



Lord Byron's Novel

By John Crowley
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Introduction

Here are not one but two fascinating and intricately intertwined novels from a master of literary fantasy, John Crowley. Mixing visionary imagination, textual scholarship, and a deep understanding of family dynamics, John Crowley gives readers not only the novel that the enigmatic and revolutionary Romantic poet Lord Byron might have written -- a gothic tale of murder, treachery, and redemption -- but also the equally absorbing story of how Byron's book was found, decoded, and published. As Crowley's narrative moves back and forth between Byron's novel and the story of its deciphering, a complex mirroring emerges. In this refracted reflection, startling, and ultimately healing, parallels begin to emerge between Byron's relationship to his daughter Ada, and Alexandra "Smith" Novak's relationship to her own long estranged father, Lee, as they work together to bring Byron's text to light.

Questions for discussion

1. In what ways does *Lord Byron's Novel* resemble Chinese boxes, with text inside of text, character inside of character? What are the challenges and satisfactions of reading such a novel?
2. What is the effect of switching back and forth between different narrative voices and between formal, nineteenth-century prose and twenty-first century emails? Can you detect a difference between the Romantic era prose of Byron and the Victorian writing of Ada?
3. In what ways does *Lord Byron's Novel* explore father/daughter relationships? How does Alex's relationship to her father parallel Ada's relationship to Byron?
4. What does Ada discover about her father from reading his novel? What new view of Byron -- and of Ada herself -- does *Lord Byron's Novel* suggest?
5. In one of her notes, Ada writes: "I sometimes think that we lead many lives between birth and dying, and only one, or perhaps two, are ever known to us consciously; the others pass in parallel, invisible, or they run backward while the one we busy ourselves with runs forward" [p. 360]. In what ways does *Lord Byron's Novel* illustrate this idea of doubling, of the shifting nature of time and personal identity, of lives lived unconsciously?
6. What is Byron's motive for writing *The Evening Land*? What is Ada's motive for preserving it and Alex's motive for publishing it?
7. How does Ali change over the course of *The Evening Land*? What does he learn?
8. What is the significance -- personal, scientific, and feminist -- of Ada's anticipation of the computer?
9. After Ali is accused of his father's murder, he exclaims: "Injustice! Can there be a terror like it, to know that we are innocent, and yet found guilty -- nay *proven* guilty, our guilt clearly demonstrated, so irrefutable it can almost convince ourselves however we know ourselves to be inculpable?" What is the larger significance of this passage -- for Lord Byron himself and for Lee Novak?
10. In what sense is *Lord Byron's Novel* a love story? What role does love -- or its absence -- play in the novel?
11. Byron was famous in his time and after his death for his amorous adventures and the rumors of his "sins". How differently is celebrity like his viewed today?

About the Author

John Crowley lives in the hills above the Connecticut River in northern Massachusetts with his wife and twin daughters. He is the author of the novels *Daemonomania*; *Love and Sleep*; *Aegypt*; *Little, Big*; *The Deep*; *Beasts*; *Engine Summer*; and *The Translator*, and the short fiction collection *Novelties & Souvenirs*.