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Byron's Poetics
Doris H. Meriwether

ABSTRACT

The following study is an examination of Byron's work, his letters and journals as well as his poetry, to discover his poetic theory. While he opposed "systems and system-spinners" and held as inviolable truth that the poet was not bound by any rules of poetry, Byron nevertheless thought about and commented frequently on those concerns that ordinarily engage aesthetic theorists. It is difficult to think of a poet who left so many observations on the nature of poets, the purpose and value of poetry, the creative process, and the relation between the poet and his audience, without expressing his views in a formalised statement.

When his random and often contradictory opinions about poetry are collected together, we have evidence of a poetic theory steadily evolving from his juvenile years towards the inimitable perfection of his final days to demonstrate that Byron took poetry more seriously than has been generally assumed. He has left a fairly comprehensive aesthetics of poetry that shows him sometimes aligned in theory with his contemporaries, at other times adhering to practices of the previous age, but frequently anticipating the views of modern poets. In the end, Byron's poetics is an eclectic theory that serves his personal need to see poetry as a worthwhile action. His final poetic theory was hard-won in contention against his own resistance to a poetic career, against public opinion and his susceptibility to that, and against a publisher concerned for profit. We can trace his poetics through the changes in the early, middle, and last stages, as Byron comes to terms with all the forces which both oppose and goad him on in his longing "to do some good" in the world.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Abbreviations and Notes	4
I. Discovering the Tensions of Byron's Poetics	5
II. The Juvenile Volumes, Prelude to a Poetic Theory	40
III. The Early Satires, Poems of Public Weal	106
IV. The <u>Childe Harold</u> Years, Poetry of Private Woe	155
V. The Poet and the Winds of Public Opinion, 1818 - 1820	231
VI. The Poet and His Truth, the Crises of 1821	278
VII. The Point of Balance: "I write the World, nor care if the World read."	351
Bibliography	496
Appendix I : <u>Marino Faliero</u> and the Power of Words	502
Appendix II : <u>"The Reeling Romaika", Notes and Queries, June, 1978,</u> pp. 227 - 228.	536

ABBREVIATIONS

- LBC Lord Byron's Correspondence, ed. John Murray (London: John Murray, 1922), 2 volumes.
- MLJ Byron's Letters and Journals, ed. Leslie A. Marchand (London: John Murray, 1973-1978), 8 volumes.
- PLJ The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals, ed. R. E. Prothero (London: John Murray, 1898-1901), 6 volumes.
- PW The Works of Lord Byron: Poetry, ed. E. H. Coleridge (London: John Murray, 1898-1904), 7 volumes.

NOTES

1. For references to Byron's letters and journals I have relied on Marchand's new edition to the extent that the volumes were available at the time of this study. For the texts of letters written after the fall of 1821, I have used various sources named in the list of abbreviations above and in the footnotes. In order that the future volumes of the Marchand edition may be more easily applied to this study, I have included the dates of the letters in the footnotes.
2. All references to Byron's poetry are to the Coleridge edition of the poetry unless otherwise indicated.
3. Throughout this study in quotations I have retained Byron's idiosyncratic spelling and punctuation without the use of sic except in instances where meaning is confused.

CHAPTER I

DISCOVERING THE TENSIONS OF BYRON'S POETICS

Near the end of his poetical life Byron drew for Lady Blessington an analogy between poetry and a boy flying a kite. The implications of this image as Byron developed it for his attentive admirer provide a metaphor for understanding the considerations that often involve a poet in arriving at his theory of poetry. Especially important in a study of Byron's poetics, the metaphor offers a way of examining his theory as it evolves to its last stage. Musing to Lady Blessington on his antithetically-mixed spirit that loved and then regretted the mischief of provoking acquaintances whom he had no desire to annoy, Byron reveals the mobility of his mind as he connects his habit of foolishness with the unexpected thought that "poets can be greater fools than other people" to come to a moment of imaginative insight into the nature of the poet and of poetry:

We of the craft--poets, I mean--resemble paper-kites; we soar high into the air, but are held to earth by a cord, and our flight is restrained by a child--that child is self. We are but grown children, having all their weaknesses, and only wanting their innocence; our thoughts soar, but the frailty of our natures brings them back to earth.¹

Muddled though the image may appear at first, on close inspection it tells us of Byron's clear but complex

1. Lady Blessington's Conversations of Lord Byron, ed. Ernest J. Lovell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 186.

sense of himself as a poet. The image in its essence captures the tension that exists between the poet and his subject-matter (or poem) as it runs between the child and the paper-kite. On the one hand, the poet is inseparable from his apprehension of experience that is his truth and therefore his poetry: poets "soar high into the air" and their "thoughts soar". Yet, on the other hand, the poet paradoxically has an identity separate from his kite-poem self. This is the self that must remain conscious to the variety of factors that determine the success of poems and of kite-flying, notably, to continue the metaphor, the force and direction of the wind that keeps the kite aloft. If we interpret the winds that bear the kite as the currents of public response, a reading supported in one of the latter Don Juan cantos, as we shall see, Byron's image implies also the tension that flows between a poet and his audience. Poetry then for Byron is a three-way process of delicate balance between poet and poem, poet and audience, and audience and poem.

On a purely superficial level, the kite-flying metaphor is an apt description of Byron's habitual practice of offering a poem to the reader with the promise of additional parts if his audience approved of the first. Again and again, in childlike simplicity he stands ready to release more cord, to fly his kite higher for admiring spectators. In the Preface to the first two cantos of Childe Harold, after explaining that the scenes described are taken from only a part of his travels, Byron adds,

There, for the present, the poem stops: its reception will determine whether the author may venture to con-

duct his readers to the capital of the East, through Ionia and Phrygia: these two cantos are merely experimental.

Later, when both he and Don Juan were out of favour with Murray and the reading public, Byron thought back to the success of Childe Harold and told Murray he was considering "taking a run down to Naples. . . and writing, when I have studied the Country, a fifth and sixth Canto" of that poem.² He introduced The Prophecy of Dante by telling the reader that if the four cantos "are understood and approved, it is my purpose to continue the poem in various other cantos to its natural conclusion in the present". Similarly, he offered the first canto of his Pulci translation, stating in the Advertisement to The Morgante Maggiore that "How far the translator has succeeded, and whether or no he will continue the work, are questions which the public will decide". Of The Deformed Transformed he said that the portion published "contains the first two Parts only, and the opening chorus of the third. The rest may perhaps appear hereafter". In the closing lines of The Age of Bronze Byron addresses the reader directly with the prospect of more to follow: ". . . if there's no harm in / This first--you'll have, perhaps a second 'Carmen'."

