

Genre and Gender as Byronic Subversions in Don Juan

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Abstract: Don Juan by Lord Byron is puzzling and engaging for a contemporary reader because of the subversiveness of its nature manifested in transgressions of both social and literary kind. It is classified as an epic, but it subverts every convention of the genre, retaining only the framework. The most prominent subversion of the genre is at the same time the subversion of gender. It is manifested in the choice, description and action of the main hero. Within the genre which normally serves as a mirror reflecting patriarchal society values and imposing clear-cut patterns for desired behavior in warrior societies, Byron presents us with an effeminate version of a notorious Spanish lover Don Juan, who gets to be chosen a hero of this unusual epic poem. This paper aims at exploring subversive nature of the aforementioned text and pointing out to the way gender is socially constructed and therefore changeable category, thus bringing it into connection with ideas of Judith Butler who questions the patriarchal discourse of power and claims that what has been sold to us as a difference of sex was actually gender all along.

Key words: Lord Byron, Don Juan, subversion, gender construction,

Introduction

The Romantic period was influenced by the French Revolution. Its main ideas were echoed in the lives and works of the English Romantic writers. The United Kingdom proved to be a fertile ground for their growth and development. Natural man, society as a limiting factor, institutions as means of corruption and human hypocrisy revolved in one form or the other in the literature of this period. Since literature is reflective of social and historic circumstances and therefore indivisible from them, thus these ideas had different forms in different periods of time. It is interesting to note that one and the same event, in different stages of its development though, produced literary works of a different mood altogether and with diverse representation of its central ideas. It ranged from excitement and an impetus to act to the disappointment in the regime that followed, which was as oppressive as the previous one. Putting the outcome aside, we notice that the pure idea of revolution in its essence is in fact very Romantic. Romantic writers, who, according to Shelley, are unacknowledged legislators of the world, brought about many changes, both in the society and in the artistic world. They experimented with the language and form, trying to produce art which strived to be democratic.

Lord Byron, the most famous Romantic writer led quite a rebellious life transgressing many boundaries. He experimented with unbounded freedom in his personal life and was quite free to model his works in an often subversive way, thus transgressing the accustomed conventions. In terms of breaking social conventions, transgression is Byron's middle name, for he literally stretched the vision of personal freedom to its utmost ends. Personal life, however, was not enough. The rebellious spirit was reflected in his work, as well. The concept of Byronic hero, which survived into the modern time sprung out of his rebelliousness. He promoted changes he thought necessary, and he lived what he preached. Being harshly criticized for his loose morals and an incestuous relationship, and being exiled even, Lord Byron himself was a perfect epitome of the Byronic hero. He preferred action of almost any kind, and when there was nothing he could do, he escaped. However, there was much that Byron actually did through his writings. The society judged him and agreed with Caroline Lamb in her description of Byron as a person who is "Mad, bad and dangerous to know" (Web). Byron returned the stroke with the harsh satire turned to the hypocrisy of English society of the time. Although he lived by his own moral code, which was in most cases different from the one adopted by the society and which was considered completely deprived of any moral whatsoever, there is one matter in which he went in line with the majority. He, as well as most of his fellow-citizens, was disappointed with the political scene at home, as well as across the Channel.

In this tempest of contrary emotions, a defiant but heavily disappointed spirit, found the way out in creating a work of art which respected and opposed accustomed conventions at the same time, reflecting a romantic spirit captured in a classical form, in an epic poem, celebrating no event, for the outcome of the French Revolution was everything but the reason to celebrate, but introducing a legendary and notorious womanizer as

its epic hero instead, with the difference that Don Juan as a hero, is a subverted one, neither manly nor heroic, but naive and seduced instead, very often displaying the characteristic usually associated with the feminine gender. The fact that Don Juan fits neither masculine nor feminine gender frame, but is something third, or first, for that matter, echoes Byron's personal life, who bridged the gap between masculine and feminine by experimenting with both. Remember his obsession with weight, or his experimenting with homosexuality.

Don Juan: Subverted Epic

The work which comprises transgressions of both social and literary kind is Byron's "Don Juan". First and the most obvious Byronic subversion in "Don Juan" is his subversion of genre. Byron classifies this work of his as an epic which leads our expectations in the direction quite opposite of the one he really takes. What he respects of epic conventions is the framework, and even that, to some degree only, for within every convention applied to this epic poem, there is a corresponding subversion, which is demonstrated as such through the comparison with corresponding epic elements in "Beowulf", a typical traditional oral epic. Playing with the expectations in terms of subverting the conventions of the epic genre is only a prelude to the real theme and a major subversion of this work, namely the subversion of gender which is incorporated into genre subversion and will therefore be analyzed as such.

