Introduction
A Thing of Dark Imaginings

There was in him a vital scorn of all –
As if the worst had fall’n which could befall,
He stood a stranger in this breathing world,
An erring spirit from another hurled;
A thing of dark imaginings […]

_\textit{Lara} I.313–317

This study aims to explore the meaning of darkness in Byron’s work, or to put it another way, to see how an awareness of Byron’s interest in darkness can serve to produce useful readings of his texts. Although it is rare to find studies of Byron that do not utilize darkness or gloom to characterize his work, there has been no serious consideration of what such darkness actually means, where it comes from, or how it figures in his writings. In embarking on such a project, however, there are a number of ideas that require qualification. There is, to begin, the question of what constitutes Byron’s ‘work’, as in recent years, scholarly interest in the poetry he produced has been eclipsed by interest in other aspects of his production. Second, there needs to be a greater degree of specificity about what is meant by the word darkness, as it is a term that, by nature, has many affinities and great fluidity. Finally, there needs to be a clarification of the methodology I intend to employ in attempting to distil meaning from the texts under consideration.

Let us take those demands in order. Along with Byron’s voluminous poetical output, which was the keystone of his early fame and made up the bulk of the works _published_ by Byron during his lifetime, he was the author of copious volumes of letters, journals, diaries, and an eclectic assortment of prosaic sorties, ranging from parliamentary speeches to the beginnings of a gothic novel. Since the publication of Leslie Marchand’s comprehensive edition of _Byron’s Letters and Journals_ in the 1970s and 1980s and Andrew Nicholson’s _Complete
Miscellaneous Prose in 1991, those productions have assumed a prominent position in the body of scholarship produced about Byron and now, rightly, are held to be as important as his poetry. Although my primary interest in this study is Byron’s poetry, I treat all his textual productions equally, continuing the project of exploring the ways in which those different modes of writing illuminate and inflect each other.

In addition, there is also the production of ‘Byron’, which, over the last ten years at least, has been characterized as one of the poet’s most important projects. As early as 1968 Jerome McGann drew attention to Byron’s self-mythologizing practice and, subsequently, scholars such as Frances Wilson and James Soderholm, as well as biographers such as Fiona McCarthy and Benita Eisler, have made important additions to the ever-growing body of studies treating that subject. Those works argue that Byron’s reputation as the dark poet of his generation did not develop by accident and that, in some senses, ‘Byron’ was the product of what may well amount to the first real marketing exercise in the history of publishing, where books were sold purely upon the suspicion that the scandalous material they would inevitably contain was only the tip of the iceberg when it came to the truth of the author’s supposedly scandalous life. The view expressed by William Hazlitt in *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), that the subject of Byron’s poetry was always himself, is a characteristic summation of the way the relationship between the man and his poetry has been

---

perceived over time.2 The production of ‘Byron’ was not exclusively carried out by Byron himself but also by his publisher, his friends and his reading audience (both professional and private). As such, reviews of Byron’s work, biographies and other writings about Byron’s life form an important aspect of the work considered in this study.

Byron is often characterized as a man who enjoyed deliberately courting scandal and, according to certain sources, would begin a rumour about himself just to see how quickly it would spread and to find out exactly how far he could push the boundary of what could be believed about him.3 Certainly he encouraged stories about himself to circulate. For instance, he actively promoted the transmission of a story that suggested he had been involved in an incident similar to the one that served as the plot for The Giaour. In general he was evasive about the detail, advising inquirers to refer to Lord Sligo who, he assured, could give them an account: ‘not very far from the truth’.4 Although Thomas Medwin did, eventually, provide the general public with a more elaborate account of the tale in his recorded conversations with Byron, the status of that account remains questionable, and even if it is true, merely demonstrates that Byron’s penchant for perpetuating the story continued to the end of his life.5

Further, a number of statements made by Byron’s wife, during and after the process of their separation, claimed that he had deliberately led her to believe that he was guilty of some mysterious crime

---

3 According to Ashley Hay, ‘[Byron] learned early the trick of dropping a suggestion, an insinuation, of something he might have done into the middle of a crowded salon, and watching it roll out, changing and growing and taking on a life of its own, through all his listeners.’ Ashley Hay, The Secret: The Strange Marriage of Annabella Milbanke and Lord Byron (Sydney: Duffy and Snellgrove, 2000), 24. Her evidence comes from a statement Byron reportedly made about himself: ‘I always say whatever comes into my head, and very often say things to provoke people to whom I am talking.’
4 BLJ. 3.200. See also the letter to Lord Holland. BLJ. 3.155–6.
5 Thomas Medwin, Journal of the Conversations of Lord Byron: Noted During a Residence with His Lordship at Pisa, in the Years 1821 and 1822 (London: Henry Colburn, 1824), 85–6.
while on his trip to the Orient between 1809 and 1811. Malcolm Elwin, Lady Byron’s biographer, reproduces a series of statements in which she made such claims, the most coherent of which appeared in the application she made to Dr Baillie in her attempt to have Byron committed as insane in the early weeks of 1816:

