Hawliyat is the official peer-reviewed journal of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Balamand. It publishes articles from the field of Humanities.

**Journal Name:** Hawliyat

**ISSN:** 1684-6605

**Title:** Male Postpartum Preface: Cervantes and Lord Byron’s Prefaces to Don Quixote and Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage

**Authors:** May Maalouf

**To cite this document:**


**Permanent link to this document:** DOI: https://doi.org/10.31377/haw.v17i0.65

Hawliyat uses the Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-SA that lets you remix, transform, and build upon the material for non-commercial purposes. However, any derivative work must be licensed under the same license as the original.
Male Postpartum Preface: Cervantes’s Preface to Don Quixote and Lord Byron’s Preface to Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage

May MAALOUF

Constituting but a fringe of the body of an author’s work, the “preface” has emerged as a worthy adversary, contesting and challenging authors’ and readers’ interpretation of a text. The dialectical discourse of ambiguity, of engagement and disengagement between author-text-reader becomes more problematic when prefaces assume a generative role for the author or the hero, wherein texts are seen as ‘children’ of the author’s brain. Although much has been written on the rhetorical strategies or narratorial masks of a preface, not much has been done on the parturition trope in Miguel de Cervantes and Lord Byron. As early as the XVIIth century, writers have used the preface as a medium to explain the ‘labors’ of the ‘birthing’ of their ‘literary children’. Nevertheless, when this paradigm oscillates between denying and defending, embracing and abandoning, owning and disowning, it behooves the reader to look closely at it as quite symptomatic of the after-birth syndrome known as postpartum anxiety. This paper proposes a reading of the preface as a birth certificate, which while it legitimizes the hero, problematizes the parental relationship between father/author and son/text or hero, for it involves more than the ontological history of the hero or the text. What seems to be at work in Miguel de Cervantes’s preface to Don Quixote and Lord Byron’s Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, is more like a postpartum anxiety that is as dialectical as Plato’s discussion of male pregnancy in The Symposium. Focusing on the importance of the preface, this paper contends that Cervantes’s and Byron’s respective prefaces could be seen as an extension of Diotima’s argument on male creative pregnancy, with

(1) Holding a PhD in English Literature from Indiana University (Bloomington), May Maalouf is an assistant professor at the Lebanese University. She has participated in many national, regional and international conferences and published several articles. She is the president of the “Lebanese Lord Byron Society” and Assistant Editor of “International Journal of Arabic and English Studies”.
a major difference: the progeny doesn’t enjoy Diotima’s requirements of wisdom and virtue, rather it is begotten in the ‘ugly’. Having fathered failed knights, one who is a ‘hidalgo’ and delusional about being one and the other a ‘Childe’ unable to be born as one, the authors’ birthing tropes are inextricably connected to their anxiety about their new self-image as professional writers and their ownership.

On Prefaces

The importance of prefaces is minutely anatomized in Gerard Genette’s *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. To Genette, paratexts are these liminal spaces such as titles, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, notes, intertitles, epilogues... all of which “constitute a zone ... of transaction” to influence the readers and ensure the proper reception of the text (2). However, that the most difficult and important of paratexts is the preface is evident in Genette’s dedicating two chapters (9 and 10) to its types and functions in order to attempt an answer to the “diabolically simple question” of “what do prefaces actually do?” (196). Simpkins also prioritizes the authorial preface and the transaction between the author and the text. He says that when the preface “comes from the authors themselves, [it] speaks with more authority about it than an ‘outside’ commentator could wield” (20), and that when the preface is written by the author (who may assume whatever performative role or mask is needed) being is privileged to do so, then it goes beyond the much-debated issue of the “death of the author”.

However, this author-text relationship tends to be quite ambivalent once it involves the composition of the author’s literary image. In her study of prefaces by XVIIIth century women writers, Nixon not only challenges Genette’s rather patriarchal typology, but also argues for the self-definition paradigm that these women authors call for in their prefaces:

While the utility of these mechanisms of self-definition are often not questioned within the body of the text, the preface reveals the conflicts that arise from the author’s attempt to enact fictional strategies of self-definitions in non-fictional spaces. (123-24)
This ontological function of the preface is further highlighted by other critics who see it as symptomatic of the anxiety of cutting the umbilical cord. Maclean notes that the paratexts posit more of a symbiotic relationship between author and reader as

authors may be seen either desperately clinging to a placental rapport with a text which has passed irretrievably beyond their control, or vigorously launching it into a new life totally controlled by that necessary yet feared third party, the reader. (278)

Such placental connection is also noted by Cunningham who, as if describing a new mother’s postpartum anxiety, says that in the preface the author “is the most literary man” where “the parturition of his thoughts, must... suffer, for at the birth of what he writes, something has left him, far beyond recall, which leaves him poorer, and perhaps enriches no one” (202). Indeed it is this ‘placental’ link that is at work in Cervantes’s and Byron’s prefaces, but not just to their reader, rather to their own birth as authors.

