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EDITOR'S MESSAGE

We have seen a good 2016 and have published seven excellent articles. We have also introduced some new features to the journal along with improvements to the website.



From Vol. 2 issue 2, *English Studies at NBU* introduced an optional Open Peer Review system. Reviewers now have the option to select whether their reviews are anonymous or open, and if they give us permission to disclose their names.

We believe that disclosing the pre-publication history of an article through the introduction of an open peer review system will make the peer review process more transparent and will stimulate scholarly discussion.

That year we also introduced a ***Doctoral section*** to give young researchers the opportunity to share their innovative ideas and research findings.

We revised our policy to state explicitly that all published articles are licensed under the **Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License** (CC BY-NC 4.0) and we started marking the papers with the Creative Commons BY-NC license and logo. This license lets others remix, tweak, and build upon your work non-commercially. If the article is to be used for commercial purposes, we suggest authors be contacted by email. You can read the revised **journal policy** on our site.

We also write the reviewers' names and that of the handling editor at the end of each paper.

On the web site we introduced ORCID iDs for name disambiguation. You can find out more and register for an ORCID iD at <https://orcid.org>. And we now publish the References in the abstract web page of each paper.

We partner with Publons.com to reward our reviewers, and 10 have already joined. You can see our journal page on Publons here <https://publons.com/journal/34145/english-studies-at-nbu>.

As always, you are welcome to send us your comments or contact the authors or the editors for further dialogue. We look forward to getting feedback from you, and continue to welcome submissions for our upcoming issues. You can find out more about submitting a paper to ESNBU at our web site.

We keep posting useful resources and software in the News section on the web site <http://www.esnbu.org>, so come back soon.

Finally, I would like to thank our authors, old and new reviewers and the entire editorial team for their help and support in the preparation of this issue.

I wish you good reading!

Kind regards,

Stan Bogdanov, Managing Editor

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Call for submissions

English Studies at NBU invites contributions for Volume 3, Issue 2 to be published in December 2017. Manuscripts are accepted in English. Translations of published articles are generally not accepted.

The Editors are open to suggestions for special issues of ESNBU devoted to particular topics. Recommendations for such issues may be forwarded to the Editors.

Subjects covered by this journal

Language & Linguistics; Language & Literature; Language & Communication; Literature & Culture; History & Cultural Studies; Language Learning & Teaching; Translation & Interpreting Studies; Creative Writing & Art History

Submissions

Please email your submissions to englishstudies@nbu.bg.

For more information on how to submit, please visit our *Submissions* page at <http://esnbu.org>.

Before submission, please also consult the *EASE Guidelines for Authors and Translators of Scientific Articles to be Published in English*, freely available in many languages at www.ease.org.uk/publications/author-guidelines. Adherence should increase the chances of acceptance of submitted manuscripts.

Submission of the manuscript represents that the manuscript has not been published previously, is not considered for publication elsewhere and will not be submitted elsewhere unless it is rejected or withdrawn.

Manuscripts written by authors whose mother language is not English should be checked by a native speaker or a professional language editing service before submission. Manuscripts submitted in poor English will be returned without review.

Every research manuscript submitted for publication to ESNBU is checked for plagiarism, duplicate publication and text recycling after submission and before being sent for initial editor screening and double-blind peer review. By submitting your manuscript to ESNBU you are agreeing to any necessary originality, duplicate publication and text recycling checks your manuscript may have to undergo during the peer-review and production processes.

EVERY TURN OF THE WHEEL: CIRCULAR TIME AND CORDELIA'S REVOLT: FROM WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE TO THE BRITISH ENLIGHTENMENT

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Abstract

This article argues that William Shakespeare's *King Lear* anticipates core political dynamics of the English Civil War (1641-49), and philosophical tenets of the British Enlightenment in John Locke and David Hume. It analyzes three principle and competing paradigms of public authority in *King Lear*: theodicy, nature, and the autonomy of thought. The play is historically contextualized within the 16th century. *King Lear*, moreover, portends revolutionary new thought patterns: the centerless universe of modern astronomy, and human embeddedness in fluid nature without fixed identity. Three variants on the concept of "nothing" – existential, social, and philosophical - interweave the cosmic and political threads, based on a circular temporality. Shakespeare's character, Cordelia, affirms the everyday over the cosmic, and the sociological over the metaphysical. *King Lear* depicts a profound moral trans-valuation in early modern history, whose shifting temporal horizons remain central also to contemporary politics.

Key words: William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Tudor history, Stuart history, English Civil War, David Hume, Enlightenment, political pluralism, secularism, theocracy

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Contested public authority

William Shakespeare's (1564-1616) *King Lear* (1603-6) anticipates defining features of England's 17th century political landscape, and the learnings derived from these experiences in the 18th century British Enlightenment. More deeply, *King Lear* portends revolutionary new thought patterns: the centerless universe of modern astronomy, and human embeddedness in fluid nature without fixed identity. This introduction will analyse three principle and competing conceptions of public authority in *King Lear*.

"My state stands on me to defend, not to debate" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 120). Thus proclaims Edmund, ascending to the height of personal glory and dynastic prestige, about to win the Anglo-French war near the climax of *King Lear*. The suppression of dialogue for *raison d'état* is a central theme of the play. Shakespeare's *King Lear* anticipates (1) core political "dynamics" of the English Civil War (1641-49), and (2) two "tenets" of the 18th century British Enlightenment. There is (3) a resultant cosmic picture, imputing a circular human existence. The beginning contains the end in the "little world of man" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 78).

Pathological narcissism underpins Lear's *raison d'état*. Everything is circular, like a spiral stairway, or a mirror reflection. There is no transparency in a world already filled with the meanings given by tradition. Lear articulates a political autoeroticism: "Which of you shall we say doth love me most, That we our largest bounty extend". He exchanges flattery for power. The opening scene: an assembly undertakes the "darker purpose" of "division of the kingdom". The haunting thematic of time and mortality, i.e. "nothing", is coiled at the heart of this scene: "Conferring [royal power] on younger strengths, while we unburdened crawl toward death" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 33-34). Intergenerational power transmission fuses human fate and cosmic meaning: "by the sacred radiance of the sun" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 36). Yet the high stakes political bargain goes horribly wrong. The dynamism of "doing" invades the stasis of "being": "nature [birth right] doth with merit challenge" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 33). The subterranean upheaval of autonomous behaviour overwhelms the controlled universal ceremony. The Duke of Cornwall evokes "our wrath, which men May blame but not control" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 93). Descent into carnage ensues, as order yields to

chaos. The Duke of Albany evokes "Humanity" preying compulsively "upon itself Like monsters of the deep" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 100). Lear's absolutism, despite the image of a total circle, i.e. the divine nexus of God, man, and the world, conceals a deeper history of cynical and cyclic wars among princes – in the mirror reflection of late medieval Christendom.

By the play's end, Edmund has employed frenzied ambition to seize total power. Ascending through betrayal of father and brother, and manipulation of Lear's two ambitious older daughters (Regan and Goneril), Edmund contemplates personal oligarchy. His character embodies an impersonal process: the psychic energies of resentment. The illegitimate brother to Edgar, yet loved equally by his father (Earl of Gloucester), he conspires to destroy them both "in the lusty stealth of nature" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 42). He hates conventional surfaces, deconstructively justifying his transgression through "nature": "when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeits of our own behaviour, we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon and stars ... drunks, liars and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 45). He declares "Nature" his "goddess" against the "plague of custom" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 42). Conservative traditionalism is a chessboard in Edmund's ambition for wealth and power: "if not by birth, have lands by wit: All ... that I can by fashion fit" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 46).

Between Lear's conservative obedience to "ceremony", and Edmund's radical obedience to "nature", the play concerns contested modes of public authority. Stripped of Lear's cosmology, embracing a naked power ethos ("The younger rises when the old doth fall"), Edmund reproduces Lear's auto-erotic politics in modernized form (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 83). His raw power, negating objective criticism, affirms sheer perspectivism: "True or false, it hath made thee Earl of Gloucester" (Shakespeare, 2004, 88). Moments later, Edmund falls, and the play's end returns to its beginning. The only real "obedience" is to "the weight of time" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 131). This circular pattern of temporality gives the whole play a roundness of necessity. Time destroys everything: "This great world shall so wear out to naught" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 110). This explains why the deeply religious Leo Tolstoy charged King Lear with being nihilistic (Orwell, p. 401-416). The coiled presence of time and mortality, i.e. "nothing",

from beginning to end, and end to beginning, shows as the hidden imperative beneath everyday life's surface.

Only, in the final moment, the values have changed. Honesty replaces convention: "Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 131). The Anglo-French war was a moral contest as well as a power struggle. Cordelia's original vision prevails. She, in the opening scene, upheld "honesty", saying "Love, and be silent" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 34). Returning from exile with the French army, she fought a war and died for love: "No blown ambition doth our arms incite, But love, dear love" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 104). Thus, Cordelia distinguished her vision from Edmund's "nature" and Lear's "convention". Both Cordelia and Edmund are activist rebels, offering different rationalizations of their modernist lines of action. Yet Cordelia's spurning of traditional courtly ceremony differs fundamentally from Edmund's revolt. Cordelia professes ordinary love as a new political horizon: in toiling, parenting, and dying, we esteem certain humans socially over others ("according to my bond, no more nor less") (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 35). Her innovation upholds the mundane as an ideal for living, even a banner of revolt, rather than simply an inferior reality as compared to eternity's perfection. Shakespeare's character, Cordelia, affirms the everyday over the cosmic, the sociological over the metaphysical, in a Copernican revolution in human politics. Her significance is in the interconnected elements of human fallibility, the dialogic, and the collective struggle for truth as a notion of justice.

The opening scene provides the context for Cordelia's revolt. When Lear divides his kingdom between his three daughters, Goneril and Regan's love soliloquys express conventionalized – and insincere – absolute love ("an enemy to all other joys"). Cordelia, shocking the court, casts critical doubt ("They love you all? ... Sure I shall never marry like my sisters, To love my father all") (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 35). There are three crucial points: (1) A simple logical observation, it links truth to sincerity rather than convention. Cordelia charges her sisters, and the king, with absurdity in political discourse. (2) She implies the king's merely fictitious "wholeness", while he is only one among many, with correspondingly divided affections. (3) Cordelia promotes an ethic of inquiry. For the "honesty" of these three observations, Cordelia is despised and disinherited (i.e. made a "stranger") (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 36). Losing inherited protective networks, she is "cast away" and "thrown to chance" (Shakespeare, 2004, p.