[Byron] believes himself to be guilty of a dreadful crime, to which he never hears or reads an allusion without the deepest agitation. [...] He has repeatedly tried to find out if I have suspicions of this real or imaginary crime, & I am certain that my life depends on my seeming unconscious for once, when [...] I touched but distantly on the subject he grew terrible – quoting some words from Caleb Williams, that if I once knew his secret I was miserable for life, & he would persecute me for ever.6

Throughout the history of Byron’s critical reception, readers have been thrilled to speculate about how his poetry illuminates his personal life and how his life illuminates his poetry. Although the development of Byron’s reputation is not a subject that is central to this study’s argument, it is a contextual fact that any current analysis cannot ignore. In this study Byron’s reputation, as well as his published work, is treated as part of the product of his artistic endeavour.

Byron’s reputation also plays an important role in beginning a definition of what I mean by ‘dark’ when referring to Byron’s work. Although the passage that functions as the epigraph for this introduction describes the hero of Byron’s Oriental narrative poem, Lara, it could easily be read as a description of the poet himself. The fact that Byron could stand as the subject of that passage, as well as many other passages that he produced over the course of his career, points to one of the aspects of Byron’s poetry that I will characterize as dark. Byron’s fluidity, and the ambiguity such fluidity generates, helps to infuse his poetry with a threatening ambiance because it obscures his audience’s point of reference. Although ‘ambiguity’ and ‘fluidity’ cannot function in place of ‘darkness’, I will argue that the poetics of darkness at play in Byron’s work operates around the anxiety that

such ambiguity generates – both for the writer and for the consumers of his work.

The dark nature of Byron’s sexual reputation also warrants particular notice. Over the course of years, the man who was famously described by Caroline Lamb as ‘mad, bad, and dangerous to know’ has come to represent many of the darkest imaginings of the human mind. In addition to the dark tales that circulated about his activities in ‘the East’ he developed a general reputation for sexual excess. He was rumoured to have conducted an affair with his half-sister, Augusta Leigh, sodomized his wife, carried on romantic liaisons with various married women (including Lady Oxford, Mrs Spencer Smith, Lamb, and possibly even her mother-in-law Lady Melbourne), and to have indulged in sexual affairs with a number of young boys (John Edelston, Robert Rushton, Nicolo Giraud) and girls (such as the ‘Maid of Athens’, Theresa Macri). Byron’s sexual taste seems to follow no predictable pattern and, as such, forms one of his most intriguing aspects – particularly because of the danger, the darkness, such unpredictable behaviour implies.

Byron’s dark sexual reputation was matched by other dark behaviour: he was famous, variously, for his misanthropic posturing, misogynist bullying, financial incompetence and outspoken heretical beliefs. He was often seen as arrogant, proud and vain and according to the Countess Blessington would stop at nothing to enhance his celebrity.7 According to some points of view he ruthlessly exploited other cultures in the production of his artistic authority. Byron’s reputation was such that when two different novels were produced by some of his former friends (Lamb’s Glenarvon, and John Polidori’s The Vampire), it was no real stretch to imagine that the vampiric central characters were thinly disguised renditions of Byron himself.

7 ‘Byron had so unquenchable a thirst for celebrity, that no means were left untried that might attain it […] there was no sort of celebrity he did not, at some period or other, condescend to seek, and he was not over nice in the means, provided he obtained the end.’ Marguerite Blessington, Countess of, 1789–1849, Conversations of Lord Byron, ed. Ernest J. Lovell Jr. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969) 222. In another place she comments: ‘the end aim of his life is to render himself celebrated.’ Blessington, Conversations of Lord Byron, 85.
Byron’s dark reputation was, of course, overstated. The man also had many redeeming qualities, a love of liberty and equality that acted in a complex relation to his aristocratic position and leanings, his love of animals, his financial generosity to friends – even in the face of his own impending financial oblivion. By many accounts he was painfully shy, although when relaxed he was renowned as a sparkling conversationalist, a fact borne out by the vivacity and wit evident in both his poetry and his private correspondence. He was, furthermore, able to be stubbornly loyal and to inspire similar loyalty in others. One observer, an anonymous clergyman who met with Byron in the latter stages of his European exile, noted with surprise the discrepancy between the poet’s reputation and the man he met:

The first impression made upon me was this – that the person who stood before me, bore the least possible resemblance to any bust, portrait, or profile, that I had ever seen, professing to be his likeness […] I could scarcely discern any of the traits for which I searched.8

Despite the disappointment registered by such viewers, however, the dark and gloomy image of the romantic misanthrope became the iconic aspect of Byron’s public face, no matter how hard people who had observed him closely tried to dispel it.