In their prefaces to Don Quixote and Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, respectively, Cervantes and Byron assume a female generative quality and describe their relationship to their texts with tropes of the begetting of their eponymous heroes; they are ‘children of the imagination/brain’. However, in both works, the heroes suffer a lot at the hands of their progenitors. One of the reasons for the ambivalence in the authors fully embracing their child/hero could be understood in terms of postpartum anxiety. First of all, the prefatory material to Don Quixote, Parts I and II, and Byron’s to Hours of Idleness and Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, represent early public appearances of the author as a professional writer. But when the author has fathered prior unsuccessful “literary children”, much is at stake with the new one to be published/delivered; hence, the fluctuation in properly acknowledging his fatherhood. Second, both writers were presenting totally new genres of writing that would add to the pressure of being in the public eye, especially the critics’ eye. Earning a reputation of accomplished authors is the aim of many authors, including Cervantes and Byron, which would place them under a lot of pressure to gain the approbation of reviewers. According to Nicholson, one of the approaches to Postpartum depression is the
social-science model which “stresses external, psychosocial factors which act as stressors” (29). Such external pressures could be “the role changes that might be involved for some women during the transition to motherhood” or “an unsatisfactory birth experience may be related to subsequent depression” (29-30). Translated into literary terms, both Cervantes and Byron suffered social stresses (such as critics’ reviews and piracy of their works) and “unsatisfactory” first literary progeny (such as La Galatea and Hours of Idleness, respectively). However, what is distinctive about these authors is that by expressing in their prefaces the “birthing” anxieties of their works and of themselves and by overcoming them in the more emboldened language of Don Quixote, Prologue for Part II, and in the prefaces to Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, especially Cantos III-IV, they turn out to be fathers of great works.

What follows will trace pre-and-postnatal anxiety of the prefaces. While with Cervantes we see this poetic of pregnancy condensed in the two prologues of Don Quixote, with Byron it is more of an ongoing process that begins with Hours of Idleness and ends with Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, Canto III-IV.

In Don Quixote, Part I, the prologue offers Cervantes as the father of the fictional book “born out of my own brain”; as the “stepfather” who is not worried about his “child’s fault’s”; as the historian who has dug up the “history” of Don Quixote from “the archives of La Mancha” (7-8), reconfigured later in the text as the “second author” of Sidi Hamid’s narrative (DQ, I, 49), and as the editor of the Spanish translation of Hamid’s Arabic chronicle of Don Quixote (DQ, I, 52). Enmeshed with Cervantes’s multiple voices in the prologue, critics tend to explicate his claim of fatherhood in terms of narratological and authorial strategies, bypassing the possibility that the dialogicity of the prologue emanates from Cervantes’s equivocal relationship to Don Quixote. For although Cervantes claims that his purpose is to denounce the chivalric romance

by presenting "a sniveling child, withered, whining, its head stuffed
with all kinds of thoughts that no one else would even think of", to
whom he is a "stepfather" (DQ, 7), by the end of Part II he not only
identifies himself with his knight, but also as the only one who can
bring him to life (DQ, 749).

This equivocation regarding the noble yet delusional knight is but
one symptom of literary fatherhood that is as anxious as any mother
towards her new-born infant.

Another anxiety in the preface is clear in the supposed difficulty in
writing the prologue itself. Aiming to "[demolish] chivalric romances"
(DQ, 11), Cervantes begins with imploding the traditional practices of
writing a prologue by refusing to write one: "Though writing the book
was hard, nothing was harder than this preface you’re reading right
now" (7). To Cervantes offering the book to the public "just as it is,
plain and simple, not decorating it with a prologue or an endless list
of all the sonnets, epigrams, and elegies we put in the front of books"
(7), would have been much better. Nevertheless, Cervantes does end up
writing a prologue that is almost a manifesto of what writing should be
like, and at the end of Part I he does adorn his knight with three epitaphs
and three sonnets.

