Rhetorical Byron: An interpretation of his historical tragedies

Vicki Maxine Bertolino
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Rhetorical Byron: An interpretation of his historical tragedies

Bertolino, Vicki Maxine, M.A.
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1990

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Rhetorical Byron:
An Interpretation of
His Historical Tragedies

by
Vicki Maxine Bertolino

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Communication Studies

Department of Communication Studies
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 1990
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University of Nevada, Las Vegas
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ABSTRACT

Lord Byron's dramatic works are rhetorical and can be seen as direct responses to the complex social and political issues emerging from both the Industrial and French Revolutions. In short, Byron's works are didactic, focused outward upon society to teach them ways to handle the societal degeneration Byron identified as the overriding problem pervading society and requiring an immediate solution. Because of the evident didactic nature of Byron's works, especially his dramas, this study examined Lord Byron as a rhetorician. More specifically, this study demonstrated that Lord Byron's three historical tragedies are rhetorical in nature, and that they reflect a rhetorical situation.

The purpose of this study was to show that Byron's history plays in particular may be works of fiction, but they may also be viewed as rhetorical discourses. This claim was demonstrated by using a contemporary concept of rhetoric, Lloyd Bitzer's "The Rhetorical Situation." Bitzer's concept is flexible enough to allow the introduction of other, related views while it also permits the critic to investigate three interrelated areas necessary for effective persuasive discourse: an exigence or overriding problem requiring an immediate solution, an audience to resolve the exigence, and the introduction of clear options to resolve or constrain the exigence. By
utilizing Bitzer's "Rhetorical Situation," a critic can obtain the answer to three central questions: To what exigence was Byron responding? Who was his rhetorical audience? What were his constraints?

The major findings of this study were that Lord Byron was a rhetorician because his plays reflected a specific rhetorical situation, yet he also failed as a rhetorician because of his selection of an abstract, idealized audience and abstract issues. Because the problem he was addressing remains relevant today, a study of Lord Byron's dramas-as-discourse is an important addition to the study of literature-as-rhetoric.
DEDICATION

To my best friend, mentor, and mother
MAMA LEE BERTOLINO
(1913-1982)
whom I wish were here to share in this accomplishment.

* * * * *

To my father
CHARLES BERTOLINO, JR.
(1914-1989)

* * * * *

My sister
NORMA BELKOFER

* * * * *

My husband
JAMES B. "MIKE" JOHNSON
whose support, patience, and encouragement
have been invaluable
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I am also grateful to all members of the faculty committee for their direction and support including Dr. Gage Chapel and Dr. Stephen F. Nielsen.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not publicly acknowledge and thank my husband, Mike Johnson, for his wonderful support and belief in me; my dear friend Susan A. Williams for her critical input; and, of course, George Gordon, Lord Byron, for providing the content.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Popular literary critiques of Lord Byron's eight plays take one of two forms. Some note his achievement as a Romantic poet, but allege Byron's plays are "negligible" and possess "dramatic power without much interest" for an audience, whereas others feel it is "a mistake to consider Byron deficient in dramatic ability."¹ Most literary critics, however, continually dismiss the dramas of Lord Byron as inferior. Samuel C. Chew points out that Byron wrote "closet dramas, never intended for the stage."² Blackstone is more scathing, referring to them as "chamber dramas," noting that "[n]othing could be more alien to the kitchen sink and unimpeded progress to majority rule than these obsessional probings of the Promethean nerve, these 'metaphysical' speculations on time and eternity, on kingship and the nature of man."³

Even in Byron's own day, literary critics judged these dramas as being "irrelevant" and "unreadable, though now and again we hear a wilderness-crying voice pleading that they should have a place in our national repertory."4 Two of those "voices" are Professors Dobree and Knight, both of whom embrace Byron's dramatic works "wholeheartedly." Bonomy Dobree suggests that Byron "chose the drama as being the most concentrated form available to his self-searching genius," for it is in his plays that "Byron is expressing more poignantly than anywhere else what he most deeply feels."5 G. Wilson Knight insists that Byron wrote "the most important poetic drama in English between the seventeenth century and our own time."6

Though one could argue both ways, what most literary critics have failed to consider is that Byron's dramatic works were rhetorical and can be seen as direct responses to the complex problems emerging from both the Industrial and French revolutions; in short, his works were didactic. Didactic plays such as Byron's were not a new experience to the world of drama. They existed since the fifth century B.C. when "poetry and dramatic action . . . produced a potent organ for the expression of human

4Bonomy Dobree, Byron's Drama (England: University of Nottingham, 1978) 5.

5Dobree, 5.

experience and thought. The first masters of the drama are in a sense masters of life."  

As early as Euripides, the theatre had playwrights who acted as critics pointing to the injustices they witnessed in their world. Euripides, like Byron, was a trained athlete and a free-thinker who preferred the "mental fight" of questioning every doctrine enacted by the ruling classes. Like Byron, Euripides' fascination as a dramatist lies in his "dualism between thought and fantasy, between emotion and reason;" and he wrote plays which reflected the thoughts and actions of the exiled liberal thinkers of his day. In the early Twentieth Century, didactic theatre found some of its most notable theatrical developments in the poetic and dramatic works of Bertolt Brecht who applied his "epic theatre" philosophy to the framework of the stage because Brecht, like his earlier counterpart Byron, believed that drama should enlighten audiences rather than induce emotional orgies.

Even though such didactic approaches to dramatic literature have been in existence since almost the beginning of dramatic art, the first stage of development of modern instructional drama had its seedbed in the Romantic Period. Allardyce Nicoll insists, "this period is, above all others, the period of change in the theatre. . . . [for]

7Gassner, Masters, 17.
8Gassner, Masters, 57.
fundamentally the fifty years after 1800 are modern, the fifty years before are ancient."9 It is in Byron's dramatic works, observes Nicoll, that modern audiences gain the clearest insights into "the power of the age."10 Others, such as Gassner, J. C. Trewin, and Sir Ifor Evans, agree. They add, however, that of all the Romantic poets writing dramas, only Lord Byron demonstrated "knowledge of the stage and its possibilities in plays such as Manfred (1817) and in 1821 Marino Faliero, Cain, Sardanapalus, and The Two Foscari."11 Byron continued his dramatic skills with Heaven and Earth (1822), Werner (1823), and The Deformed Transformed (1824). "The main body of modern drama," points out Gassner, "begins as a response to the revolutionary speculations and promptings" which stirred Romantic poets such as Lord Byron to write didactic plays, even though such poets did not lead the assault but are found "in the rear of the procession."12

Because of the evident didactic nature of Lord Byron's dramas, this thesis will examine Byron as a rhetorician. More specifically, this study will demonstrate


10Nicoll, History, 168.


12Gassner, Masters, 315.
that Byron's plays are rhetorical in nature, and that they reflect a rhetorical situation. Before beginning the analysis, though, some relevant observations explaining the rationale, methodology, and structure of this study are necessary.

Rationale

This study is warranted for two reasons. First Byron's plays present rhetorical arguments designed to make his audience aware of the nature and causes of enslavement. In his dramas, Byron argued that the individual has the free will to determine his own destiny, but, in order to experience true freedom, each person must first liberate their minds. A social activist, Byron attempted to persuade his audience to think about their condition in life and, hopefully, to change it. Byron's works, therefore, present a persuasive discourse on how, under certain circumstances, widespread cultural attitudes, practices, and beliefs can both limit freedom and prompt persuasive discourse.

Second, though volumes of literary criticism abound on the life and works of Lord Byron, neither he nor his plays have ever been studied from a rhetorical

Byron first introduced these concepts in his early Turkish tales which attempted to isolate the political and ideological concerns of his times. For a detailed analysis of these works, see Daniel P. Watkins, Social Relations in Byron's Eastern Tales (Ontario, Canada: Associated University Presses, 1984).
perspective.\textsuperscript{14} Literary critic Paul West believes that Byron's "plays are really worth attention, not because they enlighten us about his life, but because they are exhaustive dossiers on special aspects of the human condition." West observes that Byron gave "no strikingly evident solutions" in his dramas because life is not that simplistic. "Instead, for those who try to think things out, life becomes very often a slowly expanding insight into why the questions are unanswerable anyway. Byron's plays make us think."\textsuperscript{15} In short, a study of Byron's plays is significant because his discourses are worth examining rhetorically.

Although poetry is usually not thought of as persuasive discourse, the study of literature-as-rhetoric has had a long history. In his classic work \textit{Ars Poetica}, the Roman lyric poet and satirist Horace argued that the aesthetic quality of poetry shares the didactic function of

\textsuperscript{14}A few scholars have attempted to explain the distinct persuasive aspects of Byron's epic poem, "Don Juan", as it relates to the tradition of burlesque, yet these authors also attempt to define the place that the poem occupies in the English literary tradition. For instance, A.B. England shows how Byron uses the symbols of nature to comment on the human condition such as in the metaphor of the voyage in "Don Juan" which shows "some tension between the idea of discovery and the idea of control; and Byron usually resolves that tension by suggesting that the discovery is the means of achieving the control. When he imagines the possibility of a genuine penetration in the truth of things, he describes such a process as a kind of revolutionary adventure" (30). Byron's dramas take this same concept and expand upon it. His early plays, like his early poetry, deal in general with youthful Romantic ideals while his later works satirize the entire English system.

rhetoric. He insisted, "It is not enough that poems be beautiful; they must also please and lead the minds of the listeners wither they will" (II, 99-100).

Critic Bernard Weinberg reported that during the Renaissance, it was Francesco Robortello, with the publication of the first complete exegeses of Aristotle's *The Poetics*, who was finally responsible for the union between *The Poetics* and *The Rhetoric*. In these two works, Aristotle had separated poetry and drama from persuasive discourse, but, according to Weinberg, Robortello believed that "the effect produced [in poetry] is no longer one of artistic pleasure resulting from the formal qualities of the work, but one of moral persuasion to action or inaction, in which the pleasure involved is merely an accompaniment or an instrument."¹⁶ Byron's poetry was merely the instrument he used to present his morally persuasive calls to action, for Lord Byron argued that it was action and not writing that lead men to a worthwhile existence:

Who would write who had anything better to do?

"Action -- action -- action" said Demosthenes:

"Actions -- actions," I say, and not writing, -- least of all rhyme. Look at the querulous and monotonous lives of the "genius" -- except Cervantes, Tasso, Dante, Ariosto, Kleist (who were brave and active citizens), Aeschylus, Sophocles,

and some others of the antiques also -- what a worthless, idle brood it is!17

More recently, Edward Corbett noted that from about 1540 to 1800, "English creative writers looked as much to rhetoric as to any system of poetics for a rationale governing the construction of literary works." He noted that from Chaucer on, the majority of English writers had rhetorical training in the grammar schools and universities, thus, "when these writers sat down to compose a poem or a play or a novel or a prose essay, they quite naturally harked back to the lessons that their rhetoric books had taught them about the construction of a real address or assertion."18 Corbett also realized the utility of rhetorical criticism in the analysis of a literary artifact in order "to see what makes it work," but Corbett argued that "because of the disappearance of rhetorical training from the schools, modern critics have not been aware of how valuable rhetoric can be as a means of explication."19

Lord Byron received a traditional English education for an aristocrat, the lessons of which he incorporated into his writings. In fact, Byron argued that the message in his plays was so important, he was compelled to abandon the style of the old English dramatists who were so "full of

19Corbett, vii-viii.
gross faults, pardoned only for the beauty of their language, and return to Aristotle and the classical rhetoricians who appealed to the emotions of their audience in their persuasive political discourses designed to influence public opinion. Although he insisted that the modern writer had to write "naturally and regularly" and produce "regular tragedies like the Greeks," these were not to be "in imitation" but "merely the outline of their conduct, adapted to our own times and circumstances."  

Several other Twentieth Century critics have also addressed fictional rhetoric. James Sutherland, for example, explained that, like the epideictic, deliberative, or forensic orator, the satirist, for which Byron was noted, tries to "persuade men to admire or despise, . . . to see, or think, or believe whatever seems good to the writer." Byron used satire, irony, and cynicism in his dramatic appeals to the people who had no sympathy nor understanding of the plight of England's poor people. Leslie Marchand,

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20 Prothero, V:218.
21 Prothero, V:218.
Byron's most famous biographer, notes that Byron delighted "in shocking the British public . . . by telling embarrassing truths about himself, and by implication, about human nature in general."24

Among his other works, Wayne Booth specifically addressed the interface of rhetoric and fiction in both his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and in his article "The Scope of Rhetoric Today."25 In "The Scope of Rhetoric Today," Booth noted that most of his students were more influenced by the novels they read and the plays and movies they saw than by the speeches they heard or the pamphlets and tracts they received. This, he described, as a second kind of rhetoric, one

less open [and] more likely to make unacknowledged appeals to the values of a closed community, or even to produce "conversions" without the converter (sic) quite knowing what has happened to him. . . . How much better it would be if we could develop a way of understanding how great literature and drama does in fact work rhetorically to build and strengthen communities.26


25"The Scope of Rhetoric Today" was written for the 1970 Wingspread Conference which was the first national development project on rhetoric, and it included material from such noted scholars as Edwin Black and Lloyd Bitzer.

Booth contended that reading great novels or seeing great plays, even on television or in the movies, was influential because these fictional works change minds. Booth, concluded that rhetoric of fiction was in need of study, for when any discipline sets out to consider what changes the minds of people, it must face these types of works squarely, even if they are fictional works. This becomes especially true today since most young people now seem to derive their basic beliefs, at least those capable of articulation, more from fiction and drama than from forms that at one time were more influential: sermons, scriptures, epideictic orations -- to say nothing of systematic discussions of theology or philosophy.  

In The Rhetoric of Fiction, Booth maintained that, like the authors of speeches and persuasive pamphlets, the authors of literary works call upon all the historical resources at their command, from style and transformed sequence to manipulated "inside views" and commentary. Though some characters and events may speak by themselves their artistic message to the reader, and thus carry in a weak form their own rhetoric, none will do so with proper clarity and force until the author brings all his powers to bear on

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the problems of making the reader see what they really are. The author cannot choose whether to use rhetorical heightening. His only choice is the kind of rhetoric he will use.  

The operative word here is "choice" because literary authors are always making choices from among available options in reference to subject matter, genre, purpose, occasion, or audience. This term "choice" is what gets rhetorical critics to the "heart of rhetoric in general," for when a critic begins questioning why a particular author did "this in this order, and in these words, and answers his questions in relation to one or more of these reference points, he is probably operating as a rhetorical critic."  

Although today a great deal of attention is being given to this area of fiction-as-rhetoric, the actual rhetorical analysis of literary works has not appeared to have kept pace. This appears true of the works of Lord Byron, especially his dramas which lend themselves to a rhetorical examination, for they are a direct response to an oppressive political and social situation that Byron wanted to change.

Methodology

Wayne Booth's arguments make it clear that fiction, including poetic dramas such as Byron's, may represent a

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29Corbett, xxiv.
powerful persuasive force. The central claim of this thesis is that Byron's eight plays may be works of fiction, but they may also be viewed as rhetorical discourses. This claim will be demonstrated by using a contemporary concept of rhetoric: Lloyd Bitzer's "The Rhetorical Situation". According to Bitzer, rhetoric is situational in that it obtains its form from a specific event that generates it. Rhetorical works are pragmatic because they function to "produce action or change, . . . [and] rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action" (Bitzer, 3-4). Bitzer emphasized that the situation must be grounded in reality; however, he does suggest that fictive rhetorical discourse within plays, poetry, or novels may become "genuinely rhetorical outside fictive context -- if there is a real situation for which the discourse is a rhetorical response" (Bitzer, 12). As will be noted in the course of this study, Byron's plays address real situations, and they fit Bitzer's theory of rhetoric.

Bitzer defines a rhetorical situation as "a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence"

Three central elements comprise the rhetorical situation: exigence, audience, and constraints. When these three elements coalesce, unite into the single body of a persuasive discourse, a rhetorical situation exacts a fitting response.

Bitzer defines an exigence as "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done; a thing which is other than it should be" (Bitzer, 6). The pressing problem can be mundane or take on the importance of greater magnitude; it can be simple or complex, but it is always a situation requiring immediate attention in the form of a fitting rhetorical response that addresses the imperfection in a meaningful way.

Every rhetorical situation also requires the mediating action of an audience who, according to Bitzer, consists "only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change" (Bitzer, 8). Not only must this rhetorical audience have a direct interest in the exigence, it must also be able to change or alter the situation in some way.

Finally, all rhetorical situations require a set of constraints, or limitations, that can be brought to bear upon the audience. Constraints are "made up of persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence" (Bitzer, 8). In
short, constraints are those limited opportunities present in a situation which affect what may or may not be said to the audience about the imperfection it is being asked to redress. Constraints can be physical or psychological, artistic or nonartistic. Like Aristotle's rhetorical proofs, Bitzer's artistic constraints include logical and ethical proofs such as the rhetor's style and personal character, and Bitzer's nonartistic constraints include proofs that are persuasive in and of themselves such as an audience's motives, interests, beliefs, and attitudes.

All rhetorical situations come into being, evolve to maturity, decay, and eventually die. This is what Bitzer terms the life cycle of a rhetorical situation (Bitzer, 12). Like the many questions that go unanswered and the many problems that remain unsolved, many rhetorical situations evolve through their life cycle without ever evoking a rhetorical response. Eventually, every rhetorical situation passes from the scene -- either through the front door of resolution or the back door of disinterest or the side door of transformation -- and the event enters a newly-defined situation with its own controlling exigence; thus the rhetorical cycle renews itself, to begin again.