The kind of darkness at play in Byron’s self-representation – the hints at mystery and immorality – also pertains to the representation of darkness in his poetry. However, that representation owes as much to the way that darkness itself was characterized in Byron’s lifetime, particularly to the changes in the way it was perceived in the thought processes of the European Enlightenment. Whether one looks for the origins of the Enlightenment in the publication of Descartes’s Discourse on Method, or to some other phenomenon, such as the discoveries of Galileo, the triumph of scientism through the works of the likes of Leibniz or Newton and the Royal Society, or the political changes that followed in the wake of England’s ‘Glorious Revolution’ in 1688, the new philosophic movement promised to throw light into the dark spaces of the universe. Given that the Enlightenment took

---

hold more than one hundred years before Byron’s birth, the structures of thought connected to it, by the time of his adulthood, had become part of the fundamental fabric of his culture.

As well as the fact that, in opposition to ‘enlightenment’, darkness represented ignorance and superstition, its power was effectively increased by certain discoveries fostered by the newly powerful rationalist science. In particular, Newton’s science had uncovered an entirely new way of thinking about the notion of light. So profound were the effects of those discoveries that Newton wrote to Henry Oldenburg, the long-standing secretary of the Royal Society, attesting that they were amongst the most radical and unsettling he had made. The discovery that light could be broken up into composite elements challenged its metaphoric absolutism. Where, previously, its purity, brilliance and power made it a seemingly natural indicator of divinity, Newton’s light could be refracted, bent, and diluted. By contrast, darkness remained solid. Its effect could be diminished by the presence of light, but it could not ultimately be broken down. The sciences that grew in the wake of Newton, following a similar mode of enquiry, seemed to offer even more ominous ideas: the more extreme ‘Catastrophists’ who developed the ideas of Baron Cuvier, for instance, suggesting that the ‘light’ would eventually go out and that darkness would once more cover the universe in a flood.

Linking Newton and light became common in eighteenth-century literature, and many poets – Joseph Addison, James Thomson, Mark Akenside and Alexander Pope, to name but a few – used refraction and optics to forge their metaphoric universes. Not all the poetic renditions of Newton’s science were positive and some appeared to hold his discoveries and their effects in a degree of suspicion. Although Pope, who was one of Byron’s most revered poetic masters, had used Newton’s refracting prisms as a source of imagery in both The Rape of the Lock and the Essay on Criticism, he worried about the effect of taking Newton’s science to its extremity. Those concerns are voiced in the second epistle of the Essay on Man, where Pope instructs scientists

---

to ground their studies in terrestrial, humanist fields and mocks, to an extent, the practices of Newtonian scientists as they incessantly measure and rationalize the mysteries of the universe. The same can be said of Pope’s famous epitaph for Newton:

Nature, and Nature’s Laws lay hid in Night
God said, Let Newton be! and All was Light.

Even though the tone is generally laudatory (as is proper for an epitaph), the fact that Newton’s discoveries are characterized as placing him on a level just below God suggests Pope’s concern about Newton’s apparent hubris – as well as the fact that he tended to be practically deified by the scientific community that grew more powerful in the wake of his death.11

Newton’s science provided a perfect foil for the long established tradition of equating knowledge and reason with light, but his light was not the pure light of God. Instead, Newton’s light threatened to supplant religion and, in both the Essay on Man and The Dunciad, Pope attacked those who might seek to use it for such a reason. The light of scientific reason was useful – but ultimately it was wielded by men, who, by their nature, were far from perfect, and were subject to the darker passions: pride, lust, envy, and the whole gamut of human foibles. Although Pope argued that the universe ran according to reasonable principles, he acknowledged that man’s use of reason was


11 Peter Kitson points out, correctly, that Newton held a particularly important place in the development of the Romantic mindset: ‘It is in the field of science that the Romantic reaction against Enlightenment ideas is most clearly visible, although this is the case only if we take Enlightenment science as synonymous with Newtonian science. Certainly, Newtonian thought dominated the early Enlightenment.’ Peter J. Kitson, ‘Beyond the Enlightenment: The Philosophical, Scientific and Religious Inheritance’, A Companion to Romanticism, ed. Duncan Wu, Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell, 1998), 40.
limited by human fallibility. The exploration of dark passion is considered, of course, to be one of the predominant projects of the ‘Romantic’ mindset and is an essential element of the world Byron creates in and through his work.

