

ARE GEORGE SAND AND BYRON ALIKE?

MIEKO MIYAZAWA,

JAPANESE BYRON SOCIETY

George Sand and Byron seem to have some similarities. Sand is famous or notorious for disguising herself in men's clothes; also Byron disguised not actually himself but his hero Juan in a woman's dress at the Sultan's Harem in *Don Juan*. Not exactly disguising, but Byron had his portrait drawn in an Albanian costume, too. Wearing a disguise is often considered a symptom deeply concerned with matters of identity and self-confidence. Also their nature had some of the characteristics of the opposite sex and Sand was said to be rather a male friend for Balzac. Byron was described as having rather womanly feelings in his biography. They possessed both male and female characteristics within them. Also Sand and Byron were well known for their many love affairs through their lives, Sand with Musset, Chopin and so on, Byron as we know. Their passions and concern about politics were deep, and Sand supported the Republic all through her life while Byron once referred to a republic in his journals. This paper aims to examine their identities, loves and politics and the similarities between Sand and Byron, the two remarkable persons of letters in the Romantic period.

George Sand is several times referred to as a great man. Flaubert said at her funeral: "You had to know . . . how much of the feminine there was in that great man . . ." ¹ and Balzac wrote down: "She is boyish . . . she is great-hearted, generous, devout, and chaste; . . . she has the main characteristic of a man; ergo; she is not a woman." ²

At first glance, Sand's wearing men's clothes generally seemed to establish her own identity among the male-centered society in literature. Also it was convenient for Sand to attend political meetings which were not allowed to women in disguise. But actually her wearing men's clothes began as early as the age of four. When she visited her father's army camp she was dressed in an exact replica of her father's uniform. She didn't like it at all. Later while still a young lady she wore men's clothes having been persuaded by her tutor and his brother. It was convenient for riding, climbing and jumping on horse. Her wearing men's clothes was just a matter of convenience in everyday life and didn't mean that she had an identity-problem at all. Later she chose them for economical reasons as women's clothes were very expensive compared with those of men.

However hard she was criticized about her costume, smoking habit or many love affairs, she was always confident and strong. "Why must I be a slave to the artificially defined role of a woman?" ³ Her strong self-confidence and self-identity were rooted in her childhood. "It was a happy infancy" ⁴ said Sand. The deep affection of her parents

1: George Sand, *In Her Own Words*, ed. Joseph Barry (New York: Anchor, 1979) xv.

2: Ibid.

3: George Sand, *Lélia*, (London: Indiana UP, 1978) xv.

4: André Maurois, *Lélia: The Life of George Sand*, (Oxford: Alden, 1953) 50.

established Sand's self-confidence. Also the education for her to manage the estate as a mistress of Nohant made her very independent.

It was different in Byron's case as he had a lack of his mother's affection. His lame foot was regarded as a sign of God's punishment. Denied by God and not loved enough by his mother, he could never have self-confidence.⁵ However self-assuredly he tried to behave, his identity was fragile and he was eager to establish it. For the Speech Day at Harrow School he prepared many expensive clothes. "I have as much [spending?] money, as many Clothes, and in every respect of appearance am equal if not superior to most of my school fellows"⁶ At the age of ten the connection between his appearance and his self-confidence had already begun.

When he was introduced in high society, he was not regarded as a true aristocrat. Lady Caroline wrote in *Glenarvon*, "The young man you call Lord Glenarvon, has no claim to that title; his grandfather was a traitor; his father was a poor miserable exile . . ."⁷ Byron did all his efforts to impress himself in high society with his costumes and an atmosphere of Byronic heroes. Variable costumes express variable identities, which are also written in his play *The Deformed Transformed*. The fragile identity of Byron can be well traced in his letter to Annabella:

... forgive my weakness — and I will be — I am whatever you please to make me. . . .⁸ I will read what books you please — hear what arguments you please — and in leaving the choice to your judgment. . . .⁹

Sand always had a strong self-confidence and wearing men's clothes had nothing to do with her identity, but was just because of convenience. On the other hand, Byron's fragile self-confidence needed his outstanding dandy clothes to establish his identity.

Talking about their loves, both Sand and Byron had many love affairs. Sand with Jules, Musset, Michel, Chopin, Manceau and so on. Byron as we know.