Several critics take Bitzer to task for being too inflexible in his view of a rhetorical situation, especially in his narrow definition of what constitutes a "fitting response". Some critics, such as Vatz, insist that the

31 For several different criticisms of Bitzer's concept, see Richard E. Vatz, "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation,"
rhetor, rather than the situation, determines the proper response. He points out that "rhetors can arbitrarily chose" the response they believe best fits the specific situation which they have defined; therefore, Bitzer's "fitting response" derives not from "the situation's reality, but according to the rhetor's arbitrary choice of characterization."\textsuperscript{32} Other critics, such as Consigny, call for a more "complete view" of rhetoric as "art."\textsuperscript{33} Consigny believes that both Vatz and Bitzer have erred: Vatz for insisting that the rhetor has total freedom in "creating his own exigencies at will" and Bitzer for "construing the situation as determinate and predetermining" a "fitting response." Consigny argues that if the rhetor is "to function effectively," he cannot ignore constraints involving the "particularities of persons, actions, and agencies in a certain place and time."\textsuperscript{34}

Still other critics, like Miller, Hunsaker and Smith, complain that Bitzer devotes too little time to the problem of "perception" in a rhetorical situation. They

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\textsuperscript{32}Vatz, 157.
\textsuperscript{33}Consigny, 176.
\textsuperscript{34}Consigny, 178.
\end{flushleft}
argue that since the "ultimate or perceived nature of the exigence depends upon the constraints of the perceiver,"\textsuperscript{35} then the "perceptions of the rhetor and auditor are crucial to an adequate understanding of the rhetoric."\textsuperscript{36}

Despite these criticisms, Bitzer's concept of rhetorical situations does provide a broad framework with which to examine the text of Lord Byron's dramas because Bitzer's concept is flexible enough to allow the introduction of other, related views, and it allows a critic to investigate the three interrelated areas necessary for effective persuasive discourse -- an exigence or overriding problem, an audience to resolve the exigence, and the introductions of clear options to resolve or constrain the exigence. Consequently, in applying Bitzer's tools to an analysis of Byron's dramas, several questions will be answered: To what exigence was Byron responding? Who was his audience? What were the constraints? With answers to these questions, the critic may then view Byron as a rhetorician and his dramas as rhetorical discourses, thus finally clarifying the place that Byron's dramas should occupy in the English literary tradition.

Structure

Booth noted that the rhetorical elements of author, work, and audience are closely interrelated, "so closely

\textsuperscript{35}Miller, 112.

\textsuperscript{36}Hunsaker and Smith, 145.
that it is impossible to deal with any one of them for very long without touching on the others."37 Each of these elements is also independent which is clearly demonstrated by the distinct divisions of Lloyd Bitzer's rhetorical situations. Exigence is directly related to how the author responds to the demands necessitating immediate attention while audience is pivotal to both the author and his work, and constraints help give the work a specific frame, or format, for the author's persuasive message. The structure of this thesis follows Bitzer's three rhetorical elements, with each succeeding chapter allowing for the interrelationship of these elements.

Assuming that the main biographical facts of this author are well known, since a great deal has already been written about the life and poetry of Lord George Gordon Byron, this study will concentrate on Byron's dramas. Each chapter, therefore, will present only such biographical material as seems directly useful in this investigation of Byron as a responder to exigencies. Chapter II will explore the world of Byron to show how the revolutionary times he lived through influenced and guided his rhetoric. Examining the revolutionary times Byron lived in is important to an understanding of how Byron attempted to alter the beliefs and attitudes of his audience toward the state's growing idea of collectivism. This chapter will focus on reform movements and the repression of ideas, all of which leads a

critic to identify Byron's overriding exigence as societal degeneration.

Byron's purpose in dramatizing the crisis precipitated by social decay was to get his audience thinking about the changing political and social structure of England. Chapter III, therefore, will examine the Nineteenth Century theatre audience and the implied, ideal, audience that Byron had in mind while he was writing his plays. Walter Fisher maintains that a rhetorical communication "implies a conception of the audience that attends and the communicator who presents it." Edwin Black takes this concept a step further when he suggests that a "second persona," or an implied audience, permits insight into the type of audience most likely to read the discourse. The "second persona" is revealed in the ideological comments found in the work itself; these, in turn, contribute to the attitude development of the audience. In effect, the discourse becomes a "model of what the rhetor would have his real audience become." By applying Black's concept of a "second persona" to Byron's

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41Black, 113.
plays, the critic can determine Byron's ideal audience, thereby satisfying Lloyd Bitzer's notion of how the audience becomes a mediator of change in a rhetorical situation.

Although all eight of Lord Byron's dramas could be used to support the contention that his work is rhetorical in nature, three in particular clearly reflect this claim. In 1821, Lord Byron wrote a series of three tragedies that used history as the means of demonstrating how various trapped men changed their situations. This historical trilogy focused on political turmoil and corruption as set in historical locales, yet each reflected the political problems besetting England, as Byron hinted in a letter to John Murray: "I suspect that . . . you and yours won't like the politics [in these plays] which are perilous to you in these times."42 These plays included Marino Faliero, the Doge of Venice, Sardanapalus, and The Two Foscari. "Stage history tells us that the noble [Nineteenth Century] actor, Macready, did something with" each of these historical tragedies; not only were each of these staged for Nineteenth Century audiences, but each experienced a somewhat successful revival on twentieth century stages.43 Chapter IV will focus on the artistic constraints Byron utilized in these three plays which consisted of demonstrating to the English people the necessity (1) of taking a stand by


43Trewin, 28. See also Dobree's and Nicoll's works for a listing of when and where each of Byron's play have been performed.
admitting to themselves the nature of that which they were blindly accepting; (2) of challenging the state's right to assert its will over man's ability to reason; and (3) of looking behind the empty assertions of people who claimed to support freedom and denounce injustice when they were really striving to achieve serfdom and support a moral system that permitted injustice. Byron strives to the rhetorical potential of his dramas through these various strategies.

Chapter V concludes the study by showing how the use of Lloyd Bitzer's work on rhetorical situations is a useful tool in helping to understand Lord Byron's dramas. By focusing on the life cycle of the rhetorical situation in relationship to Bitzer's observation that "the rhetorical audience may be scattered, uneducated regarding its duties and powers, or it may dissipate," the critic may finally begin to understand why Byron's plays appeared to be failures during his lifetime. More importantly, Chapter V focuses on how Byron's confusion in addressing the correct audience prevented him from being successful. This chapter will also address the significance of Byron's message and its possible impact on contemporary society. In conclusion, it is hoped this analysis of how Bitzer's rhetorical situation as utilized in Byron's dramas will provide a clearer understanding of the relationship between society and rhetoric when a crisis situation, an exigence, abounds.

Bitzer, 12.
CHAPTER II
RHETORICAL EXIGENCY

Lloyd Bitzer makes a clear distinction between a real and a fictive rhetorical situation. According to Bitzer, the exigence, as well as the complex of audience and constraints which generate a rhetorical discourse, must be located in reality, be objective, publicly observable, and historic. Only then can the rhetorical situation be real or genuine. Even when the situation is imaginary, as found in fiction, the situation can be "understood as a rhetorical response" only if the fictive discourse is based on a real situation.¹

Lord Byron's three historical dramas meet Bitzer's definition of rhetoric, for each play was a direct response to a period filled with revolution, repression, and reform. As Byron often noted in his letters, the confusing era in which he lived were "times of paradoxical servility" which threatened all clear thinking and deep conviction.² This chapter will investigate Lord Byron as a responder to these urgent problems by exploring the central exigencies faced by Byron, his era, and his plays.

¹Bitzer, 11.
²Prothero, IV:62.
Revolutions

Spanning a period of forty-three years, the Romantic era sprang into existence in 1789 with the Fall of the Bastille and the publication of William Blake’s Songs of Innocence, a protestation against social tyranny; it ended in 1832 with the passage of the first reform bills in England. During that turbulent period, England moved through the Industrial and French Revolutions and into a state of dominance in the middle decades of the Nineteenth Century.

The late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries saw Great Britain transformed from a predominately agrarian society into the world’s first industrialized nation. Key inventions in textile production during the 1760s and 1780s aided in the development of England’s factory system which inexpensively mass-produced textiles for exportation to an expanding world market. The advent of railroads and steamships in the 1830s provided the English with the transportation network required to link emerging industrial centers with sources of supplies and markets.

In England, the 1780s and 1790s raged with economic change due in part to the Industrial Revolution, but due in

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larger part to the French Revolution which historian E. J. Hobsbawm insists cracked "the structure of the old social order and laid the foundation of the modern bourgeois state." The French Revolutionary Wars helped create the modern day political, economic, and ideological systems, according to Hobsbawm who stressed that England's economic growth dramatically escalated during this period. "It was now known that social revolution was possible, that nations existed as something independent of states, peoples as something independent of their rulers, and even that the poor existed as something independent of the ruling classes."  

Born in London on January 22, 1788, George Gordon Byron was but a year old when mobs of land-owning French peasantry and middle class citizens stormed the Bastille prison on July 14, an event of which Byron could have no recollection except from reading about it or hearing the stories told by others. Yet the Fall of the Bastille, which marked the beginning of the French Revolutionary Wars, would

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5Hobsbawm, 117.

6The Bastille was a fortress in Paris built in 1370 and used to house political prisoners. Even though it was almost empty by the time of the French Revolution, it remained a symbol of oppression. To this day, July 14 is celebrated as France's Independence Day.
effect a deep impact on Byron who grew to maturity during the period of post-revolutionary reaction. "His life and the war with France are correspondent."  

The first major revolution of modern times, the French Revolution overthrew the most famous monarchy in Europe (Louis XVI), ended the privileged position of the nobility, and replaced the traditional institutions with new ones based on popular sovereignty and democratic rights. Threat of attack from abroad precipitated the First Coalition of French Revolutionary Wars against Austria, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Prussia, Russia, and Spain (1793-1795). This resulted in the Reign of Terror, a period when fanatical Jacobin reformers such as Robespierre, Danton and Hebert seized control of the faltering French government from the moderate Girondins and transferred power from the radical governing body to arbitrary bodies such as the Committees for General Security and Public Safety which guillotined more than two-thousand individuals labeled as "counterrevolutionaries."

Following the end of the Reign of Terror in 1794, a new constitution, which proved ineffectual and corrupt, was established. It was not until 1799, though, that this diseased government would be overthrown by the army led by

7Kelsall, 3. Kesall also notes, "If there was a period of youthful enthusiasm [for Byron] it may have found its hero in the First Consul. It is reported anecdotally how he fought for his bust of Napoleon at Harrow" (3).

"By 1794, all three of these men faced the same terror they inflicted on others: beheading."
General Napoleon Bonaparte who established his own empire and led the Second Coalition of French Revolutionary Wars against Great Britain, Russia, and Austria. Commonly referred to as the Napoleonic Wars, these lasted from 1799 to 1815 with the Battle of Waterloo and the final abdication of Napoleon.

The Napoleonic Wars fired the imaginations of English writers, for these campaigns constituted "the largest, most immediate, and most sweeping event of the age, bringing before the public mind . . . an encompassing set of ideas about the exciting possibilities -- and dangers -- of restructuring society entirely."9 Initially, most of the Romantic writers supported Napoleon because they saw the Wars as a struggle for liberty and Napoleon as a freedom fighter introducing a new ethical consideration into popular thought. Some writers, though, like Edmund Burke,10 were horrified by the Wars.

Burke, a lover of civil liberty, believed that a settled government should be amended through reform, not destroyed through revolution. Burke saw the French


10Edmund Burke was an Irish-born British statesman, political philosopher and orator who entered parliament in 1765. His famous Reflections on the Revolution in France written in 1790 presented his rational case against violent change. Though few would side with him at the outset, for they were enamoured by the ideals of the French Revolution, after years of insurrection and wars, many of the first generation of Romantic writers, including Wordsworth and Coleridge who lived through the Wars, became disillusioned and sided with Burke.
Revolution as substituting capricious tyranny of mob rule for the established, ordered government. These writers saw the liberation for which Napoleon claimed to be fighting as nothing more than a new form of political exploitation; Napoleon's ideological concerns had evaporated and were replaced by imperial conquest. English writers such as William Wordsworth (who became England's Poet Laureate in 1843) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge at first were ardent supporters of Napoleon, but reversed their stand and sided with Burke; not so with Lord Byron who remained an impassioned supporter of Napoleon.

For Byron, Napoleon was the epitome of liberty and revolutionary thought; he referred to this leader often in both his journal of 1813-1814 and in several poems he specifically addressed to Napoleon. Of Napoleon's banishment to Elba, Byron observed in his correspondence of April 1814, "... here we are, retrograding to the dull, stupid old system, -- balance of Europe -- poising straws upon king's noses, instead of wringing them off." In Napoleon, Byron found hope for the establishment of a new republic in England, but with Waterloo, "Every hope of a

11 Several of Byron's poems focused on this revolutionary period, including "From the French" which was written after Waterloo, "Napoleon's Farwell," "Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte" which was written after his banishment to Elba, and "Additional Stanzas" to the "Ode" written after Napoleon escaped from Elba.

12 Prothero, III:218.

13 The Battle of Waterloo occurred on June 18, 1815, and it marked the final engagement of the Napoleonic Wars.
republic is over, and we must go on under the old system. But I am sick at heart of politics and slaughters."¹⁴

Less than a year later, on April 25, 1816, Byron left England, vowing not to return unless there was a revolution. He traveled extensively in Italy and Greece where he wrote his greatest satirical work "Don Juan" as well as all eight of his dramas. He also participated in several revolutionary schemes, primarily working with the underground movement of the Carbonari whose goal was the liberation of Italy from Austria. In 1822, Byron collaborated with Leigh Hunt and Shelley on the political journal, The Liberal; and in 1823 he advanced large sums of money to the Greek government to aid the insurrectionists. When a Greek expedition was planned, Byron put aside "Don Juan," telling Lady Blessington that he hoped to prove that "a poet may be a soldier."¹⁵

On July 14, 1823, Byron sailed for Greece. In December of that year, he crossed over to Missolonghi where he was received with full military honors by Prince Mavrocordato, head of the Greek staff. As the adopted chieftain of the Suliotes, Byron was soon head of the republican forces. In his attempt to free Greece from the Ottoman Empire, Byron became ill and died on April 19, 1824, at the age of 36. First honored by the Greeks for his help in their successful War of Independence against the Turks,

¹⁴Prothero, IV:302.

Byron was later returned to his homeland where he was interred at Hucknail Torkard near his family's estate at Newstead.

Byron's history plays were grounded by these real world events, both historical and contemporary. Before putting pen to paper, Byron spent long hours researching the historical facts surrounding each drama. The early part of 1821 Byron spent reading literary histories such as Friedrich Schlegel's *History of Literature* and Thomas Campbell's *Specimens of the British Poets*. These, asserts Watkins, greatly influenced the direction of Byron's three historical plays, for they helped Byron "to perceive and articulate" the importance of using history as the basis for his "analytical and moral" statements on the current social conditions facing all of Europe at that time.\(^{16}\)

The first of these histories, *Marino Faliero*, was actually begun in 1817, shortly after Byron settled in Ravenna (Italy); however, it was put aside and not taken up again until May of 1820 when it was finished in three months. Because Byron desired total accuracy in this play, the years between were spent, in part, on research and a careful study of Venetian annals. Byron was especially interested in why this real-life Fourteenth Century ruler, Doge Faliero, was a conspirator who worked closely with the lower and middle classes of his society. This concern is evident in the 1817 letter Byron wrote to his publisher:

Look into "Moore's (Dr. Moore's) view of Italy" for me -- in one of the volumes you will find an account of the Doge Valieri (it ought to be Falieri) and his conspiracy -- or the motives of it -- . . . I want it -- I cannot find so good an account of that business here . . . I have searched all the libraries -- but the policy of the old Aristocracy made their writers silent on his motive which was a private grievance against one of the Patricians.17

The private grievance was against one Michael Steno, a young patrician who insulted the Doge's young wife Angiolina. When the complaint reached the Tribunal of Forty, the senators sentenced Steno to only a month's confinement. Such a trivial punishment for such a base crime offended the Doge's honor and inflamed him against the Senate and members of his own social order. The Doge's private animus quickly merged with the larger public outrage of freedom against tyranny. The historical events dramatized in this tragedy took place between 1354 and 1355; in the play, however, they unfold in just twenty-four hours with the Doge joining the rebels against the oppressive state of which he was titular head. Bertram, one of the conspirators, betrays the revolution because of his desire to preserve the life of Lioni, a boyhood friend who had become a senator. The Doge and the chief conspirators,

including Bertram, are apprehended and decapitated.

The second history play, Sardanapalus, was begun in Ravenna on January 13, 1821, and completed by May 28 of that same year. It was an accurate dramatization of a historical event which occurred about eight-hundred years before Christ. The play dramatized the conspiracy against the fortieth and last King of Syria who was a sensual bon vivant. As in Marino Faliero, the conspiracy erupts and succeeds in one day. The plot is simple: Sardanapalus wants all of his subjects to share in his spirit of self-enjoyment and peace. Although personally brave, this pacifistic ruler "loathes all war, and warriors," preferring instead to "live in peace and pleasure" (Sardanapalus, I, ii, 576-78). The sovereign's effeminate, peaceful nature irritates some of his officers and subjects who forcibly attempt to dethrone him. After shaking off his indolence, Sardanapalus finally places himself at the head of his troops and leads them into several successful battles. He is eventually beaten and takes refuge in his palace where he insures the safety and future of his wife, sons, and loyal followers; he is joined by his mistress Myrrha as they voluntarily mount their funeral pyre.

The final history play, The Two Foscari, shifts the action from Syria back to Italy. Written after the

18The Complete Poetical Works of Byron, Cambridge Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1933). All future references to Byron's plays and other poetical works will come from this source with title, act, and line referenced within the text.
Carbonari failed in their revolutionary attempt, Byron began *The Two Foscari* on June 12, 1821, and completed it one month later. This tragedy was based on a historical incident occurring in Venice near the middle of the Fifteenth Century when the Council of Ten, an arbitrary governing body, tyrannized the citizens. In 1445, that corrupt tribunal compelled Francis Foscari, the Doge of Venice, to preside over the torture, condemnation, and banishment of his last surviving son Jacopo Foscari. The first of three trials stemmed from unsubstantiated charges that the younger Foscari had accepted bribes from a foreign prince; Jacopo was sentenced to a state of exile. When one of the Council of Ten was assassinated five years later, young Foscari was charged for the murder even though the charge was devoid of proof and the prince was not even in Venice at the time. He was again sentenced to banishment from Venice. The last charge had no feature of criminality, even though the Ten deemed it otherwise, but was based on a letter the young man had written to the new Duke of Milan entreatiing him to intercede on his behalf to end the unjust banishment from his homeland and family. This final offense was again met by torture as his father presided over the tribunal, but before Jacopo's sentence of a lifetime banishment was carried out, he died. James Loredano, the vengeance-seeking patrician who framed Jacopo, finally convinced the Ten to depose the Doge. The charges were also ill-founded, stemming from a private grievance Loredano held against Doge Foscari.
In each of these historical tragedies, Byron illustrated the necessity for revolution. He demonstrated that the people were "discontented," but insisted, "They have cause"

Since they are nothing in the State and in
The city worse than nothing -- mere machines
To serve the nobles' most patrician pleasures.

