (1993) intriguingly applies feminist scholastic thinking to ideas of masculinity. He reverses the famous feminist question, asking: “What do I see when I read like a man?” Rosen traces literary conceptions of heroic manhood from *Beowulf* to *Sons and Lovers* to show how the false dichotomy of gender has caused men to suppress part of their experience. It is now time, Rosen concludes, for men to reread their literary figures of masculinity to gain a fuller understanding of manhood. He dismisses gender as a social construct (instated to regularization information), and attempts to reconstruct a multiplicity of
gender that accounts for all aspects of male experience, from individual aggression to community orientation.  

Use of the term Romantic hero to encompass the conventional use of hero and heroine has precedence. Lee R. Edwards perhaps first de-limited the term heroine by writing about “female heroes.” Though Edwards notes that traditionally “the hero is a self; the heroine an appendage,” her female heroes are strong and independent personalities, as opposed to the weak females who allow themselves to be subordinated by men. To Edwards, heroes are those “whose lives matter because they occupy new territory or suggest alternatives to the cramped dailiness of ordinary existence.”  

Ann R. Shapiro’s Unlikely Heroines (1987) chronicles the uses of the term “heroine.” Shapiro notes that it is the atypical heroines, Dorothea Brooke, Emma, Elizabeth Bennet, and Jane Eyre, who have captured critical interest. Typical heroines are “kind, gentle, unhappy, unassertive and intellectually feeble,” as well as supposedly uninteresting. Shapiro also comments that although feminist critics can identify who the heroines of the English novel are, “no one seems very sure of what a heroine is, heroines are recognized [only] when they appear.” Yet, she determines that “unlikely heroines” are highly active, female versions of Jenni Calder’s Romantic hero, who is best represented in the Byronic “doer” hero (discussed below). Unlikely heroines are active adventurers, risk takers, seekers of independence.  

Shapiro gets beyond gender in her study of the hero by avoiding the details of plot and structure in fiction. She writes:
The subject of the novels [by women] is not domestic detail any more than Melville's real subject is whales. It is instead the motivations and conflicts of the characters that engage us because we recognize the universal problems of the human heart, which transcend male and female. (134)

Though males and females have historically had different experiences, "nonetheless, certain themes are frequently reiterated regardless of the gender of the writer. We find the same urge to break with tradition, the same rejection of conventional values, and the same desire for adventure" (34). Shapiro places the female in the post of adventurer, traditionally held by men. Because the hero's nature is problematic, the Romantic female hero, though much like Shapiro's adventurer female, is also alternatively "kind, gentle, unhappy."

Susan Fraiman's *Unbecoming Women* (1993) illustrates the direction intended in this study of the Romantic hero. In defining a heroine, Fraiman "would like to image the way to womanhood not as a single path to a clear destination but as the endless negotiation of a crossroads." Though Fraiman takes a quest-for-selfhood approach in her reading of heroines, she finds this quest a difficult bildung. Therefore, her tricky title sees women "unbecoming," complicating the conventional assumptions of the heroine's progress to self-awareness. That is, she finds her heroines coming into selfhood in conventionally unbecoming ways. Fraiman emphasizes "favoring indeterminacy seemingly for its own sake—a kind of aesthetics of 'mess.'" Her reading of Austen's and Burney's heroines teaches the process of apprenticing for womanhood by challenging conventional depictions of literary heroines, though she also finds that eighteenth- and nineteenth-
century women could not escape their socially subordinated gender role. Fraiman’s heroines are involved in quests for selfhood, but they offer to female readers multiple models for achieving this goal. Traditional roads such as marriage meet at a crossroads of other viable routes. The intersection may be a “mess,” but the heroine who can navigate through it can find fulfillment.

**The Carlylean Hero and the Byronic Hero**

Heroes are not only mythological or fictional. In his many lectures on “Heroes, Hero-Worship and The Heroic in History,” Thomas Carlyle popularized the “real” hero, a person who was the best representative of his age—a Shakespeare or a Dante. Carlyle wanted great, real men of genuine human talent to meet an historical need. He criticized the hero of fiction because it was a form of escapism that operated against this need.

Several recent critics who have written on “The Romantic Hero” have embellished on Carlyle’s ideas. In *Ranges of Romanticism* (1991), Thomas Meade Harwell notes one “range” of Romanticism as the “Hero.” He encompasses Peter Thorslev’s Noble Outlaw type, locating in Napoleon Bonaparte the rebellious and genteel spirit the age most represented. Thorslev’s typological study, *The Byronic Hero* (1962), identifies the Byronic hero as most representative of the “Romantic Age.” He recognizes Byron as the prototype of this hero.

Jenni Calder’s *Heroes* (1977) also identifies Byron himself as the most representative hero of the Romantic age. Calder’s hero incorporates the willing social rebellion of Gothic literature. As a prototype of the early Nineteenth century, she asserts,
"Byron's personal predicament, his exile, his disenchantment, his scorn of convention and hypocrisy, his idealism, his cynicism, dramatically reflected events and beliefs" of the age. Likewise, in Fables of Identity (1963), Northrop Frye discusses Byron's mythologization of his own character in the Byronic hero: "Childe Harold and the other lowering heroes of Byron's tales not only popularized a conventional type of hero, but popularized Byron himself in that role." 

Frederick Shilstone's Byron and The Myth of Tradition notes a dichotomy in Byron's hero, who represents Byron himself. Byron's hero is divided between the society rebel and the conservative. The autonomous self that Shilstone sees in Byron's early works struggles but progressively loses out in the later works to the Byron who ideologically returns to his religious conservative values of his childhood upbringing. Shilstone refers to these values as "the myth of tradition." Jerome McGann perhaps most persistently sees the Byronic hero in Byron himself, the fictionalized hero in the real man. (McGann is discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.)

Byron's contemporary critics, and even today's critics, condemn Byron in his heroes, despite Byron's many letters denouncing this association. William Hazlitt in 1824 denounced Byron's characters as being drawn too much from the author himself: "Instead of taking his impressions from without, in entire and almost unimpaired masses, he moulds them according to his own temperament, and heats the materials of his imagination in the furnace of his passions." Of Don Juan Cantos 1 and 2, a horrified contemporary reviewer writes that.
Those who are acquainted . . . with the main incidents in the private life of Lord Byron . . . will scarcely believe, that the odious malignity of this man's bosom should have carried him so far, as to make him commence a filthy and impious poem, with an elaborate satire on the character and manners of his wife.\(^{26}\)

Many critics fail to interpret beyond the biographical assumptions they read into Byron's works. Certainly, Byron seems to tease to frustration his critics, who, from Childe Harold's first entrance into the reading public, wanted to equate Harold with Byron. Yet, in many letters, Byron openly disclaims "drawing from self":

The fact is, I have become weary of drawing a line which everyone seemed determined not to perceive. . . . It was in vain that I asserted, and imagined that I had drawn, a distinction between the author and the pilgrim; and the very anxiety to preserve this difference, and disappointment at finding it unavailing, so far crushed my efforts in the composition, that I determined to abandon it altogether.\(^ {27}\)

In Don Juan, rather than the real heroes new to "every year and month," whom he catalogues and then rejects, Byron's narrator chooses a hero of imagination.

Who, then, is the Byronic hero? Is it Byron himself or a figure of fiction? This ambiguity highlights the very conflict in the Romantic hero. Far from immobilizing analysis of the Byronic hero since Childe Harold's gloomy entrance into literature, the Byronic hero has been energized and remains alive today as a popular icon (as opposed to
the Carlylean hero) because of the plurality of possible analyses. The Romantic hero thrives on the negative capability of finding power in contrariety.

Byron’s narrative pattern ultimately undermines the very Byronic hero he is accused of establishing. This recurring pattern involves a character or narrator opening the tale with narrative that fosters the protagonist’s “Byronic” image of relentless solitude and guilt-ridden mystery. Yet, the end of the tale consistently negates that image. Far from the hypermasculine hero critics have highlighted as Byronic, the conclusions of each of the Turkish Tales emphasize an image of the protagonists as desperate for social acceptance (CHP, The Giaour, Mazeppa) and as non-aggressors (The Bride of Abydos, The Corsair). Such ambivalence reinforces problematic Romantic ideology. Byron refuses to privilege any identity-construct of his protagonists; instead, he balances them against each other.

**The Romantic Hero**

The Romantic hero’s identity is established through contrasting narrative versions of the hero, not as a result of Bloomian achieved selfhood. In fact, in each work studied in this paper, Lord Byron’s verse tales, Mathilda, and Evelina, the hero(ine)’s self exists at the work’s conclusion unchanged from the work’s opening. True, more competing versions of that self may surface, but the opening view of the hero that is given does not mutate. Mary Favret in *Romantic Correspondence* (1993) refers to Frankenstein’s monster’s “component” quality as a metaphor for Romanticism’s competing contrarieties. This “suturing” of identities is distinguished from “progress” composition. The
"construct" aspect of Shelley's work, and of Romantic works in general, is essential to the epistolary form of *Frankenstein*, in which equally competing narratives refuse one authorial narrative. Byron employs this concept in *The Giaour*’s accretive form. In each of the 12 editions, Byron deliberately problematizes the hero’s identity by suturing together identities of his hero that oppose one another. He does this in such a way that makes the self seem like a compilation—and decidedly not a *bildung* progression.

The basis of this paper’s argument lies in the “inconclusiveness” of the Romantic experience reflected in writings throughout the Romantic period. This idea is not new, but what is new in this approach is its emphasis on how Romantic writers have placed this theory of competing contraries in the figure of their heroes. Romantic writers have posited this fundamental concept of the period, not only in the structure of their works, but in the makeup of their characters.

An example of this Romantic hero is Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* (1771). Like Frances Burney’s *Evelina*, this work, typically placed in the eighteenth-century sentimental tradition, can be viewed as a “Romantic” text highlights the ambiguity of the hero’s identity. What view of the hero does the text portray? What is heroic about the protagonist Harley? The questions of the hero-type boil down to two distinct attitudes towards Harley: he is praised as a sentimentalist or he is ridiculed. Certainly Harley’s ready ability to drop many tears is lauded by Mackenzie, through the novel’s editor. Mackenzie reinscribes the conventional sentimental novel for a male audience. This reinscription can be read conventionally as a *christomimetic* hero-typology, or a postfiguration of the title hero of *Sir Charles Grandison* (1754), according to the
typological theories suggested in Paul J. Korshin's *Typologies in England: 1650-1820* (1982). Yet, equally, the reader might be left feeling that Harley's altruistic heroism is deficient, that he is manipulated by confidence men and women, as several characters in the novel state. Essentially, that which stigmatizes Harley to other characters in the novel (that Harley is being foolishly "bubbled," or cheated) is what denotes his virtue to himself and is the quality the narrator/editor values as "worth a thousand homilies." Mackenzie asserts a pluralistic heroic identity, one not disabled by indecision or ambivalence, but energized by possible readings of the hero.

The *Man of Feeling* is a catalogue of Harley's encounters with the financially needy. Harley persistently maintains the world-view that "to calculate the chances of deception is too tedious a business for the life of man" (53), and he consequently opens his wallet to those who appear desperate. This is clearly good moral didacticism by Mackenzie. Yet, characters in the novel continually demean Harley as a "cully," a deceived person. This tension between polar perspective of Harley is maintained throughout the novel.

Likewise, William Godwin's *Caleb Williams: or Things As They Are* (1794) illustrates these same aspects of the Romantic hero. Caleb's self does not change throughout the novel, though his appearance certainly does. Throughout his narrative, Caleb's deeds always counter his verbal presentation of himself. A conflict emerges between appearances (the way things seem to be) and nature (the way things really are). Caleb repeats situations in which the hero's discourse management and innocent looks are not enough to guaranty guiltlessness. Caleb's terrorizer is Falkland. Falkland's defense in
his own trial, backed-up by all-important deeds, does “prove” him innocent of the murder of Tyrell. Contrarily, because he lacks positive deeds, Caleb’s gentle looks and passionate speech (so says Forester, a virtuous character in the novel) are not enough to not condemn him. Romantic writers repeatedly conflate deeds against speech to demonstrate the impossibility of reliably gauging one’s nature. This results in Romantic heroes possessing fluctuating identities that always seem to suggest they are never what they present themselves to be. Byron’s characters reflect this aspect by continually professing: “I am not what I seem.”

In Caleb, as especially in Evelina, the hero is unable to convince others that his appearance reveals his true character. Appearance, which incorporates one’s discourse and dress, fails to parallel one’s nature, demarcated by deeds. Throughout the novel, Caleb continually attempts to justify his character through his discourse, even publishing an autobiographical “defense” of himself. When Caleb twice goes before trial, he counts on his words, his tale, to clarify his innocence. This repeatedly fails him. As his friend Laura Denison tells Caleb at the end of the novel, “Your conduct even at this moment, in my opinion, condemns you. . . . Virtue, sir, consists in actions, and not in words.”

However, counterposed to the implication of the whole novel, it is Caleb’s story which validates his true self in the first published ending (1794). When Falkland confesses to a murder that only Caleb knows about, Falkland admits that any plan (deed) by Caleb would have been effectively thwarted. Yet, at the end of the novel, Falkland states: “I see that the artless and manly story you have told, has carried conviction to every hearer” (324). At last, at the end of his adventures, someone believes Caleb’s words.
Yet, William Godwin’s earlier but unpublished manuscript ending is more in accord with the whole novel. In it, Caleb’s story is not believed, and Falkland does not conveniently confess. The result is that the trial judge and reader must decide between two competing, highly subjective narratives. As these are equivocal, truth becomes dependent upon deeds, and Caleb is placed in prison, on the basis of his lack of deeds. In fact, Caleb is dismayed that his lengthy speech failed to work in his favor: “Mr. Falkland to have so little to say! I so ardent, so impassioned, so full of my subject” (332). As Caleb erodes into madness, the reader is not able to assess the true character of the hero. The novel ends conclusively with the judge’s decision, yet the reader is unable to determine whether Caleb was indeed innocent or guilty, and that ambiguity about the hero’s character resonates with energy as it evokes an unending debate over Caleb’s true identity. The incommensurable positions with which the novel ends give it lasting interest. These same issues inform Byron’s verse tales.

**Problematic Romantic Theory**

The use of the term Romantic in this paper refers to the qualities in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts that engage the imagination. These qualities determine the Romantic. This criteria allows eighteenth-century works to be considered Romantic, such as *Evelina* and *The Man of Feeling*. Some of these Romantic qualities concern Gothicism, which can be essentialized into the aspects of containment and concealment. These two aspects revolve around the individual’s relationship to society, and, of course, a certain plurality of identity in the hero. This definition does oppose Bloom’s: he claims that
“'Romantic' comes from 'romance,' specifically quest-romance, and Romantics internalize the quest.”

It should be noted that the late eighteenth-century's definition of the Romantic novel, voiced by Horace Walpole in his "Preface To the Second Edition" of The Castle of Otranto (1754), also differs. It attempts to unify classicism and idealism, which M. H. Abrams in The Mirror and the Lamp (1953) separates in his theory of Romanticism. Walpole attempted "to blend two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern," in which the ancient was "all imagination and improbability" and the modern romance was mimetic.

In The Romantic Novel in England (1972), Robert Kiely recognizes the "divisive tension, paradox, and uncertain focus" in Romantic novels. He reads the inconclusiveness of Gothic novels as one of the genre's symbolized rebellions against society, because openness disrupts and disorders basic human relationships. Kiely notes an energy in the activities of heroes, but he disagrees with Bloom as to the basic quest structure of Romantic works. He instead sees in Romantic novels that the "wanderings of their heroes and heroines are neither serious quests nor aimless meanderings"—they are in fact fleeing from goals, escaping at all costs. The preoccupation Romantic heroes have with physical violation, he notes, is "not so much a matter of breaking laws as it is of breaking life itself." Accordingly, to the Romantic hero, the desire for death is a desire for release and rebellion.

Ultimately, Robert Kiely's intuitive study is too restrictive for a problematic reading. He reduces the first person narrative technique to two strains, the moral or the prisoner/outcast. This seems to ignore the subtlety and the propagandizing of the
hero(ine)s of Byron and Burney. Kiely’s analysis is also too strictly centered on Gothic novels as representative of the Romantic novel, to the exclusion of those “domestic” works of Burney and Shelley.

Critics seem not to have immediately pursued Kiely’s approach to Romantic fiction, perhaps because “inconclusiveness” is an unsatisfactory theme upon which to group literature of a period. Abrams admits this difficulty of categorization as his reason for omitting Byron’s work in Natural Supernaturalism, for he is troubled by Byron’s satiric voice. Paul Michael Privateer likewise oddly omits all reference to Byron in his recent study of identity and ideology in Romantic poetry in Romantic Voices (1991). Andrew M. Cooper, in Doubt and Identity in Romantic Poetry (1988), notes that the reader’s role in the poetry of this period is to “counter the escapist tendencies of Romantic imagination,” allowing in this opposition a sense of closure. Frederick Shilstone, in Byron and the Myth of Tradition (1988), acknowledges a “persistent juxtaposition of personal experience and the imposing voice of tradition” in Byron’s work. However, in the Turkish Tales, Shilstone sees Byron clearly progressing to a rejection of the autonomous self represented in his Byronic heroes, in affirmation of convention. Likewise, in The Romantic Fragment Poem, Marjorie Levinson determines that Byron is obsessed with detailing history, rather than in raising questions. She sees a progression in Byron’s work from The Giaour to Don Juan that, in the latter, “celebrates the end of heroes and hero worship, rid[ding] Byron once and for all of his torturing impulse to define.”
However, some critics are returning to this inconclusive or problematic outcome in opposition as an approach that allows for aspects of Romantic writing that have been difficult to categorize. Susan J. Wolfson's *The Questioning Presence* (1986) posits great weight in the balancing of oppositions presented in Romantic poetry. Wolfson recognizes in the "syntax and structure" of Wordsworth's and Keats' poetry that "the activity of questioning sets the mind against itself, the energy of that opposition driving new expansions of thought or nervous efforts at containment." Ultimately, she states, this fear of containment reflects that age of rebellion against authority.

L. J. Swingle's *The Obstinate Questionings of English Romanticism* (1987) best addresses the Romantic writers' concern with inconclusiveness in his problematic Romantic theory. He refers to the writing of his period "as fundamentally a questioning rather than ideological phenomenon." Using political party and group alliance metaphors, Swingle seeks Romantic fundamentals: "Writers of the Romantic period seem more interested in questions concerning the nature and behavior of different parties... the nature of choosing between divisionary systems of truth" (133). Swingle omits comment on the Gothic aspects of the period in favor of the politics of Romanticism, which supports a "multiplication of viable systems." Romantic inconclusiveness, though, can be found not only in the structure and syntax of the works but, more importantly, in the person with whom the reader is meant to identify or sympathize, the protagonist him/herself.
Epistolarity and the Subjective Narrative (Self-Stigmatization)

To identify a Romantic hero not as a quester but as a composite of competing identities emphasizes a lack of centeredness in a work. The texts considered here are epistolary novels, or possess epistolary qualities. Epistolarity touches at the heart of problematic Romantic theory. It subtly offers decentered readings while posing as the essence of familiarity. In *Epistolarity* (1982), Janet Altman identifies the source of this sense of stability, although without alerting to its falseness. She states that the germ of a letter is in the reader, because the letter calls upon the reader to respond and form an "epistolary pact." "At the very inception of the letter, [the reader] plays an instrumental generative role," writes Altman. This epistolary insight can establish a false dichotomy by seeming to shift the origins of narrative from the writer to the recipient, obscuring the inherent maneuverings of the writer.

Because the texts studied here tell the story of their title heroes and heroines, these works can be interpreted as autobiographies. Autobiography is a form of information control, allowing one, in part, to disseminate a highly stigmatic version of oneself or to correct a stigma that already exists. Under the guise of the epistolary format, especially considering Altman's view of the letter as a mutually responsive pact, this one-sidedness can be intentionally obscured. Potentially then, epistolarity becomes an innocent mode for transgressive narrative.

Although not epistolary, Byron's *The Giaour* employs the form's concepts. The Giaour's character is formed for the reader through various negative commentaries, establishing the Giaour as a classic Byronic hero: hypermasculine and a guilt-driven loner.
Yet, at the end of the tale, the Giaour tells his own story. He persuasively reframes his demonically active heroic identity to that of a sentimental hero, upholder of monogamy, eager for community, and desiring to evoke a compassionate tear from his internal listener, a friar. By challenging his readers with competing and mutually exclusive presentations of the Giaour, his observers' negative image and the Giaour's own positive image, Byron problematizes the nature of the Giaour's heroic identity.

These "autobiographical" novels and tales propagandize a certain image of the hero. *Evelina* and *Mathilda*, epistolary texts, reflect this same pattern of privileging the title character's own narrative of herself. The forty years' span between these two novels reflect a changing significance the epistolary form comes to represent. The reduction of competing narratives in the latter novel serves to emphasize the letter's propagandizing power and illustrates that one's autobiography is as suspiciously ambiguous about the character it presents as are multiple and competing narratives. The feminine hero these texts present seems deceptively conventional, and only recently have critics questioned their elusiveness. Much has still to be explored in evaluating autobiographies of fictional characters, whether this presentation of the self is advertised in the epistolary genre, poetic tales, confessional histories, or traditional autobiography.

The epistolary format is a powerful propagandizing tool. In an oral version of the epistolary mode, *The Giaour*’s title hero narrates his own story to reframe his listener's conception of his character. What the reader is left with are several views of the hero’s self, though the hero’s version is deceptively privileged. Too many critics have failed to
question the veracity of the hero's subjective self-presentation, and have consequently
identified in Byron's Turkish Tales a presiding "Byronic" hero.

Romantic characters who present a self-image in their personal narration should be
treated as suspect. Because of the Romantic concern with "negative capability," the
ability to find positive returns in negative circumstances, Romantic heroes and heroines
often portray themselves negatively. Repeatedly, heroes profess to their lovers that they
"are not what they seem." In The Bride of Abydos, for example, Byron's hero Selim
insists to his girlfriend that he is not the sweet boy she loves but that he is instead a
murdering pirate who is trying to overthrow her father's kingdom. Furthermore, he
expects greater esteem from her because of this. Romantic heroes suggest that below the
image they at first present, there is a "negative" identity, or possibly even multiple
alternatives to the image they currently present. And, like Frankenstein's monster, these
identities possess an assembled quality. Romantic epistolary(-type) texts are murky
worlds of motives and intentions that demand skepticism of a writer's motive for
constructing an identity in his or her letters.

The Giaour, Mathilda, and Evelina

Chapter 2 explores Byron's aesthetics of literary equivocation in The Giaour. This
tale is a consciously imbricated text, and Byron's letters show a purposeful complication
of the poet's authority concerning the origins of this Turkish Tale. The Giaour is textually
manipulated to confuse and deflect the very biography critics have always read into
Byron's work.
The traditional “Byronic hero,” a gloomy, guilt-ridden protagonist, is considered in Chapter 3. Byron’s contemporary readers and reviewers were quick to pick up on this aspect of his verse tales, finding in the Giaour, Selim, Conrad, and Lara characteristics of Childe Harold. Yet, Byron’s Turkish Tales also reveal a much different and more sentimental hero. Byron seems to play off the reader’s expectations of the “Byronic hero” with an ambiguous hero whose character reflects the Romantic aesthetic of indeterminacy. Through the accretive structure of The Giaour, Byron creates a hero of competing component characteristics, a focus he also gives to his heroines.

Chapters 4 and 5 address works that are traditionally considered eighteenth-century sentimental novels. Mathilda and Evelina, both epistolary works, present their heroines as worldly innocents who are beset by aggressive males. Yet, their subtext suggests that these girls themselves are the aggressors, as they maneuver the men in their lives. Problematic Romantic heroines, Mathilda and Evelina are presented as both angels and seductresses.
NOTES

1 Harold Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry (New York: Oxford UP, 1973) 10. Geoffrey H. Hartman, The Fate of Reading and Other Essays (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1977), counters Bloomian anxiety of influence theory because he believes it causes readers to lose the innocence of influence, so that all influence is demonic and resistance to it is heroic: “Bloom reveals a War in Heaven: the war of poet with poet or of artist with the ‘dark riddle of imaginative priority’” (47). Hartman alerts the reader to Blake’s confirmation in his ability to be greater than his precursor, despite Bloom’s belief that each succeeding generation of poets is less than his precursors. In Milton Blake determined to successfully rewrite Paradise Lost to make it unambiguous, as Milton intended but failed to do.


5 Northrop Frye, The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1976) 68. However, Anne Mellor, Romanticism and Gender (New York: Routledge, 1993), notes that “the object of romantic or erotic love is not the recognition and appreciation of the beloved woman as an independent... but rather the assimilation of the female into the male,” and that “the male lover usually effaces [the female] into a narcissistic projection of his own self,” and “when [Wordsworth] claimed that poetry is ‘the spontaneous outflow of powerful feelings’ the Romantics stole from women their creative authority and tender feelings” (26, 25, 23). David Rosen makes a similar argument in The Changing Fictions of Masculinity (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1993).


8 Gilbert 220.

would suggest that [women writers] did not succumb to the debilitating ‘anxiety of authorship’ assigned to them” by Mary Poovey and Gilbert and Gubar.


11 However, Nancy K. Miller, ed., preface, The Poetics of Gender (New York: Columbia UP, 1986), states that gender is written into discourse itself. She writes that any poetics of gender must recognize that it must itself be a continual reminder that there is nothing impartial. That is, in Bloomian terms, all women’s writing is a result of the process of thinking, which is influenced by women’s subordinated position in patriarchal society.

12 Dana A. Heller, The Feminization of Quest-Romance: Radical Departures (Austin: U of Texas P, 1990) 1. Heller argues that “quest-romance” can be feminized because male Romantic poets created “a kind of heroism not determined by physical strength but by intellectual and visionary endeavors” (5).


New Readings On Women in Old English Literature, (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990), for a summary of feminist theories by nationality, specifically, British, French, and American.

15 Leslie W. Rabine, Reading the Romantic Heroine, preface, reflects Spacks’ views: “[The Romantic love narrative is] one of the few accepted outlets through which women can express their anger and revolt against their situation in a patriarchal order [and] it idealizes and eroticizes women’s powerlessness and lack of freedom. . . . One of the purposes of this study is to read the contradiction in a series of romantic love narratives, where the two aspects battle against each other . . . but where neither wins out over the other.”


21 Fraiman xiv.


Thus, the Promethean quest for knowledge is impossible. Hume argues, instead, for the “Faustian drive” behind the quest, making Faust “a more plausible archetypal figure” for the Romantics (112).


