

THE READER'S PILGRIMAGE

Narration and Textual Levels in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*

0. Introduction

- the importance of the narrator – interdependency of hero, narrator, and author
- several layers of the text – core text, notes, Byron's comments
- relation to the romantic verse narrative – Fischer (1991), Szegedy-Maszák (1982)

1. The Eye and the Voice

Childe Harold's status in the text – a hero?

(1) "A fictitious character is introduced for the sake of giving some connection to the piece; which, however, makes no pretension to regularity." (Byron's preface to the first two cantos)

→ Harold has a function: own character subsidiary to this

appendix to the first preface: Harold illustrates the consequences of 'early perversion of mind and morals'

narrative part of Harold's story: living a considerably sinful life → suffering from a kind of disillusionment → deciding to leave his country and to travel

Harold's journey: not about his deeds but about what he sees

→ role of the focalizer instead of the focalized

narrator's speech: overwhelming Harold's perception and cognition

showing the focalizer: reassuring connection between various parts of the journey
narrative gestures of alienation

most of the text shared between Harold and the narrator → first merger

Harold less and less important as the text proceeds

→ deconstructing the established structure – shift in Canto III (Wolfson and Manning 2004; Galperin 1998)

personal references of the narrator – beginning of the third canto (addressing daughter)

shared experience: spleen

narrator: not only source but also theme of the text

(2) 'Tis to create, and in creating live
A being more intense, that we endow
With form our fancy, gaining as we give
The life we image, even as I do now.
What am I? Nothing: but not so art thou,
Soul of my thought! with whom I traverse earth,
Invisible but gazing, as I glow
Mix'd with thy spirit, blended with thy birth,
And feeling still with thee in my crush'd feelings' dearth. (III. 6.)

narrator accompanies Harold → change in the roles → Harold ultimately disappearing, also with his name lost (the Pilgrim)

alienation from the hero rather exchanged for an admitted merger (end of Canto IV)

2. Don Juan and Childe Harold – Playing (in) Different Narrative Games

Don Juan: higher degree of reflexivity – for details, see Bacskai-Atkari (2008)

Childe Harold: no radical separation of narrator and hero – the eye and the voice
occasional distancing: alienation – negative definition of the narrator

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

(*Don Juan*, I. 1.)

→ *Don Juan*: early dominance of the narrator – fittest hero; story well-known to the readers – Haslett (1997)

role of the story – reflections (diegetic and extradiegetic level)
lack of story in *Childe Harold*
narrator not personified enough – reflexivity reduced

different treatment of literary norms

3. Textual Levels

Childe Harold: problematic as a verse novel

interaction of the core text with the notes; personal remarks – also in *Don Juan*

- (4) “It is a well known fact, that in the year 1809, the assassination in the streets of Lisbon and its vicinity were not confined by the Portuguese to their countrymen; but that Englishmen were daily butchered: and so far from redress being obtained, we were requested not to interfere if we perceived any compatriot defending himself against his allies. I was once stopped in the way to the theatre at eight o'clock in the evening, when the streets were not more empty than they generally are at that hour, opposite to an open shop, and in a carriage with a friend: had we not fortunately been armed, I have not the least doubt that we should have ‘adorned a tale’ instead of telling one. (...)” (cf. I. 21.)

author of the notes ~ narrator (second merger)

Selected references

- Bacskai-Atkari, Julia (2008) The Ironic Hero: Narration in Lord Byron's *Don Juan*. *Első Század* 2008/1: 45–89.
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- Fischer, Hermann (1991) *Romantic Verse Narrative: the History of a Genre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Galperin, W. H. The Postmodernism of *Childe Harold*. In: Stabler, Jane (ed.) *Byron*. London: Longman, 1998. 138–151.
- Szegedy-Maszák, Mihály (1982) *Kubla kán és Pickwick úr: Romantika és realizmus az angol irodalomban*. Budapest: Magvető Kiadó.
- Wolfson, S. J., and Manning, P. J. (2004) Introduction. In: Byron, Lord George Gordon. *Don Juan*. London, Penguin Books Ltd. vii–xxviii.