Even many of his works not specifically advertised as experiments or instalments have about them some quality that implies an extensibility primarily dependent on the public mood. The four volumes of his juvenilia are

2. PLJ, VI, 157, December 25, 1822; see also VI, 149, to Kinnaird, December 19, 1822.

recastings of the original Fugitive Pieces. Though core selections remained the same in the four volumes, Byron removed some and added others as he sought a collection that would bring him admiration. The verse tales, beginning with The Giaour that Byron called his "snake of a poem . . . lengthening its rattles" through several editions until the original 407 lines had grown to 1334, were written to take advantage of the enormous popular response to the first Childe Harold volume. According to Joseph, Byron thought of the first three tales as "an appendage to Childe Harold".³ To these we could add Lara since Byron in the Advertisement to the first edition of that poem suggests that he is furnishing the reader with the further adventures of Conrad the Corsair. He says that the reader "may probably regard it as a sequel to the Corsair . . . and although the situations are changed, the stories are in some measure connected". Byron himself thought of Hints from Horace as a sequel to his first success, English Bards, and intended adding it to the fifth edition of the satire before he decided to suppress that publication. The list grows as we think of Beppo, which Steffan has called "a trial balloon",⁴ or the dramas that might have followed the three political plays in Byron's scheme to dramatise the passions had

3. M.K. Joseph, Byron the Poet (London: Victor Gollancz, 1964), p. 37.

4. Truman Guy Steffan, Byron's Don Juan: The Making of a Masterpiece, Second Edition (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), p.11. Steffan also calls Beppo "a market test before going on with the experiment" and adds that "in casting about in a new pond, Byron paused, as ever in vacillation between defiance of public taste and dependence on it, between eagerness and reluctance to flout the 'No Fishing' signs" (p.11).

the early ones met with success, or Heaven and Earth, complete as it stands but termed "Part I" in the printing. Without further belabouring the point, we need only mention Don Juan as the poem finally and ideally suited to Byron's metaphor and to his requirements for a flexible vehicle to display his thoughts. Open-ended as is Childe Harold, both of these extensible poems were in Byron's mind as he made his way to Greece: "If things are farcical", he told Trelawny, "they will do for Don Juan; if heroical, you shall have another canto of Childe Harold".⁵

Returning to the original metaphor, we can discover a significance deeper than indicated in this cataloguing of poems that behave like kites on a string. On a fundamental level, the account of Byron's developing poetic theory is the history of his attempts to establish the correct relationship between himself on one hand and his subject on the other and between himself and his audience. At those times when Byron is too eager for approval and too conscious of his audience, his poetry is apt to reflect popular demand at the expense of what he would truly write about. Though his poetry sails high on the winds of popular acclaim, its flight is extravagantly erratic and beyond the poet's control. He sacrifices his own vision of reality, his poetic truth, in a bid for praise and admiration. In other instances, in an attempt to reassert his vision, Byron disregards public taste, as in the case of the dramas, for example, to force a new

5. E. J. Trelawny, Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron, ed. Edward Dowden (London: Henry Frowde, 1906), p. 142.

form in a return to the classical unities or to try in Cain a startling treatment of subject matter in his questioning of the nature of God. With no more than slight and sporadic support from admiring readers, these poem-kites fall.

In his analysis of the problems facing poets in the two decades immediately following the Victorian age, C.K. Stead has worked from a metaphor which in the final effect is not unlike Byron's image. According to Stead,

A poem may be said to exist in a triangle, the points of which are, first, the poet, second, his audience, and, third, that area of experience which we call variously 'Reality', 'Truth', or 'Nature'. Between these points run lines of tension, and depending on the time, the place, the poet, and the audience, these lines will lengthen or shorten. At one time we may find the poet and his audience close together, and 'Reality' a great distance from them. This elongation of the triangle stifles the poem, and to a later age it will seem merely the product of an agreement between the poet and his audience to deceive themselves. At another time we will find the poet close to the point of 'Reality', but the audience a great distance from them both. A later age is likely to declare of this poet that he was 'ahead of his time': but the distance of his audience will have caused some straining of the voice, as in the case of Blake. There are infinite variations, but (insofar as the metaphor can be exact) the finest poems in any language are likely to be those which exist in an equilateral triangle, each point pulling equally in a moment of perfect tension.⁶

Byron's kite-flying image suggests a similar triangular arrangement; and in the evolving of his poetic theory, the major problem that Byron had to confront and then

6. C. K. Stead, The New Poetic: Yeats to Eliot (London: Hutchinson, 1964, rptd. 1977), pp. 11-12.

solve was the problem of proper distance from both his subject matter and his audience. Implicit in resolving this question of aesthetic balance, of course, is the enigma of identity: how Byron relates to his audience and to his material depends upon how he views himself.

In summarising the main thoughts of the major Romantic poets in their concern with identity, Patricia Ball has reawakened attention to this peculiarly Romantic phenomenon, especially as voiced by Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, in their prose writings, and Keats in his letters. She describes the goal of the Romantics to define the character of the poet as a process of "chameleon" and "egotistical" activities, sometimes both at work at different times in the same poet, towards "the single end, the achieved identity".⁷ Byron both fits and does not fit into a synthesis of the concept of the self, expressed by the other Romantic poets. Ball finds that he "was not given to intellectual commentary, either on himself as poet or on the nature of poetic composition"; yet the life he lived is chameleon-like in its every detail, "in his readiness to settle into any kind of society, to live as a nobleman, ascetic, debauchée, sportsman, poet, pirate or liberating soldier, and in his ability to run through every mood from Timon-misanthrope to the most poised social sophisticate".⁸ Additionally, she notes the egotistical side of Byron's nature, the

7. Patricia M. Ball, The Central Self: A Study in Romantic and Victorian Imagination (London: The Athlone Press, 1968), p. 11.