After the bright spark of the Enlightenment, that darker philosophical movement shaped Byron’s world. Looking back on the era from the end of the nineteenth century, in her fictionalized account of literary history in Orlando, Virginia Woolf wrote an evocative description of Byron’s world:

The great cloud which hung, not only over London, but over the whole of the British Isles on the first day of the nineteenth century stayed, or rather, did not stay, for it was buffeted about constantly by blustering gales, long enough to have extraordinary consequences upon those who lived beneath its shadow.

In what is a profoundly literary moment, Woolf evokes gloom and shadow as the major characteristics of British culture as the past turned into the century of her childhood. The literary landscape in

---

12 In the Essay on Man, Pope argues: ‘Two principles in human nature reign; / Self love, to urge, and Reason, to restrain’ (II.53–4). That argument links back to his earlier comments about Newton’s science being misunderstood by his followers (II.31–4) and the conclusion that ‘What reason weaves, by passion is undone’ (II.42). All of those ideas pertain to the human figure that Pope characterizes in the opening lines of the Epistle as ‘A being darkly wise’ (II.4). The fourth book of The Dunciad has ‘Science’ groaning in chains under the rule of ‘Dulness’ – the personification of mankind’s stupidity (IV.17–21). Dulness, ‘the seed of Chaos, and of Night’ (IV.13) is also characterized as ‘darkness visible’ (IV.3). Although clearly alluding to Paradise Lost, the characterization also plays on the genealogy of the Greek gods as laid out in Hesiod’s Theogony (which is discussed below). Her ultimate triumph, where ‘universal darkness buries all’ (IV.656), may well have inspired Byron’s ‘Darkness’, the poem that serves as the subject for chapter one in this study.


14 Virginia Woolf, Orlando, Oxford World’s Classics, ed. Rachel Bowlby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 217. The passage remains evocative even though it is written for comic effect; its humour depends on the reader recognizing the characteristics described as iconic markers of Romanticism.
which Woolf grew to maturity, dominated by the towering edifices of authors such as Dickens, Tennyson and Browning, was so permeated with darkness that it seemed to pass its gloom to the entire nation. Dickens’s dirty London shaped inhabitants’ perceptions of the metropolis as much as it reflected the author’s subjective vision. Victorian vision, however, grew from that of the Romantics, especially Byron, and the darker, more chaotic, nihilist philosophies of his contemporaries (advanced by such writers as Fichte, Schiller, and Malthus) shaped a world where divine reason and human rationalism were not enough. One of the conventional ideas associated with Romanticism as a movement is that it expresses a darker, more passionate engagement with the universe to counter the clinical, enlightened gaze of the preceding era.

Although Byron was a dominant figure in his own age and for the age that followed, he did not create the atmosphere of darkness that permeated his age alone. His immediate contemporaries and predecessors also demonstrate a great reliance upon darkness as a symbolic device. To present day readers the poets Keats, Wordsworth, and Coleridge are the most prominent of Byron’s immediate peers, while others – Shelley, Scott, Rogers, Campbell and Moore, for instance – were equally important in influencing the way he practised his craft. Similarly he owed a significant debt to the coterie of quarterly reviewers, whose journals wielded great influence in determining ideas about taste. The French Revolution, too, dominated the thought-structures of early nineteenth-century Britain15 and, along with those artists I have already mentioned, political writers such as Paine, Burke, Godwin, and Wollstonecraft made powerful representations of the conflicting emotions that event generated; particularly as the idea of a new era characterized by liberty and egalitarianism, which many had hoped was the promise of the early days of the revolution, seemed to be destroyed by the ‘Terrors’ of the 1790s. Byron’s era saw vast political unrest, from the Luddite riots and the suspension of habeas

---

corpus, to the Napoleonic wars and the abolition of the slave trade in England. The ‘old’ established order of society seemed to face an ever growing number of threats, each of which could be read as a harbinger of doom and the triumph of chaos.