40). As Lear explains: “to shield thee from the disasters of the world” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 38). Cordelia’s suitor, the Duke of Burgundy, rejects her (“her price is fall’n”) (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 38). “Since respect and fortunes are his love”, she concedes, “I shall not be his wife” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 40). Cordelia is a heroine of the autonomy of consciousness. Her exile is from the imaginative and material networks of the royal absolutist conception of the cosmos.

Cordelia’s whole stance resembles arguments in John Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), a post-English Civil War text which is the fountainhead of the 18th century European Enlightenment. Locke, denying inherent or cosmic meaning investing human social power, opposed metaphysical plunges into “the vast ocean of being” (Locke, p. 58). He argued that “customs from the very childhood” puts “absurdities” in the “mind”. The “imagined infallible person dictates and demands assent without inquiry”. Instead, Locke argues for “plain reason”, and to “pursue truth sincerely” (Locke, p. 359). His secularized philosophy corresponds to Cordelia’s “honesty”, for which she makes an ultimate sacrifice, and which she connects to ordinary human love as the highest value. Cordelia is not simply being obstinate. She is leading a revolution in values, concerning the highest human ideal. When Cordelia says, “What I well intend, I’ll do’t before I speak” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 39), she is anticipating Locke’s prioritizing language for “use of life” over metaphysical “perfection” (Locke, p. 560).

Others take up Cordelia’s cause. It is a social movement. The King of France celebrates her “virtues”. Against Lear’s political demand for obedience in unconditional love, the Earl of Kent argues: “duty shall have dread to speak When power to flattery bows” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 37). He qualifies discourse in terms of a critical and dialogic function, i.e. plural and autonomous, beyond the mimesis of scripted ceremony. Kent’s warning is that authority may collapse – of its own deluded and grotesque weight - in the absence of many-sided pressures and balances. Lear’s desired peaceful transition fails because he is ignorant of the objective logic of power. He evokes royal authority through “the operation of the orbs From whom we do exist and cease to be” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 36). This cosmic grid, love as perfection uniquely for his sake, permits only his perception as the absolute limit of reality. Cordelia warns him against the “glib and oily art” of persuasion (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 39). While she predicts the

true end-result of the king's power game, her sisters feed Lear's narcissism to serve their own ends. The king is trapped in their web. He renounces his power, and is then shocked to be treated by his flatterers as a slave. The experience is the proof of power's objective logic over Lear's fancy, which he confused for received political wisdom.

Why does Lear's wisdom fail? Has the world changed? We don't know. The story is set in post-Roman but pre-Christian times. The chronology is spliced anachronistically with pagan and Christian images, in textual intersections where identities and meanings multiply and divide. It flashes with contemporary reference. Clearly, Shakespeare wrote of religion as a political phenomenon subject to good or bad use. No mere man, but a king, Lear's failing represents a deadly power vacuum ("Interest of territory, cares of state"). The royal basis in trust, kinship, and mutual protection oaths ("I must love you, and sue to know you better") meets shipwreck (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 34). "Words of love" mean dynastic power relations (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 38). As the territorial unit fails in stability and continuity, its gods are revealed as sadists: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; They kill us for their sport" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 97). King Lear becomes a deranged and flower bedecked wanderer, an unlikely soldier, and finishes as a war prisoner following defeat in the culminating Anglo-French battle. The iconic storm shows that nature – clearly disenchanted -is indifferent to human destiny. In delirium, Lear envisions redemption through becoming "God's spies". Omniscient God cannot see, requiring an informer to disclose "Who loses and who wins, who's in, and who's out" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 121). Power – a natural phenomenon - is as ubiquitous and impersonal as the tides. It is surprising: ultimately, King Lear combines this dark theme of impotent blindness with a central affirmation of the ideal of human freedom.

At the outset, Lear's dogma of received political wisdom remains unshaken. He opposes Cordelia's "honesty" by evoking cosmic power: "truth then be thy dower! For, by the sacred radiance of the sun, The mysteries of Heccat and the night, By all the operations of the orbs From whom we do exist and cease to be" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 36). Her sister Goneril scolds, "You have obedience scanted", revealing that conformity is at stake (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 41). Clearly, this is no ordinary family quarrel. Two rival social imaginaries, with corresponding power configurations, are clashing, and tearing King Lear's kingdom apart.

Only the contrast of Lear's religious behaviour, and Cordelia's science of human nature, makes intelligible Lear's crucial epiphany, at the close of the play, shortly before his death: "To say 'ay' and 'no' to everything that I said 'ay' and 'no' to was no good divinity" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 109). At the outset, the aging Lear embodied the ordered boundaries of conventional surfaces. Kingship was no accident of birth. It was a solemn and pre-scripted performance, upon which all life depended. Yet Lear's univocal religious authority, and forbidding of dissent, produces the disaster of state collapse. The assembly, intended "that future strife May be prevented now", depicts a story of mistaken motives (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 34). A violent power transfer fails to be avoided. And the mistaken motive is eternity, the perfectly good, in the traditional pattern of theodicy. The King Lear story articulates an alternate - Renaissance and humanist based - notion of good governance, gained at tragic but meaningful cost.

Let us examine the revolution. Marriage, family relations, inheritance, and spiritual crimes: these dissimulated tensions produced the violent overthrow of Lear's kingdom. The reformed Duke of Albany cites "others whom the rigour of our state Forced to cry out" as the war's principle cause (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 118). The upheaval turns the world upside down. Servants kill masters, in the "the chance of anger", undermining the hierarchic foundations of traditional cosmic world order (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 95). The Earl of Kent employs violence to "teach differences", which have hitherto been ontological self-evidence (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 50). Yet Kent, initially "too old to learn", embraces the verification principle: "Report is changeable. Tis time to look about" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 64, 117). The army seethes in unrest as "knights grow riotous" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 47). Collective meaning perishes in emptiness. The king - appointed by God as a judge - is "mad as a vexed sea" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 104). Clearly, as the example of Kent suggests, amidst this chaos, something important is being learned.

Suppression of dissent, and the struggle for voice amidst carnage, produces a revolutionary vision of community and universal values. The Earl of Gloucester, spitefully blinded, experiences an epiphany of eyeless sight: "distribution should undo excess, And each man have enough" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 98). Kent, the believer in "differences", returns behind the mask of Caius, and declares himself "a man", "no less than I seem", "honest", and prepared for "that which ordinary men are fit for"

(Shakespeare, 2004, p. 48). It is fallible humanism, susceptible to forgetting, amnesia, and dissimulation. Just before his mental breakdown, Lear says: "I will forget my nature" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 58). Lear realizes that power, far from divine, is essentially force: "the great image of authority: a dog's obeyed in office" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 110). Lear's is an epiphany of critical conscience. Obedience requires human reflection, in trial and error mode, not submission to the unified cosmic will which planets also obey. Here is the most fundamental political message of King Lear. Power is subject to the vicissitudes of ordinary human time, not a cosmic plan. Lear says: "they told me I was everything; 'tis a lie – I am not ague-proof" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 109).

The squalid inequalities, sacrifices, and losses of ordinary power haunt Shakespeare's King Lear. It is the product of a time of transition, and the breakup of personal identity attending loss of faith in the future. The web of timing, accident, and power are its principle thematic, against the metaphysical necessity and essential worth in all being of traditional theodicy. Like Thomas Hobbes' (1588-1679) *Leviathan* (1651), it existentially examines the terrors and possibilities of state collapse. Such experiences are mostly tragic from a humanist view, even if hope within worldly vicissitudes permit a non-necessitarian optimism - a distant glimmer worth staking one's only life for. This is what Cordelia does. It is customary to describe her death as senseless. Her death is tragic, but not senseless. It is the death of millions today who fight and die anonymously for a similar cause – individual human dignity against inflated power – the world over. Certainly, as with Cordelia, most of these victims are women.

"Nothingness" in King Lear

The recurrent core image of "nothing" in King Lear is, firstly, in the all-destructive path of circular time. Lear's political epiphany concerns his own human finitude. It is a visceral and material insight. When Gloucester, near the end, proposes to kiss his hand, he says: "Let me wipe it first; it smells of mortality" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 110). This first image of "nothing" is existential. It is something like the vision of human fate as decay in Edgar Allen Poe (1809-1849), "natural images of the desolate or terrible", based on the "hideous dropping off of the veil" (Poe, p.62). If Shakespeare's vision of "nothing" had been limited to this, he would have been merely a forerunner of

the literary Gothic, exploring the dissolution of subjective identity through the uncontrolled materiality of time and decay.

King Lear has a second pervasive image of “nothing” which is social. It is in solitary death by exposure: once cut from inherited social networks, the characters suffer annihilation. In the opening scene, Lear inflicts this wantonly on Cordelia and the Earl of Kent. Edmund inflicts it on his brother, Edgar. In the social “nothing”, all boundaries are thrown into flux. Both Kent and Edgar wear a variety of masks in exile, suggesting the context-dependent nature of social identity. The Earl of Gloucester, exiled with his eyes gouged out, is guided by his own son without recognizing him, and is persuaded of fantastic but non-existent realities. The most iconic encounter with “nothing” is King Lear’s self-exile, as he wanders insane under the raging storm. The king seems drawn to ultimate cosmic power, in nature unveiled, but realizes it will impersonally destroy him. He is but a man. Here the existential and social “nothing” meet. The implication is that England’s entire underclass live in a condition of deadly vulnerability, in the existential “nothing” of grinding poverty without social assistance or support.

The “nothing” therefore has a social location, in disinherited nobles, and the impoverished majority. It is a “nothing” which is dynamic and dangerous: the future unknown. Lear’s madness allegorizes the “nothing” of state collapse. The expulsions of Cordelia, Kent, and Edgar allegorize the dissolution of protective social networks. Lear, in his fall from absolute power to tramp-hood, becomes the proverbial modern hero: a homeless wanderer in the desert of emptiness (“I abjure all roofs”) (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 74). This anticipates modern writers like Jack London (1876-1916) or Jack Kerouac (1922-1969). Lear discovers a brutally secular truth: “Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 86). Only by losing everything is self-knowledge attained. The illusions of power and comfort are destroyed. Behind power networks and conventions, all human beings are vulnerable, naked, and perishable: “Expose thyself to what wretches feel” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 84).