8. Ball, Central Self, p. 16.

"egocentricity" that counters his "mobility".⁹ Though Byron left no formal statements of his views on poetry in works such as the Biographia Literaria, the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, or the Defence of Poetry, we can unravel from his letters and poems a set of beliefs about the poet and poetry comparable to, though different from, the theory of his fellow Romantics. Unlike them, Byron mistrusted the imagination as a means to truth, nor could he submerge the personality of the real self in the poetic self. In the progress of his poetic theory, at various stages he achieves a particular identity which, as his experience broadens or deepens and his attitude towards himself, his world, or his audience changes, he dissolves into a new identity. Perhaps to a greater degree than the other Romantic poets, Byron illustrates the new view of the Romantic poet's search for identity that Morse Peckham advances in his re-defining of Romanticism, concluding that the poet is

a tough-minded man, determined to create value and project order to make feasible the pure assertion of identity, determined to assert identity in order to engage with reality simply because it is there and because there is nothing else, and knowing eventually that his orientations are adaptive instruments and that no orientation can be final.¹⁰

For Byron the process of creating and asserting identity is always self-conscious and self-regarding but without ever surrendering what he considers to be his real to his poetic self.

9. Ball, Central Self, p. 18.

10. Morse Peckham, "Toward a Theory of Romanticism: II. Reconsiderations", Studies in Romanticism, I (August 1961), 8.

In the questions Ball raises about the complexity of Byron's self-consciousness, she touches on the key to understanding the variety of Byronic identities:

Aware of his mobility, acknowledging it, he is not ready to admit his critics' version of the mirror element in his work. What seems to irritate him is any falsely simple notion of the relationship between poet and poem; he regards the activity of creation as a distinctive sphere of being, wherein self is not mirrored but uniquely exercised.¹¹

For an explanation we can look to Byron's metaphor of the child flying the kite. In the figure the kite is both poem and poet; and the child, "self" and poet--"We of the craft. . . are but grown children". One self, firmly earth-bound, watches an imagined, soaring self without entering totally into the identity of the created self. The experience is an engagement with the reality of the wind, whether the wind of inspiration, the currents of social or political change, or the gales of public response, in which the projected self participates as poem and poetical identity but not as a mirror-reflection of the self that is rooted in the reality of actual events of experience in the ordinary world. The earth-bound self holds the restraining cord as aspects of himself are "uniquely exercised"; and, in Peckham's words, "his orientations are adaptive instruments". Byron himself put the idea another way in his note to Don Juan XVI, xvii, explaining the quality of "mobility" in Lady Adeline, a trait he had also identified in himself:

11. Ball, Central Self, p. 19.

It may be defined as an excessive susceptibility of immediate impressions--at the same time without losing the past: and is, though sometimes apparently useful to the possessor, a most painful and unhappy attribute.

Byron then is simultaneously the egotistical and chameleon being as he assumes one identity, retains another and at the same time regards himself in the pose, the chameleon self held by the cord in the hand of the egotistical self: "our thoughts soar, but the frailty of our natures brings them back to earth".

Apart from the problems of identity as these affect his poetic theory, Byron had also to tackle the problem of his attitude towards his audience. When we read his letters and indeed his poems, it is difficult to name a poet more painfully conscious of his reading audience than Byron. From the first, when he is sometimes almost pathetic in his desire for fame and success, to the last, when he has gained the detachment and balanced poise of his final Don Juan style, Byron had to discover his poetic theory in the process of coming to terms with his attitude towards his audience. Much of his life he alternately courted and cursed his public, including well-meaning friends and Murray and his Synod; but in contending against this opposing force Byron was able to define the nature and function of the poet and poetry and to share insights into the creative process. Though the discovery of a unique style suitable to express the truth of his experience and his concept of self has more about it of an apocalyptic manifestation than of a gradual progress towards the ultimate refinement of his original poetic

voice, we must agree in part that Byron's development as a poet is "a gradual shedding of false experiment".¹² Certainly, in viewing the whole body of his poetry, we see evidence of a conscious discriminating and eliminating process at work throughout Byron's poetic career. When we read his poetry in the light thrown back from Don Juan we see signs that seem to point the way to the epiphany of the final style. But the last achievement owes more to Byron's discovery of how to write poems as he wrote letters than to a refining of previous experiments towards the style of his last poems, except as these gave him a perspective into the relationship between himself and his audience and the confidence to speak out of his artistic integrity.

What was actually needed was a style through which he could express his individual view of the world by embracing the ironies of existence. Anti-romantic to the extent that he could not believe in either the world or man as perfectible, Byron required a verse form that would reflect and accept his vision of the disparity between reality and illusory hope, one that would allow him to laugh at the way things are rather than weep because they are so. That style Byron achieved in the end by balancing his extreme consciousness of audience demands against an unshakable belief in his poetic vision and a dogged determination to express that truth, if not for the

12. Oliver Elton, A Survey of English Literature, 1780-1830 (London: Edwin Arnold, 1912), II, 136.

sake of his own age, for a future time. The style is hard won against the demands to accommodate his dual personality.

In the image of the poet as a child Byron participates in the Romantic awareness of the child in the man, but his is not the usual Romantic view of the child. The earlier Romantic poets, especially Wordsworth and Coleridge, celebrate the child for his innate wisdom or for his unselfconscious participation in a closeness with nature and natural beauties that will inform his later years. We come away from Wordsworth's record of his happy childhood in The Prelude with a strong sense of his unrestrained enjoyment of the pleasures he found in ranging freely over his native hills. Though occasionally upbraided by his conscience gently awakened by nature when he has played some mischievous prank, as in the boat-stealing episode, Wordsworth's child is, on the whole, carefree and independent as he goes about unpremeditatedly "like a bee among the flowers", collecting and storing up the sweet things of nature for later use:

Thus, often in those fits of vulgar joy
Which, through all seasons, on a child's pursuits
Are prompt attendants, 'mid that giddy bliss
Which, like a tempest, works along the blood
And is forgotten; even then I have felt
Gleams like the flashing of a shield; the earth
And common face of Nature spake to me
Rememberable things. (Book I, 608-616, 1805 ed.)

For Wordsworth, the child in the poet is the positive force that binds the days "each to each in natural piety". Likewise, Coleridge in the Biographia Literaria finds that poetic genius rests on the ability of the man to recollect

the responses of the child, "to combine a child's sense of wonder and novelty with the appearances, which every year for perhaps forty years have rendered familiar".