Lord Byron is equally a master of multiple voices in his works,
especially in Don Juan. Yet the reader gets an earlier glimpse of Byron’s
artistic multivocality in the first preface to Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage,
Cantos I-II. Similar to Cervantes, Byron is weary of being identified
with Childe Harold. He first describes him as "a fictitious character ...
introduced for the sake of giving some connection to the piece". But it was
clear to many a reader at the time that many of the particulars of Harold’s
history are drawn from Byron’s own. Byron himself acknowledges this
when he says, "In some very trivial particulars, and those merely local,
there might be grounds for such a notion; but in the main points, I should
hope, none whatever", and he categorically states "This I beg leave, once
for all, to disclaim—Harold is the child of imagination" (Byron 1). In
another instance, Byron tells his friend Dallas:

(3) Don Quixote, Part II, also, has not only a prologue addressed to the reader, but also a
dedication page and concludes the novel with a kind of prose elegy of the brave knight
and his adventures which “gave immense pleasure and satisfaction to all who read them,
whether here in Spain or abroad” (746).
I by no means intend to identify myself with Harold, but to deny all connection with him. If in parts I may be thought to have drawn from myself, believe me it is but in parts, and I shall not own even to that... I would not be such a fellow as I have made my hero for all the world. (qtd. in Coleridge, Vol. II, 8-9)

But while Byron is adamant “to deny all connections” with Harold, he is equally adamant in defending him against unfair judgement. In response to the charge that Harold’s behavior is unknightly, Byron refutes this charge by referring to two authorities, Sainte Palaye and Roland, on the misbehavior of knights in times of chivalry. He contends that “the good old times... were the most profligate of all possible centuries”, and exonerates Harold from any anachronism, for “whatever other objection may be urged to that most unamiable personage Childe Harold, he was so far perfectly knightly in his attributes” (Byron 2). Thus, Byron takes Harold’s critics to task that his knight, or knight-to-be, does represent knightly behavior of medieval times.

Yet as we come to Canto III and its famous opening addressed to his daughter Ada, a major shift in the poet’s voice occurs: Harold is absented only to be picked up in Stanza 3 as the “One”, as “the wandering outlaw of his own dark mind”, and with whom he bears “as the rushing wing / Bears the cloud onwards”. However, this ‘bearing’ of Stanza 3 ‘delivers’ in Stanza 6 a being that is more important than the ‘bearer,’ or the creator:

’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
Mixed with thy spirit, blended with thy birth,
And feeling still with thee in my crushed feelings’ dearth.

Childe Harold is both an image of Lord Byron and a “fictive character”; he is the “son” at whose begetting the poet’s “soul” is “mixed with”. But

by Canto IV, Byron is sad to announce the ‘death’ of Harold. Written in the form of a letter to Hobhouse, the preface to this Canto indicates Byron’s anxiety about his “child of the imagination”. He bids farewell to his progeny to whom he owes so much:

In parting with so old a friend, it is not extraordinary that I should recur to one still older and better [Hobhouse], - to one who has beheld the birth and death of the other, and to whom I am far more indebted for the social advantages of an enlightened friendship, than-though not ungrateful - I can, or could be, to Childe Harold, for any public favour reflected through the poem on the poet (Byron 53, emphasis added).

Harold is written off the narrative, and Byron, the poet, takes over. He says,

it was in vain that I asserted, and imagined that I had drawn, a distinction between the author and the pilgrim; and the very anxiety to preserve this difference, and disappointment at finding it unavailing, so far crushed my efforts in the composition, that I determined to abandon it altogether and have done so (54, emphasis added).

But whatever rhetorical manipulations Cervantes and Byron pull about their relationships to their heroes, their prefaces clearly display Plato’s spiritual male pregnancy that, while it mimics a female one, it does not usurp it.

Read in light of gender studies, Cervantes’s and Byron’s anxieties may be seen as symptomatic of “masculine frustration at not being biologically capable of developing and delivering a human being” or to issue an original idea (Sacks 4). Thus, “pregnancy of imagination” becomes “the poet’s ideal, and travail of childbirth the natural metaphor for poetic agony” (5). To Sacks, “The ubiquitous metaphor of generation ... establishes a ‘pregnant poetic’ for the Renaissance, an artistic convention” which became “almost mandatory, literary element” (10). Stephanson pursues Sack’s argument in reading late XVIIth and XVIIIth poetry. Constructed on homosocial bonds,

(5) Sacks lists several seventeenth-century poets and writers, referring to their being “great with Childe to speak” or to their “genuine forms struggle for birth” or to “the first increase of my barren brain” (7).
Stephanson claims that this metapoetic of male creativity depended on “sexualization of the poetical character [which] included tropes of conception, pregnancy, and birth” (105) and which promoted the brain as a womb, literally and figuratively.

Valid as such claims may be in light of gender studies, what the reader of Cervantes’s and Byron’s prefaces encounters is more in line of the classical tradition of Plato’s notion of male pregnancy in The Symposium, where their ‘pregnancy’ and giving birth to their “children of the imagination” is an attempt at giving birth to themselves to earn immortality through their writings.