Lear calls this harsh truth, philosophically, “the thing-itself” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 86). This allusion to the metaphysical concept “substance” again anticipates Locke, for

whom “substances” signifies “nothing” (Locke, p. 100). The emptiness of King Lear represents a humanist principle of ordinary life denuded of higher cosmic meaning. Therefore “nothing” has a third meaning in King Lear, beyond the existential and social, which is philosophical. The Aristotelian maxim (“Nothing will come of nothing”) contends that “substance” transcends conditioned relations (Shakespeare, 2004, 134-35). Human identity is positively fixed and finished, while “nothing” is simply negative and without qualities. Aristotle’s view of human nature had social implications: “that which is able to supply physical labor is by nature a slave”, while “that which is able to plan and take forethought is by nature the master” (Aristotle, p. 430).

King Lear’s unfolding events, however, reveal “nothing” with many-sided moral meaning, in an unfinished universe. A king can fall to the level of a homeless wretch, and it is only a matter of variables within a homogenous humanity. This philosophical “nothing” is therefore a profoundly subversive image. It subverts the ontological Forms which explain – with one-dimensional clarity – ethical value, obligation, and identity. In the unified theocracy at King Lear’s outset, “nothing” is deceptively simple. The property and inheritance rules of unlimited sovereignty reflect cosmic auto-eroticism. It is total: “nothing” is excluded, and everything is explained. But the onset of political chaos in Lear’s kingdom reveals in “nothing” the new complexity of alternative unrealized possibilities. It opens a space of pragmatic pluralism, where everyday language is subject to multiple discourses of varying standards. Their very pluralism and fallibility implies their conventionality, or the absence of underlying supersensible object, i.e. the “nothing”.

Therefore, Edmund’s metaphysic of power struggle, and Cordelia’s humanist love, each carry one side in the double meaning of a new and acutely modernist “nothing” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 42-43). Cordelia’s “nothing” represents refusal to surrender self into mass ceremonies. She refuses to soliloquize her love for the king in contest with her sisters. At Lear’s command, “Speak”, she replies; “Nothing, my lord”. Enraged, Lear retorts, “Nothing will come of nothing” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 35). Meanwhile, Edgar’s “nothing” is the wilful distortion of antagonistic interests. He cunningly conceals a forged letter to draw his father’s interest, while calling it “nothing”. His father replies, the “quality of ‘nothing’ hath not such need to hide itself” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 42-43). False rumours, politically manipulated to poison the

collective mind, are such a variation on “nothing”. However baseless empirically, the lie is made real by organized effort and malice. This is what Edmund does with masterful effect. Shakespeare’s premonition was later exemplified in the French Dreyfus Affair (1894-1906), and in 20th century hijackings of reality by various totalitarian regimes.

Yet the three meanings of “nothing”, ultimately, revert to the first in circular time. The structuring effect of time and mortality, i.e. “nothing”, casts over all three authority modes. Shakespeare invests “nothing” with a definite and universal ontological pattern. Here-in lies the buried central fact/value dichotomy in *King Lear*, despite the affirmation of autonomous consciousness. Its kernel is contained in Gloucester’s observation: “Though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 44). To construct systems of words, images, and reasonings (value), is never to escape the continual decay and pain inherent in objective material existence (fact). The play begins with Lear’s moment of indecision (“neither can make a choice of either”), reflecting an old man’s decayed judgment. The banal dialogue evokes the timing (“before he was sent for”) and accident (“the whoreson must be acknowledged”) of a destabilizing sexual politics, which corrodes the social framework (“order of law”) (Shakespeare, 2004, 33). The sexual basis of dynastic politics itself implies human finitude.

The initially infinite ideological space of Lear’s court denies human ephemerality. Cordelia’s revolt implies consciousness as a social tool for political maintenance. Within the organic chaos of random combinations, organized existence is a perennial struggle against decline. Hence: “Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide. In cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked ‘twixt son and father”. Gloucester concludes: “We have seen the best of our time. Machinations, hollowness, treachery and all ruinous disorders follow us disquietly to our graves” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 44). Time may be shrinking politically for Lear’s kingdom, but this expresses a deeper pattern inherent in Nature itself. A historical mood of decline, it is grounded in the conditions of existence of the animal species: “Man’s life is cheap as beast’s” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 76).

The major evocation of this “nothing” is in the play’s denouement. Intrinsic to human consciousness in time are forgetting and timing. This “nothing” – implying the

impossibility of ever fully mastering destiny - is the great nut around which King Lear's finale hinges. Following the climatic death battle between brothers Edmund and Edgar, and Edmund's death, Cordelia's principle of "honesty" has, to all appearances, triumphed over "nature". Yet, some moments after, the assembly realize they have "forgotten" the question of Lear and Cordelia's whereabouts: "Great thing of us forgot!" Memory lapse, a display of human fallibility, seals the play's infamously bleak ending. Cordelia is hanged in a cell by one of Edmund's minions. The desperate plea, to "send in time", only underlines the reality of contingent timing over Providential justice (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 128). Thus, Kent cries: "Is this the promised end?" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 129).

When Albany attempts to superimpose a Providential narrative - "All friends shall taste The wages of their virtue, and all foes The cup of their deservings" - Lear shouts him down: "No, no, no life! Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life, And thou no breath at all?" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 130). His cry suggests that biology is real, while divine creation and providence are comforts rather than facts. Lear's worldview has changed since the play's opening, and with it notions of authority, nature, and the place of humankind. The transcendent standard of the saint, relativized by everyday power, yields to the fallible humanist horizon of evolution, struggle, and extinction.

The 16th century History

The template of Names had been Saint Augustine's (354-430) immutably perfect original design. Secular knowledge, for him, was mere "curiosity", seemingly "seized with the zeal for knowledge, when God alone knows all in a sovereign science" (Augustine, p. 63). The Augustinian knowledge paradigm was eternally fixed identities, and a revivalist political horizon. This worldview ruptures in King Lear, within a wider cultural pattern of the 16th and 17th centuries. King Lear exposes the horizon of a new secular meaning and ethics.

In Shakespeare, names become historical conventions, concerned with means, and prone to the accidental world of contingency. Meaning is secularized. The Providential Chain of Being yields to the living body and abject materiality. The all-unifying "great decay" is the central image of the play (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 130). The chasm dividing the eternal human soul from the beast's quick oblivion had centrally

defined Christian thought. In *King Lear*, the animate blurs with the inanimate, the human with the non-human, and the living with the dead. Everything passes in a brief flash.

Yet Shakespeare's material universe is an ethical reality. There is a path of the righteous human being, but without immortality or supernatural alliance. It is a humanism of growth, deliberate choice, transmission, and death, without the human as apex of eternal order. Here-in lies *King Lear*'s disturbing power, envisioning a meaningful and ethical world without anthropomorphic dogma. Here, also, is its elective affinity with the 17th century Scientific Revolution. Its image of reality, conveyed through the wheel and Cordelia's revolt, reckons with early modern knowledge of death, society, freedom, and the unique individual.

Let us consider the history. Cosmology, politics, and economics intermeshed, as kingship's traditional sacral power diminished. Firstly, the cosmological. Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1534), removing the earth from the cosmic centre, reduced it to a mere planet among countless. It implied an intellectual revolution. The celestial plane of immutable being yielded to a terrestrial or sublunary realm of change and decay (Koyré, p. 29). Hence, the centrality of cosmic decay as universally defining the human condition in *King Lear*. Christina of Sweden (1626-1689) questioned how, in Descartes' (1596-1650) infinitely extended universe, man could occupy the God-given central position in religious teaching (Koyré, p. 6). Hence, the context for the play's de-anthropomorphic vision.

Secondly, the politics. Two major dynastic feuds had exhausted England: The Hundred Years War (1413-53), followed by power struggle between rival descendants in the War of the Roses (1453-83). The ghosts of illegitimacy produced recurring cycles of state collapse. Henry VIII (1509-47) found a revolutionary, if bloody, solution to perennial political and economic disorder. He laid the rudimentary elements of the 17th century English market, which, creating "estatelessness", undermined the foundations of judgement about self and the world (Agnew, p. 62). Hence, the central existential problem of the "self" in *King Lear*.

Shakespeare's world had seen a revolution in institutions. Henry VIII not only defied Rome, but curbed England's three traditional powers: the medieval state, the church, and the barons. Ruling by personal prerogative, dissolving the monasteries, he shifted from Roman papacy to divinely ordained kingship. These oligarchic but revolutionary politics multiplied the king's own internally dissenting forces. Meritocracy advanced lawyers, i.e. Thomas Wolsey (1453-1530) and Thomas Cromwell (1485-1540). This legal elite enabled revolutionized land acquisition, and hence new court as well as parliamentary influence. Monastic land, sold to any stranger with money, created a revolutionary new merchant class, accessing landed status previously restricted to nobility. King Lear is replete with these themes of upstart powers, to the point of anarchy, where "every case in law is right" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 82).

There was a still broader upheaval in social embeddedness for the population, a portent of the 18th century Industrial Revolution. The enclosures of open fields had inflicted widespread and disruptive depopulation. King Lear is filled with images of mass misery. Guilt tortures the king, upon his witnessing the population's wretched plight: "Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are, houseless heads, unfed sides ... O, I have ta'en Too little care of this!" (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 84).

The reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603) has much that illuminates King Lear. Often regarded as England's Golden Age of toleration, the Elizabethan period fostered England's Renaissance. Perhaps most striking is King Lear's central political thematic of "love". Elizabeth's 1601 "golden speech", her last oration, concluded: "Though you have had, and may have, many mightier and wiser princes in this seat, yet ye never had, nor ever shall have, any that will love you better" (Jenkins, p. 130). Love was Elizabeth's code word for mutual consent. Cordelia's revolt affirmed an ordinary, everyday form of human love, far from the hierarchic and otherworldly divisions that had defined Christendom. Her humanism was revolutionary, for metaphysical love continued to dominate 17th century politics. Feudalism classed human beings in a fixed cosmic hierarchy based on kind and not degree. A royal Catholic prisoner in the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) was daily fed roast ducklings and strawberries by his gaolers, while the Protestant population perished from hunger. The Order of Rank therefore overrode even religious identity. A "person of quality" differed ontologically from an "ordinary

person" (Huxley, p. 169). The revolt against this social fact – i.e. a cultural construction of inequality - informs the revolutionary ethics of King Lear.