(Marino, I, ii, 327-31)

Marino Faliero clearly details the necessity for the state to be "exorcised with blood" (Marino, III, ii, 288), for armed revolution is the only recourse open to a people who have become "further slaves"

To this o'ergrown aristocratic Hydra,
The poisonous heads of whose envenom'd body
Have breathed a pestilence upon us all.

(Marino, I, ii, 448-51)

In Sardanapalus, the Chaldean Soothsayer Beleses aspires to rule; therefore, he encourages the Mede Arbaces "to serve and save Assyria" from the "despised monarch" because it is better to be the Soothsayer's servant than the "pardon'd slave of she Sardanapalus" (Sardanapalus, II, i, 392-403). In this play, Byron shows that a just ruler, like Sardanapalus, cannot defend his realm until he understands that

... with common man
There needs too oft the show of war to keep
The substance of sweet peace; and for a King,
'T is sometimes better to be feared than loved.

(Sardanapalus, I, ii, 579-82)

In *The Two Foscari*, Byron introduces a new type of revolution, one that uses words and not force to oppress the masses. He shows that he understands how society is ruled by men who place themselves above the law -- powerful men (like Loredano) who remain obscure, in the background, yet guide lawmakers (such as The Council of Ten) in a bloodless revolution where rulers unwittingly do their bidding. This is readily apparent when Loredano tells his co-conspirator Barbarigo: "... what laws? -- 'The Ten' are laws [yet]/I will be legislator in this business" (*Foscari*, IV, i, 38-9). Loredano admits that through the use of carefully "prepared ... arguments as will not/Fail to move them" [The Ten] that he will get the Council of Ten "to remove him" [Doge Foscari] from his long, devoted rule of Venice (*Foscari*, IV, i, 50-1). This is clearly alluded to when the Chief of the Council of Ten coldly informs Doge Foscari that after careful consideration, The Ten and "twenty-five of the best born patricians" from the senate have concluded that because of the "o'erwhelming cases/Which, at this moment, must oppress" the Doge's years, they "have judged it fitting" to ask for the "resignation of the ducal ring" which Doge Foscari has "worn so long and venerably" (*Foscari*, V, i, 16-27). These are the words of Loredano, not the Council of Ten; in addition, this request refutes a promise the Council
exacted from Doge Foscari in the past, as the Doge reminds them:

When I twice before reiterated
My wish to abdicate, it was refused me:
And not alone refused, but ye exacted
An oath from me that I would never more
Renew this instance. I have sworn to die
In full exertion of the functions, which
My country call'd me here to exercise,
According to my honour and my conscience --
I cannot break my oath.
... ye have no right to reproach my length
Of days, since every hour has been the country's.

(Foscari, V, i, 39-53)

Here Byron effectively demonstrates how a social revolution can be waged successfully through the use of false words.

Byron used his history plays to mirror the same revolutionary forces sweeping Europe; a force that swept despots from their thrones and established new, liberal constitutions among freed nations. Referring back to such historic events was important because by the time Byron began writing these dramas, little of the hopeful idealism of the French Revolution was surviving. By the 1820s, old regimes were being restored, and in Romantic, industrialized England, there were riots followed by failed attempts at reform and further repression of the very people the revolutionary ideals proposed to free. Even though he
preferred a civil war, Byron realized that in England a bloodless revolution was occurring through Parliamentary reform that swept the people into deeper social and economic distress rather than helped them survive the growing Industrial Revolution which was taking a toll on England's working classes.

Reform

During England's explosive Industrial Revolution, which became the prototype for future periods, the country's population more than doubled. In the 1500s, England housed about three million people; in 1789, more than two centuries later, the population grew to just under eight million; by 1832, less than half-a-century later, the English population swelled to sixteen million citizens; and by 1850, the English population toppled the twenty-million mark.\textsuperscript{19} In less than fifty years, England became the first developed nation in history to see its urban class exceed its rural. This transformation created new social problems for the English. With more people packed into ever-expanding cities, working and living conditions became appalling. British historian A. D. Harvey points out that the two million British working class families of early Nineteenth Century England could achieve no real coherence in voicing their concerns because their working and living conditions,

\textsuperscript{19}Harvey, 50-59. According to Harvey, growth after 1832 was due largely to improvements in food supply, sanitation, and medicine available to all classes of society; these were secured primarily through the passage of the Reform Bills.
literacy levels, and relative wealth were so varied; nor were the masses organized into any cohesive group, either out of ignorance and fear or simple apathy. "Protests and unrest were sufficiently numerous and violent to alarm the government, yet there were no real and binding programs or support groups to control the direction of political change."  

During this period, which extended well into the first three decades of the Nineteenth Century, the English discovered a social conscious that found a voice amongst the younger generation of Romantic writers, including Lord Byron.  

This movement advocated the education of the poor, the abolition of the slave trade, revision of the system to aid the poor, relief of the conditions in the prisons, and primarily a plea for Parliamentary reform. From this plea raged a battle between the Whigs and other English reformers who demanded radical social change, and the Tories and other aristocratic ruling classes who argued that the old system was working and to change it would end in a civil war.

Harvey, 57. Harvey attributed this lack of support to the fact that the majority of the mill labor force was composed of women and children. "In 1816, three-fifths of the labour in Manchester spinning factories was under 18 and probably a majority of the rest were women who even -- perhaps especially -- in the working classes had not been admitted to social organizational equality with their menfolk" (57).

Erdman explained that the "eight years after Waterloo -- during which appeared the major works of the second generation of Romantic poets -- were years haunted by the spectre of an English Civil War." In this "sulphurous background of crisis and alarm" raged an internal power struggle with nearly all classes taking sides based on their mutual loyalties or animosities.22

This turmoil erupted out of the "classical programme around which the British labouring poor rallied time and time again." This program was simple parliamentary reform as expressed in the "Six Points" of the People's Charter which Hobsbawm noted was no different in substance from the "Jacobianism" of Thomas Paine's generation, though it was entirely compatible (but for its association with an increasingly self-conscious working class) with the political radicalism of the Benthamite middle-class reformers.23 The only difference Hobsbawm noted in the restoration period of 1815 to 1830 was in the distrust of middle-class reformers. Such distrust stemmed directly from the French Revolution which began as a civil war filled with lofty ideals of freeing the oppressed lower-class citizens of France. It ended a quarter-of-a-century later leaving a trail of slaughter, insurrection, and exploitation of the

22Erdman, "Byron and Revolt," 234.

23Hobsbawm, 128. The followers of English philosopher and reformist Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) were called Benthamites. Bentham propounded utilitarianism, the aim of which was to achieve "the greatest happiness for the greatest number." He had a major influence on prison and law reforms during the Nineteenth Century.
very people it had promised to help. The outcome of the French Revolution caused confusion and despair in England, a fact that was especially evidenced in the writings of Byron.

Even though Lord Byron "learnt to be cynical about politics [and] to distrust the application of ideology to explain the nature of events," at one time he desired a political career, for Byron saw his natural talents as oratorical and martial, not necessarily poetic. Byron also felt that through a political career he could exact social reform.

Lord Byron started his political career in the usual way for an aristocrat. At the age of thirteen, he attended Harrow school where his favorite subjects were history and travel, especially Roman history and tales of the East. At that time, few books had been published for

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24 Kesall, 2. Biographical information on Byron was obtained from several different sources, but primarily from Marchand's three-volume Byron: A Biography. Other sources included Kesall, the works of David V. Erdman, and Geoffrey Trease, Byron: A Poet Dangerous to Know (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969).

25 As a child, Byron dreamed of military glory, of leading a troop of "Byron's Blacks" to victory as his childhood heroes had done. In addition to Napoleon, Byron's heroes were George Washington, Simon Bolivar, and Leonidas, the King of ancient Sparta. But many feared this lad would never be able to accomplish such feats because he was born clubfooted and walked with a brace and a limp his entire life. This handicap never stopped Byron, though, who learned to box, play cricket, swim, and was an excellent horseman and marksman. Nor did Byron's early existence of living in abject poverty after his father wasted his mother's inheritance on women and drink, leaving her a near-penniless widow in 1790, stop him in his pursuit of life. Young Byron would not inherit his title and lands from his Great Uncle, the Fifth Lord Byron, until May of 1798 when he was ten years old.
children, so Byron, a voracious reader, "went straight to the books intended for his elders, and by the time he was ten he had a formidable reading list behind him." After leaving Harrow, Byron had hoped to attend Oxford where all of his friends had gone, but there were no rooms available, so he spent his college years in Trinity College at Cambridge. "When I went up to Trinity, in 1805, at the age of seventeen and a half, I was miserable and untoward to a degree," wrote Byron to John Murray. That would soon change, for it was during his tenure at Trinity that Byron was first introduced to his life-long friend and associate John Cam Hobhouse who, recalled Byron, "hate[d] me for two years, because I wore a white hat, and a grey coat, and rode a grey horse (as he says himself), [but] took me into his good graces because I had written some poetry."28

The meeting with Hobhouse was eventful. Like Byron, Hobhouse was widely read in history and politics, and he aspired to both political and literary careers. Unlike Byron, Hobhouse had already formed liberal Whig opinions, and he encouraged Byron to become a member of the Cambridge Whig Club. Though the Whigs had emerged as a significant political force in England in the 1680s, and described themselves as "friends of the people" and "champions of liberty," by 1790 the party had dwindled and was under

26Trease, 13.
27Marchand, Biography, 101.
28Marchand, Biography, 131.
stress in Romantic England. In fact, the Whigs were excluded from English government throughout Byron's adult life. The conservative, church- and king-supported Tory Party held power during most of the Nineteenth Century.

The summer of 1808 Byron took his masters degree at Trinity; he also took possession of his family home at Newstead and began planning his Grand Tour, an accepted custom for young English gentlemen upon completion of a college education. From 1809 to 1811, Byron leisurely travelled through Portugal, Spain, Turkey, and Greece. His admiration for the ideal liberties of Greece certainly found expression in many of his works, especially in his dramas.29 Before leaving on his Grand Tour, though, Byron claimed his seat in the House of Lords, attending seven times. When Byron finally returned to London in 1812, he felt he could be politically effective within the existing British system of government, and he entered his career enthusiastically, attending the Lords twenty-four times between January and July 1812, during which time he presented two speeches. He continued to attend regularly in the spring and summer of 1813 even though he presented only one additional speech, the petition on behalf of Major Cartwright.

29Byron's literary reputation was, in fact, established from the works he wrote during this tour. When he returned to England in 1811, Byron found himself instantly famous for his "Turkish Tales" and, primarily, for "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage."
Major John Cartwright, described as the "genial monomaniac Patriarch of Reform,"\(^{30}\) founded the London Hampden Club to gather a staff of leaders for the Reform Movement, and principally to formulate a tangible program for the equal representation of different classes in Parliament. Byron joined the Club on June 8, 1812, and found himself in the company of a few liberal members of the landed aristocracy, several wealthy baronets, some Whig commoners, an assortment of Whig and Radical middle-class reformers, and a few Independent Reformers such as Sir Francis Burdett.\(^{31}\)

Cartwright and Byron had high hopes that the group would inspire a second "Glorious Revolution"\(^ {32}\) which would

\(^{30}\)Erdman, "Genteel," 1069. Most of the information on Cartwright and the London Hampden Club comes from this source, and all quotes on this subject, unless otherwise indicated, are also from this source found on pages 1069-1072.

\(^{31}\)Sir Francis Burdett would later be called a Radical even though that label was never adopted by the Independent Reformers. From the beginning, Independent Reformers were referred to as "Burdettites".

\(^{32}\)The first "Glorious Revolution" occurred in 1688-89 when Protestant opponents of the English Crown drove King James II from England and brought William III of Orange and his wife Mary to the throne of England. When the birth of James's son threatened to turn England into a permanently Catholic monarchy, the Whigs and Tories united and invited the Dutch Prince William and his wife to become joint rulers of England. In 1689, under King George, Parliament redefined and restricted royal powers in the Bill of Rights, abolished the royal power to suspend laws, established free elections, and defined citizen's rights, safeguarding them against undue governmental interference. The Whigs enjoyed a period of dominance from 1714-1760. Largely out of office under Charles Fox during the Romantic era, the Whigs were increasingly associated with reform and helped form the Liberal Party in the mid-1800s.
once again restore the Whigs to power and facilitate a major restructuring of the Tory-controlled government. However, this mix of reformers was scarcely joined together before disputes arose. Though they shared a desire for reform, they were in discord as to what type of reform: "some wanted to turn the clock back, some to speed it forward," yet no one was willing to consider the consequences of such indecisiveness, namely, the maintenance of a status quo power structure. Frustrated by such impotence, Byron proclaimed: "I am and have been for reform always, but not for the reformers. I saw enough of them at the Hampden Club."33

That the social problems of the day directly influenced Byron into some type of action is attested to by the three Parliamentary speeches he presented. The first, given on February 27, 1812, was a protest against the Frame-Work riot bill; the second, given on April 12, 1812, was in support of Catholic Emancipation; and the third, given on June 1, 1813, was a presentation of Major Cartwright's petition to reform the laws regarding the gathering of "freemen" in England.34 Even before presenting

33Prothero, IV:411.

34Erdman, "Revolt," 240. Information on Byron's Parliamentary speeches were taken primarily from Marchand, Biography, 317-323; Watkins, Social Relations, 29-31; and J. W. Lake, "Parliamentary Speeches," The Works of Lord Byron (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippencott & Co., 1856) 553-560. For a more detailed discussion of Byron's Parliamentary speeches, especially his "Frame-work Riot" speech, see Chapter III of this work.
his third speech, Byron realized how much he had misread and misunderstood the depth and power of Parliament. His failure in defense of reform left a distaste for the whole business of politics. In November of 1813, he declared himself "sick of parliamentary mummeries;"35 and Byron left English politics.

This dissatisfaction with the politics of his day is clearly illustrated in his historical trilogy. Each play is concerned with how reformers and politicians alike used the law to benefit themselves and not to reform an oppressive social system, as Marina tells her father-in-law, Doge Foscari: ". . . thou/Observe'st, obey'st such laws as make old Draco's/A code of mercy by comparison" (Foscari, II, i, 372-74). Doge Faliero, from Byron's first history play, also obeyed the law, but to no avail as he laments throughout the play:

I ask'd no remedy but from the law:
I sought no vengeance but redress by law:
I call'd no judges but those named by the law.

(Marino, I, ii, 141-43)
And still he, the Doge of Venice, "cannot even obtain it [justice]. -- 'T was denied/To me most solemnly" (Marino, I, ii, 412-13). In these two Venetian tragedies, Byron cleverly mirrored the failure of English Parliament to exact fair and just legislation for all subjects. Marina expressed it most lucidly when she informed Senator Memmo

35Prothero, II:318.
that ". . . with them [politicians] power and will are one/In wickedness," for if this ruling body was the epitome of justice in Venice, as it claimed, "There now would be no Venice" (Foscari, I, i, 222-25).

Byron, though, realized that the people themselves were as much to blame for failure of the reform movement as were the politicians -- a fact he learned while a member of the Hampden Club where no one could agree nor compromise for the good of all. This is explored in Sardanapalus. Here, indeed, was the ideal ruler, a sovereign who's only desire was to make his subjects feel the "weight of human misery less," a ruler who took "no license/Which I deny to them" [his subjects] because he realized that "We all are men" (Sardanapalus, I, ii, 310-13). Even though this benevolent monarch tried all he could "to soothe" his subjects, and though he "made no wars, . . . added no new imposts [nor]/. . . interfered with their [his subject's] civic lives" (Sardanapalus, I, ii, 403-05), the people were still not satisfied. They bewailed that Sardanapalus "stopp' st/Short of the duties of a king;" therefore, he was "unfit to be a monarch" (Sardanapalus, I, ii, 407-09).

In each of these plays, Byron attempted to present a focused picture of why it was so difficult to bring about social reform. In these tragedies, he presented an image of the complicated reality of social injustice as he witnessed it in England: each side distrusting the other, yet each demanding more than either could or was willing to give.
In addition, Byron raised questions which both the seated Tory-aristocratic rulers and the Whig-labor movement reformers in this industrializing nation needed to address, namely, how could these two opposing sides unify for the mutual purpose of establishing a reasonable, fair groundwork for social reform? A supporter of reform and the establishment of a republic, Byron wrote about and fought for liberty of oppressed citizens, that's why this impasse on both the parts of the reformers and the rulers, and their failure to stem the epidemic of repression of basic human rights, caused Byron to exclaim: "The more I see of men, the less I like them!"  

Repression

The Declaration of the Rights of Man, approved on August 4, 1789, and the subsequent spread of the revolution prior to the Reign of Terror, became a beacon for the oppressed in England. The champions of reform in England were infused with a fresh zeal because the revolution spread the explosive ideas of sovereignty of the people, liberty of the individual, and equality for all before the law which is why most of the upper class intellectuals in Nineteenth Century England "voiced social protest in the name of liberty."  

Yet this same fear of revolutionary social change caused the government and conservative factions in

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36 Prothero, III: 243.

37 Harvey, 59.
England to suppress the works of liberal publishers, poets and bill-posters in the years preceding passage of the three Reform Bills of 1832. The works of Byron were considered to be especially inflammatory, for they dissolved "the moral cement already precariously loosened by the long [French Revolutionary] war, the Bourbon peace and the invisible processes of industrial transformation."38

Robert Southey, English Poet Laureate from 1813 until he died in 1843, was one of the leaders of this attack against men whom he labeled "Satanic Poets" because they followed the revolutionary lines of Thomas Paine and his "Satanic school of thought."39 To Southey, the works of these poets, especially Byron's, constituted a greater menace to English society than even the Industrial or French Revolutions. In fact, during the first two decades of the Nineteenth Century, England underwent mass hysteria caused by ministerial and self-appointed censors such as Southey. This was a time when even ballad-singers were suspect, when

38Erdman, "Revolt," 247. Byron was among a group of "exiled poets" whose works were believed to be dangerous. Other "exiled poets" included Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, and some other lesser-known writers of the time.