The earliest discussion of male pregnancy is Diotima’s in Plato’s The Symposium. Although to Diotima “All men ... have a procreative impulse, both spiritual and physical” (86), she distinguishes between two types of male pregnancy. She points out that “those whose creative instinct is physical have recourse to women ... but there are some whose creative desire is of the soul, and who long to beget spiritually, not physically ... [and] of this all poets and such craftsmen ... may be said to be begetters” (90, emphasis added). However, what is most important in this discussion is the process of male pregnancy, which seems to refer to the seed. Diotima points out that the object of love is not beauty, but “to procreate and bring forth in beauty” (87, emphasis added) and she re-emphasizes that the poet whose desire is beauty “can never bring his children to birth in ugliness” (91, emphasis added). Discussing this type of spiritual pregnancy, Pender contends that in using the preposition ‘in’ to describe male begetting (and the prevalent Greek idea of the woman as a receptacle) means that the metaphor of birthing refers to the “birth of the seed with which the male had been pregnant” (74) and which he seeks to be “deliver [ed] ... from the severity of its pangs” (Plato 87). Pender adds that to Plato the “idea of intercourse as a childbirth follows a view widely attested in Greek literature, namely that male ejaculation represents the actual birth of a child and the father is therefore the true parent” (74). Thus, impregnating what is beautiful with the soul-seed brings forth “progeny ... of wisdom and virtue in general” (Plato 90), or, in other words, literary progeny such as Don Quixote and Childe Harold, with a major difference. Both Cervantes and Byron combine this male type of spiritual pregnancy and
birthing with female physical postpartum anxiety to deliver “wisdom and virtue” in the least expected of progeny: in “the ugly”, in failed knights.

Cervantes and Byron’s pleading/prenatal anxiety prefices DQ, Part I and CHP, Cantos I-II

To Cervantes, Don Quixote is “child of his brain”, the son, the stepson, or just a brave knight; for Byron, as well, Childe Harold is a “fictitious character” and “child of the imagination”. But the very modest success of their first progeny would definitely create anxiety in writers who were trying to reinvent themselves in their literary production. Although most critics explain the pleading preface as means of warding off criticism by critics or the public, such prefacers do exhibit symptoms of pre-and-postnatal anxiety. Both Cervantes’s and Byron’s experience of earlier literary “miscarriages”, Cervantes’s La Galatea (1585) and Byron’s Hours of Idleness (1809), were their first public appearance as writers. However, the imitative and self-referential nature of these works earned them very modest success. Close states that “beneath their pastoral guise, the shepherds [in La Galatea] stand for the author and his literary friends” (7). This is equally true of Byron’s book, which he himself referred to as “childish recollections” in an attempt to ward off critics’ censure.

Speaking of La Galatea, Close points out “Though the book was not a flop, going through two re-editions in Cervantes’s lifetime, [Cervantes] felt that it did not receive the recognition that it deserved” (6) For a detailed study of the pleading preface, see Leslie M. Thompson and John R. Ahrens, “Criticism of English Fiction 1780-1810: The Mysterious Powers of the Pleading Preface”. The Yearbook of English Studies. Vol. 1 (1971), 125-134. It is clear that the critics as well employed the parturition metaphor in their commentary on authors’ works. For example, in their scathing review of Shelley’s Zastrozzi: A Romance, the Critical Review describes the work as “one of the most savage and improbable demons that ever issued from a diseased brain” (127, emphasis added). In another instance, the English Review refers to The Life, History, Adventures, and Opinions of the Poor Blind Philosopher as “fell ‘still-born from the press’; we shall not, therefore (as the author expresses himself) either ‘give his child a box on the ear, or a kick in the breach”; not that we dread his threat of returning ‘the compliment with interest’; our leniency proceeds from not wishing to disturb the ashes of the dead” (128-129).
Most telling as to how Cervantes felt about his literary status and his book comes from Cervantes himself in *Don Quixote*, Chapter 6 of Part I. As the knight’s friends run through his library, the barber finds a book, *Galatea* by Miguel de Cervantes, to which the priest responds:

For years, this Cervantes has been a great friend of mine, and he certainly knows a lot more about misfortune than he does about poetry. There are good touches in his book; he starts some things, but he finishes nothing; we can only hope the second part, which he keeps promising, will set matters right and the book will earn the compassion now denied it (DQ 39).

Cervantes, nevertheless, continues to write prolifically as a playwright. According to O’Neill, there was a “flurry of activity [that] becomes even more remarkable when we consider that Cervantes was not only in his mid to late sixties but suffering from chronic ill-health with oedema” (7). He wrote several plays which were performed, and luckily according to Cervantes, without “offerings of cucumbers or other throwable matter” (qtd. in Close 8); however, his later plays, according to O’Neill, “did not arouse any interest amongst the *autores*, the all-powerful actor-managers who determined the repertoire of the theatre companies” (3).