In terms of length, Byron respects conventions, for "Don Juan" is quite a lengthy poem of some "16 000 verses" (Dizdar, 1999: 184). It includes journeys and it has episodic structure. Conventionally, journeys in epics often include elements of spiritual quest or some kind of sacrifice. Beowulf, for example, comes from Geatland to Denmark, to help the Danish king Hrothgar, who suffers losses due to a monster called Grendel. However, journeys in "Don Juan" have more elements of trips or even wanderings than of proper epic journeys. Don Juan does not even leave willingly, but he gets expelled as most of Byronic heroes end up being because they do not accept values and norms imposed by the society they live in. The story about Don Juan begins in a quite unconventional way. Byron explains that conventionally epics begin 'in medias res' and then somewhat later, the hero retells what had happened before in an episode. Not surprisingly, Byron decides to take different course and he says: "That is the usual method, but not mine / My way is to begin with the beginning" (Dizdar, 2002: 564) Interestingly, he speaks about the beginning in the 6th stanza, so can it really be considered a proper beginning?

After this 'second' beginning Byron continues with the convention applied convention subverted pattern and he gives us a sort of lineage, a story about Don Juan's parents, Don Jose and Donna Inez. Conventionally, lineage is the most important didactic part of an epic poem, because it traces all the male ancestors of a hero, placing them as role models for the young males of the tribe. At the beginning of Beowulf, we are also presented with the lineage of the Danish king Hrothgar. However, in this lineage mother is not mentioned; it neither ends with Hrothgar's father, nor it merely counts his predecessors and ancestors, but it traces his ancestry through several generations and tells about their great deeds, establishing a model of a hero for the next generations. From this example we see that the lineage, being a very detailed description presented at the beginning, served the purpose of establishing code of behavior in a heroic society. It had all the important qualities of a perfect hero stressed, because it was very important to educate the future warriors in both the battle and tribe-management skills. The survival of the tribe depended upon the strength and courage of the warriors and the wisdom of their leader. Another issue that can be read into this example is the fact that from the very beginning of human history the community and nation have been a part of patriarchal discourse which marginalized women.

In that sense Byron's lineage is a serious transgression of conventions. He introduced Don Juan's father in a single stanza, whereas he described his mother in detail. However, Byron is not very fond of Donna Inez and he actually mocks her by saying that she pretends to be intelligent, learned and able, whereas in reality, she is none of that. He criticizes her 'learned' shallowness and the society which falls for her tricks. This attitude is probably rooted in Byron's personal life, and the frustration caused by his learned wife, Annabella Milbanke, referred to as "Princess of Parallelograms" (Web). When explaining how learned Don Juan's mother was, he says: "She knew Latin – that is, 'the Lord's prayer' / And Greek – the alphabet – I'm nearly sure" (Dizdar, 2002: 566). This quotation, although short, demonstrates two other subversions as elements of Byron's peculiar narrative style and technique. The irony contained in it shows that the tone is quite different from the one expected in an epic. An epic tone is supposed to be elevated and solemn, in order to correspond to the content. A poem dealing with the deeds of wise and courageous leaders had a sort of sacred value for the participants of the culture it originated from. The tone of "Beowulf" for example, is not just solemn, but it gets depressing at times. It ends with Beowulf's funeral, so its tone becomes elegiac. The subjects mourn for the best of kings, who lived and died honorably.

The tone of "Don Juan", on the other hand has completely opposite characteristics. It is neither solemn nor elevating, but, corresponding to the content, it has a relaxed, casual character. In the sixth canto, the narrator clearly stated that his intention was to sing carelessly about interesting and adventurous topics. With the

irony and satire underlying "Don Juan", the tone becomes comic quite often. This comic effect is achieved mainly through witty and ironic comments of the narrator.