39Thomas Paine (1737-1809), a British-born writer and radical, was a leading figure in the American Revolution. After emigrating to America in 1774, he wrote the highly influential pamphlet Common Sense which helped encourage the colonists to declare their independence from England. Upon his return to England in the late 1880s, he wrote a defense of the French Revolution and republicanism in his classic work The Rights of Man (1791-92). After being forced out of England, he fled to France where he wrote the controversial deistic classic The Age of Man (1794-95). In 1802 he returned to the now-United States where he died in relative obscurity.
coffee houses were raided "on suspicion of harboring readers of the few papers not owned by Government," and when the "venerable Academic Society was refused license to meet because it could not guarantee in advance that no discussion of politics would ever be made."  

Such censorship may have suppressed many words before or even after publication, but it never suppressed Byron who published, among other works, "Don Juan," "The Vision of Judgement," and his three history plays which helped spread the ideas of freedom to a corrupt, oppressed, society. In his Ravenna Journal of January 13, 1821, Byron wrote: "The King-times are past. There will be blood shed like water, and tears like mist; but the people will conquer in the end. I shall not live to see it, but I foresee it."  

With bloody revolutions abounding throughout Europe and the turmoil erupting out of a repressive English social system, Byron's prophecy seemed inevitable. In England, the years of 1819 through 1821, when Byron was researching and writing his three historical tragedies, recorded not only the suppression and censorship of liberal writers, but the oppression of the working and lower classes in England. This resulted in the Peterloo Massacre of August 1819, the

\[^{40}\text{Erdman, "Revolt," 234-235.}\]

\[^{41}\text{Kelsall, Politics, 82.}\]

\[^{42}\text{Peterloo Massacre was the name given to the rally held in St. Peter's Field, Manchester, England, on August 16, 1819, when 60,000 men and women demonstrated peacefully to demand a reform of Parliament whose laws were causing bankruptcies, distress and starvation of England's laborers. Earlier that year, in February and March, colliers and weavers started to}\]
Cato Street Conspiracy of February 1820, the divorce trial of Queen Caroline in 1820, and the persecution of Byron's closest friends and fellow reformers Sir Francis Burdett, Major John Cartwright, and John Cam Hobhouse.

At first, Byron blamed the oppressive nature of English society solely on the ruling classes. In *Marino Faliero*, for instance, Israel Bertuccio, leader of the conspirators, asks Doge Faliero:

strike for better working conditions and wages; at the same time, both the Tories and Whigs pooled their votes against a field of Radical reformers led by Byron's friend Hobhouse, so these working class citizens decided to stage a massive rally. Government-backed newspapers reported that these peaceful demonstrators would have been incited to riot and treasonous conduct by Orator Henry Hunt if the militia had not been called in to disperse the people. Sabres and pistols were used to disperse the crowd; eleven people were killed, with more than six-hundred wounded.

It was on Cato Street that a group of fanatics, under the leadership of Thistlewood, plotted to assassinate the Prime Minister while he dined at Lord Harrowby's home on February 23, 1820. This plot resulted from the passage of The Six Acts which regulated how many and when people could assemble. The Six Acts evolved out of the Peterloo Massacre, and was especially distressful for Byron because newspaper reports linked his friend Hobhouse with Radical reformers like Orator Hunt of Peterloo fame. When Hobhouse won election to Parliament in February 1820, Byron took this as proof that Hobhouse was indeed only a tool in the hands of his radical constituents, but he learned the truth later and their friendship remained in tact till Byron's death. Thistlewood was captured on February 28 and hanged on May 1, 1820. See Prothero, V:11-12, and Johnson, "A Political Interpretation of Byron's Marino Faliero," 421-24.

Popular opinion rallied around Queen Caroline after her husband filed divorce proceedings and she brought him to trial because he defamed her character through lies. At his coronation in 1820, she demanded the right to be crowned his queen. For a detailed discussion of this fascinating event and how Byron capitalized on it in his play *Marino Faliero* see Erdman's works.
Not thou
Nor I alone, are injured and abused,
Condemn'd and trampled on;
... for who is he amongst them
Whose brethren, parents, children, wives, or
sisters,
Have not partook oppression, or pollution
From the patricians?

(Marino, I, ii, 489-99)

Even Doge Faliero blames "this hundred-handed senate" for
"making the people nothing" (Marino, I, ii, 298-99). In his
second history play, Sardanapalus, Byron begins to expand
his perspective to include the people themselves for aiding
in their own oppression, as this benevolent king points out:

Thou wouldst have me doubtless set up edicts --
"Obey the king -- contribute to his treasure --
Recruit his phalanx -- spill your blood at [his]
bidding --
Fall down and worship, or get up and toil."

(Sardanapalus, I, i, 302-05)

Because of his work in Parliament, his association with the
Hampden Club reformers, and his knowledge of events in
England, Byron was witness to such extreme reactions to the
causes of repression as he detailed in his first two history
plays where he first blamed such repression only on the
state and then switched the blame primarily to the people.
It was not until his third history play, *The Two Foscari*, that Byron finally dramatized what he concluded was the true nature of such repression. He laid the blame equally at both the uncaring ruling classes who made the masses groan "under the stern oligarchs" (*Foscari*, II, i, 407), and at the ignorant masses who "know as little/Of the state's real acts as of the grave's/Unfathom'd mysteries" (*Foscari*, I, i, 181-83). This view is clearly reflected when Doge Foscari proclaims:

. . . -- There's no people, you well know it,
Else you dare not deal thus by them or me.
There is a populace, perhaps, whose looks
May shame you; but they dare not groan nor curse you,
Save with their hearts and eyes.

(*Foscari*, V, i, 257-61)

Byron is saying that though the fight for liberation and human rights was still being fought, oppressed people remained throughout the known world who -- through either ignorance or apathy -- were afraid to speak out or fight for their rights.

Taken collectively, this historical trilogy does reflect English society during Byron's time. The decadent ruling class control of the established political system was steadily seeping down, polluting the very system of values to which the working and lower classes ascribed, thus assuring through fear and ignorance the perpetuation of the
power structure and the eventual destruction of the individual in society. When Byron was unable to exact reform through his work in the British Parliament, nor cause a civil war in England through his involvement with different revolutionary movements, he turned once again to his writing which, for Byron, was "a sad falling off, but . . . always a consolation." He did feel, however, that in some way through his writings he could "contribute to [making] mankind more free and wise." \[45\] Byron also understood the paradoxical times in which he was living which explains why in *Marino Faliero* he demonstrated how a carefully planned revolutionary movement can fail, and why in *Sardanapalus* he showed how easily people can fool themselves and reject a just governing system, and why in *The Two Foscari* he finally brought these two extremes together to focus on the current trend in England where both the people and the rulers alike were each nurturing a repressive social system that would eventually degenerate all of English society.

**Societal Degeneration**

By 1813, Byron was disillusioned with politics. He could clearly see how the abuses he had tried to change were weakening the social fibre of England, causing reactionary rather than progressive social reform for the masses. In three separate speeches before the House of Lords, Byron

\[45\]Prothero, V:272.
attempted to exact humanitarian social change for England's common citizens -- but to no avail. In addition, whenever any of the opposition aristocracy (whether they called themselves Liberal, Radical, or Independent Reformers) took office, "they proceeded to forget their rebelliousness and thereby to nullify their own political usefulness"\(^{46}\) -- just as Napoleon had deserted his own ideals in favor of imperial conquest. Major Cartwright, Burdett, and other liberal reformers became bedfellows with leading radical reformers such as William Cobbett and Henry Hunt who believed that social change depended entirely on simple parliamentary reform instead of a total restructuring of the government as Byron advocated.

Although Byron admitted to Hobhouse that he supported reform in Parliament, Byron also fostered doubts and concerns about the radical reformers of the day. In fact, Byron believed that this "whole gang" of "infamous scoundrels" were no different than the radical lower-classes -- the same people who undermined the exalted ideals of the French Revolution. These people fought from emotion rather than principle. "In short," Byron added, "the whole gang . . . disgusts [me] and makes one doubt the virtue of any principle or politics which can be embraced by similar ragamuffins."\(^{47}\)

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\(^{46}\) Erdman, "Genteel," 1073.  
By this time, Byron had established a reputation as a poet, but he still professed to regard political affairs as more important. In November of 1813 Byron wrote to Anne Milbanke that he preferred "the talents of action -- of war, or the senate, or even of science -- to all the speculations of those mere dreamers of another existence . . . and spectators of this apathy."^48

His extensive reading in history, travel, literature, and politics; his travels in the Mediterranean which had emancipated him from English insularity; his experiences in public and private life which had plunged him beneath surface considerations and opened his eyes to the unparalleled extravagance of the aristocratic ruling classes as opposed to the oppressive poverty of England's common citizens; his rebelliousness at the attempted censorship of writers and other liberal reformers; his understanding of events in contemporary England, such as the Peterloo Massacre and Queen Caroline Affair; and his realization of the fervor, then turmoil and disintegration of the French Revolution and Napoleonic campaigns, all contributed to Byron's growing dissatisfaction with politics and his increasing understanding that frenzied proclamations by politicians for a simple reforming of Parliament could not correct the underlying social ills destroying all of English

^48Prothero, III:405. Byron married Anne Isabella Milbanke on January 2, 1815. From this union a daughter was born on December 10, 1815. Lord and Lady Byron were separated in February 1816, just two months prior to Byron's self-imposed exile from England on April 25, 1816.
society. A total restructuring of social thought and values was needed to overcome this overriding exigency of societal degeneration.

For Byron, the answer lie in combining his desire for political action with his talent for poetry; so he drew his art and politics into carefully structured fictive discourses in an attempt to help the people understand and finally resolve obstacles to mental freedom. More specifically, the answer lie in his poetic dramas, especially the historical tragedies which he wrote to counteract the sentimental love dramas of the time.

Although they open a window on Byron's world, raising the class issue as a major theme, these historical tragedies go beyond the political and social realms, for Byron realized that economic and political freedom were not enough in themselves; in addition, one had to liberate one's mind of the emotional chains which bind the human to a life of self-imposed imprisonment through ignorance, apathy, and fear. These tragedies, therefore, are compelling critiques of the disturbing abuses and degeneration of society which both limits sovereignty and supports "reactionary and morally destitute social systems."55 Societal degeneration then was the overriding exigency in each of Byron's historical plays. This urgent problem enslaved the ruling aristocracy and mass population alike.

55Watkins, Social Relations, 16.
Byron insisted that he wanted "to make a regular English drama, no matter whether for the stage or not, which is not my object -- but a mental theatre." The key word here is "mental." Byron realized that until the people themselves began thinking clearly about why society was slowly degenerating and what the consequence of that degeneration would be, the people would continue to enslave themselves to a mind-shaping, self-seeking ruling class. Byron's purpose, therefore, was not to arouse suspense as to the final workings out of plot in his plays, for each of his historical dramas were based on real incidents whose tragic outcomes were common knowledge. Rather, Byron wanted his audience to simply become aware of the nature and causes of an enslaving situation that was destroying society, and then to mentally commit to altering such societal degeneration.

The Industrial and French Revolutions coupled with the failed attempts at reform and continued oppression of England's common citizens were the events grounded in reality that Lloyd Bitzer insisted constituted a rhetorical situation. These events promulgated the pressing problems that Byron noted needed addressing by the English citizenry before the overriding exigence of societal degeneration decayed England into a collective slave state.

Prothero, II:218; see also Marchand, Letters, 8:185, 187, and 210.
Lloyd Bitzer asserts that once the rhetor identifies the exigence, the next step involves determining the "audience to be constrained in decision and action."\textsuperscript{1} Bitzer makes a clear distinction between a rhetorical audience who is "capable of serving as mediator of change which the discourse functions to produce," and a "body of mere hearers or readers" who can experience only the aesthetic qualities of a work of fiction.

Bitzer maintains, however, that a rhetorical audience can include either people who are able to constrain the exigence, or an implied audience where the rhetor "engages himself or ideal mind as audience."\textsuperscript{2} The latter idea echoes a body of critical thought suggesting that a "second persona" exists in fiction which enables a critic to determine who an author's ideal -- or real -- audience should be. This chapter will first examine Byron's primary audience which includes his cultural and theatre audiences, and then explore Byron's secondary, or ideal, audience which is found in his fictive discourse.

\textsuperscript{1}Bitzer, 6.

\textsuperscript{2}Bitzer, 8.
Primary Audience

Contemporary research has demonstrated that the publics select and consume products based on their educational and class standing in society. This is also seen in the reading habits of individuals. In a study conducted by Bernard Berelson, he found that only ten percent of the population is responsible for seventy percent of all books read; that wealthier people read more than poorer people; and that relatively few readers are found among the working class. DeFleur and Dennis assert that they "could classify media audiences into dozens of social categories" ranging from the well-educated and wealthy, to the partially literate and poor.

These classifications describe Lord Byron's primary target audiences. First there were the better educated aristocrats and poorly educated working people who composed Byron's cultural audience because most of these people could and did read. Second there was the mass public who attended the early nineteenth century theatres. Although one found theatre goers from every walk of life in England's playhouses, many of England's theatre goers came from the lower classes of English society and were illiterate. This section will first examine Byron's cultural audience and then his theatre audience.


Cultural Audience

In each of his three historical tragedies, Byron attempted to address his two target audiences. Byron appeared to realize that even though economics and literacy separated the aristocracy from the emerging middle class, it would be only a matter of time before these two classes shared the same ideology based on the social decay he observed seeping down into all classes of English society. A perusal of the evolution of the many periodicals found on the drawing room tables of England's aristocratic ruling classes during the first decade of the Nineteenth Century, and later seen during the second decade in the parlours of England's emerging middle classes, helps provide an understanding of how Byron's two different cultural audiences merged as one voice against him by the time he wrote his historical trilogy.5

Donald Reiman notes that prior to 1815, England's reading public consisted primarily of "university-bred gentry." These were the people who influenced the trends and tastes of the majority of England's early Nineteenth

5Though selective, this survey of public comment on Byron's history plays comes primarily from the periodical reviewers and religious-political pamphleteers in 1820 England. The scope of this material is very similar: it begins with a repetition of ideas based on the fashion and prejudices of the day, has little critical analysis, but usually a summation of plots with profuse quotation which at times runs to hundreds of lines that encompass up to a third of the plays. Of course, the reviewer usually selected passages that were safe, based on artistic merit rather than on the ideas Byron was attempting to convey.
Century reading public, and the audience for whom Lord Byron initially wrote. Reviews of Byron's works appeared in such "stable and respectable" publications as The Monthly Review (1749-1845), Gentleman's Magazine (1731-1868), and The Edinburgh Review (1802-1929). After 1815, as the influential reading public shifted from university-bred gentry to the emerging middle classes, readers began viewing periodicals such as The Monthly Review and Gentleman's Magazine (both of which gained acclaim during the late Eighteenth Century) as "stodgy" and "old-fashioned" even though these journals rose above personalities by setting a "calm and measured" tone for their reviews, many of which were submitted by readers or were reprinted from other periodicals.7

At one time, these publications acted as the "voice of social acceptability;" they were influential "in promoting (or discouraging) the sale of a book among a large body of relatively affluent readers;" and they "long-occupied a special place in the reading of the upper and upper middle classes in Great Britain as a handbook of social information about their peers . . . including in that category prominent authors, publishers, and professional men as well as the landed gentry and nobility." Though their standards tended to be conservative, these publications

7Reiman, IV-B:1001.
accepted Lord Byron's innovations because of his social rank and his "evident genius."®

Within five years, though, when Byron was writing his three historical tragedies, these periodicals took a back seat to brash new state-controlled journals like Blackwood's and the New Monthly Magazine. These were the publications that captured the attention and interest of the emerging, educated middle-class. Some of these continued to offer in-depth reviews, such as The Investigator (1820-24) which was "a new breed of journal that sprang up (and died) in the early 1820s," and the Eclectic Review (1805-1868) which established a new liberal, enlightened tone in 1814 when it was sold to Josiah Condor who, in 1836, then sold the publication to devote his full attention to the weekly religious and political newspaper, The Patriot. These publications "advocated reform from the viewpoint of the pious middle class, demanding that the lax morality of the Regency aristocracy be called to account."®

Regency aristocracy was composed of the privileged ruling class, under the reign of George IV (1811-30). Most of these aristocrats could make claim to nobility, such as Lord Byron whose ancestral roots could be traced back to two of the most colorful strains in the history of English aristocracy: William the Conqueror on his father's side, and James I of Scotland on his mothers. The Regency Period

®Reiman, IV-B:1067.

®Reiman, IV-A:1165.
in England was characterized by extremes: from ornate architecture based on the elaborate and fantastic decorative style of the French Regeance (1715-23), from which the period gained its name, to self-indulgent, indolent wallowers of voluptuousness whose promiscuous, often-times slothful behavior, was accepted by all except England's reformers and commoners. The Regency Period was also a time when only the wealthy, ruling classes, and the landed nobility had any voting rights in England.

England's oppressed commoners existed at the other extreme. During much of Byron's lifetime, England's middle-class was illiterate. They were composed of tenant farmers who, because of the Industrial Revolution, were forced to desert their ancestral farms and become day laborers in the very fields they once owned and tilled, or to wander from town-to-town seeking any type of work in depressed England. This bulging middle-class also included simple weavers whose villages were transformed into single factory-cities with unsanitary tenements filled to over-flowing with unhappy, many unemployed, workmen and their starving families.

A few of the periodicals born during the Regency Period, such as the Edinburgh and Quarterly reviews, were very influential and politically powerful. These periodicals "gave shape, authority, and talent to a medium that had been struggling to be born" during a war-ravaged, oppressive era. These publications gave their writers
"space and time to explore issues in depth;" and, according to Reiman, these publications "had the right political and social bias to appeal to a large class of Whig [and Tory] gentlemen and professional and commercial men who had enough time to read, and [the] intellectual curiosity to appreciate the twenty to fifty page disquisitions on history, theology, political economy, or literature."\(^{10}\) From the fields of political economy, legal, and social reforms, to the ending of abused feudal privileges, writers in these publications "attacked or ignored almost every poet of genius who appeared during its early years, . . . [except Leigh] Hunt and Byron . . . [who] were accorded more favorable treatment"\(^{11}\) because of their political posture.