THE GIAOUR: BYRONIC ORIGINS

God knows what contradictions [this journal] may contain. If I am sincere with myself (but I fear one lies more to one’s self than to any one else), every page should confute, refute, and utterly adjure its predecessor. (Byron’s Journal of December 6, 1813)

Byron was preoccupied with his audience and their reactions. He often incited a heavily biographical reading of a work, only to simultaneously distance his personal involvement. Jerome J. McGann has made a career out of arguing that Lord Byron’s works are more than “textually autonomous structures.” Indeed, despite Byron’s disclaimer to Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage that Harold has nothing remotely biographical about him but is merely used “to give connection to the piece,” Byron seems to purposely puzzle the degree to which he implicates himself in his writing. In The Giaour, his first Turkish Tale, Byron amplifies this aspect of his work. The origins of The Giaour have not always been a subject of speculation. Romantic reviewers of the first editions took an Aristotelian stance towards the truth of the tale’s final editorial note. They declared The Giaour, as the note implicated, a tale by a “coffee-house storyteller” overheard by Byron on one of his many trips to the Levant. Byron, however, quickly confuses this issue by
privately circulating another version of the tale’s origins. In doing so, he denies a
definitive text. This tale operates on different levels, depending on the reader’s contextual
“knowing,” which vary according to the depths of knowledge of Byron’s personal
involvement in the tale.

Byron’s verse tales are consciously subtle polemics. The Byronic pattern in the
Oriental tales is to create a polytext. This pattern is represented in the narrative skein and
in the hero typology and is in keeping with Romanticism’s emphasis on defamiliarization,
equivocation, and play. In an excellent recent essay on Byron’s aesthetics, Jerome J.
McGann notes Byron’s early concentration on game playing. Referring to Byron’s letter
of 22 June 1809 to Charles Skinner Matthews, McGann summarily states that the
Matthews’ letter is . . . interesting because it suggests that the use of this
kind of style [literary equivocation] is a game . . . for it entailed the
conscious deployment of duplicitous and hypocritical postures. All of
Byron’s early tales are written in this equivocal style.¹

McGann notes that Byron’s game playing began at Cambridge as a mode of letter writing
in code between a small circle of friends. Through these letters Byron cultivated his talent
for doubletalk.

The intentional duplicities in Byron’s early letters and poems are textual
manipulations. As McGann points out, the hypocritical stances of his texts were not
apparent to many readers. Indeed, his works’ very duplicity depended on a small
percentage of in-crowd readers, those intimate few alert and attentive to Byron’s personal
references. To such readers, Byron’s texts are transformed from a theoretically located
aesthetic object to a tool of communication, and sometimes manipulation. McGann unfailingly explores the "Byronic self-expressions," the biographical intimations and feints, in many of Byron's works. What concerns this chapter, though, is the unmined curiosity of Byron's final editorial note to The Giaour.

Etymological interest in The Giaour is a mixed bag. The Giaour's last editorial note apparently divulges the origins of the tale, a matter close to the heart of Byron scholars Frederick Garber, J. J. McGann, and Frederick Shilstone. Yet, the editorial notes to the poem have been of little interest to critics. Some, like David Seed, dismiss them as Byron's authenticating gestures: "Byron's use of editorial notes to The Giaour is directed overwhelmingly towards demonstrating his familiarity with Moslem and Levantine lore." In Self, Text, and Romantic Irony, Frederick Garber seconds this assessment and places great emphasis on the end of the final editorial note, in which Byron praises Beckford's Oriental knowledge in Vathek.

This last editor's note is crucial to many aspects of the poem. It suggests completion by connecting the poem's end to the beginning, specifically, the Advertisement's mention of the Turkish custom of drowning adulterous women. Also, Byron makes claims to the tale's origins in the oral tradition of the Levantine coffee-houses, and he admits his own infidelic corruption of that original that resulted in his version of disjointed fragments. Caroline Franklin (Byron's Heroines) and Anahid Melikian (Byron and the East), however, challenge Byron's admission in his notes to The Giaour. They mention one of Byron's personal experiences in Athens as the source for the text. In a letter to his publisher John Murray, Byron apparently revised his last editor's
note with a reference to "the actual circumstances on which the poem was based" (CPW, 3.423), but this note was never published. The "actual circumstances" were revealed in Lord Sligo's letter to Byron in August 1813. In this letter, Sligo relates that just prior to his own arrival in Athens in 1810, Byron had come upon a procession leading a girl to the sea to her Mohammedan death. Byron interfered and released the girl and eventually helped her to leave the island.

The oddity of this letter is that Byron requested Lord Sligo to detail the event as Sligo heard it. Consequently, Sligo's account is very similar to the rumor of Leila's murder in The Giaour itself: "Report continues to say . . ." and "I was told that you . . ." (CPW, 3.414), compared with the poem's inferences: "Strange rumours in our city say . . ." and "But others say . . ." (447, 467). The speculative nature of the truth of Byron's Athenian "circumstance" is further compounded in a letter dated December 15, 1813, to Professor Clarke at Cambridge. In this letter, Byron directly contradicts his poem's editorial note and defers to Lord Sligo's letter as the source of his first Oriental tale, though he specifies that it is "his [Sligo's] report of the reports" (this is discussed further below). As Byron assembles different accounts of the poem's origin, truth becomes a pointedly elusive quality.

Though perhaps intended for the fifth edition of The Giaour, Byron's revision of the last editorial note was never published. It is a curious note in which Byron speciously suggests that Lord Sligo's report of the Athens encounter has validity. The curious nature of the note, though, has passed unnoticed by critics, who accept it as biographical fact. This is unfortunate, for even in his notes Byron extends his equivocal style. Comparing
the published note and the revised but unpublished note offers an opportunity to assess Byron's style:

[the final note published in every version from the manuscript]:

The circumstance to which the above story relates was not very uncommon in Turkey. A few years ago the wife of Muchtar Pacha complained to his father of his son's supposed infidelity; he asked with whom, and she had the barbarity to give in a list of the twelve handsomest women in Yanina. They were seized, fastened up in sacks, and drowned in the lake the same night! One of the guards who was present informed me, that not one of the victims uttered a cry, or shewed a symptom of terror at so sudden a "wrench from all we know, from all we love". The fate of Phrosine, the fairest of this sacrifice, is the subject of many a Romaic and Arnaut ditty. The story in the text is one told of a young Venetian many years ago, and now nearly forgotten.—I heard it by accident recited by one of the coffee-house story-tellers who abound in the Levant, and sing or recite their narratives.—The additions and interpolations by the translator will be easily distinguished from the rest by the want of Eastern imagery; and I regret that my memory has retained so few fragments of the original.

[the revised, unpublished note; see Appendix B for Lord Sligo's letter relating the Athens incident. It was received by Byron in the summer of 1813, about the time of the third edition of The Giaour]:
The circumstance related in the following letter [from Lord Sligo] I have kept back for reasons which will be sufficiently obvious—and indeed till no very long time ago I was not aware that the occurrence to which it alludes was obvious to the writer [Lord Sligo]—and when once aware of it—it will not perhaps appear unnatural that I should feel desirous to be informed of "the tale as it was told to him" on the spot and in a country where oral tradition is the only record—and where in a . . . short time facts are either forgotten or distorted from the truth—

Here print the letter . . . As a picture of Turkish ethics and having in some degree a reference to the fiction of the foregoing poem—the perusal may not perhaps displease the reader—the writer of the letter was the only countryman of mine who arrived on the spot—for sometime after the event to [which] he alludes—he relates what he heard—it is not requisite for me to subjoin either assent or contradiction. (CPW 3.422-3)

At the very point of confirmation, Byron refuses to authorize the related incident; instead, he feints. He calls attention to the speculative nature of the Athens incident, as if taunting the reader's instinct for biographical inference: "the tale as it was told to him," "in a . . . short time facts are either forgotten or distorted from the truth" (Sligo relates events of three years earlier), and "he relates what he heard." Notably, Byron apparently intended to supplant the note in the first three editions, and several versions before that, with this new note. Romantic readers would have wondered why Byron was manipulating them with the first edition's falsity, when he could easily have told the truth. Another
level of Byron’s readers, his intimate friends, however, were busy speculating on how Byron wrote himself and his experiences into *The Giaour*. Apparently, alternate theories of the origins were circulating since the first edition.

Latching onto Byron’s acknowledged “truth” of the event, Caroline Franklin’s direct interest in the two accounts of the poem’s origin is in whether Byron was the girl’s lover, as well as rescuer. Aesthetically, there is much more to glean from a comparison of these accounts than biography. Byron reveals a strategy exemplified in *The Giaour*’s formal and typological aspects. Having early established the poem’s origins in Levantine lore, Byron then forced into his intimate circle, and almost into the public, this “competing” account of Lord Sligo’s. He insisted that Sligo record the gossip he heard. Byron actively sought a multiplicity of textual origins without supporting one. Much like Frankenstein’s monster, Byron assembles his poem’s origins. The competing accounts of *The Giaour*’s origins are consciously pieced together to construct an ensemble that fluidly revolves without offering a definitive version. This strategy is reflected in the fragment form, which, offering no authoritative text, encourages many.

According to his letter to John Murray, Byron apparently intended to assert the final editorial note as the only origin of the poem. He would have maintained this “truth” had he not found out in 1813 that Lord Sligo knew of a Giaourian incident involving Byron in Athens. Months prior to its first publishing, Byron printed copies of his manuscript version of the poem, and he circulated these initial copies of *The Giaour* among at least fifteen friends (BLJ, M[arch] 24th. 1813, 3.28 and note). Two months later, on May 23, 1813, Byron again requested of John Murray to “let me have 12 struck
off" (BLJ, 3.51). By passing these distilled versions with the editorial notes amongst his friends, Byron establishes from his first versions the “heard” origins of the tale. In his April 3, 1813 letter to Lord Holland, Byron suggests that he was ready to move on to another project, perhaps one he would create rather than merely relate. Notably, this letter to Lord Holland, written two months prior to the poem’s first edition, corroborates the final editorial note, that he heard the tale in a coffee-house rather than having been personally involved:

The story was too long in all it’s [sic] details to make anything of but the disjointed fragments you saw & I have neither the time nor the impetus to make a poem of it—the incidents are founded I believe on facts--& made an impression on my memory when I heard them--which at last in an idle evening broke forth into that rhapsody with all their Turkish & Arabesque accompaniments which crept in to the puzzlement I doubt not of the reader. (BLJ, 3.34-35, my emphasis)

At the end of the poem, Byron presents the first-time reader of The Giaour with an answer to the story’s origins. In fact, his answer is authoritatively weighted by his personal account of hearing the tale performed. Further, the editor’s notes were visually very much made a part of the narrative proper; the original versions used footnotes rather than endnotes, so Byron’s notes were positionally the final text that was read. One can assume, then, that until the fourth edition was sent into the world in late August, Byron’s many British readers (presumably excluding Lord Sligo) of this popular poem accepted on faith that Byron was merely selectively recording a heard Levantine tale.
The fourth edition of *The Giaour* is remarkable because it coincided with Byron's letters publicizing Lord Sligo's record of the Athens episode, which Byron received and disseminated in late August 1813. On August 31, 1813, Byron enclosed Sligo's letter in his own letter to Lady Melbourne. His intention, he says, was to use the letter to add another perspective to the many circulating theories of *The Giaour*'s origins: "I enclose you a letter from Sligo with his *Giaour*—which differs from our friend C[aroline (Lamb)]’s as much as from mine—for that reason I send it to you" ([BLJ, 3.102 and note]). Byron's stated reason for sending this new account was to add yet another account of the poem's origins, purposely imbricating this aspect of the poem. Significantly, Byron does not validate Sligo's account; rather, he disperses it into his intimate "circle" to further problematize *The Giaour*. He specifically distinguishes Sligo's *Giaour* from his *Giaour*, presumably referring here to his final editorial note. Byron unabashedly engages in textual manipulation. This disavowal recalls his unpublished submission of Sligo's letter to Murray (quoted above) as having some degree of reference to the poem's fiction. Sligo, Byron distantly states, "relates what he heard—it is not requisite for me to subjoin either assent or contradiction." As he later states in *Don Juan*, he consciously leaves the thing a problem.

In yet another intentional confusion of the origins of the tale, Byron sent Lord Sligo's letter to Thomas Moore as a validation of the rumors Caroline Lamb had been spreading about the Giaour's character being drawn from self. Byron writes to Moore that Sligo's "letter was written to me on account of a different story circulated by some gentlewomen of our acquaintance, a little to close too the text" ([BLJ, 3.105]). Here,
Byron implies that Sligo’s Giaour was necessary to contest and devaluate the surprisingly accurate “truth” of Caroline Lamb’s rumor-ridden Giaour.

Byron’s refusal to assent or contradict, to authenticate the pure rumor of the Athens episode or his involvement, bears witness to his conscious aesthetics of equivocation. He denies the reader’s success in his pursuit of interpretive completeness. Instead, Byron, as many claim of The Giaour’s form, coats the poem with yet one more layer of possibility, never resolving but only suggesting. Byron prevents the reader from settling into a single stance. He seizes this opportunity for a fresh perspective to increase the multiplicity of the poem and offering new readings of it.

Robert Kiely astutely recognized this aspect of the Romantic project. To the reader of Romantic literature, he offers a caveat against the “readerly” desire towards a completeness that denies the potentialities in play:

In looking at specific works, one is tempted to focus upon split character types or contradictory ideologies; that is, to bring order to the problem by tracing a single pattern of disjunction. ... [Yet,] in focusing too narrowly, one risks misreading the breadth and depth of the division and sacrificing rich, though imperfect, texts to abstractions.  

Kiely’s flexible approach to Romanticism has not received the appreciation it deserves. Years prior to L. J. Swingle’s fine work, Kiely was laying the planks for “problematic Romantic theory” (discussed in the next chapter). The “richness” of many Romantic works comes from their open-endedness. They ask to be read with a mind open to the
advantages of irresolution. There are positive aspects such as perpetually new interpretations to be gained from non-definitive texts.

Without validating his Athens' encounter, Byron sometimes deferred to Sligo's account as the basis of his tale. In none of his letters does Byron personally recount the incident; rather, he defers to Lord Sligo's (questionably accurate) version. Lord Sligo reports that he heard of the incident on September 12, 1810, days after it apparently occurred and after Byron's departure. It was three years later, though, in August 1813 and in response to the poet's request, that Sligo sent Byron his account (BLJ. 102n). This is significant because Byron requested a person who was not involved in the incident, a "rumorer," to relate the reports he heard. Byron complicates matters by sometimes insinuating that Sligo's account "is not very far from the truth" (BLJ. 3.200). But just what this truth differential is is crucial. It recalls the Giaour's dilemma at the end of the poem when he at last acknowledges that Leila might not have been murdered by Hassan, thus making himself the murderer of an innocent Hassan. The Giaour tellingly cries more to himself than to his "confessor":

'They told me--wild waves roll'd above
The face I view, the form I love;
They told me--'twas a hideous tale!' (1306-8)

The murderer admits his revenge was based on rumor, unfounded by self-confirmed fact.

Not only does Byron problematize The Giaour's origin, he also founds the Giaour's own narrative on supposition.
Byron’s elusiveness about the Athens affair is paralleled by Sligo’s own account. In Sligo’s letter, Lord Sligo’s own authority is Giaourian: “report continues to say” and “I was told [that] you then” (LI 2.257-8, cited in CPW 3.414). Further, in a letter dated December 15, 1813, to Cambridge Professor Clarke, Byron suggests Sligo’s letter as the source of his first Oriental tale, though he doubly distances its credibility by specifying that it is “his [Sligo’s] report of the reports” (BLJ 3.200). The corruption of the actual event is consummated in Thomas Moore’s account of his request directly of Lord Sligo for the foundation of the story of The Giaour:

Sligo says, they [Sligo and Byron] were both riding together near Athens, when they met people bringing a girl along to be drowned . . . Byron, by his interference, saved her. Lord Sligo did not seem very accurate in his memory of the transaction.  

This elaboration is pertinent because it shows that the poem’s Byronic origins parallel the narrative presentation (not perspectives) in The Giaour. In the poem, the origins of events are pointedly the object of external observation and rumor. As the next chapter explores, Byron problematizes the basis of the narrative’s rivalry between Hassan and the Giaour by leaving unresolved what actually happened to Leila. Byron employs Byronic gossip even in the events surrounding his own experiences, so that the reader is unsure about the truth of the event that occurred, or even if the event had any “truth” to it at all.  

Despite Byron’s announcement in his revised version to his final note that the adventure in Athens was a personal one, he refuses to present, unlike the Giaour, his own “accurate,” eyewitness version of what occurred. Rather, he relates “the tale as it was
told to him [Sligo] on the spot" and that it "is not requisite for me to subjoin either assent or contradiction." Readers are asked to determine truth on the basis of gossip, the accuracy of interpretation based on observing recounted actions. Byron forces the informed reader into a threshold between "assent or contradiction."

Romantic reviewers appear to have accepted the editor's note as Byron's truth. They believed that the "original" tale came to him in complete form. The *Eclectic Review* signals this attitude by suggesting that the last editions are more perfectly complete: "We do not think it necessary to apologize for having been somewhat backward in our notice of this poem, because some of the finest passages are to be found only in the last editions."

The *Edinburgh Review* 's widely-known Giaour article suggests this assumption by praising Byron's clever, distilling editing. Byron was seen as a gracious restaurateur, disposing of the superfluous accouterments so as to serve up only those aspects crucial to the plot:

This, we think, is very beautiful—or, at all events, full of spirit, character, and originality;—nor can we think that we have any reason to envy the Turkish auditors of the entire tale, while we have its fragments thus served up by a restaurateur of such taste as Lord Byron. Since the increasing levity of the present age, indeed, has rendered it impatient of the long stories that used to delight our ancestors, the taste for fragments, we suspect, has become very general.¹⁰

This is a telling example of the Romantic reception of fragments. It suggests that fragments were appreciated not for their reader-engaging aesthetics but for the poet's
conscientious editing. That is, Byron’s contemporaries read the fragmented text as a “complete” text, rather than taking into account any missing information in the gaps between fragments. These first readers of The Giaour saw narrative wholeness, and it was common practice among reviewers to provide outlines and plot summaries to simplify the understanding of the fragment poems. They presented the fragment poem as a stable object rather than as the fluid compound that it now appears to be. The British Critic confirms this nineteenth-century reception when it states that it easily tackled the fifth edition of The Giaour because the fragments were “so managed altogether, that the attentive reader may combine from them a regular story.”

With the deliberate private circulation of Lord Sligo’s letter, Byron textually manipulates The Giaour’s historical data by creating two levels of readers. Some were the “knowing,” in-crowd such as Lady Melbourne, Thomas Moore, Professor Clarke, and Sligo himself. These reader were aware of the contradictions implicit in the editor’s final note, that resulted from the biographical information of Athens incident. Other readers, the out-crowd of public readers, could only accept the note’s claim that Byron filches the tale from a coffeehouse bard. Jerome McGann comments that Byron commonly practiced textual manipulations that were “carried out as it were half publicly and half in secret.” McGann claims that these are peculiarly Byronic.

Because of its accretive structure and multiple editions, there are various “entrances” for the reader of The Giaour. Some readers would be coming to the text for the first-time, even at, say, the fifth edition. Many, though, were “experienced” readers,
informed of the poem's origins by the first edition's notes, especially the final editorial comment. Yet, other readers were privy to Lord Sligo's account that perhaps prefaced and colored their initial reading, challenging the truth of the "coffee-house" origins.

By his rapid accretions, Byron manipulated his work so as to exploit the complicity of his readers. Each edition necessitated new readers and those experienced ones who were "informed" by previous versions. The Romantic reviewers appeared little concerned with the rapid publishing of editions. The British Critic perfunctorily stated that Byron's popularity demanded new editions and even that new poems be published fast upon the heels of the last. Byron's prolific response to his success left no time to delay a review: "The Giaour is now succeeded by the Maid of Abydos, which will probably be circulated with equal rapidity. . . . We must speak, therefore, of this [The Giaour] immediately."13

Though he directly cultivates "knowing" readers, such as Lady Melbourne, Byron tempts the entire British public with enticing gossip concerning his own activities. In a sense, he cultivated an entire nation as a knowing audience. Jon P. Klancher, in The Making of English Reading Audiences: 1790-1832, reveals Byron's remarkable ability to strategically perform to the public's demand on authors:

This vast, unsolicited audience asked of the writer that he perform, construct myths of "the author," become a public event in his own right; toward it, Byron adopted a stance of personal revelation and offered intimacies to a faceless public he professed to disdain. This historically new relation of the writer to his audience coincided with the effort to make publics. (172)
The English Romantics' task was, then, as Wordsworth called it, 'creating the taste' by which the public comprehended the writer. The public's reception of Manfred illustrates this author-audience relationship well. The accusations of incest between Byron and his sister became public knowledge, for which Byron was exiled from England. The biographical parallels between Manfred's relationship with Astarte and Byron and his half-sister were therefore foremost in reviewers' minds, though the text makes no mention of it. A review in the Monitor reflects the interpretive connections readers forced on Byron's texts: "we are almost afraid to express our belief that [Astarte] was Manfred's sister."14

The association of the verse tales' Byronic heroes with Byron himself has been a source of interest from the publication of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. Byron plays off public knowledge of his own trip to Europe in assigning Childe Harold's expedition to the Continent. Byron encourages this association of himself with his heroes. But, even divorced from the biographical details, Byron draws a Byronic hero so peculiar that critics instantly distinguished him. It is this character, begun in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, that Byron uses to manipulate his readers. Byron seduces his readers into complicity, inviting them to complete the inferences and association of himself with his heroes and of the heroes with previous Byronic heroes. Thus, the public creates a solid character type from something apparently only intended to be suggestive and used as a platform for engaging the imagination, as the next two chapters explore.

Jerome McGann notes of Don Juan that Byron is interested not with hiding truths but with exposing them. He writes:
Toward the end of the last, unfinished Canto of Don Juan Byron was to say: ‘I leave the thing a problem, like all things.’ It would serve as a fitting epigraph for all his poetry, which cultivates an engagement—his own or ours—with various riddles, puns, secret messages, and coded talk. The ‘interpretation’ of such work does not lie, however in exposing some ‘truths’ which are presumed to be locked or hidden away. Byron does not want hidden truths in his work, he wants a plain text, a dance of apparitions.\(^\text{15}\)

McGann is referring to Byron’s strategy of operating in a theater of textual surfaces. Byron consciously circulated many competing versions of The Giaour’s origins so that many texts were available to his readers (especially true considering Byron intended Lord Sligo’s letter for mass publication). Byron willingly exposes any and all of the possible “truths” of his text and heroes, even their intra- and inter-textuality. Some of these truths concern his heroes’ relation to himself, but, as these truths are only suggested in such a way as to engage the reader, they are only apparitions and lack opacity. Byron provides no resolution to the assemblage of possible interpretations he offers. Instead, he creates an arena of competing potentialities. Specifically, Byron’s Romantic hero(ine) is a compound of two competing characteristics, the adventurer and the sentimental lover.

The following chapter will explore Byron’s equivocation in The Giaour.
NOTES

1 Jerome J. McGann, "Byron and "Truth in Masquerade,"


5 Also see Marchand’s note, BLJ 3.102n: “Byron used it [Sligo’s letter] to counter some stories that Lady Caroline Lamb and others were spreading concerning his activities in the East.”


11 Reiman part B, v 1, 239. Also see Levinson on the "hoax poem," The Romantic Fragment Poem (36-7).

12 McGann, "Byron and 'Truth in Masquerade'" 1.

13 Reiman part B, v 1, 238.


15 McGann, "Byron and 'Truth in Masquerade'" 18.
CHAPTER 3

THE GIAOUR: “FUGITIVE POETRY”

Byron is often cited as an archetypal male predator: exploiter of his sister, wife, and countless other, often lower-class, women. His masterpiece, Don Juan, may be seen as a self-justificatory celebration of aristocratic libertinism.

(Caroline Franklin, Byron’s Heroines)

Taken from the heading of a Romantic review of The Giaour, “fugitive poetry” well represents the aesthetics in Lord Byron’s Turkish Tales. Byron’s verse tales are studies in the aesthetics of evasion and irresolution. His characters and forms remain “uncaught,” defying interpretive captivity. However, the majority of Byron’s contemporary reviewers found completion and resolution, rather than literary evasion in these tales. Romantic reviewers considered the Giaour, the hero of Byron’s first verse tale, The Giaour, a continuation of the guilt-ridden, fate-possessed hero Childe Harold. The Giaour was first published a year after Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage had made Byron an overnight success. This success popularized a sullen misanthrope as Byron’s hero (later referred to as the “Byronic hero”), and English readers were quick to note the similarities between the Childe and the Giaour. Byron, however, seems to lure the reader into this identification, while, in fact, providing a much more equivocal hero-typology. In The
Giaour. Byron formally reinforces this character aspect through an accretive structure that denies a textual authority.

This chapter will adopt what L. J. Swingle identifies as a “Byronic maneuver,” and in part apply this theory to illustrate Byron’s apparent focus in emphasizing hero typology. Swingle confines the Byronic maneuver to the context of a Romantic poetic strategy:

- a dynamic process that involves attraction and withdrawal, movement in some given direction balanced by movement or at least feints in alternative or even directly contradictory directions, questions that do not quite resolve themselves into sufficient answers, apparent answers that serve merely to raise more basic questions.¹

Swingle focuses on the states of mind the Romantic poet establishes that will allow him (and each reader) to be a unique creator. Accordingly, the Romantic poet attempts to create an open space of creative opportunity. This space can be seen as a threshold between poles that represent a resolution of the poem’s directions or questions.

Conventionally, the Romantic threshold state is highly energized by its “in-betweenness.”² This hovering between poles of completeness manifests itself in polytextual readings that defy an authoritative text.

Romanticism’s emphasis on liminal states of being reflects this concern with freeing oneself from authoritative encumbrances and so filling the threshold space with one’s own creativity. Byron poses such a threshold image in Canto IV of Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage when Harold stands on the Bridge of Sighs, fixed between distinct possibilities, the mutually alluring and repelling options of a palace or a prison. This basic proposition
of problematic Romantic theory, the dynamic process of attraction and withdrawal, is crucial to Byron's exploration of the hero. In his Turkish tales he establishes a Romantic hero type through both his male and female characters. The phrase "Byron's Romantic heroes" acknowledges the protagonists of the tales, male and female. Romantic heroes are heroic (worthy of protagonist status and the reader's central concern) in their ability to maintain a liminal state of possible identities, refusing to be "caught," or defined by any one polar identity.