“Dynamics” and “Tenets”: anticipating the 17th century

The English Civil War “dynamics” and British Enlightenment “tenets” require historical explanation.

(1): Firstly, the English Civil War, culminating in the 1649 beheading of King Charles I and the declaration of a Republic, posed a fundamental question for political science. This corresponded to the dilemma of ephemerality at the heart of King Lear. It is almost like the Sphinx’s riddle, suggesting the mortal limits of humankind:

Is consensus an ontological *point of departure* (i.e. dogma), to be maintained through state violence, or, is consensus *ongoingly reached*, through the division of powers, based on multiple points of view? We confront two distinctive temporal horizons, and opposed notions of truth: provisional and absolute. At bottom, the difference is between dialogue and violence in conflict resolution for the increasingly complex societies of early modernity.

Historical “dynamics” corresponded to this political science question. The English Civil War swung between two political paradigms of consensus and truth. Experiments alternated between: (1) “healing and settling” political orders (1653-54), based on (highly restricted) Parliamentary politics; this was exemplified in John Milton (1608-74), Puritan revolutionary and author of *Paradise Lost* (1667), who argued that men “should be free ... openly to give opinions of any doctrine, and even to write about it, according to what each believes” (Hill, p. 154). (2) “Godly rule” through military dictatorship, intended to “speed” religious reformation of the national population, under a “saintly” order (the Barebones Parliament of 1653, and the Major-Generals of 1655-56) (Ashley, p. 34). In the name of “Godly rule”, Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) fused violence, the sacred truth, and republican politics. The ideological kernel was the rejection of “chance”. Cromwell exemplified the discourse regarding the 1649 invasion of Ireland: to call it “a thing of chance” was to “rob God of all the glory” (Cromwell, p. 6). The Drogheda massacre was justified to the Parliament as “a righteous judgement of God” (Ashley, p. 94). The “act of violence” finds its “justification” not in “vain

imaginings” but “the compass of certain knowledge” (i.e.; Providential knowledge) (Cromwell, p. 14).

The first English Civil War paradigm embraced provisional truth and consensus as a permanent goal; the second absolute truth, and consensus as a point of departure to be imposed. These two poles constitute the political context for Lear’s gradual descent into madness. King Lear anticipated a larger European political vista: the 17th century crisis of absolutism. Europe was divided between two national models: Louis XIV’s (1638-1715) Catholic Absolutism in France – hunting feudal enemies like wild game to secure national unity - and the constitutional experiment of the Dutch Republic (Kirchner, p. 58). The “dynamic” of opposing paradigms of truth and consensus, therefore, encompassed the European continent. The English Civil War dealt with early modern nation-making, i.e. the conflict between the market and organized social life. It was an instance of “the Machiavellian moment”: achieving consent among a resistant population, within a centralizing regime, newly established through traumatic political violence (Pocock, p. 1-15).

(2): King Lear anticipates two British Enlightenment “tenets”, anticipating David Hume’s (1711-1776) *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739). Firstly, the “nature”/ “convention” dualism is resolved into “nature”/ “nothing”. King Lear’s emptiness has a political meaning. Although convention has temporal power, it has no permanent essence, is transient and accidental, and therefore is “empty”. Secondly, King Lear also affirms the crucial dialogic role, i.e. of power sharing, in good governance. These tenets interrelate: for, if there is no absolute truth, no individual can rule unilaterally based on absolute knowledge. The truth, it follows, is a temporal matter of collective dialogue and experiment. This is a basic political message of King Lear, embodied in Cordelia’s “war of love”. And so, it was for Hume, among the greatest 18th century philosophers of the European Enlightenment.

Hume’s *Treatise* is a sociological, rather than ontological, view of institutions. Hume – against the entire Western tradition - argued that human beings have no ontological identity (Hume, p. 301). Totality is imaginary: “the whole universe *may be considered as a unite* [but the] term of unity is merely a fictitious denomination” (Hume, p. 79). This anti-metaphysical philosophy, i.e. emptiness, had several political

consequences. Hume theorized the lesson of the 17th century “dynamic” in terms of human freedom, as a philosophical “tenet”.

Firstly, Hume prioritized “the conduct of men” (i.e. institutions) over “original principles” (i.e. non-negotiable consensus) in nation-making (Hume, p. 578). This should remind us of the opening debate in *King Lear*, the birth of Cordelia’s revolt. Remedy can “only come from the consent of men” (Hume, p. 587). The centrality of consent in the ordered intergenerational transmission of government pervaded *King Lear*. Obedience derives from “the institution of government”, not “obedience to government”, i.e. dialogic (Hume, p. 595, 546). This required a fallible epistemology: “a hundred different accidents, which cannot be foreseen by the mind” (Hume, p. 117). Political obligation is based on “human conventions” (Hume, p. 594). By extension, “Mankind is an inventive species” where the “rules of justice” are “artificial”, but not “arbitrary” (Hume, p. 536). Because mankind is one species, Hume promoted the secular humanist ethic of equality: “We consider not whether the persons ... be our acquaintance or strangers, countrymen or foreigners” (Hume, p. 633). These themes are also prominent in *King Lear*.

Hume’s anti-metaphysical philosophy rejects Perfection as a political ideal. Politics is partly “accidental”, the “effect of many ages”, and grounded in the “every day” (Hume, p. 544). Similarly, perfection is criticised in *King Lear*, in favor of a social vision of the human condition. Hume evoked early modern nation-building in a web of institutional linkages: “industry, traffic, manufactures, law-suits, war, leagues, alliances, voyages, travels, cities, fleets, ports, and all those other actions and objects, which cause such diversity ... at the same time maintain such a uniformity in human nature” (Hume, p. 450). Precisely the emptiness of human nature makes us the same everywhere, despite the cosmically imputed differences of traditional religions. Human reality required secular analysis: a “cautious observation of human life” in the “common course of the world” (Hume, p.46). The methodology eschews “definitions” (i.e. essences) in favor of “description”, detailing “enumeration” of “circumstances” (Hume, p. 329). This should remind us of the Earl of Kent: “Report is changeable. Tis time to look about” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 117).

Secondly, Hume adopted the ethical template of a middle-way (“some medium”) between “rigid stability” and “uncertain adjustment”, an alternative to “violence” (Hume, p. 566). For “eternal” values render all “other circumstances (i.e. conditions, means) entirely arbitrary”, and are “not admitting of degrees” (Hume, p. 508-12). This tradition of dispensing with dogmatic beliefs to promote tolerance links Hume to the Earl of Shaftesbury (a “lighter” world beyond “bloodshed, wars, persecution and devastation”) (Kramnick, p. 96). Clearly, this is a core theme in *King Lear*, in the Earl of Kent’s ideal of the “modest truth” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 115).

It follows that *King Lear* concerns political responsibility and agency. Lear initially, habitually, uses the language of divine governance: “by the sacred radiance of the sun, The mysteries of Heccat and the night” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 36). Even renouncing power, transferring his kingdom to his progeny, he voices a unified cosmic will. Lear falls because he tragically underestimates the autonomous existence of others. As with Lear, so with 17th century Natural Rights philosophers (mostly refugees of the religious wars), and also with Hume, pluralism is the core issue. The Earl of Kent attempts to save Lear from himself by “helping him to see better” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 37). Lear accuses him of seeking to “come betwixt our sentence and our power”, i.e. of dividing absolute power through dialogic intervention. “Seeing” therefore implies acknowledgment of a society of plural perspectives. Omniscient auto-eroticism contrasts with “seeing”, the unique perceptions of persons.

Here, then, are the principle lessons of *King Lear*. Lear learns all of this during his tragic fall. His fall allegorizes our world, where violent political totalization (religious or secular) produces the tragedy of state collapse and civil war. Its lesson is in toleration and freedom of conscience. This, in turn, requires a formal separation: organized institutions, whose narrow monopoly on cosmic meaning and identity excludes numberless citizens, must remain an option in the private sphere, not a state politics. Cordelia may not have explicitly articulated this theory of secularism. Her utterances, risks, and entire line of action, however, implied it as a new worldview. It was the worldview, also, of religious thinkers like Milton, who tried to square modern freedom with Theodicy. In *Paradise Lost*, he argued: “Who can in reason then or right assume Monarchy over such as live by right (and liberty)” (Milton, p. 122).

Conclusion

At his death, the now reformed champion of “nature”, i.e. pure selfishness, Edmund says “The wheel is come full circle. I am here”. He implies a just order in the universe. Similarly, his brother, Edgar, says: “The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices Make instruments to plague us” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 126). With relief from the upheaval, a notion of theodicy creeps back in. Only moments later, the tragedy of Cordelia’s death by absent mindedness shatters this illusion. The image of the wheel transforms. There is no teleology of the good. The wheel is simply time.

The notion exists that, if human life is simply time, then moral nihilism must follow. This corresponds to a devaluing of earthly life, with respect to eternity. It is in the teachings of some of the greatest religious traditions. For example, the Holy Qur’an indicts pre-Islamic Arabs in these terms: “Yet they say: ‘There is nothing but the life of this world. We die and we live, and only time annihilates us’” (Ali, p.429). Viewing the bulldozed political landscape of post-World War I (1914-1918), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) concluded his philosophical magnum opus, *Being and Time* (1927), with, “Does time itself reveal itself as the horizon of *being*?” (Heidegger, p. 398). Heidegger presented a conspicuously gloomy and joyless picture of life. This is far from Shakespeare’s vision. For him, “love is begun by time”, and “There lives within the very flame of love A kind of wick or snuff that will abate it” (Shakespeare, 1993, p. 129). There is no eternity or afterlife in Shakespeare’s vision, but ethical conundrums within the ephemeral tangle of human relationships. Their importance is no less. Value shifts from imagined eternity to ephemeral reality.

Sometimes *King Lear* presents time as stoicism in moment by moment existence, with knowledge of inexorable biological power. As Edgar famously says to his suicidal father: “Men must endure Their going hence, even as their coming hither; Ripeness is all” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 120). The mind and body, this suggests, are really one: “We are not ourselves When nature, being oppressed, commands the mind To suffer with the body” (Shakespeare, 2004, 70). Or: “When the mind’s free, the body’s delicate” (Shakespeare, 2004, 83). Death, anticipating the path-breaking thought of Ernst Mach (1838-1916), is a continuous material process: “That we the pain of death would hourly die, Rather than die at once” (Shakespeare, 2004, p.126). As Mach wrote: “That which we so much dread in death, the annihilation of our permanency, actually occurs in life in

abundant measure” (Mach, p. 4). The wheel seems to be materiality, and its corruption. This was also Hume’s non-linear view of reality.