Most of the state-run journals of Byron's day were targeted as simple entertainment vehicles for a wide variety of literate readers emerging from the mercantile and professional ranks of the growing middle-class and not at shaping the opinions of a particular ideological group. Many of these publications were "heavily weighted with summaries and/or excerpts designed to familiarize readers with the main aspects of current publications . . . and served a certain class of readers as a pony from which they could converse about the latest books without having ever read them"\(^{12}\)

\(^{10}\)Reiman, V:831.

\(^{11}\)Reiman, V:832.

\(^{12}\)Reiman, IV-B:1273.
Francis Jeffrey, literary critic for the *Edinburgh Review*, whom Reiman describes as "the greatest plot summarizer of them all," praised Byron's genius, but also summarized the beliefs expressed by most of England's 1820 reviewers when he admitted:

far more in sorrow than in anger -- that we verily believe the great body of the English nation -- the religious, the moral, and the candid part of it -- consider the tendency of his [Lord Byron's] writings to be immoral and pernicious -- and look upon his perseverance in that strain of composition with regret and reprehension. We ourselves . . . are, moreover, most sincere admirers of Lord Byron's genius -- and have always felt a pride and an interest in his fame. But we cannot dissent from the censure to which we have alluded; and shall endeavour to explain, in as few and as temperate words as possible, the grounds upon which we rest our concurrence.

He then goes on for another five pages expounding on the "charge we bring against Lord B. in short . . . that his writings have a tendency to destroy all belief in the

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13Reiman, V:910.

reality of virtue -- and to make all enthusiasm and
constancy of affection ridiculous." ¹⁵

On May 17, 1822, three months after the review
appeared in England, Byron wrote to Murray:

I hear that the Edinburgh has attacked the three
dramas, which is a bad business for you; and I
don't wonder that it discourages you. However,
that volume may be trusted to Time, -- depend upon
it. I read it over with some attention since it
was published, and I think the time will come when
it will be preferred to my other writings, though
not immediately. I say this without irritation
against the Critics or Criticism, whatever they
may be (for I have not seen them); . . . ¹⁶

In time, Byron grew impatient with all criticism
from both his aristocratic and middle class audiences. He
particularly despised the idle useless life of men of
fashion, though he felt the "sporting accomplishments
expected of him formed a common ground between the dandy and
the man of action, but Byron had a recurrent sense of the
futility of fashionable life." ¹⁷ That is why, in his
writings, Byron used every opportunity he could to assail
English hypocrisy. Even the dissenting journals failed to

¹⁵Jeffrey, 448.

¹⁶Prothero, VI:64-65. The volume Byron refers to is the one
containing his two historical tragedies Sardanapalus and The
Two Foscari as well as his biblical mystery Cain.

¹⁷Rutherford, 6.
escape the sharpness of his pen. In fact, such pious state-controlled publications which targeted the working middle-classes fell in the minion of what Byron termed "the Kingdom of Cant":

The truth is, that in these days the grand "premium mobile" of England is cant; cant political, cant religious, cant moral; but always cant, multiplied through all the varieties of life. It is the fashion, and while it lasts will be too powerful for those who can only exist by taking the tone of the time. I say cant, because it is a thing of words, without the smallest influence upon actions; the English being no wiser, no better, and much poorer and more divided amongst themselves, as well as far less moral, than they were before the prevalence of this verbal decorum.10

Always aware of his position in life, Lord Byron could never completely divorce himself from the self-serving aristocratic audience, as Talfourd, a journalist who shared Byron's liberal politics, pointed out in his review of Byron's volume that included Sardanapalus and The Two Foscari:

10Marchand, Biography, II:900. This was part of a fifty-five page letter Byron wrote to his publisher John Murray in February 1821, just a month after starting his second history play Sardanapalus. "The Kingdom of Cant" was immediately published in its entirety as a pamphlet; less than a month later, in early March 1821, a second edition appeared.
"Once an aristocrat, always an aristocrat" might pass, with little question into a proverb. Lord Byron, who has sometimes sought to wrap himself in impenetrable mystery . . . now comes out in all the dignity of his birth, . . . The costume only has been changed, the man has been the same from the first. . . . When he sneered at human glory, at patriotism and virtue, put religion aside as an empty name, and scoffed at immortality as a "tale that is told," his rank gave him confidence and success. . . . [Yet] in his very scorn of kings and rulers, there has been little regard for the common sorrows of the people; but a high feeling of injured dignity, a sort of ferocity. . . .

Although Byron remained conscious of his rank in society, he was also aware of the responsibilities that went with that rank which is why Byron believed "it is better playing at nations than gaming at Almack's or Newmarket or piecing [wenching] or dinnering." In short, Lord Byron clearly understood that these two groups, although the only people who could effect any real changes in England, could not constrain the exigence; but in this rhetor's mind lodged the ideal audience to effect change. Before extracting Byron's implied audience, one must understand the nature of


the theatre audience Byron faced which may help explain why he insisted that his historical dramas were not written for the stage, but as a "mental theatre."

Theatre Audience

John Gassner asserts that "Romanticism is the seedbed" of the modern theatre,21 that beginning at about the year 1800, a new age was born. It was then that, "for evil or for good," English theatre "and all connected with the theatre broke the bonds of the past and established that playhouse which exists among us today."22 The old had finally given way to the new. Other critics, such as Trewin and Sir Evans, assert that the early Nineteenth Century is "one of the most unrewarding periods in the English Theatre;" that when men of letters came into the theatre, they "seldom found themselves in a congenial atmosphere."23 In short, the Romantic theatre was "a complex absurdity."24

Both views are accurate. The Nineteenth Century theatre did indeed become "a theatre for the dramatist with the microscope and the portfolio of case histories, for the dramatist with the scalpel, and for the dramatist who leads

23Gassner, Masters, 315.

24Evans, 143.

25Trewin, 22.
assaults on the walled cities of vested interests"\textsuperscript{26} -- concepts which are ideally embedded in Lord Byron's history plays. The early Nineteenth Century theatre, however, also opened badly and drama did rapidly decay because of the size and inept management of the theatres and the "evils of the audience."\textsuperscript{26}

During those opening decades, two national theatres held a "double-headed dragon of a monopoly"\textsuperscript{27} over the London stage. This was decreed by Charles II and reinforced by the Licensing Act of 1737. A restrictive theatre atmosphere prevailed in London until 1843 when both royal theatres lost their patent rights. During this time, many minor theatres, under strict government control, sprang into existence. To protect the monopolies of the two Royal Theatres, these minor playhouses were permitted to continue only if they avoided spoken dialogue, so they adjusted by presenting plots that were explained "partly in mime, partly by a few songs, and partly by the use of title-boards with a few snatches of written dialogue (like captions in the era of the silent film)."\textsuperscript{28} Later, they were allowed to present only "burlettas," plays framed in three acts, with five songs performed to continual background music. By 1850 the decay of England's theatre began a turn around. Covent

\textsuperscript{26}Gassner, Masters, 315.
\textsuperscript{26}Nicoll, British, 158.
\textsuperscript{27}Trewin, 22.
\textsuperscript{28}Nicoll, British, 158.
Garden abandoned the concept of legitimate theatre entirely and was converted into an opera house, and the Drury Lane, which was near insolvency, began making a small profit.

The architect for these two national theatres must have thought they "had to be big enough to hold the nation," for these multi-tiered, candle-lit caverns held as many as two-thousand, eight-hundred people. Critics of the day complained that in the further parts of the house, a spectator "cannot see the countenances of the performers without the aid of a pocket telescope, he cannot hear anything except the ranted speeches." Because of the immense size of both Covent Garden and Drury Lane, theatre managers indulged in spectacular events and performers coarsened their methods of performance because "any flash of repartee was impossible, a tender whisper or an excited aside rendered absurd by the actor's need to shout if he were to be audible in the topmost galleries."

The very size of the early Nineteenth Century playhouse was primarily responsible for the nature of the audience whom all critics agree was "often licentious and debased [in the national theatres], while those in the minor playhouses were vulgar, unruly and physically obnoxious." Coarse language, rioting, drunkenness abounded while

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29 Trewin, 22.
30 Nicoll, History, 23.
31 Nicoll, British, 158.
32 Nicoll, History, 7.
prostitutes swarmed the foyers of all theatres. At any moment, actors on stage faced bombardment from rotten apples or other nonedibles on hand. Nicoll tells about such an incident during an 1806 performance by Sara Siddons and her brother John Philip Kemble, two of the leading performers of the day. During a serious scene, a rotten apple landed between the two stars, and when one of the other actors on stage vigorously protested, someone in the audience shouted back that the apple had been thrown at the "disorderly females in the boxes," and not at the performers.33

This was typical of the theatre of Byron's day which is why sane, sober people, who may have been influential in the growth of a more refined theatre product, stayed out of the early Nineteenth Century theatres. One drama enthusiast noted in a letter to the London Times, "We regret to observe that no measures have been yet taken to prevent the indecent and scandalous conduct of the loungers, both male and female, who infest the lobby of the theatre."34 Albany Fonblanque, drama critic for The Examiner, adroitly pointed out that the majority of theatre goers preferred "mediocrity with a bustle to the most sublime genius without it."35

Fonblanque was quite astute, for regardless of the many attempts at improving the drama, audiences kept it

33Nicoll, British, 159.
34"Letters to the Editor," The Times, August 3, 1801.
mediocre. "As one looks at the audiences of the time, one seems to see them constantly thirsting, thirsting, thirsting," reports Nicoll who adds, "The French Revolution has rumbled away in Napoleon's cannons; a new social age is born; and here are the dramatists giving them Greek tragedies and 'Love Chases' of Elizabethan life, and Kings and Princes of days gone by."\(^{36}\)

The nature of early Nineteenth Century drama was action, for this was a period when finer tragedy was subordinated to melodramas with their music and song, romantic plots and supernatural effects; to farce with its stereotyped characters; to burlesques with their pantomime; and to melodramatic spectacle with its use of live animals on stage. In short, show and spectacle were the order of the day. That's why drama "... was written in exclamation marks; it was plunged into blazing gulfs; it was lit by Germanic marsh-lights; it rattled its skeletons; it thundered and vollyed. English poetry was its high midsummer, but the stage could only shake a thunder-sheet. It waited for dramatists with something to say."\(^{37}\)

Between 1790 and 1860, many aspiring authors did attempt to improve the drama, but almost all of these attempts failed. Critics blame these failures on the fact that the Nineteenth Century playwright was detached "from

\(^{36}\)Nicoll, History, 65.

\(^{37}\)Trewin, 23.
the living world of the theatre," that their scripts originated "not from within the theatre but from without." London Magazine drama critic George Darby sided with the audiences of his day, insisting that "action is the essence of drama; nay, it's definition: business, bustle, hurly, and combustion dire, are indispensable to effective drama." He accused the dramatists, especially poetic dramatists like Lord Byron, of being short on action, for they "think that the whole virtue of tragedy lies in its poeticity. . . . At any rate, if you don't think thus, you write as if you did." On the other hand, The Drama; or, Theatrical Pocket Magazine (1821-26) attempted to reform the London stage "by attacking the practices of the monopolistic licensed theatres and urging that a higher caliber of literary figure write for the stage."¹¹ In reviewing Lord Byron’s Marino Faliero, the editor of this publication insisted that the "present really prostituted state of the stage has created an apathy in the public towards dramatic poetry." The editor did not find this "surprising" considering the state-sanctioned "pieces produced within the last few years at our national theatres, or those rejected as dramas, which

³³Sir Evans, 12.

³⁹Nicoll, British, 163.


⁴¹Reiman, V:671.
in spite of the manager's decision have struggled into existence."

Along with most modern drama critics, Sir Evans believes that of all the Romantic poets writing dramas, only Lord Byron, "despite a formidable egocentricity, showed genuine knowledge of the stage and of its possibilities." Nicoll maintains, "Byron knew so much more about the theatre than did his contemporary poets," and it is in Byron's plays that "we can see most clearly at once the power of the age and the qualities which prevented the appearance of true dramatic success." Nicoll attributes this to Byron's "lordly power over the emotions," to his "style calculated to provide excellent dialogue," and to his "flair for the theatre" which "his companion poets lacked."

Byron was among those who attempted to reform the English stage. He wanted dramatists to return to the

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*T. & J. Elvey, "Dramatic Review." The Drama; or, Theatrical Pocket Magazine. I (June 1821) 89. Each of the Royal Theatres maintained a staff of state-approved playwrights who wrote the popular theatre fare of the time. Favorites of most drama and literary critics were Maturin, Milman, and Richard Lalor Sheil who wrote such successful plays as Adelaide, or the Emigrants (1814). Few of these authors are remembered today, as Allardyce Nicoll asks: "... when have their works been played? Who now remembers their names save faintly as echoes in some account of nineteenth century literature? What true merit is to be discovered in their dramas?" (Nicoll, History, 166). It is interesting to note that after Sheil lost popularity with the managers of the Royal Theatres, it was Lord Byron who helped Sheil continue with his theatrical career.

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*Sir Evans, 144.

*Nicoll, British, 169.

*Nicoll, History, 168.
ancients, to classic dramas found in the tradition of the Greek theatre which adhered to the unities of time, place, and action. In the classic Greek tradition, tragedies took place within twenty-four hours, in one setting, and concerned themselves with only one major series of events. These elements were known as the "unities." In addition, the classic tragic hero, as defined by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, was an important personage whose misfortune affected the people generally. The classic tragic hero was also a man who was neither unusually good nor unusually bad, but one whose downfall was brought on by error or frailty, rather than by vice. Above all, Byron wanted to preserve the ancient's claim that dramas should "endeavor to secure decency, propriety, order and common sense; [and they] must aim at intellectual rhetoric rather than passionate rhapsody."46

Byron refused to court the audience of his age, admitting

I cannot conceive any man of irritable feeling
putting himself at the mercies of an audience. The
sneering reader, and the loud critic, and the tart
review, are scattered and distant calamities; but

the trampling of an intelligent or of an ignorant audience on a production which, be it good or bad, has been a mental labour to the writer, is a palpable and immediate grievance, heightened by a man's doubt of their competency to judge, and his certainty of his own imprudence in electing them his judges. Were I capable of writing a play which could be deemed stage-worthy, success would give me no pleasure, and failure great pain. It is for this reason that, even during the time of being one of the committee of one of the theatres, I never made the attempt, and never will.

(Marino, "Preface")

Byron initially expressed his disdain of the English theatre audience in 1817 when he wrote his first play, Manfred. At that time, he declared it "quite impossible for the stage, for which my intercourse with D[ruy] Lane has give me the greatest contempt."47 In 1815, Byron served as a member of the Drury Lane Theatre Committee where he read plays and made approvals for production.48

Being so closely aligned with the English theatre may be why Byron refused to produce the "rant" and excessive splendor which he knew drew crowds to the Drury Lane. Instead Byron favored "simplicity [that was] studiously

47 Prothero, IV:55.

48 Byron admitted that he found most of these plays pompous and plain bad. For his personal observations on this time, see Prothero, V:422-44, and III:201-48 which presents pertinent letters telling of his Drury Lane experiences.
Greek;" he wanted to capture "the higher passions" which would distinguish his dramas as more than mere distractions for a mindless society. Byron told his publisher Kinnaird, "I understand what you want. You want me to write a love play -- but this were [sic] contrary to all my principles -- as well as those of Aristotle."9 Of his historical tragedy Sardanapalus, Byron insisted

You will find this very unlike Shakespeare; and so much the better in one sense, for I look upon him to be the worst of models, though the most extraordinary of writers. It has been my object to be as simple and severe as Alfieri, and I have broken down the poetry as nearly as I could to common language. . . . Mark the unities, which are my great object of research.50

Although he wanted to adhere to the classic rules of drama as laid down by Aristotle and others, Byron emphatically proclaimed that his dramas were designed without the remotest notion of the stage or of being produced. In fact, when he was composing his first tragedy, Manfred, Byron insisted he wrote "actually with a horror of the stage, and with a view to render the thought

9Marchand, Letters, 8:186 and 223.

50Marchand, Letters, V:175-76. Byron is referring to Count Vittorio Alfieri (1749-1803), an Italian dramatist and poet who created the modern Italian tragic drama. Like Byron, Alfieri's hatred of tyranny and a passionate republicanism marked his impetuous and stormy life.
impracticable." Still Byron insisted that his "mental" dramas append to the classic unities, which lead Bishop Heber, literary critic for The Quarterly Review, to ask, if Byron's dramas were only meant to be read, what did the unities matter? More than a century later, Bonamy Dobree addressed this question: "When we read we become, if we have any imagination, veritable spectators; and what causes discomfort in the reader is apt to cause failure in the theatre."

That is precisely why, for Byron, clinging to the unities was not only important, but necessary because Byron's dramas are philosophic statements, each addressing some dominant idea about people and human nature and each reflecting some aspect of Nineteenth Century English life. For example, Sardanapalus exposed the self-indulgent, slothful aristocrat, while both Marino Faliero and The Two Foscari honored the spirit of rebellion against a tyrannical

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51Dobree, 6. Although written as closet dramas, many of Byron's plays were produced. Besides the five-day run that Marino Faliero experienced at Drury Lane immediately after it was published in April 1821, it had a rather successful run in the late 1960s in London. In addition, within a decade after his death, Manfred was staged at the Covent Garden Theatre in 1834. The Two Foscari was first acted at the Covent Garden Theatre on July 7, 1837, and enjoyed a revival in 1977 at the Mademarket Theatre, Norwich. Cain was produced in Edinburgh, and Werner "at one time enjoyed considerable popularity with Macready as Werner, while Sardanapalus had a vogue in Germany, enthusiastically supported by Kaiser Wilhelm II" (Dobree, 6). See also Nicoll's History, 277-78; and Jerome J. McGann, "Staging Byron's Cain," Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin (1968) 24-7, for more information on when and where Byron's plays were performed.