The Romantic hero that Byron establishes in his first Turkish tale, *The Giaour*, is maintained through his Turkish verse tales. Byron seems to play off his readers' expectations of the "Byronic hero," the guilt-ridden loner popularized by Peter Thorslev. In the opening of his tales, Byron "sets up" the reader. The poet's Byronic maneuver at first "attracts" a traditional, Byronic, reading of the hero, only to later counter it, and perhaps reassert it again. Notably, the heroic image Byron establishes is very tenuous, based on "seeming" appearances and gossip. Also, a close reading of the tales reveals that Byron's focus of heroic daring is often located in the female characters, many of whom have suffered under the critical label of "passive victims." Through *The Giaour*'s fragment and accretive forms and his heroes' elusive identities, Byron creates "fugitive poetry," an aesthetic system that attempts to escape interpretive captivity. He purposely lures readers into being caught and defined by their own expectations and preconceptions of the text, only to disturb that "complete" reading.
Leila and the Pointless Journey

Studies of The Giaour, including Caroline Franklin’s Byron’s Heroines, minimize the function of the heroine Leila in the narrative. When discussed, she is placed in the category of “heroine as passive victim” (Franklin’s chapter title). Peter Thorslev refuses to credit the heroines with any role in the tales, finding that “Byron concentrates each of his romances on one dark hero, and the rest of the characters scarcely matter” (148). Yet, Byron allows Leila to be a persistent force throughout the text, not least when the Giaour swears that she has returned from her watery grave to visit him. Indeed, the Advertisement even marginalizes the infamous rivalry between the Venetian Giaour and Hassan by announcing that the narrative, “when entire, contained the adventures of a female slave.”

The many gaps between fragments contained these adventures and made Leila the story’s protagonist. In alerting the reader to the importance of his heroine to the story, Byron uses the poem’s fragment form to allow the reader to fill in Leila’s role as protagonist. In this way, Byron creates an ever-dynamic text full of creative opportunities. Critics have persistently denounced Byron for eliminating Leila’s voice from the narrative, but, as the Advertisement asserts, this tale is Leila’s “adventure.” The fragments Byron provides topically concern the rivalry between Hassan and the Giaour.

However, prior to beginning the narrative proper, Byron engages the reader’s imagination, in Romantic fashion, to create Leila’s story. R. F. Gleckner, in Byron and the Ruins of Paradise, connects “unstained Leila” with the epic-style presentation of the now enslaved “pristine Greece” in the tale’s opening (106). Such a view assumes that the
Giaour is on a quest: he is the emancipator of Leila. Though the “Advertisement” and a
surface reading of the tale might suggest this quest structure, Byron sharply challenges the
Giaour’s actual involvement with Leila (he is, after all, riding alone when first spotted by
the fisherman, lines 470-2). Also, in de-emphasizing the rivalry between the men, two
common readings that do not account for many oddities in the poem are avoided. Jerome
McGann’s “Eros-motif” reads the rivalry as motivated by revenge for Hassan’s murder of
the Giaour’s love. Paul Cantor offers another view that the rivalry is not based on “eros”
but on the Giaour’s “mimetic desire,” to imitate Hassan. Yet, there is no suggestion in the
poem of such a desire.  

Though Leila is never allowed a voice of her own, she is vividly defined by the
Oriental tale’s two primary speakers, the fisherman-turned-soldier and the Giaour.
Whereas Caroline Franklin assumes the traditional feminist view of male-authored
Romantic texts in seeing Leila as “a displaced form of male narcissism” (45), this oriental
heroine clearly possesses power over men. Franklin does assert Byron’s plea for female
sexual autonomy, but condemns him for emphasizing Leila’s chastity as the mark of her
attraction. Franklin mistakenly chastises Jerome McGann for interpreting Leila, and every
female in Byron’s works, as an emanation: in Fiery Dust McGann states that “in every
case they [females in Byron’s poems] correspond exactly to the state of the hero’s soul
which they inhabit” (189, Franklin, 45). Franklin’s chastisement is harsh considering
McGann’s overall reading of The Giaour as an allegory on the existential condition of
man, who, because fallen, cannot live in this world with his love.
The point I wish to emphasize is that critics have fallen into Byron's trap of reading his heroine only in terms of her relationship to the poem's visible and vocal hero. This is a detour that Byron encourages as he cultivates an engagement in equivocation (Byronic game playing). Byron opens the tale with such a strong "Byronic" heroic presence with the Giaour speeding along the coast that one is made to forget that the story is really "the adventures of a female slave." In fact, the first edition's Advertisement only contained the first sentence of the entire Advertisement now in the canonical work. Yet, it too focuses on the conscious infidelity of the heroine, stating that the tale "is founded upon circumstances now less common in the East than formerly... because the ladies are more circumspect than in the 'olden time.'" This female circumspection is the female's ability to commit adultery without being caught. Again, though Byron offers detours, he also clearly prefaces his tale with instructions to the reader: anticipate a story focalized around the sexual adventures of a heroine.

Leila plays an active role in the tale. Not only is she Hassan's favorite wife and chief among the harem women, Leila attracts the Venetian youth, the Giaour, so that he risks his life in a liaison. In fact, the Giaour willingly makes himself an exile from Hassan's lands through his adultery. Hassan knows his enemy's physical description and would surely arrest him if discovered. The Giaour and Leila effectively escape Hassan. Reinforcing the tale's distaste of the pointless journey, the adventuress successfully disappears from the harem bath in which the pursuing Hassan "vainly search'd" for her. Further, in addition to masculinizing herself as a Georgian page to flee from her master, Leila cloaks herself with "seeming," the major heroic characteristic in Byron's Turkish
Tales. "So fair she seem'd" that she convinces Hassan to overcome his suspicions of her infidelity to think of her as an innocent.6

Despite the narrative's apparent completeness, the fragments raise the question of the fugitive Leila's capture. Critics have not raised this question. They seem to accept the opening of the narrative which suggests that Leila is drowned, when the fisherman describes the sinking of the Emir's "burthen" (374-87). The Advertisement's announcement of the Turkish custom of drowning adulterous women biases Leila as a wrongdoer, an adventuring adulteress. Yet, the only narrative segment describing Leila's adventure tells us that Leila clearly escaped Hassan. Hassan was led on a pointless journey in hunting for Leila: "The unwonted chase each hour employs / Yet shares he not the hunter's joys" (441-2). Having successfully fled her master, apparently to meet her lover, the same fragment purposely unsettles the reader. It suggests that the Giaour was later seen speeding alone along the shore. There is a suggestion that perhaps Leila never went to the Giaour.

Throughout the tale, Byron emphasizes the futility of the pointless journey. In the most quoted passage of The Giaour, on the Kashmeer butterfly, Byron mocks the one who pursues a fugitive object that cannot be caught:

The insect-queen of eastern spring,

O'er emerald meadows of Kashmeer

Invites the young pursuer near,

And leads him on from flower to flower
A weary chase and wasted hour. . . . (389-93)

This passage obviously prefigures in language and sentiment Hassan's weary and wasted chase of Leila. But, Byron also warns those who attempt at all costs to "capture" the objects that should be left free, open-ended. Speaking of "Beauty," the poet suggests the fatal human lure to possess Beauty:

So Beauty lures the full-grown child
With hue as bright, and wing as wild;
A chase of idle hopes and fears,
Began in folly, closed in tears. (396-9)

Byron added this passage to his work in the first edition. In this passage, he seems to offer advice to his readers who seek to pursue an authoritative text in The Giaour. Like Beauty, Byron's text lures the reader into a desire to resolve its many open-ended aspects. The Advertisement and the emphasized male rivalry suggest "complete" readings for the pursuing critics and readers. Yet, from this opening allusion, Byron warns of the frustration awaiting those who try to resolve his tale. Those readers who seek to "catch" his fugitive poetry will find they are being led on a pointless journey, a "weary chase and wasted hour." The most fruitful way to approach Byron's equivocal tale is with a mindset appreciating its polytextual possibilities.

**Critical Backgrounds of The Giaour**

Giaour critics and scholars typically force a comprehension of the narrative without allowing for Byron's aesthetics of usable irresolution in analyzing Leila and her
fate. Scholarship on the poem has concentrated on its formal production: how the fragments feature multiple narrative points of view. Such an emphasis on piecing together the story from the many observations avoids the aesthetic aspect of the fragment: its insistence is on the unknown, the irretrievable narrative information in the gaps. Byron insists that the reader step hesitantly in proceeding through his tales, drawing no quick conclusions or generalizations.

Simply put, many critics have confused Byron's use of the fragment for his suggestion of multiple narrative perspectives. For example, Robert F. Gleckner, in Byron and the Ruins of Paradise, sees Byron's main interest lying in the "conflicting points of view" (97) the tale presents. Caroline Franklin connects the fragmentation and multiple narration in elucidating the horror excited by the manuscript's "most dramatically ruptured" point, when the Emir's speech is interrupted during the apparent drowning of Leila. Characteristic of his scholarship on Byron, Jerome J. McGann sees the author treating literature as a vehicle for self-expression. McGann proposes that the poem's one narrator is a ballad singer who performs with many masks, but all are expressions of Byron himself. The fragment form, McGann states, "provided him [Byron] with a means of keeping his inclination to self-dramatization in check." McGann discusses the fragmentary aspects of the poem according to the narrator.

Karl Kroeber professes to being "befuddled" by the temporal shifts, which occur with "unnerving abruptness." His error lies in determining that "the system of expectations and fulfillments derives from the incident [i.e., action] rather than from the protagonist." Byron consciously complicates the narrative by accretions, fragmentation,
and narrative perspectives. He supports the formal aspects by emphasizing another focus. Byron directs his reader’s attention to his heroes, and through them implicates his aesthetic system.

Many critics offer a wholistic reading of the tale by filling in the gaps between fragments. Marjorie Levinson, in her thorough explication of the “Romantic Fragment Poem,” insists that The Giaour forces its readers fill in the gaps to make a “complete” poem. Despite Byron’s concerns about his “foolish fragments” and “the general horror of fragments,” the popularity of the fragment during the early part of the nineteenth century is accounted for by the way fragments actively engage the reader. The Romantic public accepted fragments perhaps because readers were not bothered by the gaps but focused on what could be determined:

The visible or advertised irresolution of these [Romantic fragment] poems apparently signified to the Romantic reader not the absence, distortion, or transcendence of form but its presence and determinate identity.¹⁰

This attitude of consciously working with the narrative, not “seeing” the gaps in the narrative is the Romantic readers’ legacy from the eighteenth century. It was against such an emphasis on textual presence that limited the role of the imagination that Romantic writers rebelled through their own literary aesthetics. However, Byron’s contemporary reviewers assumed that each edition of the poem was Byron’s elaboration and completion of those fragments of the original Turkish tale. They believed that he continued to remember and then record the original “coffee-house” tale as related in the last editor’s
note. In his first edition, readers believed that Byron outlined his narrative and in subsequent editions completed his project.

Sir Walter Scott provides a similar interpretation in his observation of The Giaour's use of fragmentation. He tells Byron in a letter that:

> every real lover of the art is obliged to you for condensing the narrative, by giving us only those striking scenes which you have shown to be so susceptible of the poetic ornament, and leaving to imagination the says I's an says he's, and all the minutiae of detail which might be proper in giving evidence before a court of justice.\(^1\)

Scott appreciates being provided with “only those striking scenes,” the story's essentials. Typically, Romantic readers naively searched for what the text stated, without observing the inferences in the gaps. Romantic reviewers of The Giaour frequently claimed that Byron's use of the fragment reflected the age's aesthetic interest in textual essentials. This Romantic view sees what the fragment exposes rather than hides in its gaps. In searching so fervently for the complete and distilled narrative, they miss the obvious incongruities and irresolution intrinsic in the fragmentary.

Levinson reads The Giaour as a political statement. It is Byron's historical reflection on Greece and his moral comment on England's military decline after the Napoleonic wars. She aligns herself with William Marshall's assessment that The Giaour cannot be pieced together because of a formal failure. From this point, she forces a reading of the poem using the method of Herodotus in The History of the Persian Wars to show Byron's failed attempt to understand his own heroic culture. Byron, she states,
simply suffers a formal failure in choosing the fragment, whose "characteristic structural jumpiness and heterogeneity" does not allow him to mediate effectively through his "bard" all the reports on the narrative action. But Levinson's comparison revolves around the distilled and multiple narrative perspectives rather than the poem's fragmentation. This (mis)direction is typical in Giaour scholarship.

William Marshall popularized the error so common among modern Giaour critics of equating accretion and fragmentation. Despite the diagram of the accretions per edition that Marshall provides, he mistakes the distinction between fragments and additions. The majority of the accretions have no relevance to the poem's formal fragmentation. Rather, they specifically complicate the character of the hero.

David Seed explores the narrative perspectives that emphasize Byron's concentration not on origins but on consequences: origins in The Giaour are "calculatedly vague so as to build up the awe-inspiring drama of consequences." But consequences stress result of actions, thus requiring the reader to complete Byron's incomplete narrative. Instead, the calculated vagueness of the narrative seems intended to channel the reader's focus onto the character of the hero and heroine.

David Seed also stresses the fragment form's demands on the reader to provide the information missing in the gaps, building a bridge between what is concealed and revealed. Seed notes that Byron chooses this form because he was "instinctively exploiting the capacity of texts to stimulate inference." It is natural for a reader to want to draw inferences. But, as an aesthetic form representative of Romantic ideology, Romantic fragment poems should not necessarily be seen as demanding a conclusion (that the reader
brings, as Seed states, or, as Levinson proposes, is a failed aspect of Byron’s “torturing impulse to define” [128]). Rather, fragments celebrate the very indeterminacy they represent. The Turkish tales represent Byron’s game playing, as presented through his heroes and heroines. Many Romantic projects ask the reader to formally suspend himself in Keatsian “negative capability.” In doing so, the demand on the reader is not to draw conclusions and inferences that connect gaps, but to exist in the aesthetic threshold of irresolution, a kind of acting out of the Romantic ideology of indeterminacy.

The readerly instinct for wholeness which Byron’s plays against is the Cain-like desire for knowledge. Byron directs the reader’s attention to this mistaken desire in the Giaour’s speech to his confessor at the poem’s end. Like Byron’s contemporaries, the monk formulates an organic impression from mere speculation. The Giaour warns him of the dangers of this “complete” interpretation: “‘Nay, start not—no—nor bend they knee, / Nor midst my sins such act record, / Thou wilt absolve me from the deed’” (1036-8). He tells the shocked monk that the conclusion he has reached is faulty. Byron’s suggestion is that no inference is ever completed.

The Giaour directly addresses the monk’s instinct to complete inferences, whether it is of the gaps between fragments or intimations of a hero’s character. Brian Nellist explores this idea in a reading of Lara. The reader of Lara is only privy to the externals of the hero, as happens in the first half of The Giaour. Byron forces the reader to accept Lara only in terms of what he extrinsically knows about his heroics. Speaking of the initial description of the hero, Nellist acutely defines Byron’s ambiguous presentation (and attitude) of his so-called “Byronic hero”: 
The lines ["He stood a stranger in this breathing world, / An erring spirit from another hurled . . .," 1.315-20] are . . . the best description of what it is like to read the poem; we are forced to live dangerously in it, courting our own dark imaginings and haunted by them even when the poem does not completely definitively confirm them. Our danger is to pursue a kind of interpretive completeness which in effect condemns Lara as guilty. The poem produces in us a Cain-like desire for knowledge, in the same way as Otto’s desire to take suspicion as certainty leads him to destroy Lara.14

This assessment approaches the very heart of this chapter. Byron indeed anticipates and encourages the reader’s desire for a wholistic knowledge of his heroes. But this desire is Cain-like because it is futile, leading to a Kroeberian “confusion.” Byron’s method is too full of contradiction and conscious ambiguity to encourage an authoritative text. Rather, his work is infidelic and Giaourian, located between textual confusion and completion. The Giaour’s Advertisement teasingly offers totalization in the “entire” tale of a female slave’s adventures, while the poem gives us only incompleteness. The Advertisement and the tale are irreconcilable because the tale will always be in “these disjointed fragments,” incomplete. Byron prepares his readers in advance for the incompleteness of his narrative. This incompleteness is the founding principle upon which the tale is related. This is Byron’s hermeneutic, generously offered at stage one in approaching The Giaour: expect incompleteness, impossibility of wholeness, irresolution and indeterminacy, and find a positive return in the poem from this. Byron’s tales share the Romantics’ interest in revaluation of accepted literary conventions.
The Giaour's fragmentariness and accretiveness suggest Byron's hermeneutic. These formal elements are a mark of Cain that warns against interpretive completeness. Approaching The Giaour with cognitive flexibility reveals the tale to be a compound of misinformation, a maze of incompleteness and suggestion. Such an agile reading of the first Turkish Tale accentuates its formal and generic aspects, its subtle anchoring of Leila as the center of the narrative action, its shifting attitude towards religion, and Byron's manipulating employment of his biographic experience in the editorial notes. The Giaour is a true exemplar of the Romantic aesthetic of literary equivocation.

Leila: Fugitive Heroine (Through the Eyes of the Fisherman)

If we look again, then, at the promise of the Advertisement to present Leila as a primary focus of the narrative, we see her not as a "passive victim" but as a Romantic hero-type, representative of the aesthetic of irresolution. Despite Franklin's quick classification of her as passive victim and not "active heroine," Leila is not easily defined. Instead, she is an alternating composite of both of these hero(in)ic (i.e., protagonistic) characteristics. Just as the fragment poem suspends a complete understanding of the narrative, so Byron's Romantic heroine defies classification and resolution. Scott Simpkins cleverly addresses this pairing: "Like many Byronic heroes... the [infidelic] fragment stands as a loner among all others."\textsuperscript{15} Essentially, the Romantic fragment and the Romantic hero define their own spaces, exist in their own thresholds of indeterminacy, escaping resolution. It is this fugitive characteristic that defines Leila as a Romantic heroine. Byron employs this same pattern in the Giaour, Selim, Conrad, and Gulnare.
There are few facts concerning Leila. The only fact of which the reader is assured is that she escaped the harem. The information of Leila's adultery and murder upon which readers of the poem from 1813 to present have stitched together a complete tale (i.e., Leila fled, met the Giaour, was caught, was drowned) is based on rumor and speculation. This is a fundamental but overlooked aspect of Byron's narrative style.

Tied to the speculative basis of narrative events is the pervasiveness of the "seeming" nature of Byron's heroes and heroines. In The Bride of Abydos, the hero Selim repeatedly states: "I said I was not what I seem'd" (2.151). Gulnare tells Conrad in The Corsair: "I am not what I seem" (3.472); while in Lara, the female gender revelation of Lara's page Kaled raises questions as to why Lara "seem'd but little kind" to Kaled (2.529). Concerning his first heroine in the Turkish Tales, Leila, Byron establishes his formal interest in "seeming" through the poem's fragment form, its accretiveness, and, as discussed below, in his use of Byronic gossip. A brief outline of the fragments detailing Leila's actions brings some of these issues to the surface. The narrative opens with the fisherman observing a seemingly guilt-driven Giaour speeding away from Hassan's palace. Then the fisherman encounters an Emir who is carrying a sack. Though Leila has not yet been mentioned, the inference is that Leila is in the sack, recalling the Advertisement's announcement of the Muslim custom of drowning women for infidelity. From these inferences, the reader is led to pass judgment on Leila and assume her guilty of infidelity.

The poem's tone then shifts, presenting two fragments that lyrically generalize on the nature of abused Beauty (Kashmeer butterfly) and of a guilty mind (scorpion). The succeeding fragment begins with "Black Hassan from the Haram flies" (439), in fruitless
pursuit of his wife, Leila. This fragment ends with the unsettling questioning of why the Giaour is fleeing alone. In essence, the fragments urge the reader to fill in the formal gaps to compose the narrative outlined in the Advertisement. The presented narrative guides the reader’s mind to presume that the Giaour and Leila have met and that Hassan has murdered Leila for this infidelity. Critics insisting on a wholistic reading of The Giaour use the Giaour’s monologue at the poem’s end to confirm and validate what is only suggested in the opening. In doing so, they silhouette the traditional Byronic hero and emphasize the centrality of revenge in the Eros-motif.16

It is apparent that Byron employs the fragment form for more than an Aristotelian format to encourage readers to bridge the spaces. Applying L. J. Swingle’s “problematic Romantic theory” to The Giaour liberates the poem’s deliberate fragmentation, so that it is seen as conscious inachievement, not as needing gap-filling. That is, Byron applies the fragment to encourage his poem’s “problem” rather than as a means of solution and completion.

In this light, the poem’s presentation of its heroine, Leila, is an opportunity for Byron to posit questions concerning his attitude towards his heroes and heroines, developing his aesthetics. This becomes evident by exploring one fragment as a synecdoche for this concern. The poem’s key fragment on Leila’s actions consciously poses more questions than answers. On the night of the Bairam feast, Leila seems to have eluded both Hassan and the Giaour, for the one is trying to find her and the other is fleeing without her. Notably, the poems suggests that on the same night Leila escapes, the Giaour is fleeing alone, as the fisherman’s eye-witness account reveals. Byron seems to
encourage, even demand, the reader to ask many questions: who or what was in the
Emir’s mysterious burden that was thrown overboard? How can it be Leila if Hassan
cannot find her? Further, when does this drowning scene occur? The suggestion is that it
occurs sequentially, following the fisherman’s sighting of the Venetian, yet, Byron admits
in his preface that he presents “disjointed fragments.” The only temporal certainties the
poem offers are that on this one evening of the Bairam feast Leila disappeared, Hassan
searched but did not find her, and the Giaour fled alone. The Giaour as hero that the
tale’s title and opening lines anticipate (“When shall such hero live again?”) appears to
have been duped.

The key passage concerning Leila as active heroine occurs in the fragment
asserting that “Her spirit pointed well the steel / Which taught that felon heart to feel”
(677-8). Byron essentially undercuts the Giaour’s heroism, supplanting Leila as the
poem’s active protagonist. Through this announcement, Byron challenges the traditional
image of the Byronic hero as a revenger, which he has constructed in the poem’s opening.
In doing so, Byron offers an ambiguous presentation of the Giaour as passive and active
hero. Similarly, Leila’s physical absence in the poem, that has led critics to proclaim her
passivity, is now a portrayal of a battling female who defeats Hassan.

Frederick Garber emphasizes this Byronic pattern of playing opposites against
themselves as “a dialectic of making and unmaking.” This continuum, says Garber,
begins in the first cantos of Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, “and it leaves Harold in a
hovering state, his condition forever unresolved” (30). Garber’s interest is in exploring
Byronic recoil, a type of illness narrative, specifically in which “the self . . . fashion[s] its
own trap.”19 That is, a character actively attempts to create his Self, while that creating is counteracted by a text that establishes an Other who actively seeks to devour the Self.

Garber finds self-corrosive recoil in Harold’s “To Inez” song (discussed below), in which Harold’s words create a self-devouring Other within himself: “What Exile from himself can flee?” (CHP, 1.84). However, this hovering dialectic in Harold himself is replaced in the Turkish Tales. Garber notes, with a narrative that seeks “to control the hovering caused by the dialectic” (31). This is achieved by extra-Self characters who act as “duplex,” or doubles. I emphasize this shift in Garber’s perspective away from the hero’s own character because Byron’s focus seems to be not on the Self and Other division. Instead, Byron maintains the dialectic of the hero’s and heroine’s heroic image within that principle figure. Byron incorporates the dialectic within his hero, without separating an aspect of the hero’s character into another character. In doing so, he creates a character who is difficult to consistently categorize. For example, in The Giaour, Garber sees Hassan as the Other who seeks to destroy the Giaour’s Self. My emphasis is less abstract. Byron contains within the Giaour the two aspects of his hero, passive sentimental lover and active, “Byronic” adventurer, and plays them off each other. This dualism in the Giaour is further discussed below.

The poem’s opening emphasis on the heroine is a result of the fisherman’s narration.20 Here I wish to sidestep The Giaour scholars’ recent concentration on the poem’s multiple narration. Instead of the four narrators scholars typically note, Byron seems to intend the fisherman as the story’s primary narrator, a point explained below. In short, the fisherman apparently becomes a vassal of Hassan and conspires with the
Arnauts. Hence, he, not the Giaour as critics assume, should be read as the self-confessed "traitor" of line 686. Through the fisherman’s perspective of Leila, and his gradual allegiance with her and subsequent rejection of Islam, Byron shows the fisherman/speaker’s increasing fixation on Leila, making her central to every action in the Turkish tale, as the Advertisement promised.

The “traitor’s” confession (675-88) of complicity in the ambush of Hassan centralizes Leila as the active force in the battle:

‘Yes, Leila sleeps beneath the wave,
But his shall be a redder grave;
Her spirit pointed well the steel
Which taught that felon heart to feel.
He call’d the Prophet, but his power
Was vain against the vengeful Giaour:
He call’d on Alla--but the word
Arose unheeded or unheard.
Thou Paynim fool!--could Leila’s prayer
Be pass’d, and thine accorded there?
I watch’d my time, I leagu’d with these,
The traitor in his turn to seize;
My wrath is wreak’d, the deed is done,
And now I go--but go alone.’
The fisherman/traitor is clearly motivated to league against Hassan because of his own perception of Islam's insult towards Leila's sex. Not only do the two main players fight because of the heroine, a third male, the traitor, is galvanized to treason by his feelings for Leila. Paul Cantor has noted the extraordinary proportion of violence to romance in Byron's tales. He sees in Byron's work love triangles based not on Freudian eros but on triangular mimetic desire. Such a paradigm provides an insightful reading of the rivalry between the Giaour (a derogatory Muslim term applied to non-Muslims) and Hassan (a Muslim Pascha). In a Cantorian reading, the Giaour desires to imitate or mime Hassan and so he challenges Hassan for possession of Leila. This conflict, then, is based on rivalry rather than being a product of the Giaour's love for Leila. However, the text suggests something different, especially considering the Giaour's motivations for professing his love. The Giaour seems to believe that he must battle Hassan in revenge for Leila's murder. But this motive seems to dissolve in the tale's end when the Giaour confesses to basing his rivalry on rumor (see the Giaour's "They told me" statements, 1306-8).

Leila is presented, albeit briefly, as an active heroine, who even cross-dresses in her escape from Hassan's harem. But the real import of Leila's role is in her influence over the poem's three men. The fisherman, the Giaour, and Hassan each risks his life for her. The narrative's battle between Hassan and the Giaour shows the fatal consequences of their love for the heroine. But it is the fisherman's love for Leila that has never been critically explored and which solidifies her position as the original tale's protagonist, suggested in the Advertisement.
The description of Leila's beauty (473-518) confirms her significance to the plot. If spoken by the fisherman, it resolves some of confusion raised by the fragment form (such as why the fisherman shows up at the monastery at the end). Further, this encomium passage is revelatory of the poem's attitude to religion, a focal point of critics such as Franklin, Levinson, Gleckner, and Garber.

The narrative's emphasis on Leila's beauty requires exploring the poem's accretiveness, because the one fragment (473-518) is the work of additions in two editions: MS.M (CPW 3.411, 473-503) and the third edition (first state) (504-518):

Her eye's dark charm 'twere vain to tell,

But gaze on that of the Gazelle,
It will assist thy fancy well,
As large, as languishingly dark,
But Soul beam'd forth in every spark
That darted from beneath the lid,
Bright as the jewel of Giamschid.
Yea, Soul, and should our prophet say
That form was nought but breathing clay,
By Alla! I would answer nay;
Though on Al-Sirat's arch I stood,
Which totters o'er the fiery flood,
With Paradise within my view,
And all his Houris beckoning through.