Thus, when he comes to *Don Quixote*, Cervantes is quite worried about not only his literary image, but also about how the readers will receive his completely original genre and hero. According to Boyd, “the primary purpose of the prologue, from the author’s point of view, was the *captatio benevolentiae*: the ‘capturing’ of the goodwill of the reader”, which Cervantes adheres to in *La Galatea*, but completely departs from in *Don Quixote* (48). The opening sentence of the Prologue of *Don Quixote*, Part I, capitalizes on probably the most endearing trope: the author as a father to the text. He begins with his wish to have offered the readers a much better child, but bad genes seem to be in control. He says,

Leisurely reader: you don’t need me to swear that I longed for this book, born out of my brain, to be the handsomest child imaginable, the most elegant, the most sensible. But could I contradict the natural order of things? Like creates like. So what could my sterile, half-educated wit give birth to except the history of a sniveling child, withered, whining, its head stuffed with all kinds of thoughts no one else would think of ... (7)
It is ‘genetics’ that has brought forth such a dim-witted personage. In addition to his self-deprecation as a “half-educated wit”, Cervantes’s description of how he ‘conceived’ the novel is probably exemplary of Plato’s male pregnancy: the gestation of the novel/hero was in bad conditions as the external physical surroundings were not conducive to conceive a more likeable and intelligent son. Having been incarcerated or “confined” in a “jail cell”, his conception of the novel did not enjoy “peace, a calm spot, delightful meadows, serene skies, murmuring brooks, and a tranquil spirit [which would] turn even the most sterile Muses fertile, filling the world with wonderful, delightful offspring” (7).

Further taking blame as a father, Cervantes defends his son for “[s]ometimes a father has an ugly child, utterly unlovely”, yet he is often “blind to its faults and sees them as wit and charm and describes them to his friends as clever and graceful” (7). However, in the very next line, Cervantes denies his paternity and assumes the status of a stepfather and will not resort to typical pleading to forgo the demerits of the child: “I’m not interested in saying things just because everybody else does, or in begging you, dearest reader, with tears in my eyes, to please forgive or overlook my child’s faults” (7). But Cervantes has already taken the blame for the ‘deformities’ and pleaded for his readers’ understanding of the natural and unnatural circumstances of the conception of the child. And by the end of the prologue, Don Quixote is no more the earlier “sniveling child, withered, whining” but “the purest, chastest lover and the bravest knight errant seen in those parts for many years” (11).

Looked at from a rhetorical perspective, these fluctuations in the prologue have been seen as Cervantes’s “writer’s block” and his use of a “language of impotence” cast in terms of “natural and unnatural generation, legitimate and illegitimate fatherings, fruitful inseminations and incontinent disseminations” (Black 109). Likewise, Presberg sees the prologue as a performative act on the part of Cervantes and hence “not a prologue” (220). Caught within the narrative strategies and ironic modes employed by Cervantes, these critics tend to overlook the possibility that such variations of masking and unmasking of the author could be connected to the parental metaphor used, to Cervantes’s anxiety about his image as a writer and the reception of the new-born child of his brain.
Similar anxiety appears in Byron’s preface to Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage. However, to better understand the birthing metaphor in Byron, a quick look at the poet’s very first public appearance as a poet in Hours of Idleness (1806) shows that it is almost exemplary of the pleading preface. As his first public book of poetry, Hours of Idleness is heavily personal and related to the young lord’s youth in Scotland. In the preface he says, “These productions are the fruits of the lighter hours of a young man, who has lately completed his nineteenth year” (Byron 84). Byron continues that these poems bear the internal evidence of a boyish mind ... Some few were written during the disadvantages of illness, and depression of spirits: under the former influence, Childish Recollections in particular, were composed. This consideration, though it cannot excite the voice of Praise, may at least arrest the arm of censure. (Byron 84, emphasis added).

Indeed most of the preface is to safeguard against critics’ negative review. Equally as famous as this preface is the denigrating and vitriolic response of the Edinburgh Review (1808) by Lord Brougham, which later on occasioned Byron’s satire English Bards and Scottish Reviewers (1809). But, undeterred by such bad review, like Cervantes, Byron continues to write, and the success of Hints from Horace and The Curse of Minerva emboldened him to think of publishing the first two cantos of Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage. However, the ‘birth pangs’ were not so easy. Even when consenting to the publication of Cantos I-II, Byron’s anxiety was more aggravated with the difficulty in finding a publisher, for “so apprehensive was the poet for his fame...” and of “the qualms and terrors he had, at first”, that he was thinking of not publishing the work at all (Life, Vol. II, 16), and he expressed his intent to publish them anonymously: “I much wish to avoid identifying Childe Harold’s character with mine, and that, in sooth, is my second objection to my name appearing in the title-page” (Life, Vol. II, 30). To avoid any biographical or ‘biological’ affinity with Harold, he refers, in the first preface to Cantos I-II, to Childe Harold as nothing but

