

POLSKI UNIWERSYTET NA OBCZYŹNIE
W LONDYNIE

ZESZYTY NAUKOWE

SERIA TRZECIA, NR 6, 2018

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VARIOUS ASPECTS OF LOVE
IN *MANFRED*, *CAIN* AND *HEAVEN AND EARTH*
BY GEORGE GORDON BYRON

One of the major English Romantics, Lord Byron offers a captivating study of love in the series of the Mystery Plays or the Speculative Dramas¹, including *Cain*, *Manfred* and *Heaven and Earth*. The reader will infallibly notice the multiplicity of the relationships between parents, children, lovers and siblings. Moreover, the author presents the bonds between human beings in general and their attachment to life. Love of God and human devotion to Him are also thoroughly exploited. All these manifestations of love are closely bound with the motifs of guilt, sexuality, knowledge and death which are interlinked with each other. Those interrelations constitute a main subject of John W. Ehrstine's discussion, in which he focuses mainly on the love – knowledge relationship:

Love and knowledge are presented as kindred paradoxes, each... being antithetical to each other. There is no real choice between love and knowledge because they are, by a further paradox, clearly akin in their disastrous results².

¹ Term used by Leslie A. Merchand in her analysis.

² J. W. Ehrstine, *The Metaphysics of Byron. A Reading of the Plays*, Paris, 1976, p. 92.

The main assumption of his analysis is that, tragic in its essence, love is inextricably linked with death and suffering. All those conclusions will serve as a background for a further and more detailed analysis of the above-mentioned Byron's dramas.

1. ROMANTIC LOVE

In all three dramas the mutual relations between men and women seem to be one of the central motifs. The main protagonists of *Heaven and Earth* – Anah and Aholibamah – are in romantic relationships with two angels – Azazel and Samiasa. Simultaneously, two sons of Noah – Irad and Japhet – claim to love these ladies³. The situation is further complicated by the fact that love between human beings and ethereal creatures is sinful and sacrilegious, which is suggested by both Archangel Raphael and Noah⁴ and affirmed by Bernard Blackstone,

*What happens... when the barrier between heaven and Earth is lowered?... The descent of the Sons of God to the daughters of Men initiates frightening consequences*⁵.

Nevertheless, the ladies reject the love of their earthly admirers and choose the heavenly ones. Anah realizes her love is impious and negatively influences her devotion to God but she is unable to resist it⁶. Leslie Marchand describes her as *a more tragic figure, since troubled with the conviction of sin she is torn between her feelings and conscience*⁷. Another matter which concerns Anah is that angels are immortal and her lover will most surely outlive her⁸. Aholibamah similarly seems to be deeply involved in her relationship with Samiasa but she does not feel guilty of it, *And where is the impiety of loving Celestial natures?, she asks*⁹. She claims to be ready to share both happiness and sorrow with her beloved one. She supports the probity of her deeds with the statement that human soul is immortal just like the heavenly creatures are¹⁰.

³ G. Byron, *Heaven and Earth*, I, i, 23–30.

⁴ Ibidem, I, iii, 510–530, 560–570.

⁵ B. Blackstone, *The Dramas and the Island*, London, 1975, p. 250.

⁶ G. Byron, *Heaven...*, I, i, 12–20.

⁷ L. Marchand, *Byron's poetry. A Critical Introduction*, Boston, 1965, p. 91.

⁸ G. Byron, *Heaven...*, I, i, 30–40.

⁹ Ibidem, I, i, 10–11.

¹⁰ Ibidem, I, iii, 460–465.

Merchand discusses this matter suggesting that Aholibamah *has the pride in her immortal part that gives her equality with her angel*¹¹. The angels resolve the women's doubts saying that God is love and their commitment is but the emulation of God's love, *Did not God love what he had made? And What do we but imitate... his love unto created love?*, they ask¹². The ladies are highly romantic in their vision of love. Instead of choosing security on the ark by the side of Irad and Japhet, they would rather die in the flood with their angels. Similarly, Japhet loves Anah with a passionate and unconditional love. Ready to forgive her that she chose someone else, he decides to or risk his own life and stay with a loved woman¹³. This unfulfilled love makes him overwhelmed by sorrow and drives him to summoning evil spirits in order to mollify the pain. He is *endowed with the dignity of his tragic mortality*, for he has to choose between his obligation to survive and be the father of the next generations, and the desire to save Anah against God's will¹⁴. Irad, conversely, is very rational in love. He would be ready to love Aholibamah provided that she desires him as well. He is waiting patiently, hoping that time will change the ladies' hearts¹⁵. This opposition between the two brothers emphasizes the contrast between the romantic blind love and its more sensible variant.