The striking impression of Byron's view of the qualities of the child preserved in the poet is far different from these. Byron's image calls attention to the child's "weaknesses", without his "innocence", and suggests the child's need for security, approval, and recognition. Though he would fly his kite high for the praise of an appreciative audience, the "frailty" of self-consciousness restrains him. The basic weakness of a child, his dependence on others, is intensified in the insecure child to a nearly insatiable need for approval from others that causes him constantly to contrive ways to be noticed. While Byron could never forget that writing poetry is a social function, in those rare instances when he was able to forget that poems were spectacles demanding approving notice, especially in the last cantos of Don Juan, he found the detachment that allowed him to write first-rate poetry. His final articulated definition of poetry shows that he had, once again, at least for the time of his current orientation, overcome that inordinate sensitivity to criticism which had haunted his poetic career and nourished his childish demand for attention:

You know, or don't know, that great Bacon saith,
 "Fling up a straw, 'twill show the way the wind blows:"
 And such a straw, borne on by human breath,
 Is Poesy, according as the Mind glows;
 A paper kite which flies 'twixt Life and Death,
 A shadow which the onward Soul behind throws;
 And mine's a bubble, not blown up for praise,
 But just to play with as an infant plays. (XIV, viii)

Here is Byron's final understanding that ideally the poet plays with words and thoughts as unselfconsciously as an infant, that poems are not "blown up for praise" but for their intrinsic worth. The first half-line of the stanza economically sums up Byron's understanding of man's position in a universe of uncertainties, as well as his release from reader pressure. In a world where contradiction regularly counters what is held as truth, knowing is constantly challenged by not knowing; the condition is accepted. Similarly the statement reflects his ambivalence toward his reading audience. Whether the reader knows or does not know, agrees or disagrees, approves or disapproves, is immaterial. In his theory of poetry Byron moves steadily towards this position of detachment though in practice he cannot always hold onto indifference. Near the time he wrote this stanza, Lady Blessington remarked on his show of disturbance when he had read criticism from an American newspaper, reprinted in Galignani's journal. His response to attack "from such frivolous sources", she says, "is the most striking instance of weakness . . . in this gifted and remarkable man".¹³ From the beginning to the end of his poetical career Byron fights a battle to find a state of equilibrium in his conflicting desires for a reading audience that would give him status and the name and fame of a poet and, contrarily, for freedom from the restrictions inevitably imposed by too close attention to audience demands.

Rutherford has observed of Byron that "for much

13. Lady Blessington, The Idler in Italy (London: Henry Colburn, 1839), II, 66.

of his career he stood alone among the great Romantics in not holding any 'theory of poetry' "¹⁴ and in this opinion he represents the view commonly held among Byron's critics. Indeed, Byron's poetic theory as a subject for serious contemplation seems at first glance no more than another contradiction is an already-long list of antitheses associated with Byron as a man and as a poet. He himself would be the first to object to any view that his poetry was the product of a consciously considered set of rules whereby the poet transmutes experience and thought into poetry. An opponent of systems and systems-spinners, Byron vigorously attacked Bowles for his "invariable principles" for judging poetry, and he despaired of Leigh Hunt's silliness when Hunt had defended as part of his "system" the quaint expressions of thought and archaic uses of language that Byron had pointed out to him in the manuscript of Rimini: "When a man talks of his system, it is like a woman's talking of her virtue. I let them talk on".¹⁵ Yet Byron, like all poets, created his poetry out of a set of attitudes and concepts about the nature of the poet, the creative process, the function of poetry, and the relationship between the poet and his audience, all of which add up to a poetic theory. Throughout his letters and journals, in the records of his conversations, and in his poetry as well, we find him directly expressing his views on poets and poetry and in some cases implying significant opinions that allow us to reconstruct his poetic principles. When

14. Andrew Rutherford, Byron: A Critical Study (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1961), p.4.

15. ELJ, V, 588.

these scattered and sometimes isolated statements are brought together, it is doubtful that any poet has had as much to say about his "craft" without making a formal statement as several of his contemporaries did. Further, Byron's poetic theory, reconstructed from principles developed over his lifetime, gains an advantage over Coleridge's Biographia Literaria or Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballad Prefaces, even in their several revisions, or Shelley's Defence in that Byron's theory reflects his views at each stage of its evolution. Since a poet's poetics is an organic process, we must go also in the case of Byron's contemporaries to their poetry and other writings for their last insights into the poetic process.

From his earliest letters we find Byron stimulated to express his thoughts "poetically" to those persons he knew to be a sympathetic audience, especially to his half-sister Augusta, to Elizabeth Pigot and her brother, and to a few school friends. Byron's first reference to an interest in writing comes in a letter to Augusta, written from Southwell in the spring of 1804, shortly after he had discovered her to be a kindred spirit. Telling her of his mother's plan to hold a party that evening so that he could meet the "principal Southwell Belles", Byron declares his intention "to fall violently in love" with one of them for the sake of relieving the tedium of his holiday in the little town. His imagination races on to spin out a scenario of what might be expected to follow, the whole described for Augusta with what he surely hopes is a degree of urbanity, propped up with a few school-French phrases:

...it will serve as an amusement pour passer le temps and it will at least have the charm of novelty to recommend it, then you will know in the course of a few weeks I shall be quite au desespoir, shoot myself and Go out of the world with eclat, and my History will furnish materials for a pretty little Romance which shall be entitled and denominated the loves of Lord B. and the cruel and Inconstant Sigismunda Cunegunda Bridgetina &c&c princess of Terra Incognita.--Don't you think I have a very Good Knack for novel writing?¹⁶

Characteristically, Byron views himself at the centre of a tale of tragic love in which personal experience and feeling, his individual history, are translatable into literature, the basic mode of his poetry as well as that of his fellow Romantics. More particularly, the brief passage hints at the poetic mode he was to develop to great effectiveness in his major poems, the technique which allowed him to be both narrator and participator in a poem, an observer of himself in an imagined self. Here, also and elsewhere in these early letters, in the typically Romantic fashion, he projects himself into a role and a situation as yet not familiar to him both for the pleasure of imagining what it would be like and as a part of the process of self-realisation. For Byron, however, unlike the other Romantics, discovering the self through the imaginative and creative act was only part of the goal; another important part was to be admired for his creativity. Typically, though not always asked for as in the question that closes this passage, Byron reveals his childish need for approval as he seeks as off-handedly as possible to know whether Augusta can admire his skill in this small scrap of a story.