Oh! who young Leila's glance could read
And keep that portion of his creed
Which saith, that woman is but dust,
A soulless toy for tyrant's lust?

This selection from second Manuscript's (MS.M) segment has proven to be a diversion to critics. In being too determined on a feminine reading, many critics have missed the odd and shocking religious condemnation of the passage. The reference to "our prophet" (480) most likely identifies the fisherman as the speaker. The Romantic Satirist noted that the speaker is "our old acquaintance, the ferryman," but was at a loss as to why he denounces Islam: "and without (as we can perceive) any adequate cause for his extravagant impiety, [he] swears 'by Alla.'"22 A close reading of the passage suggests the fisherman's religious re-orientation and Byron's teasing Orientalism.

As the above-quoted passage shows, the speaker of the encomium is remarkably familiar with Leila. If this speaker is the fisherman, he has evidently spent a great amount of time in Hassan's palace. His description of Leila is thorough and passionate, the result of many hours of caring observation. Somewhere in the gap between the fragments, the fisherman has assumed such an elevated status in Hassan's court that he has the leisure to meditate on Leila's beauty. One possible answer is that this new status is the Emir's reward for services rendered in lines 352-87, rowing the Emir out to sea to dispose of a sack that contains a female. Such an offer might have been made in the full version of the Turkish tale during the Emir's curtailed speech. It is probable that the Emir made this
promise on the condition that the fisherman drowns the woman. Notably, this reading disrupts the conventional wholistic reading of *The Giaour*. Leila would not be in the sack because the fisherman had come to know Leila and of her beauty in consequence to that drowning incident. Likewise, it suggests that this incident occurred well before the Bairam feast and Leila’s disappearance.

The fisherman, in fact, presents himself as a would-be suitor of Leila. In the third edition, Byron makes clear the fisherman’s devotion to Leila. The highly personal and emotionally charged tone with which the fragment opens (“Yea, Soul, and should our prophet say / That form was nought but breathing clay, / By Alla! I would answer nay,” 480-2) clearly continues through the passage. The private nature of this section suggests it is a confession, a personal aside. When the fisherman states his devotion, we realize it is of his own “folly” that he is speaking: “Thus armed with beauty would she check / Intrusion’s glance, till Folly’s gaze / Shrunk from the charms it meant to praise” (512-14). The fisherman fashions himself as an awkward gazer whom Leila chastises by her purity. The intimation is that the fisherman is now Hassan’s “vassal,” because the sequencing suggests the same vassal who reports on the ambush (that vassal is announced just two lines below this encomium, in line 520). This logic determines that the “traitor,” a constant difficulty for critics to define, is the fisherman-turned-vassal. Byron makes this passage the indicator of the fisherman’s transition from seaman to horseman vassal, so foolishly devoted to Leila that he plans revenge for her disappearance.

We can analyze Byron’s attitude towards the Orient as he so obviously brings back the fisherman as a direct speaker to introduce the ending monastery section. The purpose
of reintroducing the fisherman to the tale seems two-fold. It supports the claim that the fisherman makes the periodic speeches throughout the first half, most importantly the encomium and the "traitor" passages. Also, in repeating almost verbatim the fisherman's initial observation of the Giaour, it highlights the now-omitted religious condemnation originally directed at the hero.

It seems necessary at this point to elaborate on the fisherman's primacy as speaker. In further support of this claim that the fisherman loves Leila and delivers the encomium, it is significant that he does not attack the Giaour, assuming the poem's usual interpretation that the Venetian is her seducer. Rather, he pledges revenge against Hassan, and so plots an ambush with the Arnauts. Looking again at the central passage of Leila's flight from the harem (439-472), the speaker presents two rumors. The first, propagated by the Nubian guards, and seized on by most readers as a summary of the plot, purports that "Strange rumours in our city say" that Leila steals away to adulterously liaise with the Venetian. The second rumor, however, is set antithetically to the first. It essentially negates the Nubian's story: "But others say" that the Giaour was alone. That is, Leila apparently did not meet the Giaour. Byron gives validity to this second rumor and confirms that the Giaour was without Leila by the eyewitness account of the fisherman. Thus, when Leila disappears, the fisherman would naturally address his revenge against Hassan, and not the Giaour. This understanding is crucial to the poem's shift in religious bias, as situated in the fisherman.

Oddly, no critical attention has focused on the disparity of the fisherman's fervent Islamic stand in the poem's opening (198-9) and his appearance at the Christian monastery
in the poem’s close (787-797). Notably, when the fisherman arrives at the monastery, Byron implies his vassal position by never referring to him as a fisherman as he had in the opening. More significantly, as the fisherman recounts his original sighting of the Giaour, one so vivid that he remembers his features, he omits his diatribe against Christianity. The initially Islamic fisherman is now apparently a convert to Christianity (see p. 40).

Byron’s attitude towards religion shifts with the various accretions to the poem. At first Islam is occulted as a religion of terror and superstition, then it is shown sympathetically. Later, Byron repeats this pattern with Christianity, decentering any “complete” reading of this aspect of the poem. This intentional confusion supports the conscious irresolution incorporated into the poem’s formal and typological elements. Jerome J. McGann refers to this instinctual aspect of Byron’s works as Byron’s “dance of apparitions” (see Chapter 2).

The Giaour as Romantic Hero

Like McGann’s “dance of apparitions,” Frederick Garber identifies the elusiveness of Byron’s text. Garber claims that the difficulty of this struggle to identify an overriding Byronic characteristic can be explained as Byronic oxymora. He states that “Oxymora take their energy from the pull of the oppositions within them. Their life as functioning figures lasts only so long as the pull is balanced, so long as neither contraries succeeds in outdoing the other.”23 This is exactly the approach Byron takes towards the Giaour, Leila, Selim, Conrad, and Gulnare. His heroes and heroines are not necessarily questers or self-seekers. Rather, they are figures whose characters are engaging by virtue of balanced,
competing identities. Despite the narrow academic assertion of the consistency of the Byronic hero-type as gloomy loner, many of Byron's heroes and heroines are far from easily categorizable. Close study reveals that they elude neat classifications such as passive victim or demonic loner.

Byron's typological paradigm is evident in *The Giaour*. It is notable that despite at least twelve revisions, Byron insistently maintained the odd syntax of the Manuscript's opening rhetorical question, "When shall such hero live again?" His contemporary reviewers mocked the omission of an article, "a." The speaker's question is later reflected in *Don Juan*’s opening, searching statement: "I want a hero." Byron's interest is not in a particular heroic person (the narrator of *Don Juan* quickly dismisses a host of "real" political and military heroes); rather, he seeks a hero-type. Thus, *The Giaour*’s opening speaker harkens not for a hero (such as the Athenian Themistocles) but effectively asks, "When shall such heroism live again?" This tale is to be a study in the aesthetics of heroism. Byron asks the reader to question on what basis the Giaour is heroic. What the tale divulges is two distinct, antithetical aspects of the Giaour: his lone rebel character and his monogamous, sentimental lover aspects.

This analysis of Byron's Romantic hero-type differs from Thorslev's catch-all categorization of the Byronic Hero's literary antecedents. Thorslev's generalizations deny Byronic irresolution by wholesaling the heroes under (inevitably narrow) nominations. The Giaour, Thorslev specifically writes, "is largely a remorseful Gothic Villain" (149). Importantly, Thorslev limits each protagonist to a single characterization, with the protagonists collectively called "Byronic Heroes." Byron's intention instead seems to be
to lure the reader into classifying the Giaour as a gloomy loner. His subtext, though, reveals competing characteristics that deny this categorization.

Romantic reviews of The Giaour similarly applied simple classifications to the hero. The Edinburgh Review (July 1813) reviewed the second edition and deprecated the “worthlessness and guilt” of the leading characters and lamented Byron’s devotion to gloomy and revolting subjects. Another reviewer writes that:

The character of his [Byron’s] Giaour is of the cast which we cannot approve. It was the perverted aim of the moral of the Childe Harold to clothe a disappointed sulky sensualist with the dignity of that misanthropic disgust...There is a sort of morbid sentimental hue thrown over the stormy character of the Giaour.

From the initial publication of The Giaour, critics have persistently concentrated on the Giaour’s gloomy aspects that they highlighted in Childe Harold. Byron encourages this association. In The Giaour’s epigraph, Byron instructs the reader in how to approach his hero. It cues the reader to the hero’s character, which is dominated by “One fatal remembrance / . . . For which joy hath no balm--and affliction no sting.” This hint reminded many contemporary readers of Childe Harold’s self-description in “To Inez.” That song is born out of the hero’s inability to “struggle[ ] ‘gainst the demon’s sway” (CHP 1.84.832) and his conflict with the past. The opening description of the Giaour recalls the traditional description of Harold as restless, held in a threshold between joy and pain, comfort and contention. The Giaour’s restlessness noted in the fisherman’s initial impression of him occurs speedily, in line 26 of the first two editions, following fast the
opening's plaintive request for a hero. In this, Byron's second verse tale, readers certainly must have anticipated another version of Harold, though the subtitle suggested an Eastern, not European, figure.

In the "Addition to the Preface" of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Byron concludes by framing the reader's approach to his hero:

Had I proceeded with the Poem, this character would have deepened as he drew to a close; for the outline which I once meant to fill up for him was . . . the sketch of a modern Timon, perhaps a poetical Zeluco.

(CPW 2.6)

This statement is of interest in studying The Giaour because its composition date of September 14, 1812, is concomitant with the first manuscript version of The Giaour. Such a cueing of his hero typology necessarily prepared readers' conceptions of the Giaour. Indeed, Byron intended the first version of The Giaour to be published with Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.

Byron intended Harold to be a Zeluco, a character from Thomas Moore's novel of 1789. Ernest J. Lovell, in Byron: The Record of a Quest, exhaustively examines the typology of Zeluco. He reveals a hero who is a guilt-ridden self-tormentor. Consequently, this hero is unable to enjoy the beauties of nature. The availability of the "Zeluco theme" to Byron, Lovell notes, suggests that there are "qualities attributed to Zeluco which may very well have caused Byron to see Childe Harold—or himself—in the portrait" (140), notably the hero's description as a self-tormentor. Timon and Zeluco share a misanthropic character shaped by the world's actions, not their own. What
torments Byron, and his heroes, Lovell asserts, is the futility of Byron’s quest for peace amid the beauties of nature. Byron scholars have been persistent in allocating this typology of a restless quester to Byron’s heroes. McGann’s *Fiery Dust* continues this concept in relation to the Byronic flaw. This flaw, McGann states, is “the inability to rest, to submit to the will of Fortuna, and of Nature herself” (178). By suggesting the well-known figure of Zeluco as a way of thinking of his own heroes, Byron lures the reader into completing his inference. However, the hero that Byron actually provides is more complex and demands a fuller reading. This paradigm is peculiarly Byronic: in his Preface or Advertisement, Byron suggests a hermeneutic strategy for approaching his hero. Yet, in the narrative, Byron presents a figure which requires a more flexible reading.

Many have sensed a Byronic “set-up” of expectations in the tales, usually as an aspect of biography. Reviewers quickly located Byron himself in Harold. In his “Preface to the First and Second Cantos,” Byron, though, asks the reader of *CHP* to suspend his reflex association of Harold with the author. Instead, Byron pointedly insists that the reader be attentive to his hero’s utilitarian function in the work. Openly denying having sketched a roman à clef, he claims Harold is modestly used “for the sake of giving some connexion to the piece.” But Byron scholars have never honored this claim. McGann persistently locates the biography in Byron’s works, insisting that they are much more than textually autonomous structures. That is, the hermeneutic device proffered by Byron in his “Preface” is a decoy, a type of reverse psychology.29

Though Byron does disclaim the necessity of Harold’s character (he only has a formal function), he focuses the title on him and opens the poem by sketching his
character so thoroughly that critics concentrated intently on this aspect of the work.

There are strong suggestions in Childe Harold’s “To Inez” of the traditional Byronic hero of The Giaour and of Byron’s later canonical heroes (see Appendix B). Byron himself proffered this association in intending to first publish The Giaour with Childe Harold. Indeed, by the following year when The Giaour was first published, reviewers had already defined, and criticized, a Byronic hero: “the self-same loftiness and independence that characterized his former hero [Childe Harold] distinguishes the ‘Giaour.’” The Christian Observer deprecated Byron’s representation of a profligate as happy and had difficulty determining which hero was “the more hopeless and agonized culprit--the surly ‘Childe,’ or the stormy ‘Giaour.’” More recently, Frederick Shilstone in Byron and the Myth of Tradition also sees Harold depicted with the “superiority and distaste” reflected in the Giaour.

Peter J. Manning notes that after addressing the actions of each tale’s protagonist, a composite portrait of the Byronic hero can be sketched. Manning visualizes a thwarted ruin who, ignorant of his core self, represses this self under a mask of sternness. In the two stanzas preceding the song, the speaker frames Harold as this type of restless lover and fiery ruin. These aspects are visible in Harold: “Wrote on his faded brow curst Cain’s unresting doom” (1.83.827). The Giaour refers to himself in this same language: “tis written on my brow! / There read of Cain the curse and crime” (1057-8). Though the motif is based on the emotional scarring of being a Cain, Harold is a Cain physically cursed to wander, while the Giaour alludes to the sentiment of Cain’s murder and guilt.
Both Harold’s “To Inez” song and The Giaour make use of direct speech that functions to establish this image of the hero. This traditional Byronic hero image is principally not physical but emotional. Though Harold and the Giaour bear the Cain-brow, they are classified as Byronic heroes due to their restlessness and incapacity to fit into society. They are emotionally scarred. The Eclectic Review of 1813 echoed this sentiment by stating that in one passage describing the Giaour, “we think that our readers cannot but recognize the portrait of Childe Harold.”

Frederick Garber dramatically states that the importance of “To Inez” for the whole canon cannot be overestimated. He is correct in his emphasis. But, while his concentration on the song is Byron’s establishment of “the process of self-consumption,” “To Inez” concerns this chapter in its establishment of the Byronic hero type, which Byron lures the reader into pursuing in his Preface to Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage and in his opening to The Giaour.

The narrator of Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage informs the reader that “To Inez” represents Harold’s one-time struggle to “mingle[ ] with the throng.” He hopes to trigger this response by providing his eyes with a female, a “charm,” he had seen in the earlier happy days. Fetishizing a beautiful woman by making her a token of the past, the Childe makes an effort to circumvent his mind’s “demon sway” towards isolation by enforcing a connection with his social past. Garber marks this effort: “Harold draws on the stock within [i.e., memories] to counter the corrosiveness of consciousness” that he is presently experiencing (22). He brings the past to the surface of consciousness, and by textualizing it (looking on a charming woman who reminds him of his youth), he hopes to sever his
connection with it. However, this plan only leads to a heightened sense of his current isolation. Continuity with the past, says Garber, brings misery, because it accentuates the impossibility of regaining that past.

Yet, Byron seems to insist on a different approach to “To Inez” that will offer a paradigm for how to read The Giaour. There is an oddity that appears in the song and subtly surfaces in the Turkish tale: the Byronic insult. In The Giaour, this insult, at first directed at Islam, is remarkable for its covert placement within an encomium to the heroine. Garber’s “To Inez” argument avoids accounting for Harold’s repeated insult of his listener, presumably the beautiful Inez of the title. Though the song is introduced as a ditty to a beautiful woman, Harold insults Inez.

This song is apparently a love song. It is an “unpremeditated lay,” an instinctual reply to female beauty. Yet, Harold’s song opens by insulting Inez’s smile, or what he interprets as her motive for smiling. He employs her smile as a platform upon which to textualize his emotional position. He soon insults Inez’s beauty, saying, “Thine eyes have scarce a charm for me.” Further, he scorns Inez’s intellect, telling her to ignorantly “smile on,” like a grinning idiot, rather than dare to interpret his suffering. In fact, he denies her even the option of assessing him: “What is that worst? Nay, do not ask.” Harold makes no effort to politely disclose his stigma.

Harold and the Giaour act as their own interpreters of their stigmas. This is a key component to Byron’s project. Harold’s questions in his song do not seem to be textual reiterations of Inez’s extra-textual questions; rather, they are posed to provide an
opportunity for Harold to interpret his “faded brow,” his stigma. Essentially, Harold is providing emotional support for the physical face he wears.

This Haroldian pattern is repeated in The Giaour. The first half of the tale establishes the Giaour’s physical image, conventionally Byronic, through external observation. Like Harold’s unpremeditated lay, the last half allows the hero to provide internal support for the image he affects. That is, the poem’s first half institutes the Byronic set-up of the conventional Byronic hero figure, while the end, the Giaour’s monologue, superficially offers internal confirmation of this Zeluco image.

The Giaour makes his stigma of murder and ostracism loom large. Connected with the aspects of stigma revelation, is the oddity of the Giaour’s choice of residency, a monastery. Why does the Giaour proceed to a monastery, where he negates the opportunity it affords him to “pass,” or conceal his stigma, or even remove it? He openly flouts his “otherness” by bribing his way into the monastery and consciously fails to mitigate his status by not assimilating himself into the friary rituals. The Giaour purposely makes himself an outcast by choosing societies which magnify his stigmatic status. One might attribute this aspect of the narrative to the hero’s misanthropic “Byronic” character. Yet, this fits oddly with his overtly fraternal choice of residence. The Giaour appears to have a specific purpose in mind, which he reveals when he makes his closing monologue. Through the accretive structure, the narrative’s subtext counters the traditional heroic image with alternate readings.
The Accretive Structure

Some of the difficulty in assessing the accretive form comes from approaching it as fragment additions that Byron used to refine his poem. This approach would view each edition as a stepping stone to the final "corrected" edition (the seventh is established as the canonical edition). The accretive structure of The Giaour should, rather, be seen as the guiding structure of the poem through all of its editions. Byron seems to have intended many editions from the outset. By Sept. 8, 1813, after at least four editions, Byron refers to his work as "that awful pamphlet 'the Giaour,'" but at the end of that month he claims he was "bitten again" with more additions (BLJ, 3.111, 125). Suggesting repeated, distinct encounters, Byron's snake metaphor acknowledges the individuated aspect of each accreted edition. Only two weeks after the first publication of The Giaour, Byron had already submitted new additions to his poem, implying that he intended accretive editions rather than amended (revised or corrected) editions.

The Giaour shares the same effect as Childe Harold's Pilgrimage and Don Juan in being published in segments, each able to represent a "complete" poem. That is, the second edition, or perhaps the fifth, would have been considered "final" if others had not succeeded. Yet, the successive and apparently unending editions play off previous editions and continually force the reader to revise and re-analyze his impressions of the characters.

The Giaour's accretive structure determines the full rounding out of its heroes, the Giaour and Hassan. Very little critical work has concentrated on the function of the
poem’s accretiveness. Many early reviewers preferred the first editions of the poem simply because they saw more clearly what they considered to be Byron’s point, a moral comment upon the human condition. The early editions certainly were more distilled, at 685 lines compared to the seventh edition’s 1,334 lines. Modern critical concentration on the poem’s progress has focused on the narrative perspectives instead of the progress in each accreted edition. Perhaps W. H. Marshall is responsible for this direction in the study of the poem, for his essay entitled “The Accretive Structure of The Giaour” begins by confusing the poem’s accretion with its fragmentation. Garber neatly, if unwittingly, presents this point when he writes:

> W. H. Marshall . . . argued that Byron’s building of the poem by a series of scattered accretions spoiled what had begun as a good tale: the fragments “do not constitute a whole that can be pieced together.”

Fragmentation in The Giaour, however, is not a “result” or subordinate aspect of accretion. This assumption has led critics to concentrate on the fragment and multiple narration, rather than the vital complexities of accretion itself, the conscious process of almost a year’s effort by Byron.

The poem’s accretiveness formally support Byron’s attitude towards his hero. The accretions should not be read as serialization towards a “completed” version (i.e., plot fully realized), for this would conflict with the generic intent of the poem’s fragmentation. Rather, the poem’s additions per edition can and should be seen in their individual context. That is, each edition’s additions shift the image of the Giaour and Hassan. These shifts in the reader’s conception of the heroes conflict and deny interpretive completeness.
Admittedly, Byron's Romantic reviewers had difficulty with this intentional defamiliarization. The writer for the Critical Review's review of the first edition of The Giaour was aware of the accretive structure, thinking the published edition's inclusion of the "lone Caloyer" section added to the clarity of the plot. Yet, concerning the Giaour's character, this review finds that the accretions "involved the writer in contradictions of which he is himself unconscious, and paradoxes which he would, we think, find it somewhat difficult to reconcile." Yet, this is exactly the literary mentality that Romantics were challenging in emphasizing the positive aspects of textual incompletion.

An analysis of two accretions, one regarding Hassan and one concerning the Giaour, will offer vivid examples of Byronic accretiveness. In the third edition (second state) the only addition is an overtly sentimental passage concerning Hassan (288-351). The six versions of the poem prior to this edition present Hassan as a remorseless murderer. The third edition's insert of Hassan's childhood is glaringly out of place and not aligned with the rest of the poem's presentation of the Moslem chief.

The first and third (first state) editions set up Hassan as a murderer whose religion is mocked, and figure Hassan as an "ungrateful fool" and tyrant of Leila's love. This image of Hassan is in contrast to the Giaour, to whom Leila "gave her heart." This thoroughly unsympathetic view of Hassan makes the accretion of the second state of the third edition so glaring, since it was only published a fortnight after the first third edition. It is difficult for the modern reader of The Giaour to appreciate what the shock of lines 288 to 351 must have been to Romantic readers. McGann records the popularity of each edition of the work, so that each edition had "return" or experienced readers. Thus, the
reader would likely have formed an unsympathetic impression of Hassan. This view would have been confirmed by the final editorial note that claimed the practice of drowning women for adultery still continued in nineteenth-century Turkey. With this background established, in the second third edition, Byron interjects:

... oft had Hassan's Childhood played
Around the verge of that cascade;
And oft upon his mother's breast
That sound had harmonized his rest;
And oft had Hassan's Youth along
Its banks been sooth'd by Beauty's song. (308-313)

This image is supported by the after-effects of Hassan's death on society. The wandering Dervise and "weary stranger," the passage states, will no longer have protection, "For Courtesy and Pity died / With Hassan on the mountain side" (346-7).

This passage perfectly illustrates the specific reading Byron insists on in using the accretive form. A limited reading of this passage in its fragment context reveals its consistency with the Islamic perspective of the fisherman's opening tirade against the Venetian, who is seen speeding along the coast (180-199). Both segments condemn Christianity. Yet, they do so in very different ways, and this difference is highlighted within the poem's accretive context.

The fisherman's fundamentalist hatred of the Giaour ("I know thee not, I loathe thy race") is part of the earliest manuscript version and presents a very unsympathetic view of Muslims. It would presumably distance many English readers. Many months
later, however, Byron adds a highly sympathy-evoking passage towards Islam, as part of the same fragment. This strategy reveals Byron’s equivocal Orientalism.

The Hassan passage openly pleads for reader sympathy, showing the English readers that Muslim Hassan is just like them. According to Byron’s overall scheme of defamiliarization, a strict reading appreciating the accretive context of the passage displays this third edition’s disjunctive presentation of Hassan. This reading would serve to disorient the “return” reader with two distinct and competing heroic images of Hassan, as murdering adventurer and now as sympathetic friend and lover. In this edition Byron clearly presents the reader with his project as it concerns his hero typology: Byron illustrates his Romantic hero figure, an oxymoronic balance of characteristics that deny the reader’s interpretive completeness.

Again, the accretive Giaour is typically read as a periodic revision towards a completed text. However, the accretive form should be analyzed as a formal effect that is ideologically constituted, as Levinson has shown the fragment form to be: the accretive structure should be construed as the author’s formal intention. A brief view of the Giaour’s heroic image from an accretive reading nicely illustrates this point. Comparing the accretions in the fifth and seventh editions how Byron repeats his paradigm of Hassan. These typological accretions concerning the Giaour are very curious additions because they are so obviously disjunctive.

In the fifth edition, the Giaour states of himself that he upholds monogamy (this is odd in itself, considering the Giaour’s professed intention of adultery). In addition, he
makes a demand of his confessor, on which no Giaour scholar or Romantic reviewer has commented. This "I have . . . a friend" segment portrays the Giaour sympathetically and supports that edition’s overly sympathetic view of the titular hero. In the seventh edition, though, Byron presents such an obnoxious picture of the Giaour that, read accretively, it seems almost ludicrously disjunctive. Keeping in mind the fifth edition’s very sympathetic bonding between the Giaour and his confessor (the "monogamy" and "I have . . . a friend" speeches), the seventh edition’s earliest accretion flagrantly disturbs this happy skein by introducing a monk who glaringly condemns the Giaour as a devil (832-915). This terrified and terrifying view of the Venetian ends with the monk’s oath that, "By all my hope of sins forgiven/Such looks [the Giaour’s] are not of earth nor heaven!" (914-5). Gone is the friendly bonding and shared principles of monogamy and friendship. The monk, perhaps the confessor, openly denounces the hero.

Further, the final accretion of this seventh edition (1192-217) ends with the Giaour’s stark insult of the monk’s religion, with the infamous lines: "soothe not—mock not my distress!" Byron pointedly frees his hero from any wholesale, generalized interpretations. Having in the first editions set up the reader to interpret a conventional "Byronic" hero, Byron offers conflicting versions that lead the willing reader into an aesthetically usable irresolution. This irresolution offers polytextual interpretations and moves the Romantic reader beyond his literary heritage that would have him anticipate an Aristotelian completeness. Byron, like other Romantic writers, demands that his readers use their imaginations to enjoy the "play" of the text.
A closer investigation of these accretions illustrates Byronic “play.” The fifth and seventh editions demonstrate the Byronic set-up of the reader. From the “favorable press” given the hero in the fifth edition (published three months prior to the seventh), these editions present a style of character-blackening. The seventh edition’s inclusion of a lengthy passage portraying the Giaour as demonic (832-915) causes the reader to distance his sympathies from the Giaour. The segment’s “bad press” of the Giaour continues the presentation of him as guilty of a crime. The passage intensifies the first edition’s wariness of the monastery’s lodger, moving from “Dark and unearthly is the scowl” to “‘Such looks are not of earth or heaven’” (832, 915). Pointedly, it disrupts the Giaour’s ending presentation of himself as Leila’s well-intentioned lover.

Likewise, the seventh edition’s other significant addition, the “insult of Christianity” passage (1192-217), shatters the previous edition’s presentation of the Giaour as monogamous and befriended. That fifth edition had progressed directly from the Giaour’s sentiment towards Leila that “‘thou art / The cherished madness of my heart!’” (1190-1), to:

‘In earlier days, and calmer hours,

When heart with heart delights to blend,

Where bloom my native valley’s bowers--

I had--Ah! have I now?--a friend!--.’ (1218-21)

The seventh edition joltingly interrupts these innocuous sentiments with the counter-Christian harangue: “But soothe not--mock not my distress” (1217). Clearly, Byron
employs this accretion to turn the tables on the reader and disrupt the reader’s initial, sympathetic response to the hero.