In *Cain* love constitutes a background of all the events. All the human protagonists are a family, hence the reader may find all kinds of family relations there. Adam and Eve have four children: Cain, Abel, Adah and Zillah. Apart from being siblings they form two marriages – Adah is Cain's wife and mother of his children, and Zillah is married to Abel. These incestuous relations between the couples may seem immoral and blasphemous to a modern reader but to the protagonists the situation was natural, since they were the only people in the newly created world. The spouses are loyal and faithful to each other and form complainant relationships¹⁶. Gentle and noble in nature Cain who, on the surface may be perceived to be a rather negative figure, sincerely loves his wife with pure and strong love. Even Lucifer himself saying, *I pity thee who lovest what must perish* is unable to alter his feelings, for Cain answers, *And I thee who*

¹¹ L. Marchand, *Byron's poetry...*, p. 91.

¹² G. Byron, *Heaven...*, I, iii, 506–512.

¹³ *Ibidem*, I, iii, 600–603.

¹⁴ L. Marchand, *Byron's poetry...*, p. 92.

¹⁵ G. Byron, *Heaven...*, I, ii, 22–26.

¹⁶ G. Byron, *Cain*, I, i, 55–63.

*lov'st nothing*¹⁷. When shown all the beauties of the world, Cain says that Adah is still much pricier to him. She proves to be even stronger than her husband is. In verbal clashes with the devil she preserves composure and does not let the spirit deceive her. Marchand calls her *a typical Byronic heroine utterly devoted to Cain*, which is definitely true¹⁸.

The aforementioned motif of incest is also present in *Manfred*, described by Blackstone as: *an escapist drama which includes the element of remorse for injury inflicted on a loved woman*¹⁹. Astarte, with whom Manfred used to be in love, was probably his sister, although it is not explicitly revealed in the poem. The reader may only deduce it from the utterances of Manfred and Manuel²⁰. Love in this dramatic poem is inseparably linked with the motifs of guilt, death, and crime, for Astarte was mysteriously killed. The readers are not informed about the circumstances of her death but, at the same time, Manfred confesses that he somehow contributed to the crime. He claims, however, that he did not shed Astarte's blood personally but, notwithstanding, he feels responsible for the murder and lives tormented with constant pangs of conscience.

Irena Dobrzycka, in addition, suggests that Manfred killed Astarte in a spiritual, and not physical way, which is even worse a crime, for he is not able to gain forgiveness²¹. His sense of guilt is reflected in his conversation with Chamois Hunter when Manfred confesses that he hurt the most those who loved him and whom he really loved²². In his soliloquy in the Valley of Alps he reflects on the fact that had he not been born, and had not loved Astarte, she would have lived now²³. In all these monologues Manfred presents himself as a person who is deeply hurt and unhappy and, following Dobrzycka, self-ordeal is the only appropriate punishment for him²⁴. He realises that his love is sinful but, nevertheless he loves Astarte more than anything else in the world:

¹⁷ Ibidem, II, ii, 337–339.

¹⁸ L. Marchand, *Byron's poetry...*, p. 90.

¹⁹ B. Blackstone, *The Dramas...*, p. 232.

²⁰ G. Byron, *Manfred*, III, iii, 25–45.

²¹ I. Dobrzycka, *Kształtowanie się twórczości Byrona. Bohater bajroniczny a zagadnienie narodowe*, Warszawa, 1963, p. 70.

²² G. Byron, *Manfred*, II, i, 83–87.

²³ Ibidem, II, ii, 192–202.

²⁴ I. Dobrzycka, *Kształtowanie się twórczości...*, p. 61.