The role of the narrator in "Don Juan" is yet another Byronic subversion to deal with. Typically, epic is narrated in the third person and the focus is never on the narrator. In "Beowulf", for example, we have a third person omniscient narrator, who jumps in whenever an explanation is needed and who makes sure that his listeners get the message he is trying to convey. In "Don Juan" the narrator is often more important than the hero himself. Witty comments, colloquial language, and first person narration make the poem Byronic in tone and comments and the narrator the central point of the poem. Such a narrator and quite an unusual hero lead us to a conclusion that one way or another there is always Byron in the image of a hero, sometimes in the foreground, sometimes not, yet always present and important. As Hadley J. Mozer (2005) suggests: "By taking the notorious seducer and philosophical libertine Don Juan—a sort of alter ego of himself—as the hero of his epic poem, Byron took another important step toward becoming the creature of his own imagining, the "hero" he so longed to be". This quotation brings us to another important subversion underlying "Don Juan", and that is its hero and the process of choosing one, which is dealt with in the first canto of the poem. In order to be able to develop a fruitful discussion concerning this subject it is necessary to depict an image of a conventional epic hero, to describe his traits and his role both in the society and in the epic poem celebrating such a society.

The central figure of an epic is its hero, being an idealized representation of virtues important for heroic society rather than a real person. Since the society depicted in epics is a patriarchal and warrior society, the hero is always a male, the embodiment of manliness, to be precise. He possesses a remarkable physical strength and is extremely courageous. Yet, he is not simply a brute designed to kill. Quite the opposite, he shows dignity, loyalty and readiness to sacrifice in order to protect his tribe and to be a servant of the good in the eternal fight of the good against the evil. Furthermore, a hero is supposed to possess wisdom, the noblest of virtues, in order to be a good leader. All these characteristics are comprised in Beowulf. He is brave and extremely strong. In fact, it is said that Beowulf possessed the strength of thirty men. Being a fearless and dominant male figure, he perfectly fits into the image of an epic hero. He is ready to do extraordinary tasks to prove his courage and over time, he matures and gains wisdom, which makes him an excellent king. However, as any other human being, he must die. But his death, corresponding to his life is noble. Although being aware of the fact that he cannot go out of the battle with the dragon alive, he decides to take the risk and sacrifice himself in order to live up to the standards of a perfect hero, a role model for generations to come.

Don Juan as an epic hero is completely different and unconventional in several aspects. The very opening of the poem and introduction of its hero is subversive.

I want a hero: an uncommon want,
When every year and month sends forth a new one,
Till, after cloying the gazettes with cant,
The age discovers he is not the true one;
Of such as these I should not care to vaunt
I 'll therefore take our ancient friend Don Juan—
We all have seen him, in the pantomime,
Sent to the devil somewhat ere his time. (Dizdar, 2002: 562)

The situation which Byron's narrator is facing is quite strange. Writing an epic, with a vacant place of a hero is extraordinary. One usually writes an epic primarily because of the hero, to describe heroic deeds and praise virtues. Another unusual, even shocking occurrence is the fact that although writing an epic poem, he rejects contemporary high-ranking military officials as possible heroes. It took him three stanzas to enumerate famous military officials, both English and French, who should have suited for such a place, but, according to Byron, they did not. He mocks them openly, by saying that they are not true heroes. Nelson, "Britain's greatest admiral of the Napoleonic wars" (Dizdar, 2002: 209), was not a true hero. Nor were "the important persons and politicians from the French Revolutions like Barnave, or La Fayette" (Ibid.). However, this is logical to some extent, since it comes from a Romantic poet, who dreams about idealized society and advocates freedom in a time of general disappointment in the outcome of the French Revolution and the tragicomic situation with George III in England. What is not so logical at this stage is the fact that the hero he chooses is not real either, but a fictional character, a womanizer from the 17th century, "our ancient friend Don Juan" (Dizdar, 2002: 562) One possible explanation reveals itself in the identity of a hero. It is quite clear that it has autobiographical connotations, since Byron was deemed immoral and had a reputation of a womanizer as well, and like Don Juan, he was "sent to the devil" (Ibid.) by his fellow-citizens.

It can also be observed simply as a Romantic choice celebrating freedom and opposing the institutions of society. According to the legend (Web), Don Juan was a notorious Spanish lover who has had over a thousand sexual conquests, before meeting the unattainable and therefore fatal, Donna Ana. If we examine the idea carefully we will see that it comprises main tenets of Romanticism. It disregards social conventions because it

promotes 'natural' love and opposes marriage. Sexual instinct is a natural thing, what constraints and directs it is the institutionalized idea of love, or in other words marriage, which is designed to make love practical and useful for an orderly society, rather than passionate and wild, as Romanticists perceived it. Common perception of marriage is some kind of secured future, rather than an introductory chapter to a passionate love novel. Although Byron changed legendary Don Juan substantially, he retained the idea that natural and passionate feeling is above institutionalized love. Anne Crow (2007) explains it in the following manner: "To Byron, it did not matter that the lovers were not married in church; it was enough that they were in love, and that genuine feeling blessed their union and made it holy."

