

Public Abstract

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Title:Lord Byron's Critique of Despotism and Militarism in the Russian Cantos of Don Juan

In his mock-epic masterpiece, *Don Juan* (1819-1824), Lord Byron chooses Russia as one of the principal destinations in the travels of the main hero. In Cantos VII and VIII of the poem, Juan participates on the Russian side in the siege of the Turkish fortress Ismail (1790). In Cantos IX and X the hero goes to Petersburg and becomes a favorite of the empress Catherine II. The poet dwells on the example of Russia in his discussion of the politics of European imperial powers and their military ambitions. Although Russian materials play such an important role in *Don Juan*, this historical context has not yet been explored by scholars. Research on this topic will advance our understanding of the poem and Byron's views of war, despotism and liberty.

Analysis of the historical background and travel narratives of the late 18th and early 19th shows how Byron interprets history and constructs the image of Russia. The image of Catherine II is discussed in its connection with the political cartoons of her epoch. This research offers a number of close readings that help to better understand Byron's approaches to these issues and the complexity of his opinions. This paper argues that the critique of Russian imperialism amplifies Byron's critique of British imperialism and develops into a universal anti-war critique. Byron's view of Russia, though more superficial than the travel narratives, takes advantage of commonplace perceptions of Russia and Catherine to comment on the politics of post-Napoleonic Europe.