*Thou lovedst me
Too much, as I loved thee: we were not made
To torture thus each other – though it were
The deadliest sin to love as we have loved...*²⁵

From Manuel's recollections of the past events they appear to have been a perfect couple, very similar to each other, with the same interests in life and the same personality traits. All those similarities further support the assumption that they might have been siblings. Ehrstine supports the presence of incest motif in *Manfred* giving two arguments to substantiate it, namely that this motif was immensely popular in Byron's times and secondly that, *through blood kinship, incest makes Manfred's curious murder like Cain's of Abel*²⁶. Moreover, she claims that *sexuality carries with the deadliest sin* and is a direct cause of man's fall²⁷. Dobrzycka further supports this view and adds that incest serves mainly as a means of expressing the character's rebellion against moral standards limiting one's romantic individuality, which is definitely true when considering the attitude of Manfred²⁸.

Blackstone comments on this situation in a following way,

*Losing their identity, that is to say their relationship as whole personalities with the whole, they scurry from the immobilised centre to the destructive circumference and back again, seeking a final solution in suicide*²⁹.

Love is presented as tragic here and leads to a calamitous end of both lovers.

2. PARENTAL AND SIBLINGS' LOVE

Parental love is mentioned in two dramas of the three discussed, namely *Cain* and *Heaven and Earth*. In the former it is confronted with a problem – when Cain commits fratricide, Eve curses him and Adam renounces all his bonds with his son. However, he generally *moralizes without dignity* and seems to be a rather bland figure in the text³⁰. Only Adah remains faithful to her husband and brother and decides to stand by his side. Lucifer tries to deceive her

²⁵ G. Byron, *Manfred*, II, iv, 121–124.

²⁶ J. W. Ehrstine, *The Metaphysics...*, p. 22.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ I. Dobrzycka, *Kształtowanie się twórczości...*, p. 73.

²⁹ B. Blackstone, *The Dramas...*, p. 233.

³⁰ Byron. *The Critical Heritage*, ed. A. Rutherford, London, 1970, p. 242.

saying that parental love will always be stained by the original sin, committed by the first parents, and that it will bring nothing but sorrow to next generations³¹. Cain, despite despising his father for bringing death on his descendants, is himself a loving father to his own children. He would do everything to preserve them from the consequences of the sin his parents had committed. Adah is a loving mother as well. It is not the paradise but rather the family that she needs to be happy. Blackstone describes her in a following way, contrasting her with Cain, *Adah's pleas for family life, for parental joys, for contentment with simple human satisfaction, as against the vast and disturbing speculations which throng Cain's mind*³². In comparison with other parents in the discussed dramas, Adah appears to be the best mother, who sacrifices everything for the sake of the happiness of her family. Eve, on the contrary, is so concerned with her feelings of guilt and, which is suggested by Ehrstine, hatred for herself, that she is not really able to love. She blames herself for bringing death to the world and thus love gives her only pain instead of selflessness and parental joys³³. Her failure to be a good mother may be illustrated by the following words,

*Eve on one occasion and one only expresses herself with energy, and not even then with any great depth of that maternal feeling which the death of her favourite son was likely to excite in her*³⁴.

In the *Heaven and Earth* Noah combines all the platitudes of a stern father and an Evangelical parson³⁵. He obeys God's orders and objects to his son's intention to save Anah – one of the Cain's descendants. He is a loving father, demanding obedience from his children, but when he hears about the state that Japhet fell into, he rushes to save him from the contact with evil powers³⁶.

As far as the love between brothers and sisters is concerned, it is presented, with one exception, as the purest and the most firm kind of love. Anah and Aholibamah truly love each other and are ready to die together. Anah is in despair when she realises that she will not be able to save her sister's life, *Oh! if there should be mercy!... I abhor death, because that thou must die*³⁷. In *Cain Zil-*

³¹ G. Byron, *Cain*, I, i, 390–392, 420–421.

³² B. Blackstone, *The Dramas...*, p. 249.

³³ J. W. Ehrstine, *The Metaphysics...*, p. 93.

³⁴ Byron. *The Critical Heritage...*, p. 242.

³⁵ L. Marchand, *Byron's poetry...*, p. 93.

³⁶ G. Byron, *Heaven...*, I, ii, 1140–1150.