Subverting the idea of marriage was just another brick in the wall of Byronic subversions. However, there is a deeper layer within Byron's text of "Don Juan", the one that recalls Shelley's notion of poets as unacknowledged legislators of the world. For Byron acted not only as a critic of his society, but as a sociologist, as well, sensing an important social phenomenon that emerged as such in the 20th century. Crowning his highly subverted epic with the subversion of gender, he designed his epic hero in a way that twisted accustomed notions of gender roles. In the words of Vladimir Guerrero (Web) Don Juan from the legend was "the absolute male chauvinist." Many would agree with Guerrero, when it comes to original Don Juan. When speaking of Byron's Don Juan, this statement would be completely out of place, because, contrary to epic conventions, Byron's Don Juan comprises both masculine and feminine characteristics.

Byron's Don Juan is quite original in that he is different from both legendary Don Juan and a conventional epic hero. Both the legendary Don Juan and an epic hero display manliness on a large scale, whereas Byron's Don Juan behaves in a manner that is considered to be feminine. As Vladimir Guerrero (Web) explains: "The character of Don Juan has two main components, the pursuit of pleasure and a total disregard for codes of religion and society." Guerrero is speaking about the character from the legend, but this can also be applied to our Don Juan, as well, because the framework is the same. However, the core is different. Legendary Don Juan takes an active role in his pursuit of pleasure, not to say, process of seduction, whereas our Don Juan is always a passive victim of seduction. He somehow gets into a trap of more mature and sexually experienced ladies, like Dona Julia, for example, and being young and naïve he ends up as a victim of both social conventions and a heartbreaking romance, because, in the end, he is the one who gets expelled, for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Indeed, the only mistake the society acknowledged as such was the fact that he was not careful enough and was therefore caught. The fact that he participated in adultery was irrelevant as long as the affair was well hidden.

Why does Byron play with both epic and social conventions? One of the possible answers is to return the stroke to the hypocritical English society which expelled him and abhorred his eccentric and immoral way of life, for Byron experimented and explored his sexuality to the maximum, enjoying both male and female lovers, changing them very often, and as a crown to the whole matter, he had an incestuous relationship with his half-sister Augusta Leigh. Indeed, he lived a scandalous life of a celebrity, but unfortunately, he was ahead of his time, and therefore he had to pay the price. What bothered him was the fact that those who judged him were immoral too, maybe not to the same extent as himself, but they were all actors of a big play, where everyone knew what the other did, but considered it appropriate as long as there was a veil hiding it. Byron, on the other hand detested veils. He loved to shock his fellow citizens and was completely open in his immorality. However, he, as an individual, could not defeat the society. This notion of a doomed struggle between the individual and the society was echoed in "Don Juan". Guy Steffan concludes that: "Taken all together, Juan's adventures become a coherent set of variations on a pessimistic idea about the relationship between the individual and society" (West, 1963: 100).

Indeed, neither Byron, nor his Don Juan could have fought the society successfully, as individuals never can, but what they could do and what they subsequently did was depicting a society as it was at the time, with an emphasis on its many flaws and peculiarities. One of them was the satirical portrayal of upper class women. Legendary Don Juan conquered women as trophies, observing them as passive objects made just for his pleasure. And objects they were, in a patriarchal, male-centered 17th century Spanish society (Guerrero, Web). Two centuries later, English women also lived in a patriarchal society, which considered them commodities possessed by men and ranked them by the male established criteria. If there were no Byron and his satirical epic, maybe we would think that 19th century English women were in the same position as the 17th century Spanish women, since the framework remained the same. The world out there was still modeled by the image men projected. Women were still financially dependent and marriage was still the only way to gain financial security and a position in the society. For women, virginity before marriage was still a must. Yet many things changed, at least with the upper class women, those that Byron was acquainted with, since he was a member of the upper class, the one that was his inexhaustible source of satire. These women started modifying an image of passive and submissive wives whose main goal was to satisfy their husbands. Long before Simone de Beauvoir and feminist movement women began behaving as was at the time socially acceptable for men only in order to approach the allegedly unattainable position of independence and freedom enjoyed by men. Lord Byron sensed this change

and he documented it through the subversion of gender in his Don Juan. Now it becomes clear why his hero is passive, naïve and seduced and why all the women in the epic are experienced, mature and in pursuit of pleasure.