52Dobree, 11.
regime. For Byron, developing a new form of poetry, one that would transform into a profound concept of social order, was the prime directive, as he explained to Kinnaird:

I shall not be deterred by any outcry -- they hate me -- and I detest them -- I mean your present Public -- but they shall not interrupt the march of my mind -- nor prevent me from telling the tyrants who are attempting to trample upon all thought -- that their thrones will yet be rocked to their foundations.53

Byron's primary audience could not effect any of the changes that this Lord identified as the overriding exigence facing the English people. This was not Byron's rhetorical audience, as defined by Lloyd Bitzer; these were merely the "hearers and readers" of Byron's plays. One must go to the three historical tragedies themselves to identify Byron's implied audience.

Secondary Audience

Edwin Black notes that each person makes distinctions between reality and illusion, between the man and the image. This is especially true of all types of literature where we know that "the implied author of a discourse is a persona that figures importantly in rhetorical transactions."54 According to Black, there is

53Marchand, Letters, 9:152.
54Black, 111.
another, or second persona, who is also implied by a discourse, and this second persona becomes the implied auditor of that discourse. This second persona is drawn from the discourse alone, and extracts from it the audience it implies. . . . We would be claiming nothing about those who attended the discourse. Indeed, perhaps our statement concerns a closet speech, known to no one except ourselves as critics and its author. But we are able nonetheless to observe the sort of audience that would be appropriate to it. We would have derived from the discourse a hypothetical construct that is the implied auditor.55

Black further suggests that this second persona gives insight into the type of audience who would actually follow and attend the discourse. This is found in the ideological comments within the discourse itself, which, in turn, contributes to the audience's attitude development. Just as actual auditors (primary audiences) look to a discourse for cues that will tell them how to view the world, implied auditors, too, can share the author's ideology as something more than simply a hypothesis.

Walter Fisher points out, "Regardless of composition, whether speech, essay, editorial, play, or poem, rhetorical discourse expresses a theme or thesis, an inference or judgement, which is to be preferred above any

55Black, 111-112.
other proposition or proposal that relates to its subject matter." Fisher terms this "A Motive View of Communication" and insists that all types of discourse are rhetorical because they are advisory. Such rhetorical communication suggests to the reader how to view a particular subject; "it says how one should think, feel, and act in a given case where certainty cannot be achieved." But even more important, such rhetorical discourses also create "a value-oriented interpretation of some part of the word;" they create images which "always reflect how one ought to behave in regard to this subject matter." 

In addition, such rhetorical communication also "implies a conception of the audience that attends and the communicator who presents it." Fisher explains that because rhetorical communication focuses on the real world of everyday experience by relating to "reality in both subject matter and purpose," a fictive discourse may be characterized as "producing a real fiction." Such fiction is not hypothetical because "its author wants and intends that it be accepted as the true and right way of conceiving of a matter; and, if he is successful, his fiction becomes one of those by which men live."

The notion of a second persona explains a third Byron audience. In his fictive discourses, Byron's main

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56Fisher, 131.
57Fisher, 131.
58Fisher, 131-32.
goal was for his audience to find "truth." In correspondence to John Murray on June 6, 1822, and to Isaac D’Israel on June 10, 1822, Byron noted that "all men . . . have risen up against me and my later publications. Such is Truth! Men dare not look her in the face, except by degrees: they mistake her for a Gorgon, instead of knowing her to be a Minerva." Byron feared a "democratical tyranny" that would not improve social structure in England, but would merely change the existing ones; further, Byron insisted that society, "as now constituted, [was] fatal to all original undertakings of every kind."

Byron's implied, or secondary, audience would be a patriotic, pragmatic, freedom-thinking group of people unafraid to face death, who use common sense and rational thought to deflate the false emotions and beliefs permeating England; and, because of the high standards they set for themselves, they would gladly strike a blow at oppression, social hypocrisy, poverty, and tyranny in England and throughout the known world. These traits are evident in each of Byron's historical plays.

Israel Bertuccio, leader of the conspirators in Marino Faliero, Doge of Venice, asks Calendaro:

... what are we,
If Brutus had not lived? He died in giving
Rome liberty, but left a deathless lesson --

Prothero, VI:89.

Marchand, Letters, 9:152 and 119.
A name which is virtue, and a soul
Which multiplies itself throughout all time,
When wicked men wax mighty, and a state
Turns servile: he and his high friend were styled
"The last of Romans!" Let us be the first
Of true Venetians, sprung from Roman series.

(As used in Marino, II, ii, 614-22)

Byron is telling his auditors that they, too, can become true patriots like the famed Brutus and common citizen Bertuccio if they are willing to rise up against an evil state. He wants his auditors to take action against the social degeneration he sees destroying his beloved homeland, England. Byron's audience is patriotic.

Although patriotism is important to Byron, he does not want citizens to blindly love and obey a state simply because it is their homeland. In a sense, Byron's self-imposed exile was a protest against the social degeneration he witnessed and could not change in his own England. In The Two Foscari this debate is evident in the prison scene between Marina and her husband who would rather live imprisoned and be tortured for a crime he did not commit than leave Venice and live in peace with his devoted wife. Marina clearly understands that

... This love of thine
For an ungrateful and tyrannic soil
Is passion, and not patriotism; for me,
So I could see thee with a quiet aspect
And the sweet freedom of the earth and air,
I would not cavil about climes or regions.
This crowd of palaces and prisons is not
A paradise; its first inhabitants
Were wretched exiles.

(Foscari, III, i, 114-22)

Marina is a practical person who understands that life and freedom give people the ability to regroup their energies and start afresh, just as the "wretched exiles" had done in England thousands of years earlier, and were now doing in America after successfully extricating themselves from the oppression of English privilege laws. Byron's audience is pragmatic.

Byron goes even further in The Two Foscari. He wants an audience that will not remain silent. Again, this is evident in a scene between Marina and her husband, Jacobo, who asks her: "If I am silent,/Who dares accuse my country?" Marina snaps back:

Men and angels!
The blood of myriads rushing up to heaven,
The groans of slaves in chains, and men in dungeons,
Mothers, and wives, and sons, and sires, and subjects,
Held in the bondage of ten bald-heads; and
Though last, not least, thy silence.

(Foscari, III, i, 239-46)
Byron's auditors cannot remain silent about the evils they witness; they must speak out and take action against such oppressive acts. Byron's audience is composed of free-thinking men and women of action.

Byron has shown his audience that they must be freedom loving individuals who are patriotic, yet pragmatic; who are free-thinkers and unafraid to act, as is Marina. But his audience must also include individuals willing to deflate the false passions and beliefs that abound in England. In Sardanapalus, Byron shows his audience how a life of slothful self-indulgence can lead to self-deception and destruction; and in Marino Faliero, he explains to his audience how they, too,

. . . must forget all feelings save the one;
. . . must resign all passions save our purpose;
. . . must behold no object save our country;
And only look on death as beautiful,
So that the sacrifice ascend to heaven
And draw down freedom on her evermore.

(Marino, II, ii, 600-05)

Byron's audience is unafraid to face death when necessary.

Common sense is important in the success of any endeavor. A person must understand how to use one's resources most effectively, as Israel Bertuccio has learned.
When Doge Faliero asks why Bertuccio came to him to sue for justice, Bertuccio wisely responds:

Because the man
Who claims protection from authority,
Showing his confidence and his submission
To that authority, can hardly be
Suspected of combining to destroy it.
Had I sat down too humbly with this blow,
A moody brow and mutter'd threats had made me
A mark'd man to the Forty's inquisitions;
But loud complaint, however angrily
It shapes its phrase, is little to be fear'd,
And less distrusted.

(Marino, I, ii, 543-55)

Bertuccio exhibits a rational thought process, one that uses common sense and thinks through an idea before passionately demonstrating it. Byron's audience is composed of rational thinking individuals.

And Byron's audience does not despair, but searches out truth in a noble, ethical manner as Sardanapalus tells his concubine:

No, not despair, precisely. When we know
All that can come, and how to meet it, our
Resolves, if firm, may merit a more noble
Word than this is to give it utterance. . . .
They who have nothing more to fear may well
Indulge a smile at that which once appall'd;
As children at discover'd bugbears.

(Sardanapalus, V, i, 222-40.)

During Byron's Grand Tour of the Mediterranean, he became an educated, cosmopolitan man; when he returned to England, he was appalled at the state of affairs, telling the members of the House of Lords: "I have traversed the seat of war in the Peninsula, I have been in the most oppressed provinces of Turkey, but never under the most despotic of infidel governments did I behold such squalid wretchedness as I have seen since my return in the heart of a Christian country."61 Byron learned early that cosmopolitanism and education were useless among a self-centered aristocratic society whose only concerns were enjoying a leisured, luxurious, pseudo-cultivated, and often profligate lifestyle. He discovered early that common sense and sophistication were unknown in a parliament that distorted the very context of politics, destroyed any real efforts to change society, but preferred the preservation of status quo power and opinion to the enactment of progressive legislation.

Though George Gordon, the Sixth Lord Byron, was also a member of this same self-indulgent aristocratic society who willingly partook of the gaiety, feasting, and adulterous intrigues, and proudly proclaimed his noble ancestry, he was never blind to the oppressive conditions of

61Lake, 555 (from Byron's "Frame-Work riot act" speech).
his nation's poor and working classes. Nor was he afraid to speak out against such tyranny. From the publication of the poem that brought him overnight fame, "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," to each of his historical dramas, Byron's was a voice of revolution; his work was essentially a poetry of revolt against a decaying society; his desire was to raise the standards of English life and government to the more liberal ideas of the age. In short, Lord Byron, the aristocrat, was dedicated to the service of social reform. And although he was an aristocrat who despised poetry that idealized the common man, as his many barbs against William Wordsworth illustrate, Lord Byron became the leading Romantic figure of his generation -- the second generation of Romantic Poets -- because he represented the defiance which individuals hurl at oppressive governments attempting to transform their societies into collective slave-states. In effect, Byron became identified with the spirit, violence, and individualism of England's common man.

Byron held a visionary view of poetry, asserting in his correspondence that the "highest of all poetry is ethical poetry, as the highest of all earthly objects must be moral truth. . . . [and] he who can reconcile poetry with truth and wisdom is the only true 'poet' in its real sense, 'the maker,' 'the creator,' -- why must this mean the 'liar,' the 'feigner,' the 'tale-teller'?"\(^2\) That is why Byron's ideal rhetorical audience had to consist of

\(^{2}\)Prothero, V:554-60.
patriotic, pragmatic, free-thinking individuals who were unafraid to stand up for what they believed in, yet utilized common sense and rational thought in their actions and noble search for truth. In effect, Byron's dramas became his communication tool to reach his "ideal" rhetorical audience.
Lloyd Bitzer insists that a rhetorical audience changes or alters a situation in response to the constraints of discourse. Bitzer’s definition of artistic constraints opens doors for the critical analysis of fictional discourses. According to Bitzer, artistic constraints, those "originated or managed by the rhetor and his method," include the personal character and style of the author and the use of logical proofs. Such constraints lead to what Bitzer calls a "fitting response" from the author’s implied audience.

Lord Byron’s dramas reveal a plethora of artistic constraints directed at resolving contemporaneous exigencies. Though ideally the rhetor would like to see his audience take action to change the urgent problem, this is not always necessary, as Byron’s plays illustrate. In Byron’s historical trilogy, he exhorted his implied audience to modify their beliefs and attitudes toward England’s growing idea of collectivism. In dramatizing the plight of the enslaved citizen, Byron attempted to get his audience thinking about the effects of England’s rapidly changing social and economic systems. To accomplish this, Byron

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1Bitzer, 8.
employed three basic stratagems: (1) looking behind empty rhetoric; (2) challenging the state; and (3) taking a stand. This chapter will explore each of these constraints.

Looking Behind Empty Rhetoric

Byron's history plays move progressively from showing how rulers use hollow rhetoric to manipulate the power system for self-benefit, to showing how the greater guilt lies with the masses, with the people themselves, for not opening their minds to look behind the empty assertions and hollow promises of the politicians and ruling classes. Rulers use empty rhetoric to manipulate the people into believing they are sincere, yet it is only an outward show. These rulers hide their deceit behind a noble, abstract language that speaks about such things as the honor of dying for the state in a "hopeless war/ . . . which is still maintain'd/With plebeian blood, and treasure wrung/From their hard earnings" (Marino, I, ii, 499-502); or gives oral permission to a grieving wife to visit her wrongly incarcerated husband while knowing all along that the guards will turn her away because "no permission had been given in writing" (Foscari, II, i, 59).

The clearest example of using empty rhetoric as a manipulative tool occurred in Marino Faliero when Bertram sacrificed the successful outcome of the conspiracy and the very lives of his fellow conspirators because he was unable to betray his patrician friend Lioni. Bertram's friendship
and desire "To save patrician blood, and not to spill it"
(Marino, IV, i, 153) is sincere; not so Lioni who insists
that Bertram "know'st my nature" and encourages him to
"speak once out,/And thou are safe and glorious; for 't is
more/Glorious to save than slay" (Marino, IV, i, 247-253).
When Lioni fails to get Bertram to reveal any details of the
conspiracy, he continues his manipulation by referring to
Bertram as "thy friend's savior and the state's!" and urging
him once again to "Speak -- pause not" because
. . . all rewards, all pledges for
Thy safety and thy welfare, wealth such as
The state accords her worthiest servants; nay
Nobility itself I guarantee thee.

(Marino, IV, i, 319-21)

Such empty promises were quickly followed by the direct
order to "arrest this man," while Lioni continued to assert
that Bertram should "fear not/This needful violence is for
thy safety" (Marino, IV, i, 328, 333-34). When Bertram tells
Lioni, "One more such word/And you shall perish piecemeal,
by the death/You think to doom to me" (Marino, IV, i,
344-46), Byron is showing that this plebeian has finally
looked beneath this patrician's empty words and understands
for the first time that it is the
. . . spirit of this aristocracy
Which must be rooted out; and if there were
A single shoot of the old tree in life,
'T would fasten in the soil, and spring again
To gloomy verdue and to bitter fruit.
(Marino, III, i, 161-65)

Bertram clearly represents the average citizen who, like the majority of people, feels powerless to exert any change, nor does he want to believe the worst about an individual with whom he was raised as a brother. The following exchange between co-conspirators Calendaro and Bertram demonstrates this. When Calendaro asks Bertram, "Whom wouldst thou spare?" Bertram is hesitant, responding in kind with a question: "I spare?" then continues:

I have no power to spare. I only question'd,
Thinking that even amongst these wicked men
There might be some, whose age and qualities
Mark them out for pity.
(Marino, III, ii, 143-47)

Bertram exemplifies the average person who traps himself in a powerless society, who goes through life with his head buried because he is not honest enough with himself nor others; he is afraid of taking a public stand. Bertram does not seek out trouble, nor does he want to be perceived as a coward; however, his self-deception does not go unnoticed by others, as Calendaro notes: ". . . in Bertram/There is a hesitating softness, fatal/To enterprise like ours" (Marino, II, ii, 580-82).

For Byron, this is precisely where the greater guilt lies: with the masses, with plebeians like Bertram
who sacrifice not only their free-will by blindly accepting the hollow words of such men as Lioni, but who actually crave to hear such empty rhetoric. For Byron, only by showing the people the part they play in this conspiracy can the overriding exigency of societal degeneration be reversed.

Byron graphically demonstrated this role in Sardanapalus where the king "took the rabble's shouts for love, the breath/Of friends for truth" (Sardanapalus, IV, i, 519-20). The King's Ionian slave, Myrrha, tries to open his eyes to the fact that "with common men/There needs too oft the show of war to keep/The substance of sweet peace" (Sardanapalus, I, ii, 579-81). Sardanapalus is confused; after all, he did create "An era of sweet peace 'midst bloody annals,/A green spot amidst desert centuries" (Sardanapalus, IV, i, 511-12). A ruler who "hate[s] all pain,/Given or received" and who refuses to "add to each other's natural burthen/Of mortal misery, but rather lessen" it (Sardanapalus, I, ii, 395-99) should be loved, not hated; yet Sardanapalus discovers that to his subjects, he is "a nothing" because he has stopped "Short of the duties of a king" (Sardanapalus, I, ii, 408). These citizens, who have been given every opportunity to "pass their days as best might suit them" are still not satisfied; they are eager to trade in their freedom and free-will for rule by "the meanest Mede" (Sardanapalus, I, ii, 406 and 412).
At first this peaceful monarch questions, "what would they have? . . . whose then is the crime?"
Sardanapalus, though, is a wise ruler who understands how this need for blind rule, for empty rhetoric, will eventually destroy them all, turning them all into slaves for a collective society, as the King notes:

Till now, no drop from Assyrian vein
Hath flow'd for me, nor hath the smallest coin
Of Nineveh's vast treasures e'er been lavish'd
On objects which could cost her sons a tear:
If then they hate me, 't is because I hate not;
If they rebel, 't is because I oppress not.
Oh, men! ye must be ruled with scyths, not scepter
And mow'd down like the grass, else all we reap
Is rank abundance, and a rotten harvest
Of discontents infecting the fair soil,
Making a desert of fertility.

(Sardanapalus, I, ii, 655-65)

Such empty rhetoric eventually subjugates all citizens to the same status, for when people exist only for the state, to do its bidding without any personal regard, when people become so dependent on the state for their total survival, they become slaves of that state. This is the end result of a decaying society where the general populace is willing to discard their free-will by refusing to look behind empty rhetoric. Doge Faliero came to see himself as "a slave/And that am I and thou, and all our house: (Marino,
I, ii, 135-36); later in the play he again describes himself as "a slave to my own subjects" (Marino, III, i, 427) because he realized that he had devoted his entire life to blindly serving the state at any cost.

Doge Foscari, who also devoted his life to the service of the state, tells his daughter-in-law Marina:

... All is low,
And false, and hollow -- clay from first to last,
The prince's urn, no less than potter's vessel.
Our fame is in men's breath, our live's upon
Less than their breath; our durance upon days
Our days on seasons; our whole being on
Something which is not us! -- So, we are slaves,
The greatest as the meanest -- nothing rests
Upon our will.

(Foscari, II, i, 351-59).

Doge Foscari never fully realized how the political machine worked until the end of the play. It is Marina, one of Byron's example-setting characters, who finally teaches the Doge how to look behind the exteriors of noble precepts to see that these empty words are hiding dishonor and malice, as she tells him when he infers that her husband -- the Doge's son -- dishonored the family:

... Dishonour'd! -- he dishonor'd!
I tell thee, Doge, 't is Venice is dishonour'd;
His name shall be her foulest, worst reproach,
For what he suffers, not for what he did.