In working with a poetics of darkness, Byron operated within a discourse that had a strong, well-established history of representation. Given Byron’s religious grounding and classical education, there are certain principles that can be assumed as a starting point. Darkness occupies an interesting position in the Judeo-Christian tradition, because its existence is not reliant upon God. Instead, it is one of the foundational aspects of existence. The King James Bible, the standard version in Byron’s world, begins with a very familiar set of verses that establish a relationship between God, light and darkness:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. […] And God said: let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.16

Not only is darkness primal in the sense that it exists without need for creation, but it is also one of the primary markers of difference. The creation of light is God’s first act and forms the template for all of his ensuing creative acts: allowing one form to be distinguished from another. ‘Darkness’, ‘void’ (emptiness), and lack of form are qualities

16 Gen. 1:1–5. E.A. Speiser notes that the version of the creation myth presented in the Bible pertains to the Priestly source of the myth (as opposed to Yawist or Elohist sources). He goes on to draw attention to the similarities between the biblical story and the creation myth presented in Babylonian stories of creation. The three principal points in the Babylonian Enûma elish are ‘Divine Spirit and cosmic matter are coexistent and coeternal’, ‘Primeval chaos; Ti’amat enveloped in darkness’, and ‘Light emanating from the gods.’ Those points are mirrored in his summary of the principal points of the biblical myth: ‘Divine Spirit creates cosmic matter and exists independently of it’, ‘The earth is a desolate waste, with darkness covering the deep’, ‘Light created.’ In each version darkness and night have a similar function. The Anchor Bible: Genesis, intro. trans. and notes E.A. Speiser (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 8; 10.
that are distinct from and overcome by the newly formed light of God.\textsuperscript{17}

Perhaps originating in Byron’s strict Calvinist upbringing, from a young age Byron imagined and represented himself as a creature ‘born for opposition’,\textsuperscript{18} his clubbed foot marking his misshapen character and his difference from those who surrounded him.\textsuperscript{19} Such influences also fed into his later interest in other forms of religious doctrine that gave consideration to questions of light and darkness, particularly his interest in Zoroastrianism, which had been adopted by rationalist philosophers such as Voltaire as a kind of rational deism and which Byron utilized openly at times in his poetry.\textsuperscript{20} One of the central doctrines of Zoroastrianism argued that the universe was governed by two principles – good and evil, light and dark – which were engaged in an eternal struggle that maintained a perpetual balance and order.

\textsuperscript{17} Byron may have been aware of Calvin’s arguments regarding the impossibility of anything existing outside or before God. Nevertheless, even from such a doctrinal position, space remains for the primacy of chaos. According to Calvin the Genesis myth refers to the process of creation, which required perfection over time. Instead of a perfectly ordered world, God first creates ‘a chaos of heaven and earth’, which is then perfected by God’s creation of light. John Calvin, \textit{Commentaries on the First Book of Moses called Genesis}, trans. Rev. John King M.A. (Grand Rapids: House Books, 1989), 69–70.

\textsuperscript{18} BLJ. 4.82.

\textsuperscript{19} On the effect of Byron’s Calvinist upbringing, Lady Byron wrote, ‘With the dark predestination, which early Calvinistic impressions and later Oriental observations, had tended to infix in his mind, I perceived, […] that a proudly mortifying consciousness of his personal defect was associated.’ Elwin, \textit{Lord Byron’s Wife}, 270. She made a similar remark in 1836: ‘I find that I have not spoken of the morbidly tenacious feeling he had as to his lameness. There was a connection in his imagination between that & his Predestination to Evil, or his being an Exiled Angel.’ Elwin, \textit{Lord Byron’s Wife}, 271.

\textsuperscript{20} In Manfred’s visit to the underworld (as discussed in chapter 5) and also \textit{Cain}. He mentions Zoroastrian philosophy in canto XIII of \textit{Don Juan}, where he makes reference to ‘that same devilish doctrine of the Persians, / Of the two Principles’ (324–5). There he uses the idea somewhat disparagingly. For an fuller account see Peter Cochran, \textit{Manfred and Zoroastrianism}, 2004, PDF file, International Byron Society, Available http://www.internationalbyronsociety.org/images/stories/pdf_files/manf_zoroast.pdf, 24/07/07.
The binary world model was not limited to the inheritors of the Judaic tradition. Michael Kane has argued that similar ideas were endemic to the philosophical traditions of the Classical world:

\[\text{T}\]he Pythagoreans, as convinced moral dualists, drew up two columns under the headings of good things and bad things. In the good column, along with light, unity and the male came limit; in the bad column, with darkness, plurality and the female is placed the unlimited.\(^\text{21}\)

It is easy to extend this list further, and Kane does so, to include the distinctions of mind and body, spirit and matter, culture and nature, and so on. Although, as Kane also suggests, dualism has lost a lot of influence in contemporary thought, called into doubt by the precepts of post-structuralist criticism, binarism remains essential to many of the major fields of thought within our culture.