Sand was sometimes regarded as Don Juan or Byron. Sand wrote to Jules Boucoiran, "Do you know that that creature talks of me . . . as though I were a female Don Juan . . . ?"¹⁰ Chateaubriand, after reading Sand's *Lélia*, wrote to her, "You will be the Lord Byron of France."¹¹ Sand herself wrote to Flaubert about Byron:

I have no great belief in Don Juan-cum-Byron type. . . . Byron was, from all accounts, an inept lover. There must have been times — such emotional crises can be counted on the fingers of one hand — when he knew complete fulfillment of heart, soul and senses: certainly he had sufficient experience of such moments to become one of the

5: Marilyn B. Brewer and Miles Hewstone eds., *Self and Social Identity*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) 9.

6: BLJ I 49.

7: Caroline Lamb, *Glenarvon*, (London: Henry Colburn, 1816) 292.

8: BLJ IV 184.

9: Ibid. 177.

10: Maurois 108.

11: *In Her Own Words* xxiii.

poets of love.¹²

Sand's infamous image mostly came from her heroine Lélia, who cannot love a man physically. Sand's love affairs were considered to be the pursuit of physical enjoyment one after another. Marie d'Agoult wrote to Sand with hostility:

. . . the depressing experience of so many broken relations in your past life, seem to me . . . As that you are incapable of lasting feelings; that a momentary caprice weighs more . . . than old and proved affection . . .¹³

She also wrote to her daughter.

Dear child; . . . Never get to know Madame Sand . . . As a woman—I beg your pardon, as a man . . . She treats her lovers much as though they were pieces of white chalk with which she has been writing on a blackboard. As soon as she had finished, she treads the chalk underfoot, and very soon it is no more than a cloud of fine dust . . .¹⁴

Her taking care of the ex-lovers was also considered strange, monstrous and quite unnatural. But her so-called maternal attitude was already apparent at quite an early age: “I am at times under a strong illusion. I think of myself as the mother, rather than the daughter, of my father”.¹⁵ Also she helped her tutor Deschartres, the doctor and the chemist for the whole village, with his surgery and she discovered the satisfaction in helping and protecting others. Thus it was quite natural for her to take care of younger lovers. Her passionate love with heart and body was seen in her letters very clearly:

Dear Gustave: . . . You spent the night . . . in a ditch . . . like a wretched soldier, while we, made egotists by happiness, could not tear ourselves from one another's arms. It was not for want of saying, thirty times at least.¹⁶
He came—and oh, how happy we were! There he was, in my tiny little room, and in my arms, happy, exhausted, hugged, bitten, shouting aloud, crying, laughing. . . . I can scarcely stand on my feet . . . I am in a condition of ecstatic joy.¹⁷

Sand is never Don Juan, who seeks lovers just for his appetite. “Love when it came to my way, I accepted, but I never went out of my way to seek it.”¹⁸ When separation came she was also deeply wounded: “Life no longer holds anything for me.”¹⁹ But still she was concerned about her ex-lover. “Please look up Jules . . . and do what you can so

12: Maurois 429.

13: Ibid. 284.

14: Ibid. 432.

15: Joseph Barry, *Infamous Woman: The Life of George Sand*, (New York: Anchor, 1978) 32.

16: Maurois 127.

17: Ibid.

18: Ibid. 433.

19: Ibid. 142.

far as his bodily health is concerned . . . He will suffer terribly for a long time to come,”²⁰ Sand wrote *Lélia* after the end of her love with Musset. This novel is usually regarded as Sand’s confession of her sexual problems. But a deep pessimism, like Byron’s, can be seen. “I was born in this vale of tears . . . You and I are both condemned to suffer. . . The entire world is . . . cold, pale and restricted.”²¹

In what respects was she called a man? Was it because of her strength that she was the first to notice the end of love and finish their relationships? Even Maurois cannot be free from the general notions of man and woman:

Once her decision was taken, she made the break complete, as a man would have done . . . He had . . . swallowed some acetate of morphine, but the dose was too large and he was sick. It was he, really, who had been the woman in the case, she the man.²²

Self-confidence, strong character, independent mind, protecting capacity, managing ability, responsibility, all these good characteristics may have been considered to belong just to a man in those days.