'T is ye who are all traitors, tyrants! -- ye!

(Foscari, II, i, 163-167)

Throughout his history plays, Byron urged his implied audience to resolve the immediate problem of recognizing and understanding the dangers of trusting the hollow assertions, false words, of politicians. Byron attempted to make his audience aware of what Murray Edelman warned more than a century later:

Political events can become infused with strong affect stemming from psychic tension, from perceptions of economic, military, or other threats or opportunities, and from interactions between social and psychological responses. These political "events," however, are largely creations of the language used to describe them . . . [for] language does not mirror an objective "reality" but rather creates it by organizing meaningful perceptions obstructed from a complex, bewildering world.²

Byron understood how the ruling classes used words to trick their subjects into believing and accepting oppressive laws. He also understood how this destroys a people's free-will and eventually traps them in a collective slave state. Israel Bertuccio, leader of the conspirators and

another of Byron's example-setting characters, expresses this dilemma best when he tells Bertram:

This false compassion is a folly, and
Injustice to thy comrades and they cause!
Dost thou not see, that if we single out
Some for escape, they live to avenge
The fallen? and how distinguish now the innocent
From the guilty? all their acts are one --
A single emanation from one body,
Together knit for our oppression.

(Marino, III, ii, 401-08)

Unless this collective mindset is stopped, societal degeneration will continue until there are no free-thinking people. Only by looking behind the empty rhetoric and exposing it by questioning and challenging the state will the danger be eliminated.

Challenging the State

Byron believed that once citizens began looking behind such empty rhetoric, they could then challenge the state through judicious questioning of the political machine. For Byron, the people must question not only the words of the aristocratic ruling classes, but they must challenge their acts as well.

Byron wanted the English populace to realize what can happen when they blindly obey the state's commands. Values, such as morality, justice, and humanity, cannot be
looked upon as abstract terms, nor can these values be undermined by blind acceptance of every demand made upon the citizenry by the state. Byron understood the necessity of both questioning and challenging the authority of the state, which is evidenced by Doge Faliero's attempts to teach this concept to others:

DOGE: We must obey the Forty.
BERTUCCIO FALIERO: Obey them!
Who have forgot their duty to the sovereign?
DOGE: Why, yes, boy, you perceive it then at last
Whether as fellow-citizen who sues
For justice, or as sovereign who commands it,
They defrauded me of both my rights.

(Marino, I, ii, 242-47)

Byron means that just as the Doge has been defrauded of all of his rights by the state, so will the state defraud all of the citizens of their rights, thus entrapping them in a collective slave state.

Unfortunately, Doge Foscari does not learn this lesson until the final act of the play. Throughout The Two Foscari, the Doge rants, "I am the state's servant" (Foscari, II, i, 38); he even insists that his unjustly tortured son continue to "obey our country's will: 'T is not/For us to look beyond" (Foscari, IV, ii, 106-07) -- in other words, it is not for the people to question the needs or desires of the state, but to obey blindly. A good example of how such unquestioning faith leads to fear,
apathy, and overall moral decay is seen in the following scene, also from *The Two Foscari*, where a freshman senator questions Marco Memmo, a leader of the lower house of government called The Forty. Through the following exchange, Byron demonstrates how the people feel privately, but are afraid to speak out publicly, a fact he witnessed often while in Parliament:

SENATOR: A summons to "the Ten!" Why so?
MEMMO: "The Ten"

Alone can answer.
... We are summon'd
That's enough.

SENATOR: For them, but not for us;
I would know why.
MEMMO: You will know why anon,
If you obey; and if not, you no less
Will know why you should have obey'd.

SENATOR: I mean not
To oppose them, but --
MEMMO: In Venice, "but" is a traitor.

SENATOR: I am silent. ... I sought not
A place within the sanctuary; but being
Chosen, however, reluctantly so chosen,
I shall fulfill my office.

(*Foscari*, IV, i, 65-94).

These are almost the identical words of both Doge Faliero and Doge Foscari. Neither sought their titles and
positions, but the state "made me so" (Marino, I, ii, 473). Each spent a lifetime in service to their country, swearing "to die/In full exertion of the functions, which/My country called me here to exercise" (Foscari, V, i, 43-45); neither ever questioned nor refused "Toil, charge, or duty for the state" (Marino, I, ii, 477). In using similar language throughout both plays, Byron is demonstrating how a corrupt social system repeats itself generation after generation, slowly destroying all of society, trapping the people in a slave state unless someone has the courage to stop this cycle by judicious questioning of authority and challenging of the state in their actions.

Worse yet, Byron warns that such unwavering devotion will lead to further repression and societal decay because it promotes hidden power structures such as Loredano's. This is seen when Barbarigo, Loredano's co-conspirator against the Foscari family, confronts this powerful patrician:

You are ingenious, Loredano, in
Your modes of vengeance. . . .
'T is thus . . . to you I owe . . .
This undeserved association in
Your Guinta's [the Forty's] duties . . .
They speak your language, watch your nod, approve
Your plans, and do your work. Are they not yours? 
. . . They have gone beyond
Even their exorbitance of power.

(Foscari, V, i, 134-146)

The only one in The Two Foscari who is unafraid of
the state because she refuses to subject herself to the
rulers' oppressive whims and sees through their tyrannical
ways is the example-setting character Marina, Doge Foscari's
daughter-in-law. Everyone else in this play, including her
husband and his father, accept the state's decrees and are
afraid to question the abstract, mysterious power they hold
over the people. When the Doge tells Marina that she is
unable to comprehend the workings of the state, she lashes
back, "I do -- I do -- and so should you methinks" (Foscari,
II, i, 116). Neither does Marina play the traditional role
of citizen: simply sitting back and accepting without
question or challenge the forces which rule them. Throughout
the play she directly confronts those in power, challenging
them to justify their actions and change their course of
direction. Marina wants those in power to "know/That he is
known" (Foscari, III, i, 267-68); she insists that those who
use noble abstractions should keep

Those maxims for your mass of sacred mechanics,
Your merchants, your Dalmation and Greek slaves,
Your tributaries, your dumb citizens,
And mask'd nobility, your Sbirri, and
Your spies, your galley, and your other slaves,
To whom your midnight carryings off and drownings
. . . your mysterious meetings,
And unknown dooms, and sudden executions,
Your "Bridge of Sighs," your strangling chamber,
Your torturing instruments, have made ye seem
The beings of another and worse world!
Keep such for them: I fear ye not. I know ye!

(Foscari, II, i, 299-312)

Marina is the strongest, most outspoken, of Byron's example-setting characters. Through Marina, Byron shows the English people that they can question the orders and oppressive decrees of the state, and that they should not be afraid to challenge any corrupt act. Though not as forceful as Marina, Doge Faliero is another of Byron's example-setting characters. Through Doge Faliero, Byron shows the English people how they, too, can join together for their own mutual interests and survival to overcome the corrupt power structure. Byron reminds the populace that

Free citizens have struck at kings ere now,
Caesars have fallen, and even patrician hands
Have crush'd dictators, . . .
. . . but until this hour,
What prince has plotted for his people's freedom?
Or risk'd a life to liberate his subjects?

(Marino, III, ii, 555-62)

Israel Bertuccio was not surprised to discover that the answer was one Doge Marino Faliero. Through this discourse,
Byron shows that people of all classes can trust one another and join together to fight against a corrupt state.

Another of Byron's example-setting characters, and perhaps in some ways the weakest because he, too, is trapped by his own ignorance, is Sardanapalus a King who only desires "an era of sweet peace;" and who wants only to make his country "a paradise/And every moon an epoch of new pleasure" (Sardanapalus, IV, i, 512, 517-18). Through Sardanapalus, Byron shows the English people the role they, themselves, play in their own enslavement. Sardanapalus is not afraid to question the motives of those he knows are conspiring against him. When these conspirators inform the King that their own office is sacred, Sardanapalus retorts: "And what's mine?/That thou shouldest come and dare to ask of me/To lay it down?" (Sardanapalus, V, i, 318-20). Sardanapalus also shows compassion to the conspirators who are still his subjects, yet he is finally forced to don armor and weapons and go into battle against them. By not questioning the needs of his people, by not being able to resolve the internal conflict between his own thoughts and actions, Sardanapalus is doomed to failure just as Foscari and Faliero were doomed to failure for not being able to resolve the dilemma of blind acceptance or violent reform -- and just as the English people are doomed if they do not begin questioning the unjust laws and challenging the state to enact just ones.
Byron concentrated on the importance of understanding how giving up one's free-will by not questioning and challenging the state's authority, leads one to becoming trapped in an enslaving society. But Byron also realized that the people themselves were willingly sacrificing their own freedom by not wanting to sift through the rhetoric and determine truth for themselves. Byron understood a concept that Edelman noted a century later:

... political beliefs, perceptions, and expectations are overwhelmingly not based upon observation or empirical evidence available to participants, but rather upon cuings among groups of people who jointly create the meanings they will read into current and anticipated events. . . . The particular meanings that are accepted need not, therefore, be cued by the objective situation; they are rather established by a process of mutual agreement upon significant symbols. . . . [because] people can only use an infinitesimal fraction of the information reaching them.³

Through example-setting characters like Marina and Doge Faliero, Byron attempted to show the people that they could, indeed, take action because "the consequences will sanctify the deed" (Marino, III, i, 67), but they cannot act simply out of emotion and haste. Their commitment to taking a

³Edelman, 32-33.
stand must be rational, evolving out of the clear thinking they developed after looking behind the empty rhetoric of rulers and challenging the state.

Taking a Stand

Once the populace has cleared away the obstructions to logical thought by looking behind the empty rhetoric of politicians and by challenging the state through judicious questioning of orders and decrees, they should be ready for commitment by taking a stand against a corrupt and oppressive government, but, contends Byron, they are not ready to make such a commitment. As with the Hampden Club Reformers, the masses are in discord as to what type of commitment should be made. In his dramas, Byron explicitly demonstrates how the general population is unable to unite behind one firm stand. He warns that should this indecisiveness continue, the people themselves must accept responsibility for the societal degeneration which will catapult England into

... an appanage to those
Who shall despise her! -- She shall stoop to be
A province for an empire, petty town
In lieu of capitol, with slaves for senators,
Beggars for nobles, panders for a people.

(Marino, V, iii, 749-53)

Although these were the words of Doge Faliero at his execution, they exemplify Byron's message in each of his
historical tragedies, namely that the people must unite and face the dangers of overthrowing

. . . this monster state,

This mockery of a government, this spectre
Which must be exorcised with blood -- and then
We will renew the times of truth and justice,
Condensing in a fair, free commonwealth.

Not rash equality, but equal rights.

(Marino, III, ii, 286-91)

It must be remembered that the French Revolution had been based upon rash equality and freedom for all people, but that the idealism quickly waned because the people were unable to rid themselves of their old ideas and values. In each of these history plays, Byron presents the same pattern of the trapped man. Sardanapalus cannot emotionally change his passive, simplistic attitude even though he is convinced of the necessity to bear arms in defense of his country; nor can Doge Foscari save his son from a system of injustice, a system which makes no allowances for its citizens, even though the Doge presides, in title, over the inquisition.

With the Industrial Revolution drawing more and more people into cities, over crowded conditions added to the general corruption flooding these areas. Corruption was no longer seated among the elite, but had crept down into the mass population. In short, society itself was becoming doomed by this sickness, and men were being trapped in these
doomed societies because they did not want to restructure their society; instead, they preferred to complain amongst themselves, but would seldom take a stand publicly. In *Marino Faliero*, Byron attempted to show the nature and significance of this human corruption and failure to change one's old ideas and value systems. This may be why Byron wrote to John Murray on September 29, 1820: "I suspect that, in *Marino Faliero*, you and yours won't like the politics, which are perilous to you in these times; but recollect that it is not a political play."

In this play, Byron was especially concerned with the role of leaders since the 1820 Carbonari insurrection against the tyranny of an unscrupulous aristocracy in Venice failed for lack of a far-sighted, strong leader. In *Marino Faliero*, the Doge easily replaced Israel Bertuccio as leader of the conspirators because Bertuccio's objective was "not to push myself to power . . . [but]/To act in trust as your commander, till/Some worthier should appear" (*Marino*, II, ii, 494-98). Even the leaders of the conspiracy could not take a stand, make a firm commitment, to lead the freedom fighters into battle.

Throughout *Marino Faliero*, the innate corruption and frailty of man is blamed solely on the political machine. Conspirator Philip Calendaro exemplifies this

*Prothero, V:84-85.

*Byron expressed this concern on numerous occasions while he was both researching and writing this play. See Prothero, V:10, 129, 161, 183-84, 208, and 210.
thinking when he admits to Israel Bertuccio:

... I am sick of these protracted
And hesitating councils: day on day
Crawl'd on, and added but another link
To our long fetters, and some fresher wrong
Inflicted on our brethren or ourselves,
Helping to swell our tyrant's bloated strength.

(Marino, II, ii, 559-64)

By the end of the play, Doge Faliero realizes how helpless he and his fellow conspirators have been in trying to liberate this corrupt society, yet he still fails to see the responsibility that the common citizen has in this societal decay. This is evidenced by the Doge's final speech presented only to the Council of Ten and other Patricians, for the people were "without,/Beyond the compass of the human voice" (Marino, V, iii, 720-21). Prior to being beheaded, the Doge warns this noble assemblage:

... When thy patricians beg their bitter bread
In narrow streets, and in their shameful need
Make their nobility a plea for pity;
... when the few who still retain a wreck
Of their great fathers' heritage, shall fawn
Round a barbarian Vice of Kings' Vicegerent,
... [when] Thy sons are in the lowest scale of being Slaves turn'd o'er to the vanquish'd by the victors, Despised by cowards for greater cowardice, And scorn'd even by the vicious for such vices,
Then . . . all thine inheritance shall be her shame
Entail'd on thy less virtuous daughters, grown
A wider proverb for worse prostitution.

(Marino, V, iii, 757-79)

Like Marino Faliero, Byron did not want the public to mistake Sardanapalus "for a political play -- which was so far from my intention," yet both plays explore the dynamics of social reality which result in social corruption and societal degeneration. Sardanapalus, though, distributes the blame for this decaying society more evenly. In this play, Byron no longer blames just a corrupt political machine for the ills of society; he shows how the people, themselves, share equally in this destruction when

. . . they murmur
Because I have not shed their blood, nor led them
To dry into the desert's dust by myriads,
Or whiten with their bones the banks of Ganges;
Nor decimated them with savage laws,
Nor sweated them to build up pyramids,
Or Babylonian walls.

(Sardanapalus, I, ii, 273-79).

Jerome McGann observed that The Two Foscari "attempts something Marino Faliero left untouched . . . : it attempts to dramatize the effect that life in Venice has upon a number of different, very specific, people . . . The

Marchand, Letters, 8:152.
Doge, Marina, Loredano" and Jacopo Foscari. Loredano is a product of this polluted Venetian society; he knows full well how inhuman the Venetian laws are, yet he happily uses them whenever he can, and he exerts a hidden control over the power structure of Venice. Doge Foscari can see that Loredano is beyond good or evil because he no longer acts as a human being capable of thinking; he acts instead as a machine which carries out the commands of the corrupt state. The Doge, though, refused to take any stand against Loredano because he felt it was not his place: his place was simply to serve the state in silent obedience.

In The Two Foscari, Byron has come full circle, noting that the societal decay he originally blamed solely on a corrupt political machine in Marino Faliero, and which he blamed equally on the corrupt populace and aristocrats in Sardanapalus, must now be blamed almost entirely on an apathetic populace who have trapped themselves in an oppressive, decaying society because they fear taking a stand, preferring instead to remain silent about the corruption and abuse they witness or experience. Byron alleges that too many English citizens have become like Jacopo Foscari, who endured unnecessary torture and imprisonment rather than take a stand. Such people believe that the "tyranny of silence is not lasting,/And, though events be hidden, just men's groans/Will burst all cerement, even a living grave's" (Foscari, III, i, 79-81). Jacopo's

wife, though, refutes such faulty thinking and lack of commitment. Marina appears to be the only person who understands that people must accept responsibility for their lives by taking a stand against an "accursed . . . city where the laws/Would stifle nature's" (Foscari, II, i, 419-20). Like Doge Faliero, she, too, realizes that unless all the people take a stand and unite against tyranny, the state is doomed.

In fact, Marina becomes an even more important spokesperson for Byron than either the Doge Foscari or the Doge Falieri or even the Assyrian King Sardanapalus because she states precisely what Byron has been dramatizing in each of these dramatic discourses: the importance of mental freedom. In order to escape enslavement from a corrupt society where even the people themselves refuse to take a stand against tyranny, one must approach each situation with clarity of thought. In other words, one must intellectually transcend this infectious society, for a person's "mind should make its own" liberty (Foscari, III, i, 84).

The overriding argument found in Byron's three history plays is that any action to stop societal degeneration must be preceded by a clear understanding of the causes of social reality by looking behind the hollow rhetoric of those in power. To overcome one's ignorance and fear, one must ask questions and challenge unjust laws; only then can a groundwork be provided for social involvement and commitment of one's convictions. These plays, in effect,
were an attempt to cut through superficial explanations in an exploration of the condition of blight infecting the ruling class of England and steadily spreading to the lower classes, dissipating the energies of the heroic advocates of the powerless, and creating a collective, apathetic, mindless society. Only through mental liberation could a person achieve total freedom and equality.

Byron's constraints were rational, stemming from reasoned, logical arguments designed to test and prove the rhetor's persuasive discourse to an implied audience. These probative arguments demonstrated how each citizen, regardless of his or her socio-economic class, must begin looking behind the empty rhetoric of politicians, must expose those hollow words by challenging the actions of the state, and must make a commitment to take a stand and, if necessary, lay down one's life for individuality and freedom before they find themselves part of a collective slave state. Byron's strategies were indeed the "fitting response" for his implied, ideal audience.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

Lord Byron was a rhetorician because his plays reflected a specific rhetorical situation. Yet Byron also failed as a rhetorician because of his abstract selection of audience and issues. Before investigating Byron's failure as a rhetor and the rhetorical implications of this failure, this chapter will first review how Byron's plays are rhetorical in nature, thus making Byron a rhetor.