Other classical texts offer further instances of a conventional construction of darkness that continued to exert influence in Regency England. Hesiod’s *Theogony*, which traces the genealogy of the gods in Greek myth, sees darkness serving a significant generative function and gives it a specific gendered aspect. As in versions of the biblical myth, Hesiod’s darkness is a direct descendant of Chaos, and in the guise of feminine Night, is figured as the progenitor of a litter of awful children:

\[\text{H}\]ateful Doom and dark Fate and Death, […]. Cavil and painful Misery […] and the fates she bore, and the merciless punishing Furies […] Resentment also, an affliction for mortal men, and after her, Deceit […] accursed Old Age and […] hard-hearted Strife. (211–25)\(^\text{22}\)

Darkness in its feminine aspect becomes the mother of all of the woes of humankind. Such a gendered construction forms another essential element of the traditional representations of darkness. Hesiod goes further, making certain to point out that those children are born though

\[\text{22}\] Hesiod, *Theogony*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White (1914), 9. ‘Resentment’ is the word White chooses to render the Greek goddess Nemesis.
she ‘bedded none of the gods.’

Byron’s darkness does not stand outside the influence of such conventional forms of representation, but one of the things that make his use of darkness so engaging is the way that it interrogates and reimagines the character of the dark. Byron’s affinity for darkness made him its champion – perhaps, in the spirit of what is often said of Milton, a little of the devil’s party. Darkness, under Byron’s influence, is often threatening; but it is also laudable at times and can imbue an object or person with power and value. Byron does often employ negative stereotypes, but when he does, it is often to rework it into a more positive, empowering structure.

Finally, I must briefly mention the methodology I have adopted to explore Byron’s poetics of darkness. By introducing my study as ideological, I have entered an intellectual arena that contains a great deal of contested space. As numerous critics have acknowledged, there is a great deal of controversy about what ‘ideology’ means. Terry Eagleton, for instance, produces an extensive list of ideological ‘types’, indicating that the sixteen different forms of ideology he specifies do not necessarily encompass all possible ways of rendering the term. That said, however, he does indicate, in a later work, his belief that, although ideology was originally produced as a category in the parlance of Enlightenment thought, for contemporary scholars it is always mediated through the theoretical constructs of its Marxist heritage.

John B. Thompson, on the other hand, narrows the range of types to two groups of ideological theory:

On the one hand, ‘ideology’ is employed by many authors as if it were a purely descriptive term: one speaks of ‘systems of thought’, of ‘systems of belief’ of

25 Terry Eagleton, ed., *Ideology* (London and New York: Longman, 1994), 1–14. That said there are many scholars who have modified, expanded or reacted against those Marxist origins. Other prominent thinkers who have produced important works on ideology include Bourdieu, Gramsci, Habermas, Voloshinov, Althusser, Lukács, Adorno and Jameson.
‘symbolic practices’ which pertain to social action or political projects. [...] There is, however, another sense of ‘ideology’ [...] essentially linked to the process of sustaining asymmetrical relations of power.26

Both of those types are essentially useful and not entirely exclusive, although the second term, the more typically ‘Marxist’ concept, is the more limiting of the two, and does not necessarily always represent the kind of ideology that I intend to discuss in this work.

My main use for the term ‘ideology’ is to indicate that my work is interested in how systems of ideas are organized and explores how darkness acts as a conceptual element within the discursive structures formed by those systems. Although such usage does not strictly adhere to the term’s Marxist heritage, the term remains useful because it also conveys my interest in showing how those discourses represent power relationships, the roles those relationships play in formulating real-world politics, and how such power relationships in turn structure their own discourse, shaping and determining the language used to talk about them.

That is not to say, however, that the Marxist definition of ideology is completely irrelevant to this work. Eagleton provides a useful account of a typically Marxist construction of ideology:

Ideology is not in the first place a set of doctrines; it signifies the way men live out their roles in class-society, the values, ideas and images which tie them to their social functions and so prevent them from a true knowledge of society as a whole.27

Marx’s ‘ideology’, the hidden force created (consciously or not) by the way that humans organize their lives, is in its broadest sense one of the fundamental elements of any cultural practice. In Marx’s original work the hidden aspect of ideology was essential, giving rise to his formulating the idea of false consciousness. Whatever modifications have been made to the concept of ideology since Marx, that idea of a limiting and pervasive force, which modulates the relation-

ship between the individual and society, stands as a necessary point of
departure.