³⁷ Ibidem, I, iii, 462–464.

lah and Adah are also closely connected with each other. The only thing that is able to part them is Cain's fratricide, and the fact that Adah decides to depart with her husband. Beforehand, the sisters lived in accordance with each other, though their relations were definitely not equally passionate to Anah's and Aholibamah's.

Brotherly love is much more problematic. In *Heaven and Earth* Irad and Shem genuinely worry about Japhet who is almost mad with love and they attempt to get his senses back. Irad talks to his brother in a harsh yet caring manner, but to no avail³⁸. In *Cain* the relation between Abel and Cain, though tragically ended, was rather proper. Brothers worked together and respected each other. What differentiates them is worshipping God and sacrificing to Him. Cain refuses to do so, which leads to the unintentional murder of Abel, *Abel at length falls by a random blow given in a struggle of which the object is not his destruction but the overthrow of Jehova's altar*³⁹. In fact Cain loves his brother and has real pangs of conscience, thus he subsides into a remorse that is deeper and more agonizing than any punishment that could be inflicted upon them⁴⁰. He is ready to give his life in exchange for Abel's, which is of course impossible. Cain has never been jealous of his brother but Lucifer tries to arouse the jealousy in him claiming that Abel is the favourite of God and their parents⁴¹. The result is Cain's fury when God rejects his sacrifice and the murder.

3. LOVE TO GOD

Love to God is a problematic issue in all three dramas. The protagonists may be divided into those who entirely trust the Lord and offer Him their absolute devotion and into those who rebel. Adam, Eve, Noah, Abel, Zillah and Adah may be classified to the first group, whereas Cain and Manfred may serve as their opposition. The former characters express their love to God preaching aloud, as is the case with Adam and his family. They form a *society of acceptors, the guilty and repentant*⁴². The latter rebel against God and refuse to worship Him. What is curious, both groups desire knowledge about the essence of good and evil and resort to the contact with the evil spirits to achieve it.

³⁸ Ibidem, I, ii, 170–246.

³⁹ Byron. *The Critical Heritage*..., p. 242.

⁴⁰ L. Marchand, *Byron's poetry*..., p. 89.

⁴¹ Byron. *The Critical Heritage*..., p. 241.

⁴² B. Blackstone, *The Dramas*..., p. 244.

They attempt to fulfil the emptiness in their life trying to satiate their unquenchable thirst for wisdom. In Byron's dramas, which Herbert Read calls, *a challenge to conventional piety*⁴³, the author presents *the failure of both love and the thirst for knowledge to pierce through the Cloud of Unknowing which envelops man from his birth*, suggesting that man ought to desist from fathoming the mysteries that are not destined to be revealed to a human mind 247⁴⁴. Ehrstine, when discussing *Manfred*, comments on that problem in a similar way, claiming that the pursuit of unattainable things deprived Manfred of the possibility of a real human love. Furthermore he states that, Astarte's death *wracked Manfred with remorse* so great that it cannot be soothed by any amount of knowledge⁴⁵, and that though those two may seem antithetical to each other, paradoxically both lead to human's disaster⁴⁶. Cain and Manfred, prove it to be right, since though they become more experienced and more knowledgeable, they gradually separate themselves from God and turn their backs at Him.

The question of faith and religion is thus quite complicated in Byron's works. *The theology of Cain is altogether gloomy and hopeless*, professes Rutherford⁴⁷. Paradoxically, it is Lucifer who appears to be more enticing and presents himself as a reasonable rational knowledgeable being whose *whole argument is directed against the goodness or the power of the Deity, and against the reasonableness of religion in general*⁴⁸. In contrast, God has nothing to offer to a man except death and suffering, in the world created by Him: *The body of man is... ordained to nothing more than to labour, disease and death, and the soul is immortal only to be wretched*⁴⁹.

Such image of God is also reflected in *Heaven and Earth*, the most strikingly when a woman is in despair at the imminent death of her innocent child. Most of the characters, with Japhet in particular, are unable to understand the cruelty of God's will. The only explanation provided by the author is that the descendants of Cain are destined to vanish from the Earth, hence the suffer-

⁴³ H. Read, *Byron*, London, 1951, p. 32.