Byron as Rhetor

Byron's three historical tragedies evolved out of a direct response to the oppressive political and social situations emerging from both the Industrial and French Revolutions. These dramas clearly demonstrated what Lloyd Bitzer termed a "Rhetorical Situation," for each play had an identifiable set of exigencies, an audience capable of constraining these urgent problems, and a set of constraints designed to solve these issues.

Byron was responding directly to the overriding exigence of societal degeneration which he witnessed seeping down into all classes of English society. This blight stemmed from the revolutions, failed reform movements, and repression of both citizens and ideas in early Nineteenth Century England, a time commonly referred to as the Romantic Period. It was during this forty-three year time span that
England was transformed from a predominantly agrarian society into the world's first industrialized, urban nation. The desire for liberty and social equality raged throughout Europe during this era. Byron, whose political activity and revolutionary spirit captured the fiery passions of the age, was considered the leading Romantic figure of the second generation of Romantic Poets.

Though he wrote for a specific primary assemblage, consisting of the cultural and theatre audiences of his day, Byron understood that these were, as Lloyd Bitzer described, the "mere hearers and readers" of his works. This primary audience could not effect the fitting response which Bitzer insists is necessary to convert such a group into a rhetorical audience capable of constraining the exigence. Byron, therefore, insisted that his dramas were not designed for the stage, but were instead a "mental theatre" designed to get an ideal audience thinking about the paradoxical times in which the people lived. Byron wanted this ideal audience to liberate its mind because he believed that once an individual looses the ability of free-thought, that person enslaves himself to a collective, mind-controlling slave state. Out of Lord Byron's mental theatre evolved what Edwin Black terms a "second persona," an implied auditor capable of exacting a fitting response to alter the condition of societal degeneration. Consequently, Byron's secondary, or implied, audience became his rhetorical audience. This implied, or ideal, rhetorical audience
consisted of patriotic, pragmatic, free-thinking individuals who utilized common sense and rational thought in a noble search for truth, and who were unafraid to take a stand in order to constrain the pressing problems facing England at the time.

Byron's three historical dramas moved progressively from blaming solely the aristocratic, privileged ruling class in England for the societal degeneration Byron saw pervading all of English society, to showing how the people themselves were also at fault for permitting such a blight to infect England. Byron's ideal auditor, as evidenced by the example-setting characters found in *Marino Faliero*, *Sardanapalus*, and *The Two Foscari*, attempted to constrain the exigence by looking behind the empty rhetoric of the rulers, by challenging the state through judicious questioning of the ruling classes, and by taking a stand against the oppressive tyranny of these rulers, even if that commitment resulted in death, which it did for Doge Faliero and his fellow conspirators, for Sardanapalus and many of his supporters, and for most of the Foscari family.

By utilizing Lloyd Bitzer's "Rhetorical Situation" in an examination of Lord Byron's historical trilogy, a critic is able to gain answers to the three questions originally posed at the beginning of this study: To what exigence was Byron responding? Who was his rhetorical audience? What were the constraints? Because of the nature of his dramas, Lord Byron can indeed be viewed as a rhetor
and his works as persuasive discourses designed to modify a pressing problem even though Byron failed in some of his rhetorical choices.

Byron's Failure as Rhetor

The rhetorical situations evolving out of the Industrial and French Revolutions created the right timing for Byron to present his rhetorical discourse. However, this one situation involved several exigencies, all directly tied to what Byron correctly identified as the overriding exigency of societal degeneration. Byron, though, failed to consider that his three different audiences (cultural, theatre, and ideal) each required a different approach to constrain the exigence. Nor did Byron consider that the constraints "may be limited in number and force, and they may be incompatible."¹ First this section will explore the audience Byron addressed and second the constraints he used.

Abstract Audience

In his historical tragedies, Byron introduced a menu of artistic constraints to illicit a fitting response from his ideal audience on what he identified as the overriding exigence facing England during the turbulent Romantic era. Although Byron understood his cultural and theatre audiences, he failed to address their individual needs; instead, he chose to address an ideal audience,

¹Bitzer, 12.
speaking not, as he claimed, in the common language of the people, but in the bold, prophetic language of idealized truth. In short, he made this abstract, idealized audience his primary audience, which resulted in a critical flaw because in addressing his second rather than his first persona, he was unable to exact an observable, concrete fitting response to the exigence.

Byron wanted to influence his reading public into striking blows against the social hypocrisy, tyranny and oppression engulfing England because he hated tyranny profoundly, fiercely, nobly. He understood how this was destroying a homeland and way of life he loved, and he clearly understood how scattered and uneducated his public was regarding their responsibilities and power to constrain this decay. By using an idealized audience rather than focusing on the needs of his cultural and theatre audiences, Byron was guilty of taking dogma rather than human beings as the standards against which to measure virtue and vice.

Critics such as Albany Fonblanque of The Examiner and Reginald Heber of The Quarterly Review complained that Byron's appeal was made to reason as well as to the passions of his readers. . . those speculations which he designed for the educated ranks alone, are thrown open to the gaze of persons most likely to be influenced by them, and disseminated, with remorseless activity, among the young, the ignorant, and the poor, -- by the
efforts of the basest and most wicked faction that ever infested a Christian county.²

Heber may have been expounding the conservative values of the Tories and state-sanctioned censors like Southey, but he did reflect on a major area of weakness in Byron's plays: not targeting the correct audience. If these plays were to move the emerging middle-working-classes to action, then Byron needed to target that specific audience by showing in *Marino Faliero*, for example, why the Doge was drawn into the plot to join the conspirators. As Heber correctly points out, "the Jaffier of Lord Byron's plot is drawn in to join the conspirators, not by the natural and intelligible motives of poverty, aggravated by the sufferings of a beloved wife, and a deep and well-grounded resentment for oppression, but by his outrageous anger for a private wrong of no very atrocious nature."³

The unsigned reviewer for *The British Critic* also took Byron to task for a similar confusion of audience in *Sardanapalus* and *The Two Foscari*. The reviewer told Byron that the "nature and the wisdom of generations were not

²Reginald Heber, "Marino Faliero, Doge of Venice, an Historical Tragedy; Sardanapalus, a Tragedy; The Two Foscari, a Tragedy; and Cain, a Mystery." *The Quarterly Review* XXVII (July 1822) 478. Heber began this review by explaining why "several years have passed away since we undertook the review of Lord Byron's Poetry. . . . Far less have we been able to witness, without deep regret and disappointment, the systematic and increasing prostitution of those splendid talents to the expression of feelings, and the promulgation of opinions, which, as Christians, as Englishmen, and even as men, we were constrained to regard with abhorrence" (477).

³Heber, 487.
false" and that "the reckless opinions of a few desperate young men" were poor arguments for a revolt against England's established laws, manners, and religion.\textsuperscript{4} The arguments that Byron should have used were privileged ruling class indifference to and starvation of the poorer classes in society.

That Byron understood the politics of food is evident, for in several of his poems he stressed the horrors of starvation while vividly describing ceremonies of feasting among the nation's aristocracy, thus "emphatically associating political control and injustice with the distribution of food. . . . Byron was attempting to address poetically [how] the eating habits of the well-to-do were not so much a sign of sophistication and virtue as of oppression and villainy,"\textsuperscript{5} a theme he often returned to in his poetry and letters, and the main theme of his influential Frame-Breaker's speech presented to the House of Lords while Byron was still a member of this august ruling body.\textsuperscript{6}


\textsuperscript{5} Watkins, Social Relations, 26. For a clear example of this, see Byron's "The Devil's Drive," a political satire that charts Lucifer's tour through the political, social and economic arenas of Great Britain and Europe, and which described in vivid detail the child "stretch'd out by the wall of a ruin'd hut,/With its hollow check, and eyes half shut,/A child of famine dying;/And the carnage begun, when resistance is done." (8, 52-55, as found in J. W. Lake, ed., \textit{The Works of Lord Byron} [Philadelphia: J. P. Lippencott & Co., 1856] 748.

\textsuperscript{6} Before drafting the Frame-breakers speech, Byron visited the
Byron needed to target a specific concrete audience, rather than an abstract idealized audience if he wanted to influence, namely, the emerging middle classes who were already fighting for survival in the decaying English culture. In their histories, both Harvey and Thompson explain that forty-five percent, or three-hundred and thirty-five of the seven-hundred and forty full-scale riots occurring in England between 1790 and 1810, were food riots. There was a tremendous shortage of food in England because of the continuing war effort, yet the food shortage appeared to be only among the poorest citizens of the state; the ruling classes, including Lord Byron, ate well. So Heber was correct in pointing out Byron's error of not targeting the right audience, the starving commoners found throughout England. By addressing an idealized abstract audience in his dramas, Byron weakened the very fibre of this rhetorical situation which is why he could never obtain area himself; it was only nine miles from his own estate. These starving textile weavers (later known as Luddites) destroyed both their own hand looms and the labor-saving textile machinery of factory owners in protest against low wages and high unemployment. Byron sought out the advice of Lord Holland, the Recorder of Nottingham, in the hopes that he would have some special insights into the problems, but Lord Holland was indifferent. Two days before presenting his speech, Byron wrote to Holland: "My own motive for opposing the bill is founded on its palpable injustice, and its efficacy. I have seen the state of these miserable men, and it is a disgrace to a civilized country. . . . The effect of the present bill would be to drive them into actual rebellion." Byron's speech helped to modify the bill, but failed to modify his prediction because the Nottingham weavers continued to riot, ending in the Luddite Riots of 1816.

7Harvey, 59-63; Thompson, 457-462.
the fitting response he desired from his cultural and theatre audiences, and why he was forced to create his ideal rhetorical audience.

Abstract Issues

Neither did Byron chose to address concrete issues grounded by real people with whom English society could identify. Rather he chose to address abstract concepts which had as their subject primarily things rather than persons. The average citizen, especially one concerned with the basic needs of survival, has difficulty understanding such idealized philosophical arguments.

Each of Byron's successful poetic works, centering around the theme of oppression was entwined with an individual with whom the English could identify, and not simply an abstract idea. In poems such as "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" and "Don Juan," Byron attacked royalty and kings through his characters; Childe Harold censured Napoleon for his vanity and destructive ambition. Even in his poem "The Prisoner of Chillon" Byron introduced a noble man buried in the living tomb of a dungeon for holding beliefs he would not forsake, and with whom the emerging middle class could identify. His poems presented subject matter with which the contemporary transitional state of the public mind could understand, but his dramas did not.

In his history plays, Byron reverted back to near-mythical, though real-life, historical figures and
exhorted the ideals of the abstract concepts of oppression and tyranny. He failed to reach the deep passions of the English people because, like a preacher, Byron only tried to evoke a detestation of the decay rather than to develop concrete motives for removing those in power who oppressed the people. In Philosophy of Rhetoric, Campbell adroitly pointed out that "[i]t would have been impossible . . . for Cicero to inflame the minds of the people to so high a pitch against oppression, considered in the abstract, as he actually did inflame them against Verres the oppressor; nor could he have incensed them so much against treason and conspiracy, as he did incense them against Catiline the traitor and conspirator."

Byron needed to address a concrete subject grounded by real people with whom his cultural and theatre audiences could identify if he were to elicit a fitting response from them. Instead, Byron's dramas present an idealized study of self-escape from the chains of a slavish society. At first, each of his heroes convey a sense of futility, for they discovered that they were mere puppets whose strings were manipulated by the few masters. From his classical, historical dramas to his biblical, tragic mystery plays, Byron's heroes were only able to transcend their chains through death. In demonstrating their escape from such a society, Byron attempted to make his readers recognize that all people have the ability to liberate themselves from the

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George Campbell. The Philosophy of Rhetoric. (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois Press, 1963) 105-06.
chains of their oppressive world -- even if they helped create those chains.

Both Doge Faliero and Doge Foscari were slaves of civic corruption. Both learned that they could not physically free themselves from their doomed societies, but they could mentally escape its enslavement. Sardanapalus was the slave of sensuality, but he discovered that people were not yet ready for the new Eden he had planned. He, too, chose mental freedom to escape his chains of debauchery. In each case, these heroes chose death.

Perhaps such noble heroism proved that Lord Byron was too romantic and not realistic enough, and was why he was unable to exact a "fitting response" from his real audiences. To better understand this concept, one need only look to the three different levels of constraints that Miller suggests exist in all rhetorical situations. The first level is composed of a controlling constraint which constitutes the overriding value judgement usually defined by Bitzer as the overriding exigency. Simply stated, Byron's overriding exigency was societal degeneration which would eventually decay England into an oppressive slave state unless the people adopted the three constraints, or courses of action, Byron outlined in each of his dramas: looking behind empty rhetoric, challenging the state, and taking a stand. To Byron's real audiences, these were not rational constraints; they were neither relative nor probative because they failed to address the pressing issue
of starvation. After all, when a group of people are starving to death, they are more apt to respond to constraints related to solving the food shortage rather than to constraints related to the ideology of a class war.

Miller's second level involves immediate constraints, or those constraints that the real audience perceives to be the action that the rhetor wants them to take. In each of Byron's history plays, the example-setting characters die, except for Marina who was subdued by the destruction of all of those she loved. To Byron's primary audience, the message could only be perceived as either "Death is a better choice than living in an enslaving, decaying society; I disagree with this concept, therefore, I refuse to act on it;" or "Death is the only outcome for one who exerts free-will and takes any direct action against the state; since I want to live, I, therefore, refuse to act on it." In either case, the outcome is identical: inaction.

Since the value judgements held by Byron clash with the value judgements held by his primary audience, a "fitting response" was impossible, and neither Byron nor his primary audience could join together in resolving the immediate problem which Byron saw facing England. This, according to Miller, constitutes the third level of constraints which he terms a subsidiary constraint. Miller emphasized that "hearers -- as well as speakers -- operate under [such] constraints." It is only when the two --

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9Miller, 117.
rhetor and audience -- are in accord that a fitting response can be elicited from a real world that invites change.

Rhetorical Implications

Lloyd Bitzer explains that a "fitting response" is one that directly addresses the pressing issue the rhetor originally introduced; it meets the requirements which the specific rhetorical situation established, for only a situation that is "strong and clear dictates the purpose, theme, matter, and style of response." Moreover, because some rhetorical situations speak to universal situations, they come into existence, mature, persist, or recur to prompt comparable responses. "The situation recurs and, because we experience situations and the rhetorical responses to them, a form of discourse is not only established but comes to have a power of its own."11

Lord Byron's works present such a recurring life cycle. Even in the Twentieth Century, his fictive discourses continue to address the same critical issues pervading all cultures today. Taken collectively, this historical trilogy suggests that Byron understood it was ideas -- and not actions alone -- that govern a society, for when a government tampers "with the minds of men," it lulls the citizens into an apathetic state and eventual

10Bitzer, 10.
12Lake, 555 (from Byron's Frame-Breakers speech).
slavery just as a song can lull a baby into sleep. Rather than present the "expression of excited passion"\textsuperscript{13} he witnessed in other poems and plays, or worry about exacting a "fitting response" from his cultural and theatre audiences, Byron desired to address an ideal audience and to present to that audience a carefully reasoned portrayal of real life, based on historical events far removed from contemporary England but which mirrored the same social ills occurring in England at the time.

Byron's ideas have recurred numerous times in fictive discourses including contemporary dramas, films, and made-for-television movies. In fact, it was writers like Byron who paved the way for the establishment of self-governing principles because Byron's works abound with passages aflame with the fiery spirit of freedom and individuality. Over the ensuing decades, freedom-loving people worldwide have greeted Byron as the poet of freedom. Byron shares the same strength of voices of activists like Homer and Demosthenes in Greece; Cicero in Rome; Burns, Shelley, Rousseau, Paine, and Charles Dickens in Europe; and Hamilton, Jefferson, Lincoln, Barry Goldwater, and other American statesmen as well as a host of American writers such as Taylor Caldwell, Ayn Rand, and Walter Lippman who insisted, "What we are suffering in modern times is the failure of the primitive liberals to see that freedom does not begin when tyranny is overthrown. Freedom is a way of

\textsuperscript{13}Marchand, \textit{Letters}, 8:146.
life which requires authority, discipline, and government of its own kind."\textsuperscript{14}

Byron's historical trilogy is relevant today and easier to understand by a broad range of audiences in established nations such as Great Britain and the United States because of the educational levels of the masses and because of the recurring rhetorical situation present in modern day societies. However, in emerging third world nations, or among individuals who are facing starvation and the basic needs of survival, such as Byron's real audiences were in his day, Byron's ideological dramas can never be relevant. And as long as the populace of all societies continue to close their eyes to the breed, creed and greed pervading all cultures, no fitting response will be emitted from them.

Byron's works, though, are didactic, focused outward upon society to teach them ways to handle the societal decay Byron identified as the overriding problem requiring an immediate solution. Didactic literature is designed to enlighten publics on pressing problems and to demonstrate how to solve them. In effect, all didactic literature attempts to modify a shared reality and is, therefore, rhetorical. All literature, however, is not didactic, not meant to persuade an audience to action. By using Bitzer's "Rhetorical Situation," a critic can discover the persuasive elements within literature that pertain to

\textsuperscript{14}Walter Lippmann, Syndicated Newspaper Column, August 4, 1964.
shared rhetorical exigencies. In turn, Bitzer's critical tool can help discern the audience and constraints which emerge out of the situation rather than out of the author's imagination, and turn fiction into persuasive and effective discourse.

Bitzer, though, is not the only critical perspective one can take. The rhetorical implications of literary works can be derived from a dramatistic analysis, for instance, as proposed by critics such as Burke, Bormann, and Fisher. In the case of Lord Byron's works, a critic may also want to explore the potential universal audience that keeps such situations as found in Byron's history plays recurring. In any case, it must be remembered that while Lord Byron's history plays reflect the specific

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time and place during which he lived, the perspective in this study comes from a different time and place. The reader, therefore, should keep in mind that this analysis might be based as much on Twentieth Century American thought as Byron's plays were based on Nineteenth Century European thought. Readers should also be aware that Byron may have been insinuating that his audience should challenge all rhetoric -- including his own -- which would demonstrate that Lord Byron clearly understood the dangers of manipulation of the masses by all rhetoric, a problem that is as relevant in Twentieth Century America as it was in Nineteenth Century Europe.
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