(7) See Peter Cochran, ed. Hours of Idleness. 
A fictitious character ... introduced for the sake of giving some connection to the piece; which, however, makes no pretension to regularity

and that though there may be

some very trivial particulars, and those merely local, there might be grounds for such a notion; but in the main points, I should hope, none whatever. (Byron 1)

Nevertheless, all this denial was to no avail. E.H. Coleridge's comment on the autobiographical element of the poem is revealing and points out that Byron "had sate for the portrait of Childe Harold [and] he had begun by calling his hero Childe Burun, and the few particulars which he gives ... were particulars of Byron's own history" (V. II, 9). Moreover, Coleridge's description of the equivocal relationship Byron had with his hero is quite fitting of a prenatal anxiety and worth quoting in full. He says:

But though he shrank from the obvious and inevitable conclusion that Childe Harold was Byron in disguise, and idly "disclaimed" all connection, it was true that he had intended to draw a fictitious character, a being whom he may have feared he might one day become, but whom he did not recognize as himself... Byron was not Harold, but Harold was an ideal Byron, the creature and avenger of his pride, which haunted and pursued its presumptuous creator to the bitter end. (Works, Vol. II, 9)

Byron's fear of suffering again the humiliation of a review such as Brougham's on Hours of Idleness and his awareness of the personal elements in the poem not only made him reluctant to publish the work under his name, but also to deny his fatherhood.

In the Addition to the Preface of Cantos I-II, Byron continues to carry a sense of anxiety and ambiguous relationship with his fictional child/character. On the one hand, Byron further affirms that Childe Harold is "a fictitious personage" employed "for the sake of giving some connection to the piece" (Byron 2), yet the rest of the preface is a staunch defense of his hero, and probably of himself. Although the Cantos received minimal criticisms, George Ellis's accusations of anachronisms in the characterization of his "vagrant Childe" as being "very unknighthly", incensed Byron and gives a strong defense of a father of a misjudged son, despite the faults Childe Harold has. Byron, and in
minute detail, refutes Ellis’s charges by drawing on the same sources of chivalry that Ellis himself considered as authoritative. According to Schroeder, Byron takes Ellis to task when he refers, by volume and page, to Sainte-Palaye, who mentions knightly misconducts in times of chivalry (28).

With the vindication of his hero, the reader is led to believe that the father has accepted his child. He says of him, “Whatever other objection may be urged to that most unamiable personage Childe Harold, he was so far perfectly knightly in his attributes” (Byron 2). Byron, however, “leave[s] Childe Harold to live his day as he is without any adornment to his personality” (Byron 2).

Thus, the anxiety in both Cervantes and Byron may properly contextualize the equivocations in their prefatory material as that of new mother worried about her new child. Denying and defending, caring and abandoning, owning and disowning, can all be seen as the birth throes of literary offsprings that do not match Plato’s procreation “in the beautiful”.

**Overcoming Postpartum Anxiety: Don Quixote, Part II and Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage III-IV**

With a text/hero seen as a ‘child’ who needs all the help they can get and pursuing the poetic of pregnancy theory, the preface stands as the prime support an author can devise to protect his/her progeny after giving birth. Cervantes claims that “though the book was hard work, nothing was harder than this preface you’re reading right now” (DQ, 7), yet he allocates almost five pages to the Prologue and supplements his work with all kinds of paratexts. He even conjures an imaginary friend to help ensure the proper reception of his book. On his part, Byron also states that Childe Harold is just a fictitious character, yet he arms his travels with all kinds of paratextual material to earn him legitimacy. Jerome McGann finds it quite important and relevant in the interpretative process to attend to paratextual elements, especially in Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage. He says that “This book is worth pausing over—not the poem but the book”—as it has
1. The title poem in two cantos; 2. The extensive notes to the cantos; 3. A section headed ‘Poems’ which included fourteen short pieces; 4. An Appendix containing bibliographical materials, translations, Romaine transcriptions, and one facsimile manuscript, all having to do with the current state of literary culture of modern Greece”. (259-60)

He further contends that “it is the ‘books’, rather than the ‘poems’... which draw attention to the central quality of Byron’s poetical work” (265, emphasis added). Nevertheless, McGann and other Byron scholars do not attend closely to the prefaces of the poem 8.

Given the astounding success of the first part of their books 9, Cervantes and Byron get more emboldened, but not without a touch of sadness for the ‘killing’ of their offsprings. Strengthened by such recognition, their postpartum anxiety in the sequels is eased into more compassionate feelings towards their sons/texts. Other than the maturity of their creative genius, one of the main reasons for their complete endorsement of their progeny is the attempt at ‘kidnapping’ them by imposters, an act that calls on both authors to overcome their postpartum anxiety and proclaim their ‘failed knights’ not only as their own, but also to take pride in being their ‘fathers’.