⁴⁴ B. Blackstone, *The Dramas...*, p. 247.

⁴⁵ J. W. Ehrstine, *The Metaphysics...*, p. 22.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 93.

⁴⁷ *Byron. The Critical Heritage...*, p. 245.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 234.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 245.

ing and death. A contradictory view and a confession of faith is expressed by Aholibamah, when she says, *I have ever hailed our Maker... a God of love, not sorrow*⁵⁰.

Japhet's love to Anah should also be mentioned when discussing the devotion to God. When the lady declares her love to Azazel, Japhet hopes that she at least still loves God. He does not approve of the union with an angel but his utmost concern is saving Anah's life and soul. He also admits that love predominantly equals sorrow for even God had to weep over the world soon after it had been created⁵¹. Eventually, he chooses life instead of love which brings him even more emotional suffering.

Another kind of love that is partly connected with God's love is human commitment to his fellow creatures. When the flood is sent to destroy all life in the world, Japhet feels sorry for those who will be drowned and is not able to understand why he is the chosen one to survive. To obey God he is forbidden to save anyone's life. It makes his life miserable and takes all the joy out of him, especially that the woman he loves is among those who are doomed to death. Anah cries as well when seeing her father's tents drowning feeling unable to understand her lot⁵². Love again here is mixed with fear and suffering, which proves that one would not be able to exist without the other.

The foregoing analysis shows Byron's attitude towards love to be rather complex. Read suggests that the key to understanding it may be found in one of Byron's *Occasional Pieces*, in which the author bears a striking resemblance to the protagonists of his works,

*'T is time this heart should be unmoved
Since others it hath ceased to move:
Yet, though I cannot be beloved,
Still let me love!*

*My days are in the yellow leaf;
The flowers and fruits of Love are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone!*⁵³

⁵⁰ G. Byron, *Heaven...*, I, iii, 458–60.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ H. Read, *Byron...*, p. 16.

The poem proves that love seen by Byron is often complicated, blasphemous, confronted with crime, painful and passionate. The characters love with their whole hearts regardless of the consequences and in spite of the hindrances. Not even the destruction of the world or death were able to alter their feelings and love is shown to be worth all the pain and suffering it might bring along. This romantic view of love proves to remain contemporary to the subsequent generations of readers and has become one of the factors that made Byron's works immortal. The application of religious motifs, moreover, allows to portray certain aspects in a larger cultural context and, thus, make it accessible and understandable to broad audiences.

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RÓŻNE OBLICZA MIŁOŚCI W DRAMATACH GEORGE'A GORDONA BYRONA

STRESZCZENIE

Lord George Gordon Byron, jeden z najwybitniejszych przedstawicieli angielskiego romantyzmu, w swoich dramatach w interesujący sposób opisuje różne rodzaje miłości. *Kain*, *Manfred* oraz *Niebo i Ziemia* są studium relacji międzyludzkich, takich jak miłość rodzicielska, braterska oraz romantyczna. Ponadto autor pokazuje również stosunek człowieka do Boga w obliczu różnych życiowych sytuacji i prób. Problem wiary, zaufania Bogu oraz ważności wypełniania w życiu woli boskiej są jednymi z kluczowych motywów wykorzystanych w omawianych dziełach.

Byron na przykładzie wybranych bohaterów stara się pokazać, że miłość jest uczuciem złożonym, wielowymiarowym, któremu nieodłącznie towarzyszą: poczucie winy, seksualne napięcie, chęć poznania oraz śmierć. Z tego powodu relacje międzyludzkie pokazane są jako problematyczne, często naznaczone bólem i cierpieniem.

W niniejszym artykule znajduje się analiza poszczególnych aspektów miłości w dramatach Byrona, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem konsekwencji różnych wyborów dokonywanych przez człowieka w imię miłości. Ponadto zwraca się uwagę na fakt, iż wykorzystanie postaci biblijnych osadza teksty Byrona w kontekście kulturowym i tworzy z nich uniwersalne alegorie ludzkich postaw.

Słowa kluczowe: Lord Byron, *Manfred*, *Kain*, *Niebo i Ziemia*, miłość, rodzina, relacje międzyludzkie, śmierć