Religious condemnations are part of a Byronic pattern. The monogamy and “‘I had . . . a friend’” sections present a positive image of the Giaour; however, they are split by the hero’s jarring insult to Christianity in the seventh edition (1192-217) (notably, this accretion is not a new fragment, focusing attention specifically on the accretive structure). Yet, this insult is cushioned as a natural response of the Giaour’s love of Leila and of the monk’s inability to reunite the two lovers. This insult of Christianity’s potency calls to mind the fisherman’s insult of Islam, discussed above, when Hassan prayed uselessly for Alla’s help. The curious pattern Byron establishes is that both condemnations are deflected by their placement within affirmations of love. The effect of this very late edition, not published until December 1813, is to radically unsettle the reader who has swallowed the bait of the Giaour’s presentation of himself “in true romantic fashion,” as Thorslev notes. In fact, contemporary reviewers of the poem’s “ultimate” seventh edition were morally outraged by the Giaour’s anti-Christian response. So angered were they by the “almost inconceivable” offenses against morality that they were blinded to the hero’s previous professions of monogamous love, which, from the friar’s reaction, was received as a moral love. Through his accretive structure, Byron’s draws the reader into his intentional oxymoronic typology.

What Byron does with his hero in establishing a dialectical character-typology is to create a component figure, a mode of character assembly common in Romanticism. Mary Favret discusses this aspect of Romanticism in respect to epistolarity. The epistolary
novel, she writes, like the fragment and accretive poem, throws up problems of authoritative truth, by its subjective, component construction of characters and events. The distinction is made between this assemblage concept of the "Romantic hero" and that of a Bloomian "quester," whose self finds unity through processes of completion. This composite hero is no self-quester. Rather, he is a hero whose characteristics are instituted at the poem's beginning and then compositely assembled through the accretions.

Byron does not seem to be suggesting in The Giaour the hero's pursuit of his origins in myth or locating the hero's "feminine" qualities strictly in his female characters, as critics have suggested. The Giaour shows no interest in pursuing knowledge of Self. Instead, through his confessional monologue he presents an image of himself, using his narrative as a positive machination. He is a performer, propagandizing a certain image to his confessor.

**The Giaour: Performer with a Purpose**

It is in the seventh edition that the reader is fully privy to Byron's intentions concerning his use of the Byronic hero. Byron plays the reader's expectations of his hero's "Byronic" qualities against the Giaour's self-presentation—a verbal performance—that alters those expectations. The Giaour's 300-line monologue creates a section distinct from the first 970 lines of the poem's narrative. The narrative (and especially the section immediately preceding the monologue) establishes the Giaour's conventionally Byronic hero characteristics, as a rebel loner, demonic, and misanthropic. In contrast, the Giaour presents himself as a sentimental lover.
The hero begins his monologue with professions of his devotion to Leila (1016-79). He then foils himself positively against a negative presentation of Hassan, who is unrepentant for his murder of Leila (1080-98). Emphasizing this point, the next sections declare the passion of his love, "like the lava flood" (1099-126, 1101), and his monogamy. He then shifts focus to insult religion as ineffectual (1192-217), but in the same fragment pleads for his confessor’s promise to relate his tale to his friend. Following this, he supports his claims of the supernatural strength of his love for Leila by declaring that her spirit visited him (1257-318). The effect of this vision is to solidify the Giaour’s presentation of himself as a faithful lover. The speech effects this because of its sequencing: it follows on the heels of the Venetian’s demand that the monk “bid my Leila live” (1210), a deed the monk fails to perform. Further, the monk does not believe the Giaour’s vision. The Giaour styles the monk’s faith as weak to contrast his own faithful constancy to Leila.

The Giaour tells us why he calls for a confessor, after more than six years of isolation that insults the friars in the monastery. Essentially, he needs the monk to propagate a positive image of himself. It can be seen as self-propaganda. The Giaour’s rhetorical “And what have I to do with fame?” (1246) locates his impetus. He wants his name to live in perpetuity. This becomes clear as one considers the absurdity of the Giaour’s deathbed call for a confessor, whom he proceeds to repeatedly insult. He demands that the monk save his professions of absolution and “mock not my distress!” (121); he also ends his speech by commanding his confessor to “save [i.e., to not place]
the cross above my head”’ (1325). Byron-as-editor affirms this insult of Christianity in his editorial commentary:

The monk’s sermon is omitted. It seems to have had so little effect upon the patient, that it could have no hopes from the reader. It may be sufficient to say, that it was of a customary length (as may be perceived from the interruptions and uneasiness of the penitent), and was delivered in the nasal tone of all orthodox preachers.44

The Giaour is plainly not interested in Christianity. He is interested in the friar. The Giaour does not need the monk for his official duties, but for the clout of his office, for what better sympathetic messenger to have than a priest. The Giaour refuses the monk’s religious services but announces his real mission for the friar. He commands the monk to remind his friend of his end, an end so steeped in sentimentality that it draws an affirming tear from the listener. Not willing to passively rely on the monk, the Giaour burdens his missionary with a ring to give to the friend. The value and physicality (token nature) of the object functions as a seal of the monk’s pledge.

As in Childe Harold’s “To Inez” song, the Giaour rhetorically informs his listener of exactly what he wants his listener’s impression of him to be. Harold’s love lay, his one effort to “join[ ] the dance, the song,” evolves into a study of his character. Two pairs of “It is” statements that balance each other reveal the specifics of Harold’s temperament. He inserts these as if responding to extra-textual, rhetorically posed questions, but he offers these to provide the opportunity to describe himself.
The curious phrasing of these questions suggests that Harold is asking himself his
own questions: "And dost thou ask . . ." and "What is that worst? Nay, do not ask?"

Byron's subtle oxymoronic strategy surfaces here. When one considers that Harold is in
the midst of an "unpremeditated" song, the dialogic posture of the text Harold presents
should sit uncomfortably with the reader. The singer urges on his discourse by
questionably declaring Inez's frame of mind based on her smile. He presents her as
wistfully teasing: "Nay, smile not at my sullen brow." Having imaged his immediate
listener as one who gently mocks his sullenness, a Romantic version of today's "lighten
up," Harold injects his song with purpose. Far from unpremeditated, Harold's song now
necessitates his correction of Inez's "smile." Thus, Harold launches into his "It is"
statements, first negative, then correctively affirmative. For example, his first statements
in stanza 3 caution his listener from thinking Harold is disturbed by ordinary romantic
troubles: "It is not love, it is not hate." Stanzas 4 and 5 clarify what it is that distinguishes
his sullenness: "It is that weariness . . . /It is that settled, ceaseless gloom. . . ." In essence,
Harold's song rhetorically says, you haven't asked, but I will tell you how I want you to
understand my sullenness.

This is just what the Giaour does by calling on his "Confessor," not to confess sins
(be in fact insults the monk) but to recast the monk's image of the Giaour into a congenial
impression. The Venetian's rhetorical strategy is to raise the fears of himself the monk
might harbor, and then erase them. Pointedly, the Giaour tells his confessor that "'There's
blood upon [my] dinted sword'" (1032), suggesting confirmation of the "Byronic," demon
image the monk had formed. The monk takes the bait, so the confessee says, "'Nay, start
not--no--nor bend thy knee” (1036). It is then that the Giaour relies on the power of his words to erase and recast the monk’s image. He states that the monk’s impression is wrong, and that once he tells his story, “Thou wilt absolve me from the deed” (1038). The Giaour then breaks down the monk’s guard by stating that he is a Cain. Only, he then quickly dispels this possibility, saying the confessor must weigh the Giaour’s verbal self-presentation against his observed actions before judging: “Still, ere thou dost condemn me--pause--” (1060). This rhetorical strategy of pitting speech against observed actions or deeds is frequently seen in Romantic literature.

This problem of knowing the truth about another person based upon either his actions or his words greatly concerned Romantic writers. Emphasis upon one’s own deeds as the basis of one’s true character prevailed in the literature of the eighteenth century. This emphasis upon actions corresponded to the age’s Puritan influence, that emphasized good works as the opportunity for gaining heaven. Towards the middle of the century, though, the early Romantic public began to have doubts about the ability to know another’s true character. Gothic literature in the middle of the eighteenth century reveals a reversal in this attitude towards the attestation of true character by works alone. Gothicism’s concealment themes infer the impossibility of “knowing” another person, for one’s “holy” clothing might conceal a demon, as in Matthew Lewis’ The Monk, and Anne Radcliffe’s The Italian. Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein suggests the opposite, that the hideous exterior of the monster can conceal a honest heart if one looks beyond the physical.
Romantic writers questioned how we understand one another. Gothic texts showed that one could not with certainty trust another’s words or actions. William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*, subtitled “or Things As They Are,” addresses this very issue of the truth of appearance. Though accused of crimes, Caleb is shocked that no one credits his words when he professes his innocence. Rather, his onlookers judge Caleb solely on the basis of his deeds, which do not appear innocent. Yet, Godwin problematizes the issue for the reader by only giving him Caleb’s written words about himself, his autobiography.

The *Giaour*, like *Caleb Williams*, is a history of consequences from one action. The *Giaour* emphasizes Byronic consequences. The details of Leila’s death are purposely omitted and what is suggested of her drowning is mere gossip. David Seed comments that the tale’s origins are “calculatedly vague so as to build up the awe-inspiring drama of consequences.” After more than six years at the monastery without revealing anything about himself, the Giaour gives himself an identity, even a name, though that is lost between fragments (just after a fragment, the Giaour states, “Such is my name . . .”). The reader is presented with an opportunity to verify the image the Giaour’s observers have presented. In Godwin’s story, Caleb Williams is given an opportunity in a trial to tell his side of the story. The point of Caleb’s speech is specifically to recast the image others have formed on the basis of his actions. Similarly, Byron’s hero is given the chance to speak, to counter the impression established in the first 970 lines that is based on external observation.
The Giaour equivocally presents the dialectic of speech or actions that determines one’s true character, in a different application of Byronic oxymora discussed above. The first half of the poem shows observations of the Giaour’s actions, and bases opinion of his character upon that. In fact, the opening of the narrative proper presents the fisherman’s fierce bias against the Giaour’s face, which proclaims the hero guilty of some unknown crime. The final part of the tale proffers the Giaour’s words, which present his “true” character. Byron warns the reader to be wary of judgment based on observing the Giaour’s (or Leila’s) actions.

When the Giaour takes the reins of narration at the end of the poem, it marks not a plot climax but a narratorial climax, as he formally steps into the foreground. The Giaour’s personal narrative raises questions that challenge the tale he appears to confirm. Primarily, the reader should be concerned with the hero’s motives for relaying his tale at all.

The Giaour’s summarizing monologue proves the limits of his, and the reader’s, knowledge of origins. Though the Giaour was a participant in the tale’s battle scene, his motivation to attack Hassan is questionable. The Giaour’s perspective is just as limited in knowledge as the fisherman’s, who, the text suggests, became a traitor based on Hassan’s tyranny over Leila. The Giaour is the tale of the consequences of the apparent murder of Leila. Byron, though, subtly problematizes the origins of the story. As suggested above, when Leila escapes Hassan, she is not found, nor does she apparently meet the Giaour. Speculation, by the characters and the reader, replaces fact. After committing his murder of Hassan, even the hero himself admits that he does not know if Leila is dead:
'They told me, wild waves roll'd above
The face I view, the form I love;
They told me—'twas a hideous tale! . . .

If true . . .' (1306-1310)

The Giaour's actions were based on rumor. This uncertainty concerning the justification of his murder is the basis for the Giaour's Cain-like guilt.

Byron places the reader in a Giaourian situation of forcing inference-completion based on rumor and speculation, on what is said rather than what is seen. Through the Advertisement and the final editorial note, Byron suggests that a wholistic knowledge of the adventure can be compiled. Yet, this is not the case, and the reader who creates the tale out of the fragment pieces will ultimately, like the Giaour, find himself plagued by a sense of having been misled. The wholistic reader and the Giaour complete an action based only on the gossip of others.

**Byronic Gossip**

Byron's contemporary reviewers were horrified that Byron's morally lacking heroes were so engaging. The *British Review* wrote that:

There is a sort of morbid, sentimental hue thrown over the stormy character of the Giaour, which is likely to beget a feeling in which too much of admiration enters, for a reader not well grounded in good principles to be safe under its influence.⁴⁶
Byron's easy, fast-paced style was accented by the fragment's distillation. It was seen as cultivating an engagement to subversion that was too easily grafted into social and literary standards, leading to their decay. Byron's style has the enticing power of gossip.

In "Gossip in Beppo" Cheryl Fallon Giuliano points to Byron's "psychological motives for writing Beppo as a piece of gossip, . . . that he was well acquainted with the literary power of gossip to impel plots, its economic power to sell, and its erotic power to titillate." From a structural point of view, the accretiveness of The Giaour operates as does the circulation of gossip: bits of information, not necessarily accurate, based on the Giaour's actions are circulated and establish public opinion about him. Likewise, Byron's use of fragments denies the reader the entire story and encourages, even demands, that the reader fill in the gaps with his own speculations. The reader becomes rumor. Nothing, then, can be nailed down as certified truth. Through the potentially unending accretive structure and the irresolution of the fragment form, Byron has created a game with no winners, because the ending is altered by every reader with every reading.

Not only do people gossip about the Venetian, Leila is the object of rumor. Nobody truly knows the circumstances of Leila's disappearance or if she is dead: "Strange rumours in our city say / Upon that eve she fled away" (447-8). The speaker calls into question the method of Leila's escape and whether she escaped Hassan to meet the Giaour. The Nubian slaves who began these rumors are clearly politically motivated because of their official responsible for Leila. Presumably, their complicity is lessened if Leila is portrayed as wily, concealing herself as a Georgian page. Also, the Giaour is made the ultimate scapegoat, further removing the Nubians from responsibility.
Yet, the Nubian’s is not the only gossip about Leila’s disappearance. The fisherman’s sighting of the Giaour riding along the shore is another rumor: “But others say, that on that night, . . . The Giaour . . . Was seen—-but seen alone” (467). It directly counters the previous rumor. The Nubian’s tale calls into question the Giaour’s part in Leila’s disappearance, while the fisherman’s rumor questions if Leila met the Giaour at all.

Byronic gossip raises many questions. Did Leila really meet the Giaour? If so why was he alone? If she did not meet him, is the Giaour riding furiously because he was “stood up,” and the fisherman misinterprets the Giaour’s look of bitterness for criminal guilt? The fisherman’s initial description of the Giaour, “A moment on his stirrup stood” (220), primarily implied that the Giaour contemplated returning to seek his revenge on Hassan for murdering Leila. But, it is possible his rage is directed at Leila. The impossibility of knowing the truth of the situation is stressed by a series of rhetorical questions: “Why looks he o’er the olive wood?”; “but who and what art thou/Of foreign garb and fearful brow?” (221, 230-1). In Caleb Williams, Laura insists her criterion for discerning Caleb is observing his actions. Caleb, however, continually attempts to verbally persuade others of his innocence to counter the appearance of his actions. Yet, far from confirming one’s true character based on externals, Byron warns the reader that actions are a questionable source of character information, of knowledge of another person. Gossip based on external observation is inherently suspect because of the subjectivity of interpretations.

When the Giaour tells his own tale, words should prevail to confirm or dismiss the established image of the hero. But, Byron does not offer such an easy solution. The basis
of the Giaour's murderous revenge is a rumor about Leila's death. The Venetian was not
an eyewitness to her murder but accepts the words of others as truth. This pattern of
Byronic gossip is repeated in many of Byron's tales.

Rumor is unsubstantiated in Byron's tales. For example, in The Bride of Abydos,
the hero Selim initially frames the reader's bias against his uncle Giaffir by relating a
"rumor," unverified by himself, that Giaffir killed Selim's father, Abdallah. In the opening
lines, Giaffir insults Selim as being the son of a Giaour slave. Then he threatens to behead
Haroun, a eunuch and apparently the only witness to the murder of Selim's father.
Giaffir's open animosity and death threats towards Haroun do not even elicit a response
from the eunuch. This could imply that it is a common practice and conceivably could be
the impetus for Haroun to fabricate his tale of murder, to incense Selim to murder and
succession. Byron succeeds Selim's questions of his sire ("Son of a slave!... and who
my sire?" 1.109-111) with Giaffir's almost-confirmation: "I would not trust that look or
tone--/No--nor the blood so near my own--/That blood—he hath not heard--..."
(1.140-2). Significantly, Byron refuses to settle the issue; he only allows the reader to
infer completion.

In Byron's verse tales, those who can confirm the truth of rumors do not or are
not allowed. Giaffir, like Hassan in The Giaour ("Doth Leila there no longer dwell?/That
tale can only Hassan tell," 445-6), is not allowed to confess. Though it is commonly
accepted that Giaffir was about to confirm Selim's suspicion, it is equally possible,
especially considering Byron's game instincts, that Giaffir is truly Selim's father. His half-
thought about Selim's blood quite possible was going to confirm some question about his
slave-mother (drown perhaps in Leila fashion?). Upon the interruption of Zuleika’s entrance, Giaffir’s comments suggest that Selim’s mother is a slave, and not the same adored mother of Zuleika. Giaffir says that Zuleika “is offspring of my choice-- / Oh! more than even her mother dear” (1.148-9). The rapid succession of these competing references to parentage radically confuses the reader who does not assume Selim’s bias against Giaffir. Again, Byron does not offer origins but consequences to enhance his poems’ irresolution.

In The Bride, the basis of Selim’s vengeance against Giaffir is based upon a story. Haroun tells Selim of something unknown and unconfirmed by anyone else, that Giaffir killed Selim’s father. Selim even presents this as a “tale.” He challenges Zuleika that “’if thou my tale, Zuleika, doubt--/Call Haroun--he can tell it out’” (2.246-7, my underline). Speech, approached warily by Romantics, is presented as rumor. It is made the unstable basis by which the reader is asked to judge Selim’s murderous and mercenary actions against his “father,” Giaffir.

Byronic gossip and Byronic oxymora partake in developing Byron’s Romantic hero, revealing indeterminacy as a Romantic ideology. He supports this formally through the poem’s fragments, accretions, and character assembly. Byron composes his tales with questioning kinds of formulations, from the poem’s form to the hero’s composite make-up. The success of Byron’s The Giaour is determined by its irresolution. Removing the dialectical aspects of the poem would present an un-Byronic tale, precisely because it is the equivocal aspects of the poem that represent the uniqueness of the author. As Jerome
McGann states, Byron's "style is a game." His method of writing is polytextual and insistingly problematical.
NOTES


8 McGann, *Fiery Dust* 143.


16 McGann, *Fiery Dust* 162: "Each [tale] centers around an exploration of the nature and consequences of a life that is Eros-directed."
In his only reference to these lines, McGann lets the implication of this avowal slip by him in his focus on Leila's allegorical status: "She it is who directs the sword of the Giaour just as she later beckons him in visions to join her in another place," *Fiery Dust* 158.


Garber's chapter "Self-Consuming Symmetries" in *Self, Text, and Romantic Irony* discusses a "mode of recoil" in Byron's works. McGann strikes a similar note in *Fiery Dust*: "Harold's 'fever at the core' (III, 42), which has its analogue in the life of the narrating poet as well . . . is predominantly ruinious and self-lacerating, and productive only of a deteriorating emotional fluctuation between chaotic frenzy and languid weariness. This is precisely what Byron wants to eliminate from his poetic life, and he does it . . . by giving them complete freedom to seek their own limit" in his fiction (80).

**20** Leila is named or suggested in eight fragments, from line 352 to 675, specifically 360, 374, 396, 445, 473, 535, 619, 675.


**23** Garber 29.

**24** Reiman, part B, v 1, 415, the *Christian Observer*. 
25 Thomas Moore, “As a beam o’er the face,” Irish Melodies, in CPW 3.415.

26 “Addition to the Preface” was added in the fourth edition (CPW 2.269).

27 In May 1813, Byron wrote to Samuel Rogers: “And will you have any objection to my inscribing to you ‘the Giaour’ in the next E[ditio]n of C[hilde] H[arol]d where it will be published for the 1st. time,” in BLJ 3.44 and note.


29 Tilottama Rajan, The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990). Rajan notes that Mary Wollstonecraft’s Preface to Mary: A Fiction employs the same divertive tactics. Wollstonecraft’s Preface, Rajan writes, seems “unaware of itself as a text.” It so consciously attempts to divert attention from its constructiveness that Rajan declares this as a Wollstonecraftian strategy to conversely draw attention to itself. By introducing her novel so innocently, and providing a text so heavy in plot that it fails to satisfy most readers, Mary Wollstonecraft almost ensures a more responsive and eager return-reader who gradually learns how to read her text.

30 Reiman, part B, v 5, 2087, The Reasoner, October 1813.

31 Reiman, part B, v 2, 576, the Christian Observer, November 1813.


34 David Simpson. Fetishism and Imagination: Dickens, Melville, Conrad (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982) xii, 11.


37 Thorslev: "The final poem, in the seventh edition, is in twenty different fragments, with three different narrators" (149); Garber 54; Gleckner, *Byron and the Ruins of Paradise* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1967) 97.


40 The barrage of editions was so great that Byron's contemporary reviewers sometimes complained of not having time to review one edition before the next appeared. In light of the great commercial and critical popularity of all of the poem's twelve editions that were published in the same year, 1813, Byron knew he held a captive audience. One reviewer was confronted by a new editions before finishing his review: "We had brought the preceding remarks to a close, when 'a new edition, with additions,' was put into our hands, and we cannot suffer this paper to leave our possession without giving to it the notice which it demands" (Reiman, part B, v 2, 625). This same review acknowledges the many circulating versions of the poem, even prior to the first published edition.
41 See Levinson 34-5: Romantic reception.

42 Reiman, part B, v 2, 573, the Christian Observer.


44 CPW 3.422, 1207n.


46 Reiman, part B, v 1, 415, the British Review, October 1813.

MARY SHELLEY'S MATHILDA: A NEW DOMESTIC AFFECTION

and I happy in the Possession of my Father's Heart.
(from A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Clarke)

I am by no means indifferent to the manner in which whatever moral tendencies exist in the sentiments or characters it contains shall affect the reader. Yet my chief concern in this respect has been limited to the avoiding [of] the enervating effects of the novels of the present day and to the exhibition of the amiableness of domestic affection and the excellence of universal virtue.

(1818 Preface to Frankenstein)

Romantic heroes and heroines destroy domestic affection. As discussed in Chapter 3, under the guise of pursuing love, Byron's Giaour ruins the domesticity of Hassan and even his own potential domestic happiness with Leila. The Corsair's Gulnare kills her husband and master. Zastrozzi, the title hero of Percy's Gothic work, destroys the future of two innocent lovers in revenge for his own ruined childhood. Jane Austen's Lady Susan steals husbands and even the affections of her daughter's suitor. In Caleb Williams, Caleb is ejected from his domicile because of his "ungoverned curiousity" and "mistaken thirst for knowledge" and then is ruthlessly pursued by his father-figure, Falkland. The mother and son family unit in William Beckford's Vathek is destroyed by the unsatisfiable
ambition and desires of the son. Repeatedly, Romantic literature exhibits the "enervating effects" which Percy Shelley's Preface to Frankenstein wants that novel to avoid, and very little of the affirmation of the "amiableness of domestic affection" Percy desires.

Frankenstein's prefatory concern with domestic affection seems antithetical to the novel. The work is about a Promethean overreacher and his failure and the lesson he imparts to the potential overreacher Walton. Still, at the end of the novel when Victor bids Walton farewell, his advice is to seek contentment in the home, not at work:

"'Farewell, Walton! Seek happiness in tranquillity and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries.'"1 The hopes of Percy Shelley's 1818 Preface seem to be realized in this succinct moral advice that demonstrates the lessons learned by Victor. But, just as succinctly, Mary Shelley has Victor reverse his position on the domestic in his afterthought to Walton: "'Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed.'" The tension Shelley creates between affirming both "the amiableness domestic affection" and adventuring ambition energizes the novel and is in part the reason it is still discussed over a century later. Shelley's story is a patchwork of unmixable contraries.

In Mathilda, written a year after Frankenstein, Mary Shelley reverses her commentary on the domestic as the site opposed to the exceptional. She makes the exceptional, incest, part of the natural familial relationship. Addressed to a representative of conventional society, Mathilda's subtext propagandizes incest as the fulfillment of love, yet this is an incommensurable proposition to her audience. Shelley also incorporates in her title heroine competing positions that the author refuses to resolve. Using the
epistolary format to portray herself as a sentimental romance victim, Mathilda
simultaneously acts as seducer of her father. Shelley offers two equally weighted versions
of her heroine to challenge her reader's conceptions of a literary heroine.

Mathilda shares Romanticism's concern with raising "obstinate questionings."
Because of the work's subject and Shelley's transmission of it to her father, Mathilda
provokes questions about Shelley's own domestic relationships. Like Frankenstein, it is
introduced as a work about domestic affections. Shelley critics, however, have enforced
the ultimate domesticity on this work: they read into the novella Shelley's incestuous
desires for her father, William Godwin. These scholars focus more on Shelley than her
creations in reevaluating Mary Shelley's influence on the Romantic Circle. They sees her
tome as more than the socio-psychological fluke, the "creative accident," of Frankenstein.
The titles of two recent works signal the importance of the author, rather than of her
masterpiece: Anne Mellor's The Other Mary Shelley (1993) and Jane Blumberg's Mary
Shelley's Early Novels: 'This Child of Imagination and Misery' (1993). Curiously, and
mistakenly, Mary Shelley's second work, the novella Mathilda, barely receives mention in
either of these reassessments of her novels. Mary Shelley scholarship, recent and past, has
found it all too easy to dismiss Mathilda as "undisciplined and uncomfortably personal . . .
an uncontrolled, certainly therapeutic purge of psychological tensions and anxieties
surrounding Shelley's relationship with her father."2 Initiated by Elizabeth Nichie's notes
to her 1959 publication of Mathilda, this bias against this work is certainly unjustified.
Despite the novella's slimness, Mathilda's chronological fit in Shelley's literary career,
written in 1819 in the footsteps of the publication of *Frankenstein*, should prejudice it to critics eager to show that all of Mary Shelley's novels are worthy of their great 1818 ancestor. It is time to get rid of early critic Elizabeth Nitchie's reading of *Mathilda* as Shelley's simple autobiographical purging of "incest, guilt and death." Like Shelley's great Romantic classic, *Mathilda* raises questions about the affects of domestic affection on the literary heroes and heroines. And, like *Frankenstein*, *Mathilda* reflects Romantic ideology in its insistence on irresolution. Shelley transforms her heroine's story from what seems to be a confession epistle of an innocent victim into an argument for incestuous love. Yet, this stance is problematic.