16. MLJ, I, 48, April 9, 1804.

Byron's early correspondence with Augusta, before it was interrupted by her marriage in 1807, serves the same purpose for Byron that he was later to assign to writing poetry. Writing to her provided relief from the ennui of his vacation days spent in Southwell and escape from his tyrant mother. Beyond this, and perhaps above all, he hoped to amuse and entertain Augusta. Underneath the youthful pretentiousness of much of the phrasing and the obvious wish to be seen to be a writer, we discover a decided poetic turn of mind in his ability to conceive and sustain a metaphor, in his seemingly natural lapses into alliterative and rhythmic patterns when he speaks out of strong feeling, and in his habit of abstracting some dominant impression or feeling to render specific with a few well-chosen details. We feel the boredom of Southwell where the young boy has "no amusement of any Kind", "few books of any Kind that are either instructive or amusing", and "no society but old parsons and old Maids". On a slightly more positive side, there are conversations with his mother, "sometimes very edifying but not always very agreeable" and there is shooting, a pleasurable pastime, but it occupies his neighbours to the exclusion of all else so that "they are only one degree removed from the brute creation". Already the double vision is at work, seeing and accepting the whole as a mixture of good and bad, but unafraid to see it as it is. As the letter continues, Byron abruptly steps outside of his languishing self to watch himself perform a part, complete with costume,

...I am an absolute Hermit, in a short time my Gravity which is increased by my solitude will qualify me for

an Archbishoprick, I really begin to think that I should become a mitre amazingly well.¹⁷

This and similar passages in these early letters affect a sober and near melancholy mood, but under the surface Byron's comic vision also is already at work. Byron sees himself thwarted by forces over which he has no control, but he can turn his situation to humorous effect. While logically a reclusive and sombre lifestyle precedes election to a high clerical position, the reverse is not true. Byron pushes his image beyond rationality into the realm of the ludicrous.

Mrs. Byron's volatile disposition is another topic for some of his most dramatic writing. As the first in a long line of forces against which he found himself in opposition, her unpredictable rages provide him much opportunity to describe. In one instance, he reveals his mother in a fully developed metaphor of a tropical storm. Finding himself with "nothing to amuse" Augusta other than more accounts of his mother's "diabolical disposition", Byron tells his half-sister how his very efforts to conceal his disapproval of his mother ironically result in the opposite of the desired effect:

...this so far from calming the Gale, blows it into a hurricane, which threatens to destroy every thing, till exhausted by its own violence, it is lulled into a sullen torpor, which after a short period, is again roused into fresh and renewed phrenzy, to me most terrible, and to every other Spectator astonishing.¹⁸

17. MLJ, I, 47, April 2, 1804.

18. MLJ, I, 75-76, April 18, 1805. See Marchand's note (p. 75) and valid reason for presuming this letter to have been written in 1805, rather than 1804 as Prothero has it.

Without having experienced an actual hurricane, Byron has captured the essential details of that sort of storm in the progressive strengthening of the winds from gale to hurricane force, through the quiet eye of the storm, the deceptive lull before the circular moving winds again begin to batter the victim with increased strength. This passage looks forward to the various evidences in Byron's poetry of his fascination with sea-born storms, most notably, of course, the storm and shipwreck of the second canto of Don Juan, and to other recurrent images in which he equates life with safe passage through storms. The most memorable of these occurs in Don Juan (X, iv), in the stanza that begins "In the wind's eye I have sailed, and sail", a celebration of his ability to survive in his "still sea-worthy skiff" and to stay afloat "Where ships have foundered, as doth many a boat". This is worth comparing with the earlier image in Childe Harold IV, civ, cv, where Byron at the tomb of Cecilia Metella in Rome longs to remain in that affecting spot until his fired imagination, from the "floating wreck" of his life and "planks, far shattered o'er the rocks", has

Built me a little bark of hope, once more
 To battle with the Ocean and the shocks
 Of the loud breakers, and the ceaseless roar
 Which rushes on the solitary shore
 Where all lies foundered that was ever dear.

Mrs. Byron is also the antagonist who provides Byron with his earliest opportunity to express his thoughts on tyranny, oppression, and liberty and to try on the identity of the oppressed, as well as the liberated. His

letters to Augusta and the Pigots frequently reveal his fate in near poetic terms with darkly comic exaggeration. Comparing himself to those who are truly victims of the worst kind of oppression, Byron laments his confinement and anticipates his release in a blending of the sublime and the ridiculous:

No Captive Negro, or Prisoner of war, ever looked forward to their emancipation, and return to Liberty, with more Joy, and with more lingering expectation, than I do to my escape from [this] maternal bondage, and this accursed place, [which] is the region of dullness itself, and more stupid than the banks of Lethe, though it possesses contrary qualities to the river of oblivion, as the detested scenes I now witness, make me regret the happier ones already passed, and wish their restoration.¹⁹

Byron is already shaping his ambivalent view of the world. Though he is mixing his metaphors in explaining the intensity of his longing for freedom and the living death of Southwell, what is past has greater appeal for him than what is to come. Byron participates in this instance in the general Romantic cast of mind that looked backward to a more glorious past, but he lacks or does not give voice to the usual Romantic conviction in the possibilities of creating an even more glorious future world. Locked into a hateful present, he is without any vision of better times ahead and would simply retreat to the past. Constantly swayed by the mood of the moment, Byron's early letters, like his early poems, are effusive responses to immediate experience built out of an unmediated and "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". When he next wrote to Augusta, his current mood was as high as the former was low. Jubilant now with his first experience of

19. MLJ, I, 76, April 18, 1805.

college life, Byron exults in his escape from "the Trammels or rather Fetters of my domestic Tyrant Mrs. Byron". Revelling in his "Superexcellent rooms", his generous allowance, a servant and a horse, he finds himself "as independent as a German Prince who coins his own Cash, or a Cherokee Chief who coins no Cash at all, but enjoys what is more precious, Liberty. I talk in raptures of that Goddess because my amiable Mama was so despotic".²⁰ At this stage Byron's sampling of identities remains on a surface level. He makes no effort to penetrate and explore imaginatively the inner feelings of those figures he uses briefly as projections of identity. His technique in these instances in the letters reminds us of the neo-classical method of relying on the type to communicate information about the specific, of choosing abstractions that can be expected to carry meanings because they are traditional symbols. In expressing his sense of liberty, Byron forsakes the captive negro and prisoner of war who had embodied for him the extremes of lost freedom and turns instead for new images that expressed for him the opposite end of the scale, his new-found sense of complete autonomy embodied in the figures of independent power, the German prince and the Cherokee chief. Byron's concern here and in much of the poetry he had begun to write is totally self-conscious, and he directs his creative efforts towards finding stock images and situations that will permit him to feel the effect of trying on different disguises. He would have had no desire to get

20. MLJ, I, 79, November 6, 1805.

inside Keats's pecking sparrow in order to experience the sparrow's world through self-negation but he might have put on the sparrow's costume for the sake of the statement such a display could make about his feelings about himself.