The long gestation of such literary “children of the brain” (while Don Quixote, Part II was published nine years after Part I, eight years separate Cantos I-II from III-IV) jeopardized the author’s self-image

(8) Alice Levine in “Byronic Annotations”, Byron Journal, 35 No. 2, 2007, 12-136, however, takes a different stand on the role of the annotations in Byron. To her in Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage I-II “the notes alter the poem’s effect and significantly supplement or extend its meaning” to the extent that as a travel poem “the body of the poem is itself, in effect, a series of Byronic annotations” (130). Contrary to Levine’s reading of annotations as disembodifying the poetic work of its emotional impact on the reader, Ourania Chatsiou, in “Lord Byron: Paratext and Poetics”, The Modern Language Review, Vol.109, No. 3 (July 2014), 640-662, sees them in “symbiotic” relationship that “is very often latently antagonistic, generating a tense, dissonant hybridity that has a direct impact on Romantic-period poetics, and requires, therefore, further exploration and a much more detailed theorization” (641). However, to Chatsiou, because he solely focuses on the annotations, the paratexts to this poem “do not help Byron to manifest the poem’s systematic, ironic vacillation between Romantic idealism and melancholic realism, or the constant process of self-creation and self-destruction that the Byronic narrator and the Childe are involved in” (645).

(9) Cervantes’s Don Quixote went into a second edition the same year and as for Byron’s Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage Cantos I-II, three days after its publication in 1812, 500 copies were sold and occasioned the famous statement, “I woke up and found myself famous”. In the same year, seven editions were printed.
and the status of their progeny. The ‘abandonment’ of their ‘new born’ for such a long time resulted in expropriating or ‘kidnapping’ of their brain children: Cervantes’s by an impostor-author under the pseudonym Alonso Fernandez de Avellaneda and Byron’s by a Cheapside imposter. Interestingly enough, both pirated versions of Don Quixote and of Childe Harold are characterized by parody and denigration of the authors.

On his part, Cervantes gets quite incensed and spends most of the Prologue to Part II targeting this impostor and telling tall tales about him (361). Fearing the loss of his child, he does affirm that “this second volume of Don Quijote, hereby offered to you, is cut by the same craftsman and from the same cloth as the first, and what I give you, here, is more Don Quijote” (362). However, to avoid any future piracy or hijacking and parody of his knight, Cervantes makes sure that he “is dead and buried, so no man will dare raise any new accusations against him, for those already levied will be quite enough” (362). This mercy killing in the prologue is taken to a higher level in the final page of the novel. Cervantes declares not only his paternity but also his ownership of Don Quixote. Addressing any future “arrogant and wicked writers” (745) that may entertain stealing him again, Cervantes emphatically confirms that

Don Quijote was born only for me, as I for him; he knew how to act and I how to write; only two are a unity, in spite of that fake Tordesillas scribbler who dared— and may dare again— to record with his fat ostrich-feathered quill such badly drawn adventures for my brave knight, who is far too weighty for his shoulders to bear, and is a subject his frozen brains could never take on. (746, emphasis added)

Published in 1817, Byron’s Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage Cantos III-IV earned even more success than that of Cantos I-II. But while the manuscript for Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage Canto III was still under publication, the Morning Chronicle carried two advertisements, one for the new Canto and another for an impostor who steals the name and writes a sequel to Lord Byron’s and Harold’s adventures (Works, Vol. II, 222). Nevertheless, the Cheapside impostor continued publishing using Byron’s name. And like Alonso Fernandez de Avellaneda’s version of Don Quixote, which insults Cervantes and his hero, the Cheapside imposter’s version is “a dull and ..., apparently, serious
production, suggested by, but hardly an imitation of, _Childe Harold_” (Works, Vol. II, 222-223). Byron’s response to the piracy of his name and his works is as ironic as that of Cervantes’s. He writes to Murray on Dec. 9, 1816, saying:

> I never wrote such poems, never received the sum he mentions, nor any other in the same quarter, nor (as far as moral or mortal certainty can be sure) ever had, directly or indirectly, the slightest communication with Johnson in my life ... With regard to myself, the man has merely lied; ‘A Pilgrimage to Jerusalem!’ How the devil should I write about _Jerusalem_, never having yet been there? (Life, Vol. III, 203)

