**Rejection and Suicide in Byron’s *Deformed Transformed* and Hogg’s *Confessions***

As Oscar Wilde states: ‘Poets, you know, are always ahead of science’.[[1]](#footnote-1) Recent scientific research concurs with behaviours that Lord Byron’s and James Hogg’s characters portray after suffering parental rejection and abuse. Martin H. Teicher, Carl M. Anderson and Ann Polcari write that ‘the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) study identified maltreatment as the leading preventable cause of major mental illness […] episodes of depression, addiction to illicit drugs, and suicide attempts’.[[2]](#footnote-2) *The Lancet* states that “severe psychological abuse in childhood” might lead to “social difficulties, aggression, mental health problems, self-harm, and attempted suicide.”[[3]](#footnote-3) The notion that rejection and abuse can cause mental illness, self-hatred, and suicide, was something realized by Hogg and Byron 200 years earlier.

In a letter to Lady Byron on the ‘shocking’ abuse of Byron by his nurse May Gray, her solicitor, John Hanson, remarks that this ‘honourable’ child would ‘forgo the satisfaction of seeing’ his mother again if it meant meeting Gray another time. Byron links his two guardians as abusers. The theme of parents abusing children is something that Byron would return to in his work.

This paper mainly concentrates on Byron’s unfinished, and least studied drama, *The Deformed Transformed*. I argue that Byron’s maltreated children suffer consequences that affect their entire lives, particularly suicide ideation. Wishing for death is found throughout Byron’s work from *Childe Harold* to *Manfred*. I will argue that Byron chimes with fellow Scot James Hogg, whose *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* also shows that maltreatment of children, and particularly parental rejection, can lead to reckless behaviour and suicide.

John Gardner

John.gardner@anglia.ac.uk

1. *Oscar Wilde in America*,ed. Matthew Hofer and Gary Scharnhorst (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2010), p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ‘Childhood Maltreatment is associated with reduced volume in the hippocampal subfields CA3, dentate gyrus and subiculum’, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the Unites States of America* (*PNAS*) 109.9 (2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *The Lancet* 380:9841 (11 August, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)