The ‘use’ Byron makes of darkness is not necessarily conscious
or planned and the ideology expressed and implied by his work is
often engaged with the workings of ‘hidden’ power – hidden from
society and, often, from himself. For example, Byron exploits dark-
ness as an aspect of his Scottish heritage because to do so seems
poetic, but he does not appear to be aware of, nor interested in, the
assumptions that lie behind the association. As I have indicated, how-
ever, I do not wish to suggest that Byron was always unaware of what
he was doing, and in some cases, particularly as I will argue in
relation to *Manfred* in chapter five, he deliberately exploits the ideo-
logical function of language to create specific effects.

With that point in mind, I also wish to consider Foucault’s
account of ideology, as it specifically links the concept to language
and knowledge, making ideology as much the product of discourse as
its origin. In Foucauldian thought, individuals are formed in relation to
specific ways of thinking about the world, which, in turn, are dictated
by the language available for describing them. That relationship be-
tween ideology and discourse is a fundamental principle for this study.
As such, I am interested in many of the ideas that Foucault outlines as
central to discursive analysis: power relations, formations of enuncia-
tive modalities, and coalescence of discursive formations. Although I
try to avoid making over-use of such terms in the body of my work,
the ideas are important to my method of procedure.

Strictly speaking Foucault avoided the term ‘ideology’, but that
dispute over nomenclature is indicative of his strategy for distancing
his work from a reductive Marxist discourse. In reading Foucault as
ideological, however, I am not breaking new ground, as I am by no
means the first to read his work in that way. Chris Horrocks and Zoran
Jevtic, for instance equate Foucault’s ‘statement’ in *The Archaeology
of Knowledge* with Althusser’s ideology, while Eagleton, too, dis-
cusses Foucault’s work as ideological, although he stresses his belief
that Foucault’s construction of ideology weakens it to the point that it

---

becomes meaningless.\textsuperscript{29} Eagleton’s next proposition, however, that ideology ‘is a matter of “discourse” rather than “language”’, and that it is ‘less a matter of the inherent linguistic properties of a pronouncement than a question of who is saying what to whom and for what purposes’, is essentially Foucauldian – even though Eagleton credits the ideas to masters he feels more comfortable associating with: Emile Beneviste and Raymond Williams.\textsuperscript{30} Eagleton’s argument also begs the question it asks about power, for he never actually disputes Foucault’s claim that all values and beliefs are bound up with power.

Foucault’s analysis does effectively broaden the range of ideas that can be construed as ideological, but far from weakening the term, such an approach allows it to encompass other ideas that must be considered ideological – including, for instance, forces that are not necessarily hidden.\textsuperscript{31} If ideology is a construct that derives from language and knowledge, and I believe it to be so, subjects are limited to an extent by the language they use and the thought structures to which they have access, whether they are aware of them or not.

\textsuperscript{29} Eagleton, \textit{Ideology: An Introduction}, 7–8.
\textsuperscript{30} ‘If there are no values and beliefs not bound up with power, then the term ideology threatens to expand to vanishing point. Any word which covers everything loses its cutting edge […] If power […] is omnipresent, then the word ideology ceases to single out anything in particular and becomes wholly uninformative.’ Eagleton, \textit{Ideology: An Introduction}, 9.
\textsuperscript{31} Slavoj Žižek also challenges the idea that ideology is necessarily hidden, re-writing what he sees as Marx’s quintessential formulation of ideology. His own statement: ‘They know very well how things really are, but still they are [acting] as if they did not know’, reworks Marx’s statement in \textit{Kapital}: ‘Sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es.’ – ‘They do not know it, but they are doing it.’ Žižek, \textit{The Sublime Object of Ideology}, Phronesis, eds. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (London: Verso, 1989), 32. Žižek’s argument is that although people are aware of being subject to ideological processes they continue to act as though they were not aware of the fact. That idea challenges Marx’s assumptions about the way to counter ideology (since Marx saw education and awareness as the key to overcoming ideology) but does not, entirely, demand a different framework for considering the way in which ideology is constructed. Žižek also implicitly challenges certain aspects Foucault’s argument, particularly his ideas about the possibility of resisting ideology, but such problems lie more in relation to the processes by which the individual is subject to ideology than in its basic construction, and lie beyond the scope of this present study.
Foucault’s ‘archaeology of knowledge’ is expressly a method for historical analysis involving the study of the relationship between different discursive structures:

Archaeological analysis individualizes and describes discursive formations. That is, it must compare them, oppose them to one another in the simultaneity in which they are presented, distinguish them from those that do not belong to the same time-scale, relate them, on the basis of their specificity, to the non-discursive practices that surround them and serve as a general element for them. [...] Archaeological study is always in the plural; it operates in a great number of registers; it crosses interstices and gaps; it has its domain where unities are juxtaposed, separated, fix their crests, confront one another, and accentuate the whitespaces between with one another.32

One of the ideas that drive this study is that it may be possible to utilize the presence of darkness in a variety of discursive fields to produce a reading of the relationships between and among different ideologies; not only to illuminate points of similarity, but also to discern the places of rupture and liminality. The intermingling of ideologies through the discourse of darkness forms the basis upon which this work proceeds.