Byron adores the beautiful aspects of a woman mostly on the upper part of her body: “dark eyes!”, “long eye-lashes!”²³ “The black curls”, “the glossy shoulder”,²⁴ His descriptions are never sensual. “She loved and was beloved, she adored / And she was worshipped” with “intense souls”.²⁵ But as Sand wrote, “emotional crises”: Byron had strong ambivalent feelings about love. Bad experiences in his childhood caused him guilty feelings towards love: “filthy loves of gods and goddesses . . . never put on pantaloons . . .”²⁶ For Byron a sexual relationship was always a sin and to be despised. In the case of Julia, “How beautiful she looked!” but she stood on the “immense precipice” and “How self-deceitful”.²⁷ Juan and Haidee were about to “run the risk of being damned forever” forgetting “the very crisis” “the Stygian river” “hell” and “purgatory”.²⁸

Byron had a fatal scar in his heart. “I have long stood alone in life—”²⁹ His heart is always full of solitude, loneliness, despair and melancholy. “Count o’er thy days from anguish free, / And know, whatever thou hast been, / ’Tis something better not to be.”³⁰ The vain feeling always haunts him. As Sand pointed out, he never had complete fulfillment of heart, soul and senses. He chose Annabella Milbanke calmly as his wife without strong affection. “What an odd situation and friendship is ours! — without one spark of love on either side . . .”³¹ He needed an aristocratic woman to establish his identity in society. His marriage ended within a year.

20: Ibid.

21: *Lélia* 7.

22: Maurois 141.

23: BLJ IX 40.

24: *Don Juan* I 158.

25: Ibid II 191.

26: Ibid I 41.

27: Ibid I 106.

28: Ibid II 193.

29: BLJ IV 176.

30: CPW I 352 (*Euthanasia*).

31: BLJ III 227.

He aspired unconsciously to a dear, warm, happy, relieved, tender and perfect love, so to speak maternal love:

Sweet hour of twilight! In the solitude
 Of the pine forest . . .
 Oh Hesperus, thou bringest all good things
 Home to the weary, to the hungry cheer,
 To the young bird the parent's brooding wings, . . .
 Thou bring'st the child, too, to the mother's breast.³²

Both Byron and Sand had many love affairs but their loves were quite different. Sand had no illusion about love and she loved her lovers to her heart's content. For eight years with Chopin. For Fifteen years with Mansau. In Byron's love affairs he may have had sexual enjoyment but he never seemed to have true love and happiness from women. He was always deeply wounded and left in solitude again and again. It seems that Sand's love is reality and Byron's illusion.

Both Sand and Byron had a strong desire to protect the weak since their childhood. Sand had strong emotions to protect her mother from her grandmother. They were quite different in their blood and upbringing and her grandmother's treatment of her mother filled with contempt triggered her awareness of class discrimination:

. . . that philosophy of wealth, independence, tolerance and grace was pleasant and appealing, but one had to have an income of five or six hundred thousand francs a year to sustain it . . . how the poor or the oppressed could ever have felt that philosophy as their own.³³

Also she used to play with peasant children in her neighborhood, so she naturally felt that she belonged to the people. Sand's political writings began as one of the sub-editors of the *Figaro* when Latouche offered this position to her. Her involvement in politics was through the influence of Michel de Bourges. Pierre Lenoux confirmed Sand is a Socialist. By 1848 she was eager that Socialism should turn to action and also she supported and enlightened the proletarian poets:

It is not we the literary world who are poor, suffering humanity; . . . No, it is the People, the ignorant, abandoned people, full of stormy passions which men rouse for their own evil ends, . . .³⁴

She came to know Louis Blanc, a Socialist with Communist sympathies. She wrote to him in 1847 one year

32: *Don Juan* III 105.

33: Barry 12.