Byron's satire was not directed towards English women only, although they were the most prominent targets of it. The main hero changed countries and lovers quite often, due to lack of respect towards social conventions, not to say total disregard of them. However, there was a constancy, repeating in every country, and that is the reversal of the accepted and acknowledged gender roles, according to which men picked and chose, and women obeyed and provided pleasure. The women Don Juan encountered across the wide globe were neither passive nor submissive, at least when it comes to satisfying their sexual appetites. The part in which Byron masterfully painted the game of power and subverted socially constructed and acknowledged gender roles is the episode with the sultana Gulbeyaz. Don Juan ended up as a slave of this whimsical woman who got used to get everything she wanted. When describing her Byron says:

‘‘To hear and to obey’’ had been from birth
The law all around her; to fulfill
All phantasies which yielded joy or mirth,
Had been her slaves’ chief pleasure as her will (Byron, 2007)

Her will was respected as if she was an absolute dictator rather than a woman. Sultana is described in terms that are even today associated with males and manliness. She is commanding, dominant, powerful and determined to get whatever she wishes for. Upon seeing Don Juan, she felt a strong wish to possess him so her eunuch came up with a marvelous plan of tricking the Sultan by smuggling Don Juan into sultana's chambers dressed up as a woman. When he was asked to do so, not knowing the reason Don Juan replied: ‘‘I'm not a lady’’ (Byron, 2007) pointing out to the fact that clothes is an important gender marker. He eventually complied with the request, being forced into dressing as a woman to save his life and the main marker of his sex. To make the transformation complete Byron dressed his hero in silk and lace, so that in the end his hero ‘‘looked in almost all respects a maid’’ (Ibid.) At the beginning he just looked like a maid, but was quite clumsy and did not really know how to behave dressed in that strange way. He was irritated by the situation and was ready to use his fists to defend his manliness in case someone would mistake him for a woman, when he looked like one. Furthermore, he refused to pay respects to the Sultana in the usual manner, that is by kneeling and kissing her foot. As if the situation was not complicated enough with an epic hero dressed as a woman, standing in front of a commanding woman, whose property he was, he dared to refuse to obey her, saying that: ‘‘It grieved him, but he could not stoop/To any shoe, unless it shod the Pope’’ (Ibid.) And just when you think that you got the idea of what is Byron doing, he acts contrary to your expectations, by making Sultana ask such a sentimental question: ‘‘Christian, canst thou love’’ (Ibid.) to which Don Juan reacts in a correspondingly sentimental way, with tears, which had been, are and probably will be part of exclusively feminine mannerism. Sultana, is taken aback by this reaction, but she does not know how to react and console him since that was the first time she felt sympathy, otherwise being merciless, which is yet another quality normally associated with men. It seems that Byron shared Freud's view that the fate of women is predetermined by their sex (Lešić et al., 2006), for he describes her reaction in the following way:

But nature teaches more than power can spoil,
And, when a strong although a strange sensation
Moves—female hearts are such a genial soil
For kinder feelings, whatsoe'er their nation,
They naturally pour the 'wine and oil,'
Samaritans in every situation;
And thus Gulbeyaz, though she knew not why,
Felt an odd glistening moisture in her eye. (Byron, 2007)

Sultana's condition was paradoxical since she, as a favourite Sultan's wife had the power that was not usually bestowed upon women, but on the other hand she herself was in the position of a slave to the Sultan. Anyway, she could have had Don Juan killed for not complying with her wish to love her, but she decided not to. The reason of her reaction, was, as Byron explains, rooted in her ‘female heart’, which was by nature prone to tears. ‘‘To them t is a relief, to us torture’’ (Ibid.), says Byron, pointing out to the difference in perception of one and the same phenomenon depending on whether it is done by males or females. The fact that his hero cries because of love in front of a woman is thus justified with the explanation that tears are weakness in women and torture in men. So, it must be about the clothes. Don Juan defended his manliness in the beginning of this episode, but after being exposed to an important feminine gender marker for a bit too long, he started behaving like a woman, as if his looks were not just an appearance, as if the clothes really determined his gender.