Mary Poovey, in *The Proper Lady*, suggests that Mary Shelley's later novels, especially *The Last Man*, are Shelley's "retreat from [the] unorthodoxy" that characterizes her early work. She asserts that *The Last Man* (1826) "disavows *Frankenstein*'s condemnation of the egotist as original agent of destruction."³ In light of this view, *Mathilda* can at least be read as a text of transition, with its feet in both radical and conservative corners. *Mathilda* certainly asserts the unorthodoxy of female, unrepentant autonomy. It also uses domestic relationships, which in *Frankenstein* fail to tame Victor's ego, to reinforce female domestic affection, which modulates the male's desire of ambition. *Mathilda* is not about ambition at all, but about love. Further, the text's primary male, the father, is doubly tamed by his wife, Diana, and daughter, Mathilda, and even Mathilda's friend Woodville hastens to his mother at the novel's end. As the Introduction to *The Other Mary Shelley* notes:
Inspired by Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*, . . . [certain nineteenth-century female] writers advocated a 'revolution in female manners,' by emphasizing the rationality of women, by celebrating community, by conceiving of nature as an ally, by preferring gradual and evolutionary reform to revolution, and by espousing an ethic of care rather than an ethic of individual justice. (8)

Shelley goes beyond this "revolution of feminine manners" by fusing the radical and conservative aspects of domestic care in Mathilda, having her heroine encourage incest.

As was seen earlier in Byron's heroes and heroines, *Mathilda* is a problematic text in part due to its protagonist. In *Mathilda*, Shelley sutures the competing characteristics of conventionally feminine domesticity and transgressive autonomy, typically associated with masculinity. *Mathilda*, like Byron's Leila and Gulnare, presents herself as a passive victim of her father and fate, while the story's subtext affirms (though never confirms) that she is in fact a predatory heroine. *Mathilda* is both sentimental heroine and adventuress. In Romantic fashion, this simultaneous affirmation and subversion of the domestic engages the imagination by its monstrous suggestion. *Mathilda* is forced to mediate in an arena of two incompatible allegiances in which she cannot win: her father's love and a society (represented by her immediate reader Woodville) that forbids this type of expression. Just as Evelina does in Frances Burney's *Evelina*, the heroine simultaneously presents herself verbally as an innocent, while her actions suggest that she is a transgressor. Ultimately, Mathilda conflates in an impossible mediation a socially unacceptable type of domestic affection.
Mathilda can be analyzed extra-autobiographically, though Shelley scholars refuse to do so. Jane Blumberg asserts, questionably, that Mathilda’s literary value was not a serious consideration because “Shelley herself came to see how inappropriate it was for public consumption, unworthy to follow the distinguished Frankenstein.” In Women, Letters, and the Novel, Ruth Perry suggests that incest tales were popular in the Eighteenth century because:

Seductive relationships to authority figures, either fathers or guardians, were appropriate fantasies for women with so little power over their own lives and so little experience with any but the all-powerful males of their own families. (52)

Tilottama Rajan also refuses to consider the novella apart from an autobiographical context, even suggesting that Shelley, like Mathilda, falsely blames her father for her own desires. In sending the text to Godwin, Rajan suggests, and in knowing he would reject its publication, Shelley protects her own desire not to risk society’s censure, by assuring the “(im)possibility of publication.”

Likewise, Blumberg sees in Mathilda Shelley’s rejection of her seemingly omnipresent father. Blumberg comments that:

One cannot help but be reminded [when reading Shelley’s novels] of the cramped and tense atmosphere in the Godwin household at Skinner Street and Shelley’s gratitude to her lover for rescuing her from its constant frustrations. . . . PBS’s connection with Godwin ensured that her father continued to invade her intellectual and emotional life and she must have
felt stifled by his ‘presence’ and perhaps resentful of the relationship that he shared with her husband. (115)

Blumberg, though, extrapolates too greatly when she determines Godwin’s “stifling” influence. From her assumption, Blumberg asserts that “Shelley would not be fulfilled by a complete home life.” Yet, Mathilda and Shelley’s many pregnancies illustrate that she pleaded for familial harmony.

These arguments, though, do not account for the strictly literary attachment between Shelley and Mathilda. Though she did offer the work to her father, Shelley was in the regular practice of submitting her manuscripts to Godwin. Shelley labored over Mathilda to revise it from The Fields of Fancy; she also read it to Percy, the Gisbornes, and the Williamses, and the efforts to send it to Godwin suggest Shelley had serious intentions for it that went beyond diary-type purgings. Further, Elizabeth Nitchie cites several of Shelley’s letters to friends after Percy’s death that make references to Mathilda, supporting Mary’s concept of her novel as public material, not private emotional release. Mathilda participates in the popular Romantic motif of incest that Byron’s Manfred established in 1816. Shelley’s literary interest in incest began in 1810 with her “A History of the Jew” (as titled by Blumberg, 62). This story deals with incest in the Bible, originating with the marrying of Adam and Eve’s children. Incest was a theme prevalent in Percy’s Laon and Cynthia (1818), and in Beatrice Cenci’s history. In 1818, Percy even invited Mary to write the incestuous story of the Cencis, but she declined and instead wrote Mathilda.
Evidence suggests that Mary Shelley was quite independent of her father, as her elopement with Percy indicates. Not only did Shelley physically separate herself from her father, but Blumberg catalogues her psychological distance, in her criticism of Godwinism in *Frankenstein*. Victor’s Caleb Williams-like pursuit of truth only masks his appetite to satisfy his own vanity; his ambition results in the desolation of his family. Godwin’s belief in human perfectibility is ridiculed in Victor’s egomaniacal ambition that is presented as a drive to create on the pretense that mankind will benefit. His monster becomes the terror of humanity. The personal quest for Godwinian “truth” that dis(re)gards the domestic is doomed to failure, Blumberg finds Shelley saying. Shelley criticizes Romantic idealism which supports the Promethean overreacher who rejects family to pursue a personal goal, even if nominally for the good of others.

*Mathilda* is a problematic text. The title heroine announces in the beginning of her letter-autobiography that she is driven by a “feeling that [she] cannot define”; she has a problem to solve. While this appears to be a private emotional release, the act of recording her feelings for another, who can share with others, makes *Mathilda* public material. In essence, she is confessing to her addressee, Woodville, that which she could never tell him in person. What results is Mathilda’s confession of her incestuous, but unconsummated, relationship with her father and her refusal to heed her friend Woodville’s conventional insistence to control her grief and re-enter society.

Mathilda’s ability to write of her experience allows her pleasure in expiation though pain in its articulation. Merely by writing she breaks through a lifetime of liminal
reticence. Her choice of confession as her narrative mode can be understood according to Edmund Burke's popular eighteenth-century essay on the linking of pleasure and pain. In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Burke suggests that the English writers, responding to a new sensibility to feeling, recognized a pleasure in experiencing emotionally painful events. Burke discusses the delight gained from distress and the implicit pleasure in re-processing highly emotive painful memories. Mathilda writes her painful history "because it will give [her] pleasure to dwell on [her] friendship" with Woodville. Mathilda also suggests that the revelation of her long kept secret offers an opportunity for epiphany in being able to help her understand her past experiences.

In analysis of narrative the reader must question an author's choice of narrative modes. For example, what is the significance or strategy Mathilda intends in writing an autobiography to tell the woes of her "tragic history"? Mathilda initially sets out such an adamant defense of her innocence in her fate that one might question her need to write her story in the form of a confession, emphasizing some secret to be revealed, if she is solely a victim of unfortunate circumstance. Rather, a reader would be justified in responding in the opposite manner to this likely textual strategy of pleading innocence before being accused of a crime. Indeed, in shouting her innocence at the top of her text, Mathilda might be announcing some guilt in the silences. The epistolary aspect of this autobiography assumes that the writer has formed her opinions of her experiences—Mathilda knows she is guilty of incestuous feelings. Yet, in constructing a "sjuzhet," the sequence of fictional events as presented in the narrative, Mathilda is able to mask her
guilt as innocence. Mathilda’s presentation of her parents’ history in the beginning of her tale, out of the logical sequence of when she heard the history (at age sixteen, upon the return of her father), manipulates the reader to bias her history.

Typically, the rewriting and restructuring of events forcibly sets up scenarios of mimetic rivalry. As discussed above in Chapter 3, Paul Cantor’s essay “Mary Shelley and the Taming of the Byronic Hero” appropriates Renè Girard’s revision of Freud’s Oedipal complex as based on eros to argue that desire is learned. In a son’s desire “to be like his father, he comes to desire what his father desires, namely, his mother” (92). Accordingly, in each of Byron’s dramas, a pattern emerges. The hero typically fatally falls in love with his rival’s wife. This happens not for solely misogynistic reasons, but because the men are rivals and incorporate their aggression in appropriating their rival’s possessions. Mimetic desires create mimetic violence in these male Romantic texts. In contrast, Shelley’s “ethic of care” based on domestic harmony in Mathilda evades mimetic rivalry because Mathilda has no rival. Anne Mellor contests the separate sphere’s ideology of critics such as Mary Poovey and Patricia Meyer Spacks. Poovey and Spacks attempt to empower eighteenth- and nineteenth-century heroines, though they are protagonists who are isolated in the separate sphere of the domestic. Such a “traditional paradigm” sees women as oppressed and reactionary against the patriarchy. Instead, Mellor argues, Shelley’s non-maternal narrative avoids the conflict that comes so easily to the aggressive Romantic literature of Byron and Blake. In the absence of the idealized nurturing mother, Mathilda relies on herself. Far from creating violence, Mathilda attempts to re-establish the domestic family.
The private immediacy of autobiography, and especially of a confession, commands the reader to participate in the history and understand the author’s need to express her story in extended written form. Mathilda vaguely identifies this need as “a feeling that I cannot define [that] leads me on” (175). By writing her story, Mathilda entrusts the reader to define that “feeling,” that impetus that demands expression, and bring resolution to the author’s confusion. In exchange for solving her riddle, the reader is rewarded with the satisfaction of closure and in essence becomes the author of the text in answering its silences, its apparently undefinable (for Mathilda) secret. This strategy resembles that of the fragment form, as Byron uses it in The Giaour. The fragment engages the reader to complete the narrative missing in its gaps. Both Shelley and Byron employ a strategy that lures the reader to resolve issues that are intentionally unresolvable. By doing so, the reader is left distinctly aware of the limitations of enforcing a complete reading on Romantic texts. Instead, these Romantic texts insist on polytextual readings.

Tilottama Rajan agrees that Mathilda’s strategy could be subversive, but she assumes a defeatist perspective. Rajan asserts that Mathilda “transmits a tale to a reader, but almost posthumously, as if to extinguish the possibility that its reading will change anything.” Surely, though, the overtly propagandist writings of Mary Shelley’s mother and father and husband would ensure that Shelley’s own writings, as does Mathilda’s autobiography, exist only to change her readers. Readers who complete Mathilda’s tale with a conventional reading, seeing Mathilda as the victim she suggests she is in her opening, are forced to reevaluate their stance by the end of the story. In vigorously interpreting Mathilda from the autobiographical context of Nitchie, Rajan and others fail
to emphasize Mathilda’s own purposes in writing her history. With this understanding, Mary Shelley’s purpose, not her purging, can be seen. By engaging the reader in uncovering the mystery of her text, Mathilda maneuvers the reader into vicariously propagating her point of view.

As Francis Burney does in Evelina, Shelley presents a text in which the heroine presents herself as a conventional heroine, a pawn of sexually aggressive males. Yet, as the tale is told, it becomes apparent that another type of heroine can be seen. Under the cloak of domestic passivity, Mathilda and Evelina present themselves as aggressive, predatory females, who in fact enjoy dominance over the men in their lives.

Mathilda’s direct mention of Oedipus in the beginning of the letter and her ready association of herself with him is a maneuver that intentionally proclaims Mathilda as an innocent. Her strategy in foregrounding this association so early in the novel evokes the response that, like Oedipus, “Mathilda too is the unwitting victim in a story of incest.” This rhetorical name-recognition device plays right into Mathilda’s bid for the reader’s sympathy and her accusation of fate. As in Frankenstein, Mathilda accuses men of instigating woe. Like many Radcliffian heroines who are set upon by providence, Mathilda trusts in the innocence of her conscience to save her. Kate F. Ellis classifies this type of narrative as “feminine Gothic.” Ellis writes that “[i]n the feminine Gothic the heroine exposes the villain’s usurpation and thus reclaims an enclosed space that should have been a refuge from evil but has become the very opposite, a prison.” Shelley’s Mathilda seems to have fared better than her Otranto titular counterpart. In Horice
Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, the origin of the "feminine Gothic" novel, though Mathilda is killed by her father, her sturdy adherence to virtue ultimately cleanses the castle of all evil caused by his secret sin. Ellis reads the "angel in the house" as more than an imprisoned victim. She is a powerful figure who can cleanse the home of the male's secret sin. Shelley's Mathilda at first presents herself as this type of heroine. Yet, as her confession evolves, she exposes herself as the holder of the secret. Mathilda conflates the heroine-types of angel and seductress.

Shelley establishes a deceptively conventional tale in the story's exposition. Her father's narrative is re-framed to suit Mathilda's own purpose. The way in which he described himself to be before his misfortunes locates the source of the original narrative in the father's male perspective. The reader's expectations of patriarchal conventions in the eighteenth-century epistolary novel are engaged as the father commodifies his beloved. He claims that Diana possesses "real humbleness of soul," and he will allow "nothing . . . for a moment to shake his purpose of uniting himself to her" (178). Also, in an extension of the sentimental romance, Diana dies soon after in childbirth. When the father initially talks of his daughter, it is of her token value. As the father sneaks away to the Continent, he leaves his daughter in pawn with his sister, so that "one day [he] may claim her back" (181).

Society's convention of male dominance is enlisted as the apparent ideological foundation of the text, perhaps to make it more palatable to its readers. The introduction of Mathilda's parents' narrative portrays the female as a conventional eighteenth-century literary type: Mathilda's mother is "angelically gentle," with "so pure a heart, and so much
real humbleness of soul jointed to a firm reliance on her own integrity and a belief in that of others” (178-9). Further, she is the passive object of the man’s lust, for “nothing was ever able for a moment to shake his purpose of uniting himself to her.” Yet, beneath this narrative facade and at odds with this patriarchal structure, the mother is plainly empowered with an ideology that subsumes and supplants the father’s. For, when they marry, the father quickly rejects his former society because “Diana had torn the veil which had before kept him in his boyhood” (179). The female not only instructs but, here, masculinizes the boy. He is made malleable to his wife’s ideology. This is clearly the narrative pattern Mathilda wishes the reader to recognize in her own narrative. Through “her beloved lessons,” Diana and her husband establish a myopic, mutually inclusive relationship based on Diana’s “superior wisdom.” Mathilda’s narrative empowers Diana as a preface to Mathilda’s own maneuvering tactics.

Mathilda exploits the reader’s Aristotelian propensity to sympathy. She achieves this by using the confessional form of narration which allows her to filter and orchestrate her past to present herself as the victim of her father and of fate. In fact, she begins “my tale” immediately with her father’s history, thereby solidifying the reader’s association of responsibility for her fate with her father. Mathilda chooses to relate “my tale therefore as if I wrote for strangers” (176), though solely addressing her close friend Woodville. She uses a lexical strategy to defer reader gratification and disassociate herself from fault, thereby dismissing any criticism of her by polite society. By off-footing the reader with a stop-start narrative apparently the result of mental lapses, Mathilda displaces the reader’s association of “my history,” “my tale,” with her implicit complicity in the “crime.” “What
am I writing?” she queries initially, placing herself as reader rather than writer, but she immediately halts a response by escaping to a consumption-induced absentmindedness. This again sides the reader with herself and prejudices her innocence through his sympathy towards her imminent death, continually referred to in the opening paragraphs and reinforced with pathetic fallacy. When she again, with affected fortitude, demands of herself “enough of this [,] I will begin my tale: it is my last task” (176), she defers the association of herself with the crime with another bid for the reader’s collusion. Mathilda grammatically halts her history by following “tale” with a connecting clause that evolves into another sympathetic emphasis on the finality of her task as death approaches.

The confessor’s seeming revelation of the cause of her woes is the announcement of the father’s incestuous desires. Revelation of this secret acts as a crossroads to connect text and narrative. The revelation of the crime satisfies the textually-engaged reader and acts as the narrative’s climax. The voicing of the secret, the father’s declaration, “My daughter, I love you!” (201), satisfies the reader’s sleuthing for the confessor’s woes. Further, the father’s announcement and subsequent death impacts the plot by leaving Mathilda alone. Yet, it is just this revelation and satisfaction that should cause the reader to distrust his inferences and “complete” reading. A reader has every occasion to feel satisfaction and pleasure in resolving the crime announced in the text’s opening: there is a sense of closure. Through her writing, Mathilda exorcises this terrible woe. This revelation scene acts as a climax in the narrative in its amplitude of emotions and in that Mathilda “gained his secret.” All is revealed. But is it? This seeming closure and resolution comes only a third of the way into the text. The placement of this revelation
can be seen as a textual strategy that, rather than satisfying, demands the reader continue through the significant remainder of the text and discover what Mathilda is really “confessing,” not just “expressing.”

The confessional narrative is broken by points of emphasis of Mathilda’s innocence that should be seen as suspect. Using Miltonic metaphors, Mathilda reverses the female transgressive guilt of *Paradise Lost* to make her father the Eve figure who ate the apple and drove them both from Paradise. Mathilda blames her father as source of all sin. At the end of *Mathilda*, however, Shelley re-writes the male-orientation of Miltonic cosmology. Here, Shelley pointedly signals her re-casting of female subordination, Eve as the source of sin, to make the female (Diana’s mother, Diana, Mathilda, Woodville’s mother) the source of all ideology: Eve-creator. Shelley defines a new role for the domestic sphere, in which alternative familial relationships are acceptable. The close reader discovers that Mathilda is not the passive victim she initially portrays but a heroine actively asserting a radical code of behavior.

Mathilda goes to great lengths to exculpate herself from any impropriety in the beginning of the epistle-autobiography. She “committed no crime”; she “ate no apple.” Like Woodville, Mathilda initially blames fate for her woes, but their own culpability differs significantly. Both attribute their woes to unfortunate circumstance, and fate is explicitly made the scapegoat in Mathilda’s opening writing: “My fate was governed by necessity, a hideous necessity” (176). Woodville was delayed from his lover while transacting business—the inconsequentiality of the delay while his lover was dying heightens his misery. Yet a loved one’s death, the parallel in their cause of woe, also
highlights their differences. Woodville could not prevent his lover's death, the cause of his misfortunes. Mathilda, however, could prevent the voicing of incest and her father's resulting death, but did not. She encouraged her father while blaming the hand of fate. The active responsibility Mathilda feels for this event and her subsequent death-desire that proves unconquerable contrast to Woodville's ready admission that he will surmount his woes after due grieving time. Woodville hopes "that there is a joy that the sun and earth and all its beauties can bestow that [he and Mathilda] will one day feel" (240). His distance from complicity in his woe proves the criterion for returning to normalcy, shaking off his stigma, his guilt that separated him from society. Mathilda, however, is responsible for her stigma and cannot return to society.

Mathilda's textual strategy is to preface and sanction her transgression by filtering her parents' narratives through her own. Mathilda presents the embedded narratives of her father and mother in a schema that parallels her own relationship with her father. She makes her story her mother's story, textually prefacing the expression of her own values in Diana's narrative. Mathilda asserts a matriarchal economy. As with Mathilda, Diana's family consisted of an absent mother and a father with "many peculiar ideas which influenced the system he adopted with regard to her" (179, my underline). In a potentially infinitely regressive pattern, the instruction of Mathilda's father by Diana suggests that Diana's mother likewise instructed Diana's father in unconventional domestic affection. This pattern is based not on the Alphonse Frankenstein-like control of emotion but on emotional expression. Significantly, the apparent domestic family ruled by a widower
father is only a mask for the wife’s rule, disseminated in a taught ideology. This unconventional economy is meant to sanction the father’s “secret love” for Mathilda’s mother. In fact, the father’s name is never mentioned in the novel, a disempowering strategy for anchoring his position while allowing a nominal substitution of “Diana” with “Mathilda,” effectively marrying Mathilda to her father.

The textual pattern appears to focus on the father’s “corruption” of Mathilda. Yet, the close reader recognizes that the father’s views transparently reflect those of his wife:

She was his monitress as he learned what were the true ends of life. It was through her beloved lessons that he cast off his old pursuits. . . . [H]e seemed to love her more for what he considered her superior wisdom.

(179-80)

Mathilda’s focus in so forcibly announcing her mother’s active influence over her father reflects her own active engagement of her father’s love. Mathilda replaces her mother in the family relationship.

Mathilda’s narrative stresses her father’s lack of courage in confiding his (secret) love of Diana to society because it is somehow transgressive. Initially, Diana is pointedly made the object of the man’s desire. Yet Diana, because she is “less initiated in the mysteries of life and society” (179), is established as an autonomous figure adhering to her own code of values. Mathilda endears Diana with the autonomy that she herself will command. Her coda, just as Mathilda’s own, makes the father “look[ ] up to her as a guide” (179). And when they clandestinely marry, “he had become the husband of Diana” (my underline). Mathilda empowers the female with an alternative social ideology so
powerful that she becomes the standard-bearer for the husband. It becomes clear that the transgressiveness of the father’s secret concerning his relationship with Diana, which he is hesitant about publicizing, is her ideological position of power over him.

With Elizabeth Nitchie in mind, one might interpret the father’s desire to take Mathilda to the home where he once lived with his wife in all of its Oedipal splendor of male agentivity. Mathilda, and Mary Shelley, indeed, initially demand that reading. Yet, according to a paradigm in Mathilda, patriarchal action only frames scenes, to disarm the reader. The bricks and mortar of the structure support female control of the male. This model was noted in Chapter 3, in which Byron’s Gulnare is at first rescued from her harem cage by Conrad, and at the tale’s end she assumes a very subjugated role before him and his pirates. Yet, sandwiched between these endpoints of passivity and domesticity, Gulnare murders Conrad’s enemy, and she frees Conrad from his prison cell.

Mathilda closes the narrative of her father by appealing to literary conventions of filial praise of the father. As with Byron’s use of The Giaour’s Advertisement, Mathilda’s textual pattern has been to frame the father’s history under the cloak of literary convention. She emphasizes her father as a superior male hero. In closing this encomium, Mathilda makes reference to her father’s disappearance as society’s loss of “one who had been as a part of themselves and of their hopes” (181). This is a highly transparent rhetorical strategy to sugarcoat a subversive text with mouthings directed at the passive reader. For, in reality, by marrying Diana and subsequently declining any other company, the father had made himself “extinct” to his society long before his disappearance. He then disappears for sixteen years and upon his return secludes himself with his daughter.
Having engaged the reader’s sympathy with a heroic figuring of her father, Mathilda’s subtext draws the reader into the autonomy of the female and the propagation of her transgressive views.

When father and daughter arrive at the home where Mathilda’s mother had lived and Mathilda is asked to choose a book, the father intimates that she should continue reading Dante where Diana left off. Mathilda, though, undutifully chooses another book. She selects the “descent of Sir Guyon to the halls of Avarice; [and, Mathilda notes,] while he listened his eyes fixed on me in a sad profound silence” (195). On the surface level she pleases the reader by leading him to easily recognize the father’s manifest incestuous ocular signals. The writer achieves this not only by showing the father’s confusion of mother and daughter, but also by syntactically positing the weight of the sentence in the ending argument phrase: “in a profound silence.” This textual strategy serves to disguise the agency of Mathilda’s seemingly randomly selected passage from The Faerie Queene. Just as her mother controls her husband, Mathilda toys with her father’s emotional instability in suggesting her own sexual topics.

Mathilda’s father gives Mathilda a moral construct. Her only learned moral code is her father’s, presented in his history in which Diana’s unconventional ideology guides him (though the secluded spinster aunt with whom Mathilda spends sixteen years doubtlessly instilled lessons of female autonomy). Further, her father “enlarges her mind” through the stories of his travels, where he experienced “the freedom from all restraint” that made him “impatient of any censure except that of his own mind which had no relation to the peculiar notions of any one country” (188). Mathilda is partaking in the
transmission of ideological systems that owe nothing to the conventions of society but which stress the rightful autonomy of the individual.

Though using a common trope of father/daughter seduction, Shelley reverses the victim. Patricia Meyer Spacks notes that conventional literary morality punishes the female:

Many works of fiction endorse a rigid punitive sexual morality. Women must be punished more severely than men for their lapses: the innocent girl seduced and betrayed will die in subsequent childbirth, her seducer, repentant, punished only by fits of melancholia.11

In reversing the father/daughter victimizer/victim roles, the father dies, while Mathilda becomes afflicted with a self-absorbed melancholy. As seducer of an innocent, the father invokes the full measure of punishment typically reserved for the female. Mary Shelley’s textual strategy also uses autobiography to reverse a trend common in eighteenth-century literature of delegating women to positions of auditor. Having purged her acknowledgment of incestuous desires in writing the revelation scene, at the end of the text Mathilda becomes a purposeful story-teller.

Narrative manipulation in autobiography is an implicit textual strategy. The narrative effect of the father’s death serves to eradicate any potential dissension to Mathilda’s story in her autobiography: only she now knows the entire, true story. She enhances her status by denying the authority of another narrative viewpoint. Further, an absent father makes a fine scapegoat and all impropriety can be easily attributed to him. This is not, however, the strategy Mathilda reveals in the final third of her narrative.
When she could be sanctioned by society from any complicity in her father's incestuous desires, indeed, when she meets in Woodville a perfect friend and very eligible bachelor, Mathilda professes her love for her father, desiring to "unite me to my father." By the story's end she is happily anticipating "the moment of our union" (241). In her final words, Mathilda accepts full guilt for the transactions. She declares the event "my folly," with repeated statements of agentivity. When she announces her death, it is masochistic: "I caused myself," signaling her fatal consumption as suicide at the novel's end.

Mathilda's narrative has evolved into an acceptance of her own incestuous desires.