Byron's juvenile poems illustrate again and again this ability to adopt different identities to communicate the emotions common to human beings. His amatory verse particularly demonstrates Byron putting on a variety of masks in order to write about the range of attitudes possible to lovers--the lover bereaved, rejected, thwarted; constant or inconstant; consoled or inconsolable; hopeful or despairing. Though the titles sometimes suggest that these poems are addressed to a number of women and therefore require no consistency of attitudes, except in the case of the several poems to Mary Chaworth, the women to whom the poems are addressed have little if any identity. What is important to Byron, whether the poem be addressed to Eliza, Julia, Caroline, or Mary, is his stance towards the dramatic situation he sets up for the lover and the beloved, the pose that he adopts for the particular poetic moment.

His "first dash into poetry" not only establishes a pattern for much of the amatory verse that followed, but also provides us with a glimpse of traits that inform Byron's later poetry, his self-dramatising way of observing himself, his ability to look at a situation from varying points of view, and his efforts to reconcile reason and emotion. In this "ebullition of a passion" for Margaret

Parker, his young cousin whose death inspired his first poem, Byron creates a dramatic situation in which he as a bereaved lover comes as a mourner to her tomb to "scatter flowers on the dust I love". The point of view, however, combines a self who mourns his loss, entering subjectively into the grief of bereavement, and a self who observes the mourner and the scene objectively so that he is able to offer an appropriate way of handling the grief. The mourning self dominates the first three stanzas. He comes through the evening gloom to the tomb and then observes himself meditating upon the loss of one whom death had not spared despite her worth and beauty. Beginning with the fourth stanza grief turns towards consolation through an acceptance of God's will as the observing self asks and then answers the question "But wherefore weep?" Reasoning with the mourning self, the objective self arrives at an acceptance of his grief through a somewhat daring compromise with God. Though he is impotent to change the fate of the beloved, he will neither "arraign" nor "accuse" God. He must submit to God's will, yet he will also allow her beauty and goodness still living in his memory "to retain their wonted place". Byron admits the force of a power beyond his control, but he maintains his integrity as an individual with characteristic Byronic refusal to yield meekly to such force. Finally, the poem is a display of emotion which the poet himself watches approvingly, a kite he flies for his own admiration. But Byron's note to the poem, appearing first in Fugitive Pieces, indicates that this first poem is also a bid for audience attention

as he "claims the indulgence of the reader more for this piece, perhaps, than any other in the collection".²¹

Byron's early letters again bear out his divided view of what a poem is. He is strongly conscious that it is both a private expression of feeling and a spectacle for exhibition. We first learn that Byron is writing poetry, indeed already preparing a volume for private printing, in a letter to Elizabeth Pigot on August 10, 1806. Having fled Southwell and his despotic mother in the dead of night, from his London sanctuary he writes several letters over the next few weeks to John and Elizabeth Pigot with instructions for his printer. These letters give us some idea of Byron's earliest view of poetry and his attitude toward himself as a poet. Speaking of the proofs which the printer Ridge will deliver to the Pigots for correcting, Byron refers to his work as "the offspring of my poetic Mania", already incorporating ideas about poetry that he returns to again and again during his career, both that a poem is a kind of child of the poet and that it is generated out of a diseased or distraught condition.²² On the same day he sent privately to John Pigot what he termed an "astonishing packet" of stanzas composed during "an idle hour this evening". Apparently wishing to parade these before close friends, Byron asked that the stanzas be sent to Ridge for a separate printing as they were "improper for the perusal of Ladies".²³

21. PW, I, 5, note 1.

22. MLJ, I, 96, August 10, 1806.

23. MLJ, I, 97, August 10, 1806.

A few days later, to John Pigot, he elaborates on the notion of poetry as the result of procreation:

By the enclosure of a 2d. jingle of Rhyme, you will probably conceive my Muse, to be vastly prolific, poor Girl! she is now past Child bearing, her inserted production was brought forth, a few years ago, & found by accident on Thursday, amongst some old papers; I have recopied it and adding the proper Date, request it may be printed with the Rest of the Family.--I thought your Sentiments, on her last Bantling, would coincide with mine, but it was impossible to give it any other garb, being founded on Facts. 24

It is not difficult to sense Byron's ambivalent feelings about poetry from these passages. Pride in his accomplishment and his need for admiration, his concern to date the poem as proof of his precocity, however, outweigh the modest depreciation of his "jingle of Rhyme". The underscoring of words in itself reveals the proud father who proves his manhood by the number of children he sires and in the process wears out the mother. More interesting, perhaps, than his adolescent preening is this first evidence of Byron's insistence on writing poetry that reflects the truth of his experience. Pigot had obviously concurred with Byron's opinion that the "last Bantling" would not do for the volume to be printed. Whether or not, as Marchand speculates, the reference is to the poem "To Mary" that required the suppression of Fugitive Pieces soon after it was printed in December 1806,²⁵ Byron developed early his principle of writing poetry "founded

24. MLJ, I, 97, August 16, 1806.

25. MLJ, I, 97, note 1 to letter of August 10, 1806. There seems to be no particular reason to assume that the stanzas referred to are the poem "To Mary", printed in Fugitive Pieces. Byron specifically states that they are "to be printed separate from my other Compositions" because he considers them "improper". Certainly, at the time of writing the letter the stanzas in question seem intended for private circulation only.

on Facts" that he was to adhere to for his entire career and that was to engage him in a continuing battle with both advisors and readers.