Yet “ripeness” is not entirely natural. It is also social. This too was emphasized by Mach, as well as sociological pioneer Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), who both separately took up the mantle of Cordelia’s humanist revolt. The Fool’s famous line, “Thou should’st not have been old till thou hadst been wise”, suggests the possibilities of learnings in experience (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 58). Crudely determinate destiny as inevitability is an illusion, as embraced by Edmund to justify his own worst impulses. Although claiming to take responsibility for his own actions, Edmund realized, at the point of death, that he had hidden behind an abstraction no less than King Lear. It was a rationale for ignoring his everyday debt to others. Lear failed to learn because he did not listen to others, only to his own narcissism masked as a cosmic order.

The Fool accuses Lear of having “mad’st thy daughters thy mothers”, suggesting the turning of a wheel at the end of one’s life (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 52). This is the natural wheel of biological life. Goneril says “Old fools are babes again” (Shakespeare, 2004, p.47). Elsewhere, the Fool tells Kent, warning him of the folly in remaining loyal to a declining regime: “Let down thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill, lest it break thy neck with following” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 70). This is where the social intervenes to thwart inevitability. For, rather than opportunistically letting go, Kent holds on. To be sure, he is on the same material wheel of time and decay: “we that are young Shall never see so much, nor live so long” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 131). The universe, Kent suggests, is running down with every generation. All of nature and the earth will one day vanish. But through his struggle, as we have seen, Kent changes and learns. He obtains wisdom. He embraces “mature time” and “modest truth” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 114-115). Kent upholds an ideal, Cordelia’s ideal of “honesty” and autonomous conscience. So it is with King Lear, also, who, transformed by humility, describes himself upon “a wheel of fire” and “mainly ignorant” (Shakespeare, 2004, p. 116-117).

An ideal does not transcend time, but it transcends generations. Hence, it is worth fighting for, so long as life remains upon the earth. Despite the best efforts of contemporary scoundrels like U.S. President Donald Trump to set the planet ablaze through short-sighted greed and scientific ignorance, to suppress organized dissent (i.e. media) through sheer narcissism, and to openly spread toxic lies, we are still here today

to oppose what he stands for. The state is not merely to be defended, reflecting a man's vanity. Good governance in modern complex societies requires the multi-centered dynamic of independent thought and debate, a respect for secular truth, and an all-embracing humanist principle of equality.

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DOCTORAL SECTION

BYRON'S AND SHELLEY'S REVOLUTIONARY IDEAS IN LITERATURE

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Abstract

The paper explores the revolutionary spirit of literary works of two Romantic poets: George Gordon Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley. In the period of conservative early 19th century English society that held high regard for propriety, tradition, decorum, conventions and institutionalized religion, the two poets' multi-layered rebellious and subversive writing and thinking instigated public uproar and elitist outrage, threatening to undermine traditional concepts and practices. Acting as precursors to new era notions and liberties, their opuses present literary voices of protest against 19th century social, religious, moral and literary conventions. Their revolutionary and non-conformist methods and ideas are discussed and analyzed in this paper through three works of theirs: Byron's *The Vision of Judgement* and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*.

Keywords: Romanticist era, poetry, insurgent, Byron, Shelley

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The English Romantic era marks the period between 1785 and 1830 in which great changes occurred, affecting and shaping the literature of the time. This turbulent period witnessed the French Revolution, which produced a great impact in England, inciting optimism, hope and support for the cause of liberty and equality. The age saw social and economic changes: the Industrial Revolution brought improved techniques in production and manufacturing; a new laboring population inhabited growing mill towns; with the process of enclosure, home industry disappeared in rural areas; impoverished landless villagers struggled for survival; the original landscape was transformed into modern ambiance; the population was starting to polarize into the capitalist class and the laboring class, thus widening the gap between the rich and the poor; the working class was faced with exploitation through low wages, long working hours, strict discipline and child labor; introduction of new machinery replacing people resulted in the first modern industrial depression. Overwhelming changes brought misery and suffering to the majority of people, who started to demand their rights. This resulted in political terror of the ruling class, tightening their grip on the people with harsh repressive measures. The escalation of the conflict came with the Peterloo Massacre of 1819 in which the authorities exercised control over people by violent killing and wounding the trade unionists protesting against the exploitation. This historical context heavily influenced the writing of the time (Casaliggi & Fermanis, 2016). Seeing so much misery, terror and poverty around them, most of the writers of the era turned to the ideals of the French Revolution, which „generated a pervasive feeling that this was an age of new beginnings when, by discarding traditional procedures and outworn customs, everything was possible, and not only in the political and social realm but in the intellectual and literary enterprises as well“ (Abrams, 2003, p. 6). Perhaps the greatest literary proponents of the new social, political and economic order that would be governed by liberty, justice and equality were Romanticist writers. Works of poets such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Blake, Percy Bysshe Shelley and George Gordon Byron permeate with notions inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution (Forward). Although their fervor was abated by the subsequent Reign of Terror and first-generation Romanticist poets witnessing the horrific turns of events actually divorced from the French Revolution in political sense, the literary opuses of the above mentioned poets were in their own distinctive

divergent ways influenced and shaped by the (theoretical) ideals of the French Revolution (Heath, n.d.).

Considering the fact that the scope of this type of paper cannot possibly accommodate investigation into the works of all the above mentioned poets, two second-generation Romanticist poets were selected: George Gordon Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Neither of the two directly witnessed the French Revolution. Therefore, their works embrace The French Revolution as an idealist construct representing values of liberty, justice and love, taking a revolutionary stand and promoting novel notions about the world, state, religion and humanity in general.

Young Romantics: Byron and Shelley

Byron and Shelley were among the most controversial writers of the English Romanticist era. Both of them were attacked during their lifetime on political, religious and moral grounds. Shelley was assaulted for his atheism, while Byron's works were condemned for having blasphemous and nihilistic attitudes, lacking conventional religious convictions. He was also reproached for his political attitudes: his favorable attitude towards Napoleon, his severe assaults of George III and Castlereigh, his uncompromising criticism of every destructive war and his lack of patriotic spirit. On the other hand, Shelley's political socialist principles advocating equality, abolition of private property and monarchy were considered radical and unacceptable (Redpath, 1973, p. 168-169).

They shared the same image regarding moral issues too. Byron was accused of misanthropy and unhealthy pessimism, while Shelley's flaws were his egotism and self-assurance. Both of them were considered depraved and sexually permissive, which was being evidenced by their various love affairs and defense of free love (which included incestuous relationships). Both of them being considered outcasts, the two rebels were compelled to leave England. They met in Europe and started the most important literary friendship of their lives (Franklin, 2006, p. 15).

Both poets' literary works overflow with yearning to reclaim human freedom. Affected by the spirit of the French Revolution, the two poets recurrently employed the concept of liberty as their literary motif. However, as a more thorough investigation into

their works in the following sections of the paper will illustrate, their conceptualization of freedom underwent transformations in relation to “liberté” as perceived in the French Revolution. For the Revolution, freedom referred to liberation from authoritarian social oppression. Drawing heavily on Enlightenment philosophy, it championed logic, order and reason. It stood for collective national well-being and equal human rights in an organized society. For Byron and Shelley, freedom translated into unconfined individual free spirit. For them, at the heart of freedom there is an unbound inward-looking, creative, contemplative, intensely instinctual individual on the quest to know the self.

In spite of all attacks on them, Byron and Shelley left as their legacy some of the greatest works of the English Romanticist era (Ferber, 2012). This paper will focus on analyzing three of their works, accompanied by relevant background biographical information. The three works are all a fine representation of the poets’ revolutionary literary spirit in their own distinctive manners. Byron’s *The Vision of Judgement* was deemed “Heavenly! Unsurpassable!” by Goethe (Marsben, 1953, p. 327), while his *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* “is famous for making him famous” (Markovits, 2011). Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*, being his “most ambitious work” (Barbuscia, 2016, p. 55), was placed “among the sacred books of the world” (Yeats, 1961, p. 65). The following sections are dedicated to further elaboration on the poets and the above mentioned works.

George Gordon Byron: Libertarian or Libertine?

Byron was one of the most controversial British poets of his time. Born in an aristocratic family, he was given a chance of high-class education in Cambridge. However, Byron was more interested in enjoying himself than studying, which pushed him into heavy debts. (Franklin, 2006, p. 4). He indulged himself in boxing, swimming, cricket and many other activities (Dizdar, 1999, p. 161), which testify to his energetic and vivacious spirit. He toured throughout most of Europe visiting classical ancient sites, but also the places of modern historic significance. These extensive travels gave him an insight into the Oriental Eastern culture in the countries under Ottoman rule. All this experience and gathered knowledge of different civilizations and people resulted in his producing works with adventurous themes, oriental motifs and glorious sites, which brought him popularity throughout the country and the possibility of entering the

highest social circles (Dizdar, 1999). However, at this time of conservative and moralist principles being at a high-price in England, Byron stood out as an outcast with his radical, libertarian, and nonconformist ideas. Namely, at the time of the conservative Tories in power, Byron joined radical factions of Whigs. In addition, during French and British antagonism and fighting in Peninsular Wars, Byron showed a great respect and admiration for Napoleon and the ideas of the French Revolution in some of his works. Finally, while the age held decorum and morality in high regard, Byron shocked the public with his loose morale, many relationships and adulterous affairs of which one was incestuous (relationship with his half-sister Augusta Leigh). (Franklin, 2006, p. 12) There were even some indications of his bisexual nature. The public scorn made Byron leave his homeland never to return. He spent the rest of his life in Italy, where he tried to influence the political situation and unite different political factions, and in Greece, fighting for the cause of the Greek War for Independence, where he eventually died (Franklin, 2006).