By Canto IV, and as is also the case of the less adventurous and more-aware-of reality Don Quixote of Part II, Byron gradually writes Harold out of the narrative and endows him with less morbidity than that of Cantos I-II. Written in the form of a letter to Hobhouse, the preface to this canto expresses Byron’s changed attitude toward his “child of the imagination”: “With regard to the conduct of the last canto, there will be found less of the pilgrim than in any of the preceding, and that little slightly, if at all, separated from the author speaking in his own person” (Byron 54, emphasis added). Thus he bids farewell to Hobhouse, “who has beheld the birth and death of the other [old friend, Childe Harold] ... though not ungrateful– I can, or could be, to Childe Harold, for any public favour reflected through the poem on the poet” (Byron 53, emphasis added). Paul Elledge’s reading of Byron’s address to Hobhouse sees Hobhouse “as custodian of the child whose father he forsakes” (18). Focusing on paradigms of separation and endings in Byron’s poetry, Elledge, in a way, diagnoses Byron’s painful letting go of his child. But, the success of his child/text has been proof of his own self-definition, hence his gratitude. Canto IV “lies in Byron’s reinvention of himself as an individual”, shedding the static mode of Cantos I-II as “the poem shifts from presenting himself as a type to presenting himself as a man whose capacity for self-development defines his uniqueness” (Elfenbein 31, emphasis added).
Conclusion

Having ensured fame as great literary men, by the same offsprings they tried to disown, and gained more confidence in their literary self-image, Cervantes and Byron cut off the umbilical cord and send their children off on their own life journey. Thus they are not afraid anymore of acknowledging their affection towards them: They have given them all the support they need and their fate is with the readers and the test of time. Cervantes concludes Prologue II by ‘eulogizing’ his hero: “It will be good, too, that some man of honor give you these final words about such a wise lunatic, never intending ever to mention the subject again” (362). Cervantes bids farewell to Don Quixote on a laudatory note for the old knight’s sallies have already “[given] immense pleasure and satisfaction to all who read them, whether here in Spain or abroad” and he “remain[s] pleased and proud, having been the first writer to fully relish ... the fruit of his own work” because “the truthful history of my Don Quijote has already begun to pull those books [of chivalry] to the ground” (746).

Analogously, Byron as well comments that Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage “has been to me a source of pleasure in the production, and I part with it with a kind of regret which hardly suspected that events could have left me for imaginary object” (Byron 54, emphasis added). To Byron, cutting the umbilical cord is more painful than Cervantes’s as the poet probably suffered more calumny and scandals in his time. He also releases his child/book, believing that “the work is to depend on itself, and not on the writer” (Byron 54, emphasis added).

To sum up, the preface involves such a complex discourse of creation that renders it an epistemological center for the author’s creative process and hermeneutically necessary for the readers’ interpretation of the work. As it is written after the work is finished, it encapsulates authors’ pains and labor in giving birth to themselves as professional writers and as rightful owners of their work. Combining the male ideational paradigm of autogenesis and the female material act of procreation, the male postpartum prefaces of these authors not only extend Plato’s male spiritual pregnancy but also the humanity of their writers.
References

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


Cochran, Peter, ed. *Hours of Idleness*.


Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to attend to the preface as an important element in understanding the symbiotic relationship between author and text, especially when a male author assumes the female power of procreation. In the prefaces to Don Quixote Part I and II and Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, Cervantes and Lord Byron, respectively, identify their main heroes as their ‘child of the imagination/brain’. Nevertheless, in many instances we encounter moments of anxiety manifested in a dialectic of engagement and disengagement, owning and disowning, of denying and defending their fictional personages. To Cervantes, Don Quixote is “child of his brain”, the son, and yet he’s also the stepson, who eventually ends up no more than a brave knight; to Byron, as well, Childe Harold was initially called Childe Burun, but later on is referred to as just a “fictitious character” from whom Byron tried to disengage throughout the poem. This equivocal and dialectical discourse of embracement and abandonment could be better understood by extending the birthing metaphor to encompass postpartum anxiety. In the prefaces, both Cervantes’s and Byron’s Platonic male spiritual pregnancy is combined with the female physical and psychological symptoms of giving birth and its aftermath. Thus, the preface becomes a birth certificate not only legitimizing the hero, but also problematizing the parental relationship between father/author and son/text or hero, for it involves more than the ontological history of the hero or the text.
الكلاسيكية للولادة، فإنهما يحتلاان في الوقت عينه العائق الجندرية عبر جمعهما في كتاباتهم لفكرة الحمل الذكوري الروحي الإفلاطونية والحمل البيولوجي وأعراض الجسمية النفسية الأنثوية. وعلى يصبح "التمهيد"، مهيداً ما بعد الولادة الذكورية، بمثابة شهادة ميلاد تضفي على النص وعلى بطله "شرعية الخلق الأدبي"، من خلال العلاقة الأبوية بين الأب / المؤلف، وابنه / النص، علاقة تعدى التاريخ الأنثولوجي للبطل أو للنص.