Through the game of reversed gender roles, Byron tackled an important and sensitive issue. His intention was to amuse his readers, and to expose upper class women to harsh satire. He demonstrated to what extent gender is socially constructed and therefore changeable category. Unlike sex, which is fixed, gender is something that is done and undone by the society as a whole. When saying that tears are part of feminine nature, Byron is reflecting fixed gender role mannerism. Both males and females are biologically capable of producing tears, and in childhood both use this ability extensively. But from the early childhood children are taught that girls cry and boys do not, as well all the other important gender markers, such as appropriate male or female clothes, behavior and occupation. Children in the kindergartens know that girls cry and use make-up, that boys have short hair and that mummies cook lunch, while daddies go to work. Gender roles, however, have been undergoing great changes. Yet, it is still very important to mark them as clearly as possible, because they determine our social roles. And if those are questioned or changed, the society is not as orderly as it is supposed to be. In order for the society to function properly, there must be a clear distinction of who does what, what are whose rights and what are the responsibilities. In this division someone is always restrained. Men are not "allowed" to cry or wear pink clothes, but women are those who were traditionally marginalized in the society. The sad thing is that the unfair treatment was justified by the biological difference between men and women, as if sex was responsible for created boundaries and restraints. The fact that a woman is capable of giving birth does not contain any assumptions that it is the only thing she is capable of. The assumption that women are household queens is a part of gender construction. Sex has nothing to do with it. According to Judith Butler, sex has never had anything to do with it. It was gender all along (During, 1999).

In connection to gender-sex opposition, Butler also questions the notion of gender as a binary phenomenon, saying that: "there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two" (Ibid.) Judging by clothes, as one of the most important gender markers, it seems that the number has been reduced to one. The clothes is becoming prevalently androgynous and it is no longer a marker which helps you place person into one or the other gender category. Quite the opposite, it confuses you very often, by displaying something in-between masculine and feminine. It is not only the clothes that is combining both masculine and feminine and creating something third. Just like Byron, who played with the accustomed gender roles, by shaping his hero in both masculine and feminine terms, the society today is doing gender by promoting some of the traditionally feminine features as desirable in males and vice versa. Men are advised to be calm, sensitive and talkative, whereas women are advised to be strong, independent and self-confident. Byron was able to achieve comic effect with his reversal of gender roles, because masculine and feminine was essentially different. Today, this reversal is really happening and who knows where it will take us. In terms of clothes it could result in monotony, but in terms of sending an important message of gender equality it could be a small step that is a giant leap.

Conclusion

"Don Juan" by Byron is the right choice for those who enjoy in amusing, funny and complicated texts which offer series of relevant discussion topics. While reading Byron one always has to think twice in order to figure out what is he really saying, because Byron himself was not always sure which path he wanted to follow. He simply let the spontaneity lead him in his ironic commentary on the social stage in the 19th century. It led him into an interesting game of respecting and opposing conventions of the epic genre at the same time. He classified his work as an epic, and then he modeled it as something quite different. "Don Juan" is in fact a mixture of genres with the subverted epic domineering. It only follows the framework of an epic. It is long narrative, written in verse with episodic structure. These are basically its all clearly epic characteristic. Everything else belongs to the epic genre only nominally. Deep down it is simply Byronic and subversive; genre is unimportant, it only serves as a basis for subversion.

Only its subversive nature can account for the fact that the epic hero is a legendary character, a womanizer, who embodies everything opposite of an exemplary behavior for the next generations. His adventures are told in an ironic and comic way, so as to amuse the readers, rather than to instruct them about important social matters. However, Byron's intention was not just to amuse his readers. His text contains a deeper layer which is supposed to reveal, to be "a satire on the abuses of the present states of Society and not a eulogy of vice" (Crow, 2007). Byron felt free to go that far and seriously jeopardize the central characteristic of an epic hero, his manliness. He played very skillfully with the sensitive notion of gender roles, shaping his hero not as a seducer or womanizer, but as the one who repeatedly gets into traps of more mature ladies. Furthermore, he presented gender as a socially constructed category, by using clothing and mannerism as colours of his masterfully painted reversal of gender roles. He played with the gender marked notion that women are weak and submissive, whereas men are strong and dominant in order to satirize upper class women, who were not as submissive as they pretended to be. That is why his Don Juan, dressed as a woman, cries in front of the sultana, whose slave he is. This episode shows what a great role mannerism and clothes had as important gender markers, placing one into one of the two categories. It is also a link to the present situation, in which we still have quite rigid gender standards of what is considered appropriate for males and females. However, things have changed

and they are constantly changing, since gender is a mutable category. Judging by clothes, it seems as if we are heading in a new direction, which tries to erase the existence of gender as binary phenomenon, but instead it promotes neutral path, trying to equalize men and women so much that one could not make a distinction between the two anymore. Gender as binary phenomenon has provided an opportunity for the domination of one and marginalization the other. Maybe this reduction will show that there is no essential difference between men and women which could justify such treatment and hopefully it will lead us into the world of equal opportunities.

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