All of Byron's private affairs, political attitudes and overall beliefs and ideals are projected in his works in which he shows his dissent and mockery of the mainstream society. His rebellious nature in his private life is always reflected in his works in one way or another. His unconventional religious perceptions, his abhorrence of hypocrisy and adulation, his ideas of liberty and personal freedom and attitudes towards warfare are all presented in his works. Byron is a sharp and critical observer of society whose condition, habits, beliefs, and actions he portrays thoroughly in his works (e. g. *Don Juan*; *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*; *English Bards, and Scotch Reviewers*; *The Vision of Judgement* etc.). His revolutionary spirit is shaped ambivalently: he uses innovations in literary techniques, and subverts traditional established literary concepts and writing conventions; also, he depicts society, people, religion, and authorities in a novel way by sharp and thorough critical portrayal and analysis, stripping away all their masks. His detailed and pessimistic image of society, under a magnifying glass, is to compel a reader to re-examine and actively re-think the established political, social, or religious structure.

Byron wrote more than 40 works in either verse or prose. They include divergent themes and are of various quality. Some of his earlier works manifest only the hints of techniques and ideas he would develop in his later and more mature literary phase. However, a unifying force behind all of his works is a passionate, forceful desire

to break free from any imposed norm or standard. Individual unconfined freedom is one of his central themes. That is why it is no surprise that both Napoleon, as a larger-than-life, Moses-like, liberating figure, and the ideals of the French Revolution, are his obsessions. However, highly turbulent political and societal changes transformed Byron's own views towards Napoleon. Over the course of time, Napoleonic efforts having become tainted with blood and violence, Byron's "attitude to the Emperor changed, from being a worshipper, via being a critic, to becoming, after Napoleon's death, his would-be alternative, an avatar, or reincarnation" (Cochran, 2013, p. 1). Thus, Napoleon and the French Revolution hovered in Byron's mind as emblems of unrestrained liberty, of "what could be", and his glorification of these ideals in his works is a wish to glorify ultimate freedom.

Both Byron's private life and his career are strikingly insurgent and non-conformist in their nature. Revolutionism in his works naturally flows from his innermost nature. It needs no external cause. Natural revolutionary was born in perfect time to join the radical bandwagon with other dissenters. Therefore, the distinction between his loose morals and his advocacy of freedom (libertine-libertarian dichotomy) becomes irrelevant, for his private and professional actions are harmonious and interconnected – they are uniform. They both stem from his innate longing to break free from customary, religious and institutional norms.

Byron's Carnavalesque: *The Vision of Judgement*

One of Byron's later works incited a great debate due to its content. Being full of unconventional and excessively progressive ideas for 19th century England, *The Vision of Judgement* was hard to publish. Byron's own publisher refused to print the poem (Jones, 1981, p. 10). However, he managed to publish it in the radical periodical *Liberal*, although with some parts removed. The fact that John Hunt, who published the poem, was prosecuted and imprisoned, and the poem declared "calumnious, wounding and a danger to the public peace" (Jones, 1981, p. 10), testifies to the rebellious and nonconformist quality of the poem. Byron wrote the poem as a response to Robert Southey's work *A Vision of Judgement* that he, as Poet Laureate, produced after the death of the king George III (Jones, 1981, p. 10). In his poem, Southey presents George III as a noble, wise and dignified king who deserves a place in Heaven, while the rest of his contemporary

political opponents are presented in a negative light and sent to Hell (Dizdar, 1999, p. 188). Taking Southey's poem as the basis and source of his parody, Byron construes an opposite image reversing the traditional system of values. He makes satirical references to political figures and authorities of the time, undercuts the traditional roles of devils and saints, and subverts both the Christian conceptions of Hell and Heaven, and Biblical representations of heavenly figures, by employing them all into his comedy.

The Vision of Judgement can be perceived as a great political satire characterized by "the nimbleness, the daring, the impudence, the lightsomeness" (Elton, 1925, p. 28), in which all of the characters assume roles of the real political figures of the time. The major opponents in the poem St. Michael and Satan, who are fighting respectively pro and against the king's entering Heaven, make a clear connection to real people. Byron writes himself into the role of Satan in the poem, as a response to an ironic Southey's remark that Byron belongs to "Satanic School" of poetry. His assuming the Satanic role in the poem is not surprising, considering Byron's inclination to insert some of his own aspects of personality in most of his works. However, it was not only Southey's remark that prompted Byron to assume Satanic role. The very nature of Satan, who is a symbol of rebellion against the establishment and prevalent ideology, a figure who seeks alternatives and liberation from the constraints of the highest authority, is in overall accordance with Byron's own revolutionary spirit. By making a sarcastic observation that "we learn the angels all are Tories" (*The Vision of Judgement* XXVI), an inevitable conclusion follows: the angels' opponent Satan is a Whig, the leader of Radical Opposition (Byron was, at some point of his life, enrolled in British politics as a Whig - a radical member in the House of Lords, which is another argument for identifying Satan with Byron (Peterfreund, 1979, p. 278)). After meeting Satan, Michael states:

"Our different parties make us fight so shy,
I ne'er mistake you for a *personal* foe;
Our difference is *political*.."

(*The Vision of Judgement* LXII)

This necessarily leads to the conclusion that Michael is a Tory and that Byron related him too with a true political figure. Thorough analyses by critics acquainted with Byron's political life led them to conclude that Michael is a reflection of Lord Eldon and that Pater's original is Lord Harrowby. They were both members of the Parliament (at

the same time as Byron), but representatives of opposition with whom Byron had political quarrels over passing some laws (Peterfreund, 1979, p. 279). Thus, Byron takes real identities and allocates them new roles of representatives of tyranny and the oppressive Whig authority he abhors. The meeting between Satan and the two overflows with autobiographical allusions to Byron's real meeting and relationship with the two politicians. Therefore, the king is brought to trial before "heavenly" House of Lords: Michael/Eldon as Lord Chancellor, Satan/Byron as the self-styled leader of the radical Opposition and Peter/ Harrowby as the President of the Council (Peterfreund, 1979, p. 287). The hilarious trial begins in which witnesses against the king are brought, all being real figures of opposition: John Wilkes, Fox and Junius. In this kind of setting filled with allusions, every action has an ironic, ambivalent meaning: The poet's exclamation "God save the king" (The Vision of Judgement XIII) does not only refer to the British national anthem, but serves as a reference to a concrete dramatic event of trial to the king in which his salvation is at the stake; George III's blindness in the celestial world, as well as Louis XI being decapitated, do not only refer to the concrete conditions in which they died, but bring additional amount of humiliation and great humor through the fact that the king cannot see and decipher the actions around him. The comic spirit progressively increases as the trial goes on and reaches the hilarious climactic point with the appearance of Southey, whom Satan accuses of adulation, hypocrisy and betrayal of principles, for "he had written for republics far and wide, And then against them bitterer than ever" (The Vision of Judgement XCVIII). Southey himself confirms it by offering first to Satan, and then to Michael too to write them autobiographies. Besides mocking Southey's yielding principles and his self-interest, Byron produces a hilarious slapstick when Southey starts reciting his poem and all the spirits and saints start running away in horror. Finally St. Peter, "an impetuous saint, upraised his keys,/ And at the fifth line knocked the poet down" (The Vision of Judgement CIV), thus saving them all from listening to Southey's obnoxious and boring poetry. The king slips into Heaven and thus saves himself in a much undignified, humiliating manner, while Southey falls into "his lake" among other Lakers whose servility and dishonest flattery of the monarchs Byron despised.

Byron's ridicule of the political figures, of the monarch and Southey is not intended only as a parody of the concrete historical figures. Satan in the poem says that

all those who “uttered the word 'Liberty!' Found George the Third their first opponent” (The Vision of Judgement XLV), thus accusing the king for oppressive despotic reign. However, his poem is an outcry on a broader level, for he speaks not only against the monarch, but against the monarchy itself that as an institution serves to oppress people and restrict their liberty.

Besides being a political satire, the poem has another dimension that stirred people's spirit. Namely, for traditional, religious England, Byron's presentation of Christian sanctities was outrageous: St. Peter is bored and unoccupied, he “yawns and rubs his nose” (The Vision of Judgement XVII), having nothing to do; he is also impetuous and does not jib from using violence (he knocks Louis XVI's head off of his arms and hits Southey); he is ignorant of the things on the Earth and does not admit the earthly authorities (he does not know who George III is); St. Paul is “a parvenu”; there are no people entering Heaven, but all going “on the other side”; cherubs' song is discordant; Satan and St. Michael are talking in a civil, polite manner and there is “a high, immortal, proud regret” (The Vision of Judgement XXXII), that they were made enemies for eternity; Satan is a positive concept and a dignified figure. Besides the fact that “the very essence of Byron's manner is contemptuous defiance of decorum and propriety” (West, 1963, p. 83), all these untraditional notions were considered blasphemous and disrespectful of Christian religion. Thus, not only does Byron's satire challenge the established political system speaking against the tyranny and advocating liberty, but it also plays with the Christian dogma subverting some of its most basic concepts.

Through the progressive dynamic action and rhetoric that is “impressive, with its sweep over history, its rises and falls, its easy command of bitter irony” (Thomson, 1994, p. 529), Byron produced a great satire of the society providing laughs and amusement for the readers, especially for the contemporary ones, who could find in every verse multifold parodies and allusions to the current issues. But beyond the level of sheer amusement and comedy, Byron's satire stands as an outcry against inhumanity, oppression, tyranny and adulation of the corrupted monarchy and society and calls for justice and freedom for which he himself fought in his life.

However, *The Vision of Judgement* being a satire that parodies certain concepts, institutions and figures, it only signals Byron's outlook towards egalitarian and

libertarian principles, the ideals of the French Revolution and his perception of the war. This aspect of Byron's revolutionary and humanist spirit is more prominent and conspicuous in one of his early extensive works: *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

The Journey is the Reward: *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage is an extensively written romance consisting of four cantos and around 4,500 verses (Dizdar, 1999, p. 165). The travelogue produced as an outcome of Byron's journeys throughout Europe is peculiar and revolutionary in several aspects: Byron's undermining the literary conventions of a romance, his introduction and development of Byronic hero for the first time, an extraordinary tribute and glorification of the ideals of the French Revolution, liberty and equality juxtaposed to the tyranny and oppression.