It is only at the end that the reader is allowed full witness of the text's design. And, at this point, he is forced to dismiss the writer's professed innocence at the story's opening. Robert Newman notes that in reading novels "[w]e travel a text in quest of an ending that will retrospectively impose order by relieving the tensions generated by plot, thereby returning us to a beginning. In doing so, we seek the beginning of history in its end." Mathilda directs the reader's sympathy and anticipation of a secret to engage and encourage him to find the truth of her story. Implicit in an autobiography and letter-novel is the completion of the author's history inclusive of the beginning point of writing. Thus, Mathilda is already self-stigmatized when she begins writing. What Mathilda presents at first as a transgression by her father so extreme that it requires a text to express it can, with hindsight of a second reading, be seen as Mathilda's propagation of her transgressive image. At the novel's end, the reader is able to identify Mathilda's independence from society and from society's moral conventions. As Leona Toker notes in Eloquent Reticence, on a first reading the "audience" does not realize certain information that the
author has known all along but has withheld until the end. “Then we realize that the
texture of the preceding portion of the narrative is considerably richer than it seemed to
be.” Indeed, the reader is then able to distinguish the secret transgression Mathilda is
confessing. Mathilda’s writing, leaving a physical script, allows Woodville multiple
readings to enable him to see the richness of her story. In a second reading, the patriarchal
coatings of the text dissolve to reveal a story that leaves one questioning Mathilda’s
culpability. Having obliged the reader to complete a duty to the confessor in making sense
of Mathilda’s story (notably Mathilda’s “confession” not “expression”), Mathilda can be
seen as a manual for a new social system, offering new codes for relationships of love and
female autonomy.

Mathilda’s own narrative opens with a conventional Romantic schema of an
orphaned child in communion with nature. She is a “solitary being.” She draws upon that
convention by using lines from Wordsworth’s “She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways”
(surely a Shelleyan pun in conflating sexual innocence and social subversion in
“untrodden”). Very quickly, however, it is apparent that the language of the subtext
poses Mathilda as the agent in encouraging an incestuous relationship.

Even before her father returns from his travels, Mathilda imagines herself disguised
as a boy traveling the world in active pursuit of her father. In revealing his miniature that
she wears “exposed on [her] breast” (an action suggesting a desire to reveal her sexuality
to her father), her pursuit demands his words of love for his daughter. This scheme of
pursuit and avowal of love evolves into a narrative pattern in the plot’s climax and in
Mathilda’s dream.
Mathilda has a secret agenda. Just when her father arrives to see his daughter for the first time, Mathilda walks into the woods in which she has grown up and surprisingly gets lost. Yet, she conveniently makes a spectacular and surreal entrance, seemingly for the best stage effect, when her father is positioned to gain a long and appreciative view. Mathilda’s language reflects her frame of mind. When she finds her father’s dead body at a cottage, her language is sexual: “we knocked at the door and it was opened: the bed within instantly caught my eye; something stiff and straight lay on it, covered by a sheet; the cottagers looked aghast” (214).

In the Freudian concept of penis envy, the daughter’s desire of her father is desperate. As almost the sole male in Mathilda’s environment, Mathilda reflects an attraction that Luce Irigaray notes of women in general. Irigaray suggests that “the only redemption of her value as a girl would be to seduce the father, to draw from him the mark if not the admission of some interest.” If the phallus is the standard of value, the father, possessor of the phallus, must desire the daughter to give her value. Accordingly, Mathilda’s sole chance of sexuality in her condensed family economy is for her father to recognize her feminine value. She must cultivate her father’s love.

Mathilda rejects the novel’s other males, a suitor and Woodville, by not encouraging them as lovers. Though her father is Mathilda’s first point of male contact, she is offered others, especially one her age and ready to be suitor in the conventional manner. Mathilda emboldens her father to end the suitor’s courting, by offering no encouragement to the youth. Significantly, she rejects conventional love and courtship rituals. Mathilda explicitly signals to her father her rejection of the suitor through silence:
she will not play the courtship game. Though the suitor is a “young man of rank, well informed, and agreeable in person,” Mathilda claims she “was too much taken up by [her] own occupations and feelings to attend much to this” (191). Yet, she still refers to the suitor’s visits as obnoxious. The father’s violence in extricating the boy is a fulfillment of Mathilda’s desire to be unburdened by the youth’s love, leaving herself free for the primary male in her life. Again, she so artfully projects onto her father the culpability for conventionally improper actions that, though guilty, she appears innocent.

Mathilda’s narrative silences, her eloquent reticence, are highly suspect. They manifest a distinct announcement of her more-than-filial-love for her father, though disguised as naive grappling in an incomprehensible situation. Immediately following the suitor incident and the father’s “transformation,” Mathilda becomes a predatory female, though she continues to claim naiveté. At one point, she mentions Alfieri’s incestuous tragedy Myrrha and then “chanced to cast my eyes on my father and met his.” This flirting behavior suggests the ambiguity of Mathilda’s confession. Mathilda seems to want to expose her own complicity, her own desires for her father, to the reader, while enlisting literary convention to not distance her reader.

In positing blame on her father, Mathilda disguises her efforts to cultivate her father’s expressed affections as innocent responses. By doing this, she makes her ideology more accessible to her conventional reader(s). Most critics now agree that Mathilda exhibits incestuous desires for her father. Tilottama Rajan states:

> It is far from clear whose incestuous desire the text is about and [ ] whether it protects or abjects that desire. The narrative is ostensibly about the
father's passion for Mathilda and yet just a powerfully about her desire for him. In one of the few sustained discussions of Mathilda, Terence Harpold, in effect, reads through this contradiction so as to reduce the text's profound ambivalence. He argues that the novella (including its transmission to Godwin) acts out a seduction fantasy which testifies to the way Mathilda/Mary, who knows her mother only through the mediation of her father, is caught in a desire that is always already constructed within the patriarchal order. (9)

Rajan and Harpold mistake the textual economy established by Mathilda. Though the writer is raised without her mother, her family is not "constructed within the patriarchal order." This, however, is the suggestion of the surface text. Rather, Mathilda’s ideological heritage is firmly represented by a matriarchy, including her father’s sister, who in turn was raised by her maternal relations. Also, Harpold’s "reading through this contradiction [of whose is the guilt] so as to reduce the text’s profound ambivalence" disregards Shelley’s engagement of the imagination. It is this provoked ambiguity that energizes her text, making it at once permissibly Gothic (if the father is the sole seducer) and radical (if Mathilda is seen as the predator).

Mary Poovey notes the dualism of Mary Shelley’s own life that caused a “collision between what we now call the ‘Romantic’ model of originality and the ‘Victorian’ model of feminine domesticity” (116). The ascent of Shelley’s conservatism, seen particularly in her 1831 Frankenstein, has been well documented. But, prior to this, Shelley was
instructed by her father in benign not radical Godwinism. Though Blumberg does not pursue this influence on Shelley, she notes that:

By the time PBS [Percy] met Godwin the latter had long since revised considerably his political views. Indeed, he had done so by the time that he began to educate his daughter. Shelley's challenge to PBS developed over the years, but even by the time of their first meetings she was unlikely to have shared his singled-minded commitment and uncompromising views; he was dedicated to the doctrinaire Godwin, the Godwin of the first edition of Political Justice. (6)

The internal "collision" between radical originality and conservatism is marked in Shelley's writing and life. Mary's years during and before her writing of Mathilda in 1819 primarily exhibit the stamp of social unorthodoxy, yet they are mixed with the influence of her father's increasing conservatism. What Shelley read of her father's work contrasted sharply with the man who was raising her. Certainly Shelley exiled herself from him by eloping with Percy at the age of sixteen, showing the autonomous rebellion she inherited from her mother. William Godwin made his disapproval clear in his repudiation of the young couple and in his refusal to allow his family to speak to Mary upon her return to England. Mary Shelley should have anticipated such a censure, Mary Poovey suggests, because of the universal abuse received by her mother's similar adventures told in her Memoirs. Mary Wollstonecraft's self-determined affair with Gilbert Imlay prefaces and sanctions her daughter's elopement.
Against this backdrop was Percy’s insistence that Mary live up to her parents’ literary reputation, and Mary’s own intellectual development based on reading her parents’ radical texts. For a girl who would read her mother’s works at her mother’s grave, defiance of social convention must have eclipsed any duties she felt to obey polite society, and indeed her actions illustrate this. However, Poovey wants to convey Shelley’s conflict between defiance of and submission to convention, evidenced in the ascendancy of conservatism in her writing and in her settling down to a domestic life while raising her son Percy Florence. Shelley was simultaneously pressured to radical actions and writing while assuming a maternal domestic role in her relationship with Percy: until Percy’s death, Shelley was pregnant every year after her elopement.

Shelley uses the interplay between exile and “associate” to create another level of tension between polar allegiances. Mathilda offers Woodville a poisonous death. In defining herself by her extra-societal status, it is natural for Mathilda to encourage suicide and “willingly and joyfully quit this hated round of daily life” (235), a self-damning option decisively anti-society. But, Woodville responds from his patriarchal economy. As society’s “associate,” he encourages his friend to “bestow happiness on another” (238) and attempts to return her to society. Both positions remain antithetical, yet Mathilda has the last word and the greater influence: she leaves her “tale” for Woodville to read and respond to.

By encouraging her social stigma, and therefore managing her stigma, Mathilda marks her call for a new social order through social protest. Jane Blumberg argues that Shelley retracted from Percy’s radical ideologies and into her own views that were
influenced by Byron’s more moderate ideas. Mary Shelley was closely associated with Byron and fair copied many of his works, beginning with “Ode on Venice” and Mazeppa in 1818. Shelley is not a passive mouthpiece for Percy, Blumberg suggests, but an autonomous thinker who grew into her own voice in her early novels, Frankenstein (1818), Valperga (1823), and Lodore (1835). Notably, Mathilda’s date of completion in August 1919 (Nitchie, x) qualifies its inclusion within this schema, suggesting Shelley’s autonomous voice.

As do other Shelleyan characters, Mathilda exhibits actions typical of a socially-stigmatized person. Erving Goffman identifies three steps a stigmatized person undergoes to regain his society. The character first alters his identity, then joins a stigmatized society (typically one of a lower social standing than the one from which he has been ostracized). Lastly, the stigmatized person, if unable to erase the stigma, attempts to create an anti-society in which he is compatible. Mary Shelley’s concern with this socially transgressive aspect of character can be seen in the monster’s actions in Frankenstein. The monster at first clothes himself to cover his body (his stigmatic mark), then associates himself with the outcast De Lacey family, and finally requests a mate of his type with whom he can isolate himself in the wilds of South America. Mathilda, too, disguises herself as a nun, associates herself with socially isolated Woodville, and finally chooses death over re-inclusion in society.

Characters in Romantic literature frequently willfully encourage their own deviance, locating a positive gain in a negative circumstance. Mathilda self-enables her stigma. Though an apparently wholly negative act, incest conceals a form of
empowerment for Mathilda. It is after all the father who caves in to his passions and
vocally confesses his incestuous feelings. In doing this he effectively emasculates himself;
he destroys the idea of incest and thus the imagined physical act by forcing and expecting
Mathilda's immediate abhorrence: "'Why, cruel girl, do you drive me on: you will repent
and I shall die'" (200). Then, unable to control the situation or his exposed knowledge, he
kills himself, while Mathilda proves the stronger one. She is able to, if nothing else, not
allow the situation to destroy her.

Mathilda can encourage her stigma because she can control it, albeit, perhaps in a
hysterically repressed form. In this scheme both daughter and father can harbor
incestuous wishes, maintaining an ideal erotically charged Oedipal relationship. But it is
Mathilda who is able to sublimate her passions and easily maintain this incestuous ideal in
fantasy without the possible disaster of realizing it in actuality. Indeed, this power reversal
parallels her mother's superior position in her relationship with the father, who had to find
the courage to publicize his love for Diana. In a patriarchal economy where the sole male
would be expected, and even at first appears, to be the dominator, Mathilda quickly
displaces his position to one of weakness, asserting instead the influence of the female.
Byron employs this model with Gulnare, who at first is rescued from her harem-prison, to
ultimately free her rescuer.

Stigmatizing oneself can be empowering. Mathilda psychically empowers herself
in being able to, finally, express her passions. In a way in which Alphonse Frankenstein
cannot, Mathilda expresses her passions and emotions. Shelley's heroine is characterized
by this freedom to release her emotion. Mellor refers to this as an aspect of "female
romanticism” that contests “male romanticism’s” stifling of emotion, traditionally seen as a characteristic of the Byronic hero. Mathilda further gains power in continually and willingly placing herself in an unconventional economy in her desire to die, hiding in a remote land, and eventually committing passive suicide. Her whole life and actions support her belief in socially alternative moral codes.

This independence from emotional constraint is in keeping with Shelley’s anti-masculine ideology of emotional restraint, portrayed in Alphonse Frankenstein’s insistence that his son repress his hysterical outpourings of grief and self-accusations (Hobbs, 159). Hobbs notes Victor’s feminine hysterical symptoms such as talkativeness and overt emotionalism. This gender cross-dressing allows Shelley to acceptably, if subversively, voice feminine views in a masculine character to an audience which asserted the morals of male rationality.16 Just prior to writing Mathilda, Shelley lost a favorite child, William, her third such loss. The devastation this caused Shelley is well known. Despite her father’s insistence, she refused to restrain her emotional despondency. Mary Shelley instills this same feminine assertion of emotions as a proper response to crises into Mathilda’s refusal to heed Woodville’s command to restrain her grief. Accordingly, though Mathilda presents herself as a victim of her society, she in fact maintains autonomy in her situation. In this respect, Anne Mellor misinterprets Mathilda’s suicide at the novel’s end. It is not the turning of repressed anger for incest on herself (a male reading), but a female, emotive refusal to control her grief as conventional society, in the voice of Woodville, urges.17
Mathilda's stated desire for a "mental union" with her father seems designed to elicit a particular reader response. This confession is, after all, going to be read, and her life and actions judged, by Woodville. As he is representative of conventional society, Mathilda must apply to his values in a non-confrontational strategy that would then allow him to be sympathetic to her own. Ultimately, Woodville's speech discouraging suicide fails to shake off her suicidal melancholy. Mathilda is locked, willingly, in the economy of her father as taught by Diana, where the unconventional, incest and suicide, are permissible expressions of one's passions. She refuses to compromise her deviant view of society in a manner made available by Woodville, of partaking in society if only to do good to one person. Again, as in Frankenstein, Shelley counters masculine romanticism's pursuit of the ideal and Godwinian belief in the goodness of man in her propagation of extreme "domestic affection."

Mathilda's dream is a synecdoche for the tension between contrarieties in the novella. Nitchie, Mellor, Levine, and others, have commented on Mathilda's dream from its biographical import: Shelley's deathwish/punishment of Godwin, her father. But, limiting an analysis of Mathilda's dream strictly to the fictional character's autobiographical narrative reveals not a deathwish but a wish for life. Supporting the novella's structure of framing segments with conventional aspects, immediately prior to her dream, Mathilda idly decides the proper, conventional response to the father's announcement of love. Her reaction can be seen as a strategy for reader alliance. She at first determines: "never, never may I speak to him again" (202). Then, though, she
distances herself from this conventional response. Mathilda decides that her father must depart for “another sixteen years,” until his passion is exhausted and he can return to his daughter. There is clearly a movement in her narrative to a reduction of the transgressiveness of the crime. She moves from requiring absolute abstinence from “her greatest enemy” to a hopeful reunion with her “miserable father.” The subsequent dream, then, engages Mathilda as actor: “I pursued him [but] he leapt down” the precipice (205). Notably, Mathilda does not “push” or actively cause her father’s death. His suicide is the logical extension of his conviction that he had “endeavoured to pollute [her] mind” (207). Shelley establishes two polar positions in having both characters accept total blame. This tension creates energy. Mathilda so signals her desire for her father that far from being repulsed by incest she is energized by the potential loss of her father. Thus, when she receives the letter announcing his departure, her first thought is to physically catch him.

Mathilda’s dream can be contrasted with Victor’s, in which he kisses his dead mother. The dreams of both protagonists reflect their sublimated desire to establish domestic affection in incestuous bonding. Victor’s dream, however, suggests the impossibility of domesticity when personal ambition is prioritized. Poovey, in citing Victor’s wish “to procrastinate all that related to my feelings of affection until the great object, which swallowed up every habit of my nature, should be completed,” maintains that Shelley’s critique of imaginative egotism is “more concerned with this antisocial dimension than with its metaphysical implications.” While Poovey’s assessment may unnecessarily limit Shelley’s scope and skill to the quotidian, it is certainly true that
Victor's egotism results in the destruction of his immediate society: his relationship with his father's family and his neglected bond to his creation.

In *Mathilda*, Shelley presents the disruption of the family. Yet, it is society's strictures, and not the protagonist's ego, that destroy domesticity. Mathilda's pursuit of her father signals her desire for the establishment of domestic affection. This pursuit is prefaced in *Frankenstein*. At the end of *Frankenstein*, the monster locks Victor in a bond of deadly pursuit. Transforming their bond in *Mathilda*, Shelley rewrites this fatal attraction as a bond of love.

Mathilda's silence and seclusion from her father after he professes his love undercut her initial rejection of her father. Mathilda is the force behind the expression of incest in their relationship. While her immediate thoughts of fleeing reward a conventional moral response to the situation, Mathilda's actions reinforce her rejection of those codes and her underlying fidelity to a new order of domesticity.

Mathilda appears to only do what is good in initially considering fleeing her parent/seducer, but she then justifies her pursuit by imagining him moving towards death. She willingly stigmatizes herself by evading society, going into punitive exile for the transgressions in which she was implicated. She apparently complies with contemporary innocent seduction victims in becoming ostracized from society, yet it becomes her mark of protest. Society does not reject Mathilda: she rejects society. Mathilda willingly involves herself in an incestuous relationship in defiance of a taboo which represents that which society, with its moral code, would most abhor. Even the public display of her incest in her confession to "whomever might read it" is an actively defiant tale. At the
end, Mathilda distinguishes her hopes to be found in death from Woodville’s conventional “in this world” hopes.

In a patriarchal society which prohibits incest and where sin is expiated by the father in his suicide, Mathilda equates her own status to her father’s by taking the same road. Mathilda chooses suicide (doubly so in her earlier metaphorical death) to affirm her own beliefs in the face of society’s strictures against this action. By dying, the father and Mathilda stay faithful to their unconventional, shared ideology. If as Spacks states, “genuine female self-fulfillment may demand the pursuit of other goals than happiness,” then Mathilda acknowledges this fulfillment by pursuing isolation. Melancholy is savored in her self-annexation from society and, while perhaps not happy, Mathilda is satisfied. In willing her own death, Mathilda fulfills her desire to abide by her autonomous coda.

Shelley, like Byron with his heroes, seems to play off the reader’s expectations of her heroine, to challenge the reader’s ideas of a literary heroine. This Romantic activity of “shock aesthetics” exists in much of Shelley’s work. Romantic writers attempted to shock their readers into recognizing as social constructs that which had become normalized. Byron’s Harold functioned as this type of “shocker.” Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage shocked Romantic readers by presenting a hero who was sullen and misanthropic, thoroughly unconventionally heroic. In Shelley’s short story “Transformation,” the hero Guido is more subtly an anti-society hero. Guido is initially exiled because of his rude behavior towards others. However, he is accepted back into society by surfacey altering his
behavior. To partake in society, Guido realizes that he must merely improve his speech.
He learns courteous rhetoric, earning him the title of Guido il Cortese and notably not that
of Guido il Gentile, which would mark an internal rather than superficial change. In this
way, Shelley established a character who maintains his own rebellious ideology while
being included in society.

Mary Shelley had precedent in her mother’s writings for subverting contemporary
values. Shelley read **Mary: A Fragment** in the summer of 1814. In **Mary**, Wollstonecraft
acknowledges the rightness of a woman willingly stigmatizing herself by leaving (but not
divorcing) her husband and taking a lover. The story ends with a fierce rejection of
marriage and encourages an Oedipal love relationship in nominally making the heroine’s
lover her “father” and “brother.”

Shelley places her reader in an energized threshold, between Byron’s “palace and
prison,” by presenting a heroine in Mathilda who is both angel and seductress. She
declares herself passive victim of fate, yet her actions suggest that she pursues her father.
As the next chapter explores, Fanny Burney’s heroine Evelina is presented just as
ambiguously. These authors decenter the construct of the literary heroine that had
become naturalized. In Mathilda’s excessive domestic affection, Shelley offers a polar
alternative to the eighteenth-century fictional heroine, creating a tension between the
expected and the radical to energize the reader’s imagination.
NOTES

1 Betty T. Bennett and Charles E. Robinson, eds., *The Mary Shelley Reader* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990) 160. All citations from *Frankenstein* are from this work and will be noted by their page numbers.


4 Jane Blumberg 225, note 20.


7 Betty T. Bennett and Charles E. Robinson, eds., *The Mary Shelley Reader* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990) 176. All citations from *Mathilda* are from this work and will be noted by their page numbers.

8 Tilottama Rajan 48.


16 For more discussion on cross-dressing, see Scott K. Simpkins, “They Do the Man in Different Voices: Narrative Cross Dressing in Sand and Shelley,” *Style* n. 3 (Fall 1992).


18 Mary Poovey 124.

19 Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Imagining a Self* 69.

20 Frederick L. Jones 9.
CHAPTER 5

FRANCES BURNEY’S EVELINA: CHAMELEON HEROINE

I was inexpressibly distressed; to suffer Lord Orville to think me satisfied with the single protection of Sir Clement Willoughby, I could not bear; yet I was more than ever averse to returning to a party which I dreaded his seeing. I stood some moments in suspense, and could not help exclaiming, “Good Heaven, what can I do?”

(Evelina)

This is not an age in which we may trust to appearances.
(Reverend Villars to Evelina)

Catherine Moreland in Austen’s Northanger Abbey learns the limits of certain literature as a manual for becoming a heroine. The Radcliffian heroine she so wants to emulate is forcibly discouraged. Rather, Austen encourages novels that instruct women in the practicalities not the passions of life: those of acquiring husbands. In Rachel Brownstein’s Becoming a Heroine, Brownstein discusses novels as training manuals for women: “Girls have learned from novels about the most important things in their lives, sexual and personal relations, in training for marriage, the one great profession open to our class since the dawn of time.” Read as a traditional eighteenth-century novel, Frances Burney’s Evelina portrays exactly this type of exemplar for contemporary girls’ important “entrance” into fashionable society, as its subtitle suggests: “or the History of a Young Lady’s Entrance Into the World.” Evelina was lauded for its fine moral instruction.
Driven by a new market of leisured and increasingly more educated women, publishers sought literature about women’s concerns. Female readership stimulated literature written by women and with female protagonists. Early Bluestocking writers such as Lady Montagu, Mrs. Thrale, and Hannah More paved a path for women writers that emphasized literature with strong moral values in women, as guardians of the home and instructors of children. It was amongst this background of conservative values for women that Burney wrote *Evelina*. Combining sentimental-courtship aspects with strictures on the absolute necessity of a woman’s preserving her chastity, *Evelina* was popularly received by a society that looked to literature to instruct its morality.

*Evelina*’s first “fashionable” ball throws her into the thick of courtship ceremonies and teaches her, and Burney’s young readers, how to react in this new environment. Asked to dance by a pompous fop named Sir Lovell, Evelina unreservedly rejects him with scornful laughs at his pretensions. However, when another suitor, a rich and gentlemanly Prince Charming named Lord Orville, requests a dance, she readily accepts. The injured Sir Lovell is quick to point out *Evelina*’s faux pas. Asked by her guardian why she did not adhere to the commonly known custom of not refusing one suitor only to accept another, *Evelina* pleads ignorance of the custom. She vows not to make this mistake again. This is a lesson learned. *Evelina*’s encounters in this society of female manners allow Burney to illustrate proper conduct for young bourgeois ladies. With a bourgeois English readership unfamiliar with aristocratic customs and eager for guidance, Burney found a receptive audience, willing to take the text at face value, in the sentimental, didactic tradition.
Conduct material for women increased in popularity after the 1740s and "letters from readers ... suggest ... that women did look to this material as a guide to their own conduct."² With the mass marketing of these manners, a standard for the way women acted became normalized, established as hegemonic. In *Typologies in England: 1650-1820*, Paul Korshin notes the potential prescriptive effect of novels on culture. Concerning fiction, Korshin states that "[w]ithin prose narrative a typological person can function as a predictive structure for a preferred kind of behavior."³ Typology was used to persuade audiences of a particular point. Frances Burney's readers saw in Evelina a model of behavior that was highly commendable. Indeed, Evelina was sanctioned by the bastion of propriety, Queen Victoria, who recorded Evelina in her diary as one of her favorite books.

Many sentimental aspects of the work have popularized it in the eighteenth-century canon, in which critics have fenced it. *Evelina* is an epistolary novel, a genre that reached its apex in the 1780s and was virtually non-existent a decade later. In the tradition of *Pamela*, the title heroine writes of her trials resisting males who want only to destroy her precious chastity, her sole commodity value. She is an orphaned heroine exploring her emotions as she confronts love and lust.

Burney's contemporaries praised her heroine's strict consciousness of her sexual innocence and her ability to preserve that purity, demonstrated in a series of compromising situations with aggressive males. Courtship and marriage were vital for women, as they had few prospects for economic protection in their future. With the added threat of having only one chance to enter fashionable society, high stakes were involved in guiding
young ladies through the straits of sexually attracting a prospective husband's attention and appearing inviolably chaste and pure.

Current criticism of the sentimental novel written by women is that the writers uphold the system that limits them. Far from applauding Burney, this assumption attacks the desire of contemporary women to abide by inscribed codes of conduct. Nancy K. Miller sees the eighteenth-century “heroine’s text [a]s the text of an ideology that codes femininity in paradigms of sexual vulnerability” not strength. These paradigms, however, seem to be countered by an aspect of the heroine that critics have failed to recognize. Part of Burney’s intent in Evelina might be a defamiliarization of this prescribed conventional construct. She provides in her heroine a model who can engage, actively and by accident, in aggregate indiscretions without sacrificing her society value: her virtue remains intact.

The common critical response to Evelina’s myriad encounters with men is to view Evelina as the “patient” victim to the agentive force of her suitors. This is a common view of eighteenth-century literature which assigns males aggressive roles and women innocent, reactionary roles (a common reading of Mathilda). Indeed, most of the men in Evelina (mis)read the heroine as an “actress” and aggressively respond to her accordingly. Yet, it is Evelina who seems to build coalitions of suitors, effectively reading their characters and engaging with them in such a way that encourages their interest in her. As in Mathilda, the heroine’s ideology that is transmitted to Evelina, in this case concerning marriage, is built on maternal instructions: Evelina’s grandmother, Madame Duvall uses her beauty to capture a husband, and Caroline, her daughter and Evelina’s mother, secretly marries wealthy John Belmont as she echoes her mother’s actions.
Evelina feminist scholarship has failed to do itself justice by neglecting certain narrative features of this text. In doing so, Evelina's character as a proto-feminist, using her sexuality to build communities of men for her own purpose, has been ignored. Burney's heroine reflects a strong independent stance for eighteenth-century women, and suggests that Burney's agenda is far from advocating proper morals becoming of a chaste girl. This characterization counters Judith Newton's woman-as-victim claim that in Evelina "women's power in particular is not effectual, that female abdication of autonomy is therefore justified, and that in a world demonstratively full of bad male energies the only lasting protection is to marry." Rather, Burney seems to present a model of assertive female social power.