The publication history of the four volumes of his juvenilia tells us much about Byron's theory of poetry in its earliest phase and shows in the process of alterations made to the successive volumes the young poet's growing awareness of the tensions to be reckoned with between himself and his subject matter and himself and his readers. Properly viewed, the four volumes are in reality a single volume reworked through four editions as Byron omitted poems objectionable to his own or readers' sensibilities and added newer compositions to reflect his developing discrimination.²⁶ Byron's original motive for printing his poems seems clearly to spring from a combination of his admiration for Moore's early work, The Poetical Works of the Late Thomas Little, and a strong desire to display his own young talent. Moore's work, first published in 1801, had already gone through several editions when Fugitive Pieces was printed in 1806; and fond memories of the volume recurred to Byron in later years. When he had first put Newstead up for sale, Byron wrote nostalgically to Moore of having first read his poems there in 1803 and of the striking impression they had made on his mind while he was still "without the smallest poetical propensity" himself.²⁷ And again, from Ravenna,

26. See E. H. Coleridge's Bibliographical Note, PW, I, xi-xii, detailing the numbers of poems dropped and carried forward in the various volumes.

27. MLJ, III, 96, August 22, 1813.

Byron wrote to Moore,

I have just been turning over Little, which I knew by heart in 1803, being then in my fifteenth summer. Heigho! I believe all the mischief I have ever done, or sung, has been owing to that confounded book of yours.²⁸

Byron, however, overestimates his debt to Moore as far as the poetry is concerned and we agree with Marchand that apart from taking "his cue from Moore in these poems celebrating passion subdued to sentiment, in several respects he went beyond his model".²⁹

Moore's poems, attributed to Little, are all cut from the same piece, consistently and predictably little glittering creations expressing the sentiments of a young man who amused himself during his brief life with versifying his dalliances with a variety of women. The collection of poems in toto gives us a detailed portrait of the youthful poet-lover, doubtless steeped in Lovelace and Jonson and Herrick, trying his hand at expressing his thoughts on his own Julia, or Rosa, or Mrs.--. The volume as a whole is an artfully conceived fiction presenting the effusions of a self-conscious young man, vain about the feminine hearts he has moved and proud of his ability to turn a phrase. The poems affirm and validate the biographical sketch provided in the "Preface by the Editor" and the preface prepares us adequately for the poems.³⁰

28. MLJ, VII, 117, June 9, 1820.

29. L. A. Marchand, Byron's Poetry: A Critical Introduction (London: John Murray, 1965), p. 16.

30. For a somewhat detailed analysis of Moore's volume, see Jerome J. McGann, Fiery Dust (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 10-14. While I believe that McGann places too much, or perhaps, the wrong emphasis on Byron's debt to the volume, his discussion is valuable for the insights it provides into Byron's early works.

Though a few of the poems at the end of the volume are on topics other than love--"Fragments of College Exercises" upholds patriotic duty to country, for example, and "To a Boy, with a Watch" treats both filial obligations and the importance of employing time wisely; all aim at a gem-like brilliance effortlessly achieved after the manner of the Cavaliers. One of the early poems in the volume, "To a Lady, with Some Manuscript Poems", sums up the poet's intention to demonstrate his facility and his sensitivity. Departing the country, the poet leaves with the lady a "simple page" of his poetry to be shown only to sympathetic hearts:

For, trust me, they who never melt
 With pity, never melt with love;
 And they will frown at all I've felt,
 And all my loving lays reprove. (13-16)

Explaining why the poems are most likely to "be blest" by another woman, he asks the lady to

Tell her, that he whose loving themes
 Her eye indulgent wanders o'er,
 Could sometimes wake from idle dreams,
 And bolder flights of fancy soar;

That glory oft would claim the lay,
 And friendship oft his numbers move;
 And whisper then, that 'sooth to say,
 His sweetest song was given to LOVE! (25-32)

The love poems revolve around the conventional themes of fickleness and undying fidelity, jealousy and indifference, the pain of parting, the threat of time, the pleasure and pain universally common to lovers. The poet is caught in the expected variety of moods that depend on the particular situation of each poem. By turns he is light-hearted, sober, reflective, teasing, extravagantly flattering, but he is never sincerely disheartened by rebuffs nor downcast

to discover that love is transitory. Even as he tries to convince a current love who has begun to doubt his devotion--"My life has been a task of love, / One long, long thought of you", we know he has said that already to previous loves and will use the line again to those who come later. The over-all impression of Moore's volume is that Moore has created an imaginary poet-lover (Little) and is trying his hand at writing the sort of sentimental love poetry appropriate to the personality of a young man whose chief interest in life is collecting women's affections like trophies. No encounter leaves a lasting scar such as Byron claimed in the case of his love for Mary Chaworth, but Moore's poems instead seem to be studied exercises in turning out polished pieces on traditional courtly themes. The poem "To--" ("With all my soul, then, let us part") is typical of the lack of genuine emotional involvement. The lover records his sentiments in an amicable decision between the pair to end their romance, but he registers no pain at the end of the affair. He merely sees each of them proceeding on their separate ways with neither having gained nor lost anything by their association:

Our hearts have suffered little harm
 In this short fever of desire;
 You have not lost a single charm,
 Nor I one spark of feeling fire. (17-20)

Their love has served as a spring-time amusement that otherwise "would be but gloomy weather"(7) and will serve as a point of reference for comparisons when each finds pleasure in another's arms (25-36). One stanza sums up the poet's general attitude to the succession of loves he

has paraded through the collection and must have echoed in Byron's mind, in thought and rhyme, as he began the writing of Don Juan:

'Tis not that I expect to find
 A more devoted, fond, and true one,
 With rosier cheek or sweeter mind--
 Enough for me that she's a new one. (9-12)

There can be no doubt that Byron, on first discovering Little's poems, admired Moore's ability to write glibly of his love exploits and that he would think of his early poems as imitations of that technique. Surely, however, in later years when he defended Don Juan against the charge of corrupting young ladies he had come, perhaps intuitively, to recognise that Moore's poems are rendered corrosively prurient because they lack genuine feeling. What Byron owes to Moore is the stance he assumes in offering the poems to his readers. Both writers hide behind the mask of anonymity, with Moore claiming the double protection of serving merely as editor of the juvenile efforts of a dead friend; and both crave praise based on a consideration of the youth of the writer. The first two paragraphs particularly of Moore's preface to the pretended work of his friend Little suggest Byron's attitude toward his early poems. Moore states first that the poems "were never intended by the Author to pass beyond the circle of his friends". He also calls the poems "trifles of the moment", the work of one who died at twenty-one and

written at so early a period, that their errors may claim some indulgence from the critic: their author, as unambitious as indolent, scarce ever looked beyond the moment of composition; he wrote as he pleased, careless whether he pleased as he wrote. It may likewise be remembered, that they are all the

production of an age when the passions very often give a colouring too warm to the imagination....³¹