Byron's entitling his work a romance instigates in the reader a set of expectations: firstly, the very title mentioning childe (a young knight) prepares a reader to go back into the glorious medieval past to read about a virtuous, masculine, courageous knight; pilgrimage implies a definite and familiar destination; romance as a genre also includes a chivalrous hero's quest who is to overcome various calamities and to fight against monsters and evil spirits, in order to save and unite with a beautiful and chaste damsel in distress; a hero is always masculine, active and combative, while his heroine is passive, fragile and unprotected in the men's world; the knight is always of a glorious lineage and has patriarchal, protective and authoritative role in his family or the entire society; the romance as a genre is formulaic with established and familiar chronology of events; the language is elevated and sublime. (Glenn, 2005)

All these conventions of the romance as a genre were observed as a tradition by writers for centuries. However, being everything but a traditionalist, Byron borrowed the standards of writing a romance and dissolved it into a new mock genre. Taking the precepts of romance, adjusting, and modifying them to reach his own objective is one of the revolutionary components of his work.

Although there was an established form for writing a romance, Byron acquires Spenserian stanza for pragmatic reasons: "to give full scope to my inclination, and be either droll or pathetic, descriptive or sentimental, tender or satirical, as the humour strikes me" (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Preface). A reader does not encounter a

medieval, epic and sublime language, but instead, a colloquial, conversational tone with occasional insertions of archaic expressions: “wight”, “whilholm”, “ee” and “mote”. Unlike a traditional romance, where the narrator speaks of events from the past, we learn that Harold’s adventures take place in the contemporary time, for he visits the sites of Napoleonic Wars and travels into various countries of modern Europe. Not only do we learn about Harold’s adventures and moods, but about the narrator’s too, who finally marginalizes his hero and takes the role of the main protagonist. Thus, Byron inserts his autobiographical experiences and makes references to people from his life: often mentions his child or dedicates part of the poem to his deceased friend. This personal undertone is another new element that Byron introduces into his romance. The reader’s puzzlement and confusion do not stop here, for another objection to his piece of writing is that Harold has no clear destination, which is another deviation from the traditional romance. “Calling Byron’s romance the narrative of the modern tourist” is quite possibly the most perfect description of the romance quest Byron presents to his public. Byron presents his readers with his own contemporary romance, with his protagonist as a Regency everyman traveling through the contemporary world of war-torn Europe. Harold is a pilgrim of Byron’s cosmopolitan, polyglot, and sliced-up Europe, not a world of the past filled with obsolete ideals that seemed anachronistic in the current experience of industrialization and political revolutions” (Caminita, 2008, p. 25).

However, of all conventions that Byron violates, the greatest and everlasting impact was produced by his conception of a hero. Childe Harold is a mock-hero and stands as a contrast to the paragon of a medieval knight. This anti-hero is a young man “Who ne in virtue's ways did take delight” (Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage 1.2) and likes concubines and carnal company (Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage 1.3). He does have noble and famous origins, but Byron says: “But whence his name and lineage long, it suits me not to say” (Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage 1.3). He is a brooding, melancholic figure whom “One blast might chill into misery” (Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage 1.4). He is haunted by his past wrongdoings and seems a mystery to others:

“Strange pangs would flash along Childe Harold's brow
As if the memory of some deadly feud
Or disappointed passion lurk'd below:
But this none knew, nor haply cared to know;“

(Child Harold’s Pilgrimage 1.8)

He is an isolated individual feeling rejected and unfit for his social setting. Although he had many affairs, he loved only one woman. However, unlike a traditional hero who would try to prove his love towards her, Harold decides that she would be better off without him. Therefore, being a recluse and judged by society that stifles him, the libertine decides to leave England to go travelling through Europe. "Byron's hero is running away from his women, and he is running away from his patriarchal responsibilities to his women, tenants and servants" (Caminita, 2008, p. 30). He becomes a vagrant without any definite goal. Thus, Harold's personality of a mysterious, melancholic, misanthropic and burdened outcast becomes a representative of Byronic hero, of a mock-hero that will occur in Byron's later works such as *Don Juan*. This new kind of a fallen hero that Byron introduced into literature is a precursor to the modern hero who is likewise remote from an ideal, medieval bold knight that remains just a relic of another time.

As already mentioned, besides breaking from tradition, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* significance lies in another aspect of Byron's revolutionary spirit. Namely, his personal ideals of liberty and revolution are projected in this romance, particularly in the later cantos (III and IV). In the first two cantos, Harold travels through Spain and Portugal, visits ancient sites of Greece and reaches Albania and Turkey. Throughout the voyage, Harold is in a constant state of resignation and lamentation. Through the ruin sites of ancient glorious civilization he is always reminded of the futility of life and inevitability of transitoriness and mortality. Only on the sites of glorious battles for freedom is he able to find certain solace and internal peace. Byron laments for the grandeur of past battles in Spain and Portugal, and finally in Greece, the ancient symbol of liberty, he exclaims in anguish: "Where are thy men of might? thy grand in soul?" (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* 2.2). The same melancholic and pessimistic undertone is retained in Byron's following cantos that he produced after his second and final leaving of England. In these cantos Harold is gradually suppressed by narrator until he finally completely disappears in the last canto and becomes replaced by Byron.

In the second part of the voyage, the poet universalizes Harold's condition by juxtaposing him to something greater than his own personal misery. Namely, Byron brings Harold to 'this place of skulls, / The grave of France, the deadly Waterloo!' (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* 3.18). He stands on the glorious site of Napoleon's defeat,

the place of dissolution of the ideals of the French Revolution, but also of the restoration of monarchical dynastic rule in Europe. Byron envisions the great battle recreating the night before it happened, and brings us to the very spot of a grand combat. However, Byron proceeds with an elegiac mourning for all the young men who gave their lives in the battle, seeing it as a calamity and not a victory. He then reflects on human capacity to endure the pain, which finally brings him to an analysis of the larger-than-life figure, Napoleon himself. Bonaparte is presented as “the greatest,” the “Thunderer of the scene” who could “shake the world again”. He is a rebellious figure who fought against the entire world and for whom Byron expresses admiration, but also identifies himself with this titanic figure, for Byron himself feels as an outcast and a rebel against the prevalent ideologies and established institutions and their traditions. Even though Byron had no monolithic view of Napoleon throughout his life, Napoleon here stands as a great symbol: “He now sees Napoleon, the foe of all corrupt and obscurantist tyrannies, as having tried to be to Europe what Prometheus had been to mankind – a beacon, a light, one who shows the way and provides an instrument by which darkness can be illuminated. Like Prometheus, he has been defeated and isolated, but his gift cannot be taken away. Reason will finally triumph over Power. That Napoleon had also been ruthless, self-aggrandizing, and obsessed with Power himself – anxious to be a mortal Zeus, not a Prometheus – makes no difference. The source may indeed be corrupt, but the pure quality of the stream is unaltered” (Cochran, p. 5).

Besides Napoleon, Byron mentions other historic figures, proponents of freedom, such as Rousseau, who helped instigate the French Revolution with his political writing, Voltaire, a freethinking Enlightenment philosopher and Gibbon, an ironic and satiric historian. All of them share the same Byronic rebellious spirit and advocate libertarian principles, prompting Byron to remember these grand figures in an elegiac tone. From glorification of the grandiose past embodied in the famous historic advocates of liberty, but also in the revolutionary combats that were to found the new world, to the lamentation of the loss of the ideals of the French Revolution, Byron finally ends his poem in Italy which would provide “a rebirth of political liberty and enshrine it in the creation of a new nation-state. For Republicans such as Byron and his friends, the ruins of the ancient Rome were of a more than antiquarian interest. After the defeat of the French Republic, young idealists turned to Italy (most of which was ruled by Austria), as

well as Greece (part of the Ottoman Empire), and fixed on them their dreams of revolution against imperial, monarchical tyranny” (Franklin, 2006, p. 44). In Italy, Byron recalls Renaissance poets such as Tasso, Dante and Petrarch who stand as the prophets of love and liberty and releases an optimistic outburst:

“Yet, Freedom! yet thy banner, torn, but flying,
Streams like the thunder-storm *against* the wind;
Thy trumpet voice, though broken now and dying,
The loudest still the tempest leaves behind;
Thy tree hath lost its blossoms, and the rind,
Chopp’d by the axe, looks rough and little worth,
But the sap lasts, – and still the seed we find
Sown deep, even in the bosom of the North;
So shall a better spring less bitter fruit bring forth.”

(Child Harold’s Pilgrimage 4.98)

Beginning with desperation and melancholy, moving to the recalling and lamentation over the grand past, Byron ends his work in hope and call for the restoration of the revolution that will bring liberty and justice to the world. This outcry is not a pose, or a poetic instrument of achieving dramatic effect, but a candid and zealous call of a man who himself spent his last years of life fighting for the cause of freedom in the Greek War for Independence.

Byron was a writer whose all works are pervaded with the idea of freedom. The release of humankind from oppression and tyranny and the establishment of freedom were his omnipresent obsessions.

Red Shelley

Besides Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley was another nonconformist writer who opposed the mainstream society in his works. Already as a young man he caused the detestation of the public with his work: *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811), claiming that God cannot be proven by ratio, which resulted in his being expelled from the college. His promiscuous behavior, elopements and inconsistency in his affections toward women procured him a label of a scandalous libertine. Therefore, his denial of God in the conservative, religious 19th century England together with his profane behavior caused societal judgment and frequent attacks on his (im)morality. Thus, together with Byron,

Shelley was put in the line of moral outcasts whose writing was assessed primarily through their private endeavors, while their literary achievements and qualities were put aside as being of the second-rate importance. Shelley abhorred institutions of any kind: religious, political or social. As a believer in the potency of human progress and a relentless optimist and proponent of hope and liberty, unconditional submission to institutions was unacceptable for Shelley, who believed that all types of organized human establishments acted as tyrannical weapons of enslaving human minds. However, although Shelley denies Christianity as an established religion, he does not dismiss the belief in an omnipresent, prevailing spirit that rules the universe, for he says: "Since in reality I believe that the universe is God" (Gingerich, 1918, p. 446). This omnipotent concept coeternal with the cosmos Shelley called Necessity. The concept of Necessity is his private personal belief, but also a principle echoing through his writing. The animating and living spirit from which flows all life governs every phenomenon and action in the universe and people's lives. Shelley believes that kings and priests are an outcome of Christian religion and that in essence the rewards and punishments based on belief are tyranny. The submission that Christianity asks from its followers is "only the pitiful and cowardly egotism of him who thinks he can do something better than reason" (Gingerich, 1918, p. 450). Therefore, to this tyranny, Shelley juxtaposes an all-prevailing spirit that rules neutrally and does not impose any humiliating oppression on people, for people are the agents molding their own destinies. Thus, Shelley rejected any kind of higher human authority or belief in fatalism, replacing it with his inherently optimistic belief in the concept of human liberty, unrestrained potential and free will.

