

Title: Of Gods and Monsters: Byron, Idolatry and Literary Vampirism in the Poetry of Mikhail Lermontov

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In 1832, Mikhail Yur'evich Lermontov wrote a short poem which began, “Нет, я не Байрон,” traditionally translated into English as, “No, I’m not Byron.” This paper examines the phenomenon known as “Byromania” as it is manifested in several poetical works of Lermontov to ultimately suggest that his famous lyric is more appropriately interpreted, “No, I’m *no* Byron.” My analysis focuses primarily on the poems “Death of a Poet,” *The Demon* and “Tamara.” I interpret these works by considering Lermontov’s relationship to poetry and its public reception in Russia – both his own and that of his prolific predecessors, Lord Byron and Aleksandr Pushkin. I read Lermontov’s works in terms of J. Hillis Miller’s notions of symbiosis and influence in his essay, “The Critic as Host.” However, I also pose Lermontov’s own “Death of a Poet” as a critical framework for reading his poetry as an expression of the relationship between the poet, his audience, and the possibility of a definitive religious/moral judgment of art. I then apply this framework to *The Demon* and “Tamara,” two poems which provide different accounts of the same characters. Reading these characters as personifications of the above-named formulaic elements – that is, the poet-audience-higher judgment relationship – I suggest a reading of the Demon character as a vampire, and conclude with a discussion of the “vampiric” elements implicit in Lermontov’s attempted emulation of Byron, his greatest idol.

Miller, J. Hillis. "The Critic as Host." *Deconstruction and Criticism*. Ed. Harold Bloom et. al. New York: The Seabury Press, 1979. 217-253.