In a Romantic reading of Evelina, Burney can be seen attempting to challenge her contemporary readers' conventional notions of heroines through schema that explore female power. The image Evelina presents to Lord Orville and to her guide and father-figure, Reverend Villars, is enigmatic, unbalancing. Both men insist on seeing Evelina only in and idealized way. She seems to toy most with those who most want to "pedestalize" her, on the assumption of her unaffected virginity. In fact, by having her heroine direct her letters detailing her exploits to her male guardian, Burney dramatically confronts her patriarchal society's strictures on women. This tension between an agentive heroine and the conventional assumption of how a heroine should behave can be seen as the core focus of Evelina. In Evelina Burney creates a heroine who is at once totally innocent and wholly predatory.
Burney does assert an independent stance with her heroine, but one that is also distinct from the static ambivalence Kristina Straub envisions in her recent book, *Divided Fictions: Fanny Burney and Feminine Strategies*. Straub's "dividedness of a text" theory sees certain texts as trying to go two ways at once. In *Evelina*, she sees this conflict as between a potentially independent heroine and one who gains her value in society by associating her virtuous identity through her father figures, a conflict which neutralizes any of Burney's feminist assertions.

Straub notes that Burney is unable to resolve the socially aggressive and the passively feminine aspects in *Evelina*. Straub clearly sees the conflict as neutralizing, that instead seems energizing, when she states that "her [Burney's] heroine's ambivalence, probably like her own, remains unresolved, her feelings about what she does unmixed." For Straub, Burney is an author paralyzed by a desire for self-definition within an economy that prescribes feminine conduct.

Eighteenth-century women's "trivial pursuits," to which Kristina Straub' dedication of a chapter signals the subject she attacks in sentimental fiction, are in *Evelina* associated with London's distractions. She discusses the traditional female pastimes such as needlework but in relation to *Evelina* focuses on theater, dance, and toilette as the distractions that country parson Villars so feared Evelina would adopt as vices in her visit to London. In Evelina's first letter to Villars, in which Evelina states, "You see I know their names [of the London playhouses] already," Straub only notes an "enthusiasm":

This initial outburst of eagerness reveals a characteristic duality in her desire, to be safe within the realm of domesticity [noted in Evelina's
repeated mention of the Mirvan's domestic happiness and joy] and still
explore new areas of experience, to be both inside and outside the
eighteenth-century definition of female 'goodness.' In turn, this
ambivalence places the heroine both inside and outside stereotypical
notions about a young lady's enjoyment of 'diversions,' allowing her to
relish the prospect of town pleasure without completely losing moral self-
consciousness. (95)

While Straub is correct in recognizing Evelina as “inside and outside the eighteenth-
century definition of female ‘goodness,’” in solely noting Evelina's rhetoric as
“enthusiastic” she clearly fails to distinguish Evelina's discourse from Burney's. This is
why Straub determines that Burney and her heroine are ambivalent; whereas, she should
note Evelina's purposeful, rhetorical maneuvering of Villars in her epistles. This is not a
young woman torn between her natural inclinations to have fun and her desire to be
guided by Villars but a woman who has learned from the errors of her female forebearers
and has adopted her own strategy to gain independence.

Straub and other critics are too trusting of Evelina's self-professed virtuous
tendencies. As an epistolary novel comprised almost solely of Evelina's own letters to her
moral guide Reverend Villars, Evelina creates her character in her narrative. It is the
repeated sexual encounters Evelina engages in that should define her character, rather than
that aspect which tends to blind Evelina scholars, the heroine's vocal announcements of
her virtuous character. Far from solely being a passive object of male assaults, she
conscripts male suitors to make Lord Orville jealous, in her effort to marry him. Making
Orville work to fully appreciate her worth, Evelina forces him be conscious of why he chooses her.

To effect her project of marrying Orville, Evelina establishes rivalries of suitors. The greatest rivalry is established between the gentlemanly Orville and the rakish Sir Clement Willoughby. Early in the novel, Evelina scandalously accepts Sir Clement’s offer to solely escort her from the opera, yet she then maneuvers herself near Lord Orville’s group so that Orville approaches upon seeing her. Veiling her assertiveness in false modesty, Evelina exclaims to herself, “I was inexpressibly distressed[,] to suffer Lord Orville to think me satisfied with the single protection of Sir Clement Willoughby.” Yet, what she in fact does is force Orville to “win” her from Sir Clement, an act which he will do only if convinced of Evelina’s unqualified virtue.

Needing a ride home, yet presumably somewhat unwilling to place herself in the protection of one man, Evelina positions herself between these two suitors. She exclaims her predicament aloud, saying, “Good Heaven, what can I do!” (84), to force Orville into gallant action to preserve her reputation. Vocally presenting herself in the paradigm cliche of virtue in distress, Evelina actively brings to the fore the suitor’s rivalry. Clearly, Burney’s readers and Lord Orville know that Evelina should reject the wanton Sir Clement, whom Evelina’s guardian has already warned her to avoid at all costs. Yet, when Sir Clement again offers his coach and his “protection,” Evelina “made no answer,” a silence which forces Orville to “then” respond by offering his own coach, though he does so without compromising her with his “lone” protection. However, when Sir Clement offers again to personally ride with her, Evelina accepts.
When she is offered a ride by Sir Clement, she “made no answer”, and Lord Orville then said that she might take his coach. Evelina’s rhetorical strategy has the same effect on Orville and on her guardian Villars, to whom she is writing. In an apparently compromising situation with the known rake Sir Clement, whom Villars has already warned his pupil is “extremely disgustful to me” (44), Evelina manages to present a virtuous image in both her exclamation and her silence. In Leona Toker’s term, Evelina’s “eloquent reticence” in not responding to Sir Clement’s offer is significant to Orville, and he signals the success of her strategy by offering his coach. In her pause that invites Orville to then speak, Evelina employs a rhetorical “cause and effect” strategy to make Orville “win” her, to rescue her image of “virtue in distress.” The pause also acts as a reframing device to show Orville that despite a situation of seeming value concealment in which he might, and his delay even signals that he does, question her virtue, Evelina’s virtue is uncompromised. This pattern of framing indecorous situations with “danglers” and then reframing these scenes to Orville (and explicitly to Villars in her letters) to illustrate to them that their image of her is still intact pervades the novel. Evelina continually unbalances Orville by self-enabling an image that reveals her stigma of indecorum. She then manages her rhetoric to present the virtuous image he so wants to believe, demanding that Orville question, and then consciously affirm, her uncompromised virtue.

Romantic texts challenge their readers’ assumptions of heroes and heroines. These works accentuate the disagreement between one’s speech and one’s actions. Evelina
presents this very disparity to Reverend Villars and Lord Orville, as they attempt to conform the image they expect of a “proper lady” with Evelina’s continual indiscretions.

Evelina’s character is problematic because she presents herself as in a threshold between promiscuous actions and verbal decorum: she signals this liminal position by repeatedly referring to herself as “suspended.” Burney demonstrates the disparity between actions and words in Evelina’s decision to accept Sir Clement’s ride home from the opera. At every point that Evelina’s actions suggest that she is behaving indecorously in accepting Sir Clement’s invitation, her speech counters that presumption. When Evelina is about the accept “the single protection of Sir Clement Willoughby,” she sees Orville and “stood some moments in suspense” (84). Then, as Sir Clement is about the take her hand and conduct her into his carriage, she tells him to go without her. Yet, even when the proper conduct is clear, she again says, “I stood suspended,” and “was thus uneasily deliberating what to do.” Such is Evelina’s conduct with Orville as described to Reverend Villars, who is not at all pleased with Evelina’s deliberations. By suspending herself in (in)action, Evelina makes others question her propriety.

Evelina willingly stigmatizes herself by suggesting her impropriety, challenging and disorienting Villars’ and Orville’s idea(l)s of her virtue. In accepting Sir Clement’s sole and highly questionable protection, Evelina makes her chastity problematic to Orville, forcing him to accept her repeated professions of constant virtue at face value. Evelina is no girl to be married just for her beauty, but she forces Orville to analyze her character, and more, to consciously affirm her uncompromised virtue, as a prelude to a strong trust when they are married.
Evelina must engage in information strategies of concealing and revealing to accomplish her goals. There are certain people from whom Evelina needs to conceal her stigma and others to whom she can reveal it. Just as prostitutes must conceal their social failings to police but expose it to others such as clients, Evelina must conceal full awareness of impropriety from Villars and her potential husband Orville. On the other hand, in effecting her project to fully win Orville and make Villars’ idealization of her virtue more realistic, she can afford to reveal her stigma to Sir Clement Willoughby, Mr. Smith, Miss Branghton and others. She does not critically damage her reputation with these people because they do not impose false ideals of her character.

Romantic heroes and heroines encourage their stigmatization. As discussed in Chapter 3, the Giaour’s irreverent and demonic behavior at the friary earns him his outcast status. By announcing to Villars her compromising situations, Evelina attempts to move from the realm of discreditable to discredited. Verbally negating the evidence of her actions, Evelina engages in “disclosure etiquette” as a person who is “ready to admit possession of a stigma (in many cases because it is known about or immediately apparent) [but she] nevertheless make[s] a great effort to keep the stigma from looming large.”

Evelina is engaged in a hermeneutic strategy to advertise her “unidealized” character to Villars and Orville without ostracizing them, her most important social critics.

The intactness of a woman’s virtue is essentially an unadvertised stigma. Evelina need not wear her failings on her sleeve in repeatedly engaging in questionable alliances. Such simple dictates of common knowledge as not getting into a carriage with Sir Clement, not wandering around Vauxhall alone at night, and not joining ranks with
prostitutes would surely have left Evelina free from potential disrepute. Yet she repeatedly is involved in these situations and further announces them to her fiercest critics, who continue to view her virtue as untainted. Evelina desires her stigma to be plainly visible to Villars and faithfully writes to him of her encounters. To disagree with Goffman, perhaps “it can [not] be assumed that a necessary condition for social life is the sharing of a single set of normative expectations by all participants.” Operating by necessity within Villars’ ideology, Evelina vocalizes restorative measure to assure her guardian of her virtue, yet her actions continually suggest that another ideology is being enforced. Far from “sharing a single set of normative expectations,” Evelina goes out of her way to defamiliarize her immediate reader with detailed and shocking (to him) accounts of her transgressions. Clearly, she is attempting to break down the image construct of female virtue Villars holds.

Though critics continue to read Evelina as prescriptive of conservative female manners, Evelina’s willingly transgressive behavior seems to reject the conventional patriarchal views of a pedestalized heroine. To Villars, a woman’s virtue is an all-or-nothing commodity. Yet, Evelina shows him in her repeated sexually transgressive encounters with rakish suitors, and as her successful marriage to Lord Orville confirms, that stigma-revealing encounters which conceal virtue do not necessarily alter a woman’s virtuous status.

Goffman limits his study of stigma by assuming that the stigmatized want to re-incorporate into the norm, to conform to society. Yet, Romantic writers desired to defamiliarize what society assumed was normative to engage their readers’ imaginations
and challenge static literary conventions. Further, norms such as physical attractiveness take the form of ideals "and constitute standards against which almost everyone falls short at some stage in his life."^{12} Notably, however, uncompromised virtue is an ideal that only Villars and Orville impose as a norm—the women in the novel, nor the other men hold this view. Evelina's actions can be viewed as her attempt to challenge Villars' views of the feminine and as Burney's attempt to challenge her eighteenth-century society's sentimental impositions of female conduct.

In her first letter, to Villars, Evelina exemplifies her open independence. She rhetorically manipulates Reverend Villars while sedating him with discourse he expects. Evelina enlists and antagonizes Villars' character flaw of obsession with losing in Evelina the countrified child he created. Reverend Villars dreads the evils of London and fashionable society. Yet, Evelina's first letter to Villars is solely a plea to become part of that very life. She has even learned the names of London's play-houses. From the novel's start it is apparent that Villars has been an incompetent instructor of country values.

Evelina pacifies the reverend by presenting the image he harbors of her as his dutiful pledge. Early in her letter she defers to him as a competent and fulfilling father: "a petition implies a want and have you left me one? No, indeed" (13). A self-satisfied Villars comes to mind; Evelina has engaged his sympathy. She then demands that he make a decision for her, playing into his role as guide, as well as guardian. Evelina hazards no transgressions if obeying the dictates of such a moral guide. Yet, having pacified her "father" with the image he desires of her, for the remainder of the letter
Evelina openly authorizes her own decision to go to London by relentlessly urging her enthusiasm for fashionable things which Villars would surely despise:

They tell me that London is now in full splendor. Two play-houses are open,—the Opera-house,—Ranelagh,—and the Pantheon.—You see I have learned all their names. However, pray don't suppose that I make any point of going, for I shall hardly sigh, to see them depart without me, though I shall probably never meet with such another opportunity. And, indeed, their domestic happiness will be so great,—it is natural to wish to partake of it. (13)

Evelina even argues to the point that she will go unless Villars’ refusal persuades her with “reasons unanswerable.” Evelina has rhetorically maneuvered herself into the position of power, in which Villars must satisfy her criteria. This is clearly not the manners Reverend Villars expects of Evelina, but she so disguises her independent stance in obsequious rhetoric that he is satisfied. Villars is a model passive reader.

Likewise, just two weeks into her stay in London (a stay the will extend over several months and occasion two visits) Evelina consoles a very wary Villars with her desire to be under his protection in the country. This declaration occasions Villars’ response of “how grateful to me are your wishes to return to Berry Hill! Your lengthened stay in London and the dissipation in which I find you are involved, fill me with uneasiness” (44). Very early into her city visit Evelina merely voices for Villars’ benefit her desire to return to him while her actions posit her squarely in fashionable society. Villars is pacified, and Evelina continues to stay in this exciting life.
Evelina is a chameleon heroine. She is an assertive character, very independent from conventional heroines who require male protection. This aspect is best illustrated in her response to Reverend Villars' demands that she "quit" her significant suitors Lord Orville and Sir Clement. Evelina's unique chameleon-like responses to each suitor suggest her ability to read men's characters and orchestrate her suitors accordingly. She is, therefore, silent to proper Lord Orville and permissible of close contact and hand-kissing to rakish Sir Clement. Evelina scholarship has persistently seen Evelina as a reactor to male aggression, yet such individuated actions and rhetoric by Evelina are merely disguised by the professions of innocence and virtue in her letters. Though Sir Clement is just the type of rake from whom Villars wants to sequester Evelina, her physical responses to him shows that she, in part, seeks his attention. Further, she engages him sexually, though this would be inappropriate with Orville.

Responding to her guide's strongest opprobrium against Sir Clement, from whom Evelina should fear the most for her virtue, she says slightingly that "indeed I know not how I should be able to absolutely forbid [Sir Clement] my sight." Despite these warnings by Villars, Evelina's engagements with Sir Clement are the stuffing of the novel's plot. However, when told to stay clear of Orville, Evelina rather immediately responds with vehemence: "Yes, Sir, I will quit him" (304). There is no equivocation in this statement. This quitting sanctions her strategy of silence to Orville that so effectively entices him to her.
Villars speaks out against Sir Clement four times though only once against Orville, and he quickly qualifies that denunciation. In the beginning of her stint in fashionable society, Evelina is advised by her moral guide to “see no more of Sir Clement Willoughby” (44); then, that Villars is “extremely irritated at his conduct” (103); and more strongly that “it is not sufficient for you to be reserved: [Sir Clement’s] conduct even calls for your resentment” (147); and finally, finding Evelina refuses to heed his advice, Villars vehemently speaks out that “as to Sir Clement Willoughby, I know not how to express my indignation at his conduct. . . . You must converse with him no more” (202). Yet, concerning Orville, only one comment late in the novel that “you must quit him” (291) suffices to make Evelina resolute in avoiding contact. The disparity in these warnings accentuates Evelina’s autonomy from Villars’ influence and suggests that she is employed in some strategy that allows her to independently defy or adhere to his dictates. Despite contemporary strictures that girls should blindly obey their fathers, Burney’s Evelina asserts her own authority, maneuvering both her guardian and her suitors.

Sir Clement and Orville are forever pondering how Evelina’s “nature and [her] countenance [can] be so totally opposite” (86), and Burney makes this dichotomy a major theme in the novel. This dichotomy reduces to a distinction between character and actions. What continually unbalances Orville is his desire to equate these two principles, a character flaw that makes him desire to read virtue into Evelina’s beauty, though Evelina’s actions profess her indecorum. Thus, when Evelina rhetorically re-frames her promiscuous encounters, she easily assures Villars and Orville of the intactness of her virtue.
For example, Evelina’s encounters with a young suitor Mr. Macartney, really her brother, appear so indecorous that Orville is jealous and Villars is shocked. In one instance, in front of Orville, Evelina asks Macartney to meet her, so that “turning to Lord Orville, [she] saw his countenance so much altered, that [she] was frightened by what [she] had so hastily said” (281). Using the epistolary format to full advantage, Evelina excuses her actions to Villars by recounting her conversation to Orville. By doing this, Burney presents the external reader with her heroine’s rhetorical maneuverings of her two primary men, while offering the reader the distance to question Evelina’s veracity. In her letter to her guide, Evelina uses a “fish-out-of-water” plea as the cause of her errors (this in itself is a direct insult to Villars’ method of moral instruction and a denial of the many letters of advice he has offered since her arrival to London):

Unwilling to leave him [Orville] to reflections which could not but be to my disadvantage, I summoned sufficient courage to say, “There is no young creature, my Lord, who so greatly wants, or so earnestly wishes for, the advice and assistance of her friends, as I do: I am new to the world, and unused to acting for myself;--my intentions are never willfully blameable, yet I err perpetually! I have hitherto been blessed with the most affectionate of friends, and, indeed, the ablest of men, to guide and instruct me upon every good occasion:--but he is too distant, now, to be applied to at the moment I want his aid:--and here,--there is not a human being whose counsel I can ask.” (288)
Not only does Evelina present herself empathetically, she slight Villars' practical guidance while seeming to praise him. Further, her project to win Orville is readily apparent: despite her indecorous actions, Orville is responsive to her pleas for friendship. Evelina moves the conversation away from her actions and to an open invitation for Orville's trust. She appeals to the innocent girl Orville and Villars want to see in her. Orville's words and face pronounce Evelina's success: "'Would to Heaven,' cried he, with a countenance from which all coldness and gravity were banished, and succeeded by the mildest benevolence, 'that I were worthy,--and capable,--of supplying the place of such a friend to Miss Anville!'"

The goals Evelina seems to want to achieve with the virtuous image she rhetorically presents to Orville and Villars affirm her independence from eighteenth-century social stereotypes of women. Many feminist critics see Evelina's marriage to Orville at the novel's end as an unrealistic "happy ending," belying any assertiveness the novel may have projected. If feminist critics find a type of autonomy in Evelina's actions, they do not yet see Evelina as the agent of the independent stance she achieves at the novel's conclusion. This female protagonist is not confined in a sphere "in which male assault is the most central expression of power," as Judith Newton claims. Rather, she is manager of suitor-coalitions that work into her agenda, suggesting an independence she will maintain in her marriage. In an epistolary novel that has required its characters and readers to question appearances, the closure's fairy tale quality not only discounts the seemingly patriarchal system within which Evelina places herself (for it is really a
matriarchy), it also positively suggests Evelina's status of power within her marriage to Lord Orville.

**Evelina’s ending denies the closure suggested in conventional epithalamion narratives.** Janet Altman notes that epistolary novels are characteristically open-ended. Altman writes that “[w]hat is particular about epistolary closure . . . is that it depends as much on the act of narrating as on what is narrated. For us to sense a letter as final we must not only be satisfied that all important threads of the plot have been tied but that there is no longer any reason for the writing to continue.”¹³ But Evelina’s much commented on fairy tale ending denies that closure. Instead, we are asked to evaluate Evelina and Orville’s seemingly patriarchal marriage relationship from an extra-conventional viewpoint. The ideal relationship in which Evelina fulfills many of Burney’s female readers’ dreams of marrying and “taking care of” a lord is called into question by the letter narrative’s lack of closure.

Elizabeth MacArthur recently observed that the “epistolary form seems to have been an integral part of an attack against the limits imposed on women’s lives. The absence of central authority and the ambiguous closure that characterizes epistolary novels apparently corresponded . . . to a desire to escape centralized power structures, with their accompanying fixed meanings, and to a desire to leave the outcome of lives (particularly women’s lives) perpetually open.”¹⁴ With no guide but Evelina, one of the novel’s several letter writers, to definitively mark the text’s end, the reader is asked to “read on” from Evelina’s marriage announcement.
The expectation of Evelina's ideal marriage that has been established beginning with the novel's subtitle is, in fact, a rejection of the fairy tale ending. It is the completion of marriage, not the expected "process" of marriage, that dominates the novel's ending. The act of marriage is reduced to efficient one-liners: "You are now . . . all my own" (Orville); "Yes, I do give thee my consent. . . . Hasten then, my love, to bless me with thy presence" (Villars); and most tellingly, "All is over" (Evelina). The mood Evelina established in the opening, viewing marriage as a project to accomplish, is confirmed by the business-like discourse of the ending. If the epistolary format signifies an escape from centralized power then Burney's presentation of a presumably ideal marriage for Evelina defies eighteenth-century conventional views of a happy marriage. Burney, like her contemporary, Mary Wollstonecraft, urges a marital relationship based on the practicality and rationality of both parties. In making Evelina the agent of the marriage, Burney equalizes Orville's authority in the marriage, leaving the outcome of Evelina's life "perpetually open," and not confined within her "sphere."

Evelina has engaged in a project to gain Lord Orville as a husband from her first meeting with him at her first fashionable ball. It is Villars who alerts the external reader to this project and offers a reason for the minutia in Evelina's letters. Because of Evelina's history with men, Villars distrusts all suitors. Finding his daughter expresses her love for Orville and that Orville seems inclined towards her, Villars demands she leave him, for "this is not an age in which we may trust to appearances" (291). Yet Lord Orville's actions are only virtuous, and it is Evelina's actions that consistently appear indecorous. Evelina is given her rallying cry from Villars when he acquiesces that "Could I flatter
myself that Lord Orville would, indeed, be sensible of your worth, and act with a
nobleness of mind which should prove it congenial to your own, then I would leave my
Evelina to the unmolested enjoyment of the cheerful society, and increasing regard, of a
man she so greatly admires” (291). The maneuverings of Evelina pay off in this letter that
occurs late in the novel. At this point, Villars is far from berating fashionable society with
his mentor’s advice that Evelina “has too little wealth to be sought with propriety by men
of the fashionable world” (8). Evelina shocks Villars with details of her escapades with
Sir Clement and others to help him visualize Orville’s true commitment to her. Evelina’s
agenda has been to make Orville consciously recognize her true value. At the end, she
must present Orville’s “sense” of her worth to enable Villars to see this transformation,
and therefore give his consent to her marriage, a consent denied her mother.

In Evelina Frances Burney calls into question contemporary female manners
advised by conduct moralists. Hers is not, however, a militant manifesto but one that
coopts her readers’ inclinations, male and female, towards this moralistic system so that
they do not react reflexively (and negatively) to her novel. Though it popularized her
novel, this veiling of radical text under didactic courtship novel has allowed Evelina to be
misread. At a time when conduct moralists urged the isolation of women in the domestic
sphere to protect the woman’s virtue, Burney’s Evelina proves that virtue is a more pliable
construct than society insisted. The conduct Burney seems to offer to her contemporary
women was and has been misread as prescribing strict moral chastity, that imposed on
women false and unnatural discipline. Burney prefaced her contemporary Mary
Wollstonecraft’s stress in A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792) that women
deserve equal status with men in society, and that women should not be “protected” by containing them in the separate domestic sphere. Rather, women should be allowed to experience the world.

Burney provides in her heroine a model who can engage in indiscretion without sacrificing her social value: Evelina’s virtue stays intact. Further, the year before writing Evelina, Burney herself refused to be pressured by her father, sisters, and uncle to marry an unwanted suitor because she refused to act “from worldly motives.”15 This resilience to social convention is evoked in her heroine, who, though posing as a popular sentimental heroine, suggests an alternative femininity that encourages subversion of the ideal.
NOTES


8 Frances Burney, Evelina or The History Of A Young Lady’s Entrance Into The World (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1965) 84. All citations hereafter are from this reference and noted by page numbers.


12 Goffman, *Stigma* 128.


15 Newton 26.
APPENDIX A

LORD SLIGO'S LETTER TO BYRON
Lord Sligo's letter of summer 1813 to Byron relating events in Athens in 1810:

The new governor, unaccustomed to have the same intercourse with the Christians as his predecessor, had, of course, the barbarous Turkish ideas with regard to women. In consequence, and in compliance with the strict letter of the Mohammedan law, he ordered this girl to be sewed up in a sack, and thrown into the sea—as is, indeed, quite customary at Constantinople. As you were returning from bathing in the Piraeus, you met the procession going down to execute the sentence of the Waywode on this unhappy girl. Report continues to say, that on finding out what the object of their journey was, and who was the miserable sufferer, you immediately interfered; and on some delay in obeying your orders, you were obliged to inform the leader of the escort that force should make him comply; that, on further hesitation, you drew a pistol, and told him, that if he did not immediately obey your orders, and come back with you to the Aga’s house, you would shoot him dead. On this the man turned about and went with you to the governor’s house; here, you succeeded, partly by personal threats, and partly by bribery and entreaty, in procuring her pardon, on condition of her leaving Athens. I was told that you then conveyed her in safety to the convent, and despatched her off at night to Thebes, where she found a safe asylum. Such is the story I heard, as nearly as I can recollect it. (CPW, 3.414, my emphasis)
APPENDIX B

"TO INEZ"
"To Inez"

Nay, smile not at my sullen brow,
Alas! I cannot smile again;
Yet heaven avert that ever thou
Shouldst weep, and haply weep in vain.

And dost thou ask, what secret woe
I hear, corroding joy and youth?
And wilt thou vainly seek to know
A pang, ev'n thou must fail to soothe?

It is not love, it is not hate,
Nor low Ambition's honours lost,
That bids me loathe my present state,
And fly from all I priz'd the most:

It is that weariness which springs
From all I meet, or hear, or see:
To me no pleasure Beauty brings;
Thine eyes have scarce a charm for me.

It is that settled, ceaseless gloom
The fabled Hebrew wanderer bore;
That will not look beyond the tomb,
But cannot hope for rest before.

What Exile from himself can flee?
To Zones, though more and more remote,
Still, still pursues, where-e'er I be,
The blight of life--the demon, Thought.

Yet others rapt in pleasure seem,
And taste of all that I forsake;
Oh! may they still of transport dream,
And ne'er, at least like me, awake!

Through many a clime 'tis mine to go,
With many a retrospection curst;
And all my solace is to know,
Whate'er betides, I've known the worst.

What is that worst? Nay, do not ask--
In pity from the search forbear:
Smile on--nor venture to unmask
Man's heart, and view the Hell that's there.

(CPW 2.837-72)
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