All these traits of his character, which make him anti-institutional, anti-capitalist, anti-religious and a firm believer in the necessity of social change and revolution, make him a socialist in his ideology. He produced many Marxist works of insurgent nature that he compiled in *A Philosophical View of Reform*. In this "revolutionary left" work Shelley makes specific references to Tory government and the oppressive British political system. Some of the most powerful and intense of these poems with socialist undertones are: *Sonnet: England in 1819* and *Song to the Men of England* in which Shelley challenges "the audience to reject their subhuman images...and to assume their full status as human beings. The deluded masses fall into the habit of nurturing their oppressors, literally 'giving them all they have', rather than risk the destabilizing trauma

of resisting thus unjust arrangement” (Keach, 1997). Shelley outpours frenzied hatred towards the Crown, Church and state and their inhuman, egotistic, despotic control over people, who need to liberate themselves from fear, servility and tyranny and establish liberty and human dignity and equality.

These kinds of libertarian and egalitarian principles that deny established authorities permeate all Shelley’s works, for he wrote about the worldview in which he fully and candidly believed his entire life. However, of all the works that Shelley produced perhaps his most famous, most valuable and most extensive piece of writing encompassing and overflowing with all his hopes, beliefs, concepts and doctrines is his lyrical drama *Prometheus Unbound*. (Ristić, 2000, p. 69)

Retribution Replaced by Redemption: *Prometheus Unbound*

Shelley composed *Prometheus Unbound* as a reactionary work to Aeschylus’s *Prometheus Bound*. The famous mythical story speaks of Prometheus who stole fire from god Zeus (or Jupiter in Roman mythology) giving it to humans and thus enabling their progress. This, together with the secret that Prometheus knows about Jupiter, but would not reveal, is the reason for Zeus’s putting Prometheus in the chains as punishment. In Aeschylus’s drama, the resolution comes in Prometheus’s and Jupiter’s reconciliation. However, in his own work, Shelley develops the story in a different direction that suits his own principles and the message he wants to communicate to the readers.

This work has been analyzed from various perspectives and critics provided myriad of interpretations, which testifies to the drama’s complexity. It is one of those works that literary analysts will always reexamine and reinvestigate providing new shades of meaning every time. However, the possible multifold interpretation that speaks of the work’s perennial quality can be dissolved into two main aspects. Firstly, *Prometheus Unbound* can be perceived as an individual struggle speaking of a human’s imprisonment and his inclination towards liberation. Also, this story can be interpreted as a microcosm and personification of the entire society and its aspirations, outlooks and laws of mutability.

In his preface, Shelley explains that his Prometheus is “the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and truest motives to

the best and noblest ends" (Prometheus Unbound) and that the only character resembling him somewhat is Satan. Satan is, however, tainted with envy and revenge, which deprives him of the possibility to be Shelley's kind of a hero. Already in the preface, we are given a signal of Shelley's ideal hero: the one who dares to rebel and raise his voice against authority. Due to rebellion against the highest authority of Jupiter, he gets punished, and Prometheus in return casts a curse on Jupiter. However, Prometheus undergoes transformation, repents for his curse and ceases to hate his enemy. Supported by Ione and Panthea, the incarnations of hope and faith, he endures all the pains. Jupiter is dethroned by Demogorgon, while Prometheus is liberated by Hercules and then reunited with Asia, personification of Love. Love triumphs over hatred and violence. Humankind is ready to be reborn in freedom and the drama ends with the optimistic outburst of the impending vision of a new society based on love.

Jupiter is an embodiment of evil tyrannizing the entire world. On the other hand, with his desire to help mankind and incite progress, Prometheus usually stands as a contrast. However, Shelley signals that Prometheus' uttering a curse full of hatred does not differentiate him much from Jupiter. Prometheus is being described as "firm, not proud" (Prometheus Unbound 1. 337) and Jupiter's Phantasm has "gestures proud" (Prometheus Unbound 1. 258). Prometheus uttered the curse with "a calm, fixed mind" (Prometheus Unbound 1. 262) and Phantasm looks "calm and strong" (Prometheus Unbound 1. 238) while repeating the curse. Thus Shelley makes his point that Prometheus is alike Jupiter, for he is too led by hatred and anger. Due to this, the major alteration in the drama occurs when Prometheus decides to forgive Jupiter. He says he "hates no more", but "pities" (Prometheus Unbound 1. 53-57) Jupiter. Therefore, after transcending hatred, it is only (ideologically) proper that the curse (which Prometheus forgot) cannot be repeated by anybody else but by Jupiter's Phantasm. The evil curse can be repeated only by the evil god, for Prometheus does not want evil of his words "pass again his lips or those of aught resembling him" (Prometheus Unbound 1. 220). Jupiter, being equated with Prometheus' former self, is the only one deserving to utter the evil words. At this point we are made to realize that "the difference between Prometheus and Jupiter's Phantasm is that between Prometheus and his former self" (Abrams, 1975, p. 389). Prometheus's ability to conquer his evil alter ego is the main change that enables his liberation, for only after he is completely morally purified can his imprisonment cease. Therefore, "Prometheus's struggle is really a contest within

himself" (Abrams, p. 389) and an inevitable conclusion follows that liberation comes only after we make alterations in our minds. At this dramatic moment of forgiveness we realize why Satan could never be Shelley's hero, for "with his sufferings, love and readiness to forgive the omnipotent he resembles Jesus Christ. With his defiance he is like Milton's Satan" (Ristić, 2000, p. 81). His great moral strength is tested by Furies who torture him with the images of Christ in pains, but with his feeling of pity for the tyrants he manages to drive them away. Only after his mental change will Prometheus be able to finally reunite with Asia representing love, which, for Shelley, is the only concept that can change the world. Demogorgon at one instance says: "Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance, and Change? To these All things are subject but eternal love" (Prometheus Unbound 2. 4. 119-120). These words also imply that Demogorgan's power is not eternal and that he will fall eventually. Demogorgan who represents Necessity, the concept that governs the universe and turns the wheel of fortune, finally realizes what the driving force behind the world is.

It is peculiar that Jupiter is not dethroned by Prometheus, for he remains passive, immobile figure. However, Shelley implies that Necessity will bring change, as it always does, but emphasizes that the man's role is to use the change for the good cause. Precisely in this lies the importance of Prometheus as a character. Namely, he is the one who as the new Christ-like figure will utilize the new situation and spread justice, equality and liberty in the world with his love. This merit makes him a grand hero, for as a man who has transcended hatred and evil, he is able to build a new world on the foundations of love, instead of simply replacing Jupiter as an instrument of tyranny – a likely scenario had he remained former embittered Prometheus. Thus, on a personal level, *Prometheus Unbound* is a story of a man imprisoned not by external oppressor, but rather by his own internal mental demons impeding him from making headway. Liberty can be attained only after we choose to reform our mind, disregard the evil, elevate ourselves from aggressors and their malice and radiate love. Therefore, we learn that nobody can really encase us but ourselves, and nobody can really liberate us until we liberate our mind and heart.

Besides transmitting a powerful message as a personal story, the drama is nothing less effective in communicating its ideas on a broader plane through the use of symbolism. On a more universal level, Jupiter stands as a paragon of all tyrannies that

humankind impose on themselves through institutions of Church, monarchy or conventions. Shelley believes that the human mind makes the implementation of evil possible by imposing on itself imaginary authorities that he calls tyrannies. So, tyrannies are “fabricated by the mind, which then abdicates to these fictions its own powers and enslaves itself to its own creation” (Abrams, 1975, p. 386). Therefore, for Shelley, Jupiter is actually the conventional Christian God, his priests and the monarch. Men abandoned their inherent freedom after opting to obey these established authorities. In a similar manner, people distanced themselves from the true, benevolent and ennobling teachings of the Christ when they accepted Christianity as a religion that eventually turned into despotism and failed the original Christ’s tenets. Prometheus is paralleled to Christ, for the knowledge and power that he gave to humans was also misused.

Besides being a criticism on religion and discrepancy between original Christ’s principles and Christianity as religion, Shelley refers to political tyranny too. Necessity, that “all-pervading Spirit”, bestows on people its gift of change such as the French Revolution that could and should transform society and recreate the world. However, the Revolution was abused by Napoleon’s despotism which halted the Revolution from evolving into freedom. Instead of people’s utilizing the potential given by Necessity, they simply replaced one reign of terror with another one. “Shelley is observing that in all of history the release of the good in any of its forms , whether virtue, wisdom or freedom, will, unless it is safeguarded by love, become perverted into a self-oppressive and therefore self-destructive force, just as Christianity has subverted Christ’s doctrine and as Jupiter has subjugated Prometheus with Prometheus’ own gifts. True revolution is rebellion governed by patient suffering and by love and benevolence; rebellion alone grows into self-destructive civil war that reinstates with its own gains what it was designed to overthrow” (Abrams, 1975, p. 407).

Therefore, Shelley’s underlying message behind his work is the necessity of love, for love is the driving force that will bring physical and mental liberation to mankind. Only when we learn to love will we be able to spread “truth, liberty and love” among all the nations of the world. This relentless optimism, elation, altruism and unconditional belief in human potential that Shelley projects in his work are perhaps the greatest aspect of his revolutionary spirit that does not tolerate terror, oppression or any kind of human humiliation.

Conclusion

Byron and Shelley are among the most influential poets of the Romantic era. Both of them wrote in a spirit of revolt, asserting the dignity of the individual spirit and hollowness of the time-rusted values. Their perennial value lies in their non-conformist spirit that does not tolerate tyranny and oppression imposed on men and their mind. For this libertarian cause Byron fought even personally in the Greek War for Independence, while Shelley retained his eagerness for liberty in the field of his writing. Both of them were eager revolutionaries who rejected enslavement of people's minds through social, religious and political establishments. Precisely in this rebellious, bold and energetic intercession of human freedom, justice and equality we find perhaps the grandest and the most substantial aspect of their literary existence. Byron and Shelley may be accused by various critics on the various grounds, but they are not the ones guilty of the sin of silence at the times demanding the voices of protest, which makes them admirable and unique historic figures.

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