34: Maurois 328.

before the June Days. “Leave behind those who fall, dig a trench. After victory there will be enough time to bury the dead.”³⁵ “Madame Sand is going over to Communism, and is undertaking to preach to the workers,”³⁶ wrote Sainte-Beuve. In those days the Lyons silk workers were suffering like Nottingham frame-breakers in Byron’s days. Wages were declining, poverty was growing. And any worker’s actions, strikes and collective protests were illegal, unions a criminal conspiracy:

I am a Communist now . . . For me, Communism is the ideal which all progressive societies must set as their goal. . . .
If by Communism you mean a plot to seize dictatorship by force . . . we are not communists . . . But if by
Communism you mean the wish and the determination . . . to destroy . . . the revolting inequality of extreme wealth
and extreme poverty, and to establish the beginnings of a true equality, then we are Communists indeed . . . ³⁷

The Lyons workers were arrested on a charge of conspiracy. Michel defended them. Sand helped the workers in prison and her house became a political meeting place. After the outbreak of February 1848, Lamartine was the leader of the Provisional Government. And her friend Ledru-Rollin, the Minister of the Interior, asked Sand to write the leading articles for the government’s *Bulletin de la République*. Thus she became “the Muse of the Revolution”³⁸ But Balzac thought “. . . the Republic won’t last more than three years at the longest . . . we shall return pretty quickly to practical politics . . .”³⁹ The General Elections were held and resulted in defeat:

If these elections do not assure the triumph of social truth . . . they will sound its death-knell. Should that happen there can be but one road to safety for those who have already built the barricades, and that will be for them to manifest a second time their will that the decision of a false National representation shall be adjourned.⁴⁰

So the workers of Paris followed this article in Bulletin N^o. 16. Sand disapproved of manifestation but this article seemed to encourage it. Many readers of her article made the accusation that she had encouraged the manifestation. The June revolt broke out and bourgeois order was restored. Sand had to retire to Nohant together with her thoughts. “I’ll have no more bloodshed, no more evil means to bring about good ends . . .”⁴¹ Still she wrote from Nohant, “Long live the Republic, despite everything!”⁴²

Byron had a deep sympathy for the weak and oppressed and his maiden speech for the Nottingham frame-breakers was full of a strong sense of justice with deep sentiment. But the high society members had no concern

35: Barry 281.

36: Maurois 329.

37: Ibid. 338.

38: Barry 287.

39: Maurois 337.

40: Ibid. 338.

41: Barry 374.

42: Ibid. 366.

for politics and the poor. Lord Grey sometimes regarded political life as “amusement or pastime for grown up gentlemen”.⁴³ But the young members of the Whigs such as Tavistock gradually became conscious of the misery of the poor:

When you say there is no distress, you are wrong. It is dreadful amongst the working classes of the community. When we have excess of wealth and money on one side, we have the extreme of poverty and crime on the other, individual riches and national misery.⁴⁴

These young members came to change the Whig party but Byron didn't belong to them. The society in which Byron was involved had no concerns for politics:

Last night, party at Lansdowne-house. To-night, party at Lady Charlotte Grenville's. — deplorable waste of time, and something of temper. Nothing imparted — nothing acquired — talking without ideas . . . and in this way half London pass what is called life. To-morrow there is Lady Heathcote's . . .⁴⁵

Byron could do nothing in reality in England:

I have simplified my politics into an utter detestation of all existing governments . . . The fact is, riches are power, and poverty is slavery all over the earth, and one sort of establishment is no better, no worse, for a people than another.⁴⁶ Oh for a Republic! . . . The greater the equality, the more impartially evil is distributed, and becomes lighter by the division among so many — therefore, a Republic!⁴⁷

The great difference between Sand and Byron was not in their politics but in their real activities. Sand had political comrades but Byron didn't. Sand could enlighten people directly through her many articles in political journals but Byron couldn't.

Sand had fulfillment in her long life, a life of reality till the age of 72. On the other hand, Byron lived in reverie and ambition and died young at the age of 36. Sand left something very significant to be considered about her life:

I suffered no doubt from illusions of greatness. It was the fashion of the time. Everyone wanted to be great, and, since they were not, relapsed into a mood of despair.⁴⁸

Only in this respect Sand and Byron seem quite alike.

43: Ellis Archer Wasson, *Whig Renaissance: Lord Althorp and the Whig Party 1782-1845* (London: Garland, 1987) 51.

44: *Ibid.* 52.

45: BLJ III 254.

46: *Ibid.* 242.

47: *Ibid.* 244.

48: Maurois 444.