Such an approach is similar to certain aspects of Bakhtinian theory, suggested by his concept of heteroglossia.33 Although Bakhtin sees the novel as the primary location of heteroglossia, one of the major implications of his work is that all language is heteroglossic in nature. The tension between the unitary notion of language and the multiplicity of languages actually spoken is present regardless of


33 Simon Dentith provides an excellent description of heteroglossia: ‘Bakhtin produces a dynamic account of language which sees it pulled in opposite directions: centripetally, towards the unitary centre provided by a notion of “national language”; and centrifugally, towards the various languages which actually constitute the apparent but false unity of a national language. Bakhtin’s word for these various languages is heteroglossia (raznorecie, literally “multispeechedness”); it is a word he coins himself to allude to the multiplicity of actual “languages” which are at any time spoken by the speakers of any “language”.’ Simon Dentith, _Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader_, Critical Readers in Theory and Practice, ed. Rick Rylance (London: Routledge, 1995), 35.
whether the artist is aware it, and, as such, all textual artefacts (including so called ‘monologic’ texts) can be examined for the way in which they deploy meaning through linguistic association. Bakhtin suggests such an approach in his essay, ‘Discourse in the Novel’ (1934–5), where he introduces the idea of the ‘hybrid construction’:

> a hybrid construction is an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two ‘languages’, two semantic and axiological belief systems.34

The hybrid construction can exist as a complex grammatical formation, but can equally be manifest as a single word: ‘one and the same word […] belong[ing] simultaneously to […] two belief systems that intersect’.35 If that is the case, it is possible to examine single words or ideas in any text and to explore what belief systems they indicate and how they help to shape its discourse. Such an approach helps to illuminate the work’s symbolic order, and, projecting outwards, the symbolic order of the cultural sphere in which it is produced (including, of course, that in which the text is re-produced through the process of reading).

As I stated at the outset, darkness is a relatively fluid term, and it cuts into many discursive fields. One of the characteristic traits of darkness is its ability to obscure and hide (as will be discussed in the first chapter, an aspect of darkness central to Burke’s incorporation of darkness into his sublime aesthetics). The study of darkness in this work tries to canvas as wide a range of its discursive possibilities as it can. In the earlier chapters I focus upon ‘darkness’ quite literally. Chapter one explores its position in Burke’s sublime aesthetic, exploring the relationship between that aesthetic discourse and the discourses of gender and sexuality as it plays out in and around Byron’s 1816 lyric ‘Darkness’. The second chapter then picks up the quite literal presence of darkness in Byron’s juvenilia and explores its

---


function in solving his quest for an authentic poetic voice by tapping into a discourse of Scottish nationalism. The third chapter loosens its focus a little, looking at the way that darkness operates in the construction of Byron’s racial discourse, inquiring into the effect of his identification with darkness on his so called Orientalism, and then analysing the effect that identification has on the production of black (physically dark) characters in his poetry. The fourth chapter explores the role of textual darkness (or narrative gaps) in producing Byron’s poetics of fragmentation and the role of ‘virtual space’ in his work. Concentrating on two of Byron’s Oriental narratives, The Corsair and Lara, I argue that the function of such darkness is essential in Byron’s developing idea of heroic action. The final chapter considers the role of darkness in mediating the relationship between Byron, his poetry, and his audience during the production and reception of Manfred. Although those chapters by no means exhaust the possible permutations of ‘the dark’ in Byron’s work, I believe they are indicative of the scope of possibilities facilitated by such modes of reading.

The choice to begin this study with an exploration of gender and sexual discourse is not arbitrary. Even within the context of a wider critical discourse, the ideology of sexuality remains one of the most hotly debated fields in contemporary theory, and one of the hardest to pin down. Foucault’s observation that ‘[b]etween each of us and our sex, the West has placed a never-ending demand for truth’, has never rung so true. The challenge following – that, ‘it is up to us to extract the truth of sex, since this truth is beyond its grasp; it is up to sex to tell us our truth, since sex is what holds it in darkness’ 36 – is one that remains as pertinent today as it did when The History of Sexuality was first published in the 1970s. Given the controversies that continue to govern discussions of Byron’s sexuality, and the significance of this issue in critical interpretations of his life and work, it is fitting that we should initially look to the discourse of darkness to see what truths can be told about sex.