We see Byron imitating these sentiments when, on the dedication page of Fugitive Pieces, he solemnly and anonymously admits that "These TRIFLES" are printed at the request of friends and are intended solely for their "AMUSEMENT OR APPROBATION". On the back of the dedication page he paraphrases Moore even more elaborately:

As these POEMS are never intended to meet the public eye, no apology is necessary for the form in which they appear. They are printed merely for the perusal of a few friends to whom they are dedicated; who will look upon them with indulgence; and as most of them were composed between the age of 15 and 17, their defects will be pardoned or forgotten, in the youth and inexperience of the WRITER.

A greatly reduced version of this statement appears on the reverse of the title page of Poems on Various Occasions, printed quickly following the suppression of the Fugitive Pieces quarto:

The only Apology necessary to be adduced, in extenuation of any errors in the following collection, is, that the Author has not yet completed his nineteenth year.³²

When he sent John Pigot a copy of the new volume, Byron again echoes Moore's preface by way of explaining why his amatory verse is apt to offend certain readers:

The Adventures of my life from 16 to 19 & the dissipation into which I have been thrown when in London, have given a voluptuous Tint to my Ideas, but the occasions which called forth my Muse, would hardly admit any other Colouring.³³

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31. Thomas Moore, The Poetical Works of the late Thomas Little, Esq. (London: J & T. Carpenter, 1803), Third edition, pp. vi-vii.
32. Fugitive Pieces, printed by S. and J. Ridge, 1806, and Poems on Various Occasions, 1807, are available in the Ashley Collection of the British Library.
33. MLJ, I, 103, January 13, 1807.

Byron unfortunately carried his fawningly apologetic stance into the preface to Hours of Idleness in which he claims that the poems are "the fruits of the lighter hours of a young man, who has lately completed his nineteenth year", after admitting that apart from the usual risks authors must take he fears that he "may incur the charge of presumption, for obtruding myself on the world, when, without doubt, I might be, at my age, more usefully employed".³⁴ More than any single flaw in the poems themselves, it was this seeking after indulgence on account of his youth and his class status that provoked Lord Brougham's shattering attack on Byron in the Edinburgh Review. Calling attention to the frequency with which Byron sought the protection of his minority--on the title page, on the cover of the volume, repeatedly in the preface, and in the evidence of the date of composition pointedly attached to the individual poems, the reviewer hands down the legalistic judgment that the plea of minority is "available only to the defendant; no plaintiff can offer it as a supplementary ground of action". Then, without mercy, Brougham went directly to the heart of the problem in seeing Byron's poems as spectacles too obviously "blown up for praise", childishly insistent on admiration:

Perhaps... in reality, all that he tells us about his youth, is rather with a view to increase our wonder, than to soften our censures. He possibly means to say, "See how a minor can write! This poem was actually composed by a young man of eighteen, and this by one of only sixteen!"--But, alas, we all remember the poetry of Cowley at ten, and Pope at twelve....³⁵

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34. George Gordon, Lord Byron, Hours of Idleness: A Series of Poems Original and Translated (Newark: S. and J. Ridge, 1807), p.v.
35. Edinburgh Review, XI (January, 1808), 285.

Meanwhile, before the Edinburgh critic had done his work in teaching Byron a lesson he never forgot—"As an author, I am cut to atoms by the Edinburgh Review", he told Hobhouse, "it is just out, and has completely demolished my little fabric of fame",³⁶ Byron had already begun to adjust the tension between himself and his audience. His answer to Ridge's decision to bring out a second edition of Hours of Idleness only a few months after its appearance shows first his genuine surprise that another edition is warranted and also that he has made judgments about the volume that indicate a growing aesthetic discernment. Apart from changes he would make in the appearance of the new edition--its size and the colour of the boards, Byron had already decided on substantive changes that reflect increased self-assuredness:

We will also alter the Title, simply to "poems" by Ld. Byron &c. &c. & omit the Latin Motto, the two others can remain.--The preface we will omit altogether.³⁷

The process of reducing pretentiousness to arrive at even this slight degree of independence from his almost slavish desire for approval reflects the confidence Byron had gained from the flattering praise of friends and the favourable reviews that preceded the damaging Edinburgh Review. Further into the letter he tells Ridge to remove the "Stanzas on a view of Harrow" from the new edition and thus again anticipates Brougham's opinion that Byron should have held back those "hobbling stanzas" because they can

36. MLJ, I, 158-159, February 27, 1808.

37. MLJ, I, 137, November 11, 1807.

only be unfavourably compared with Gray's "Ode on Eton College".³⁸ Whether or not he had as yet articulated for himself the reason as Brougham gave it, to "have a care of attempting what the greatest poets have done before him", in this case Byron acted in accordance with a principle that he retained for the remainder of his career. There can be no question that a growth in critical judgment was stimulated by the decisions he had to make in settling on the contents of each of the three volumes that evolved from Fugitive Pieces and that the omissions and additions sprang from the desire to please himself and his readers. Since the poetic theory of his mature years is rooted in this first encounter with critical opinion--Southwell matrons, flattering friends, favourable and unfavourable reviewers, we must examine in some detail these often neglected because largely unavailable early volumes for what Byron's alterations in the successive editions tell us about the evolution of his principles.

38. Edinburgh Review, XI, 286.

CHAPTER IITHE JUVENILE VOLUMES, PRELUDE TO A FOETIC THEORY

The four volumes of Byron's first poems appeared within a period of a year and three or four months, with the great majority of the sixty-eight poems written during that time. The first two privately printed collections followed closely on one another: Fugitive Pieces, which Byron distributed to friends in late November or early December, 1806, was almost immediately recalled to be destroyed and replaced by Poems on Various Occasions, printed in January, 1807. Ridge published Hours of Idleness in late June, 1807, and by November was already encouraging Byron to consider a second edition, which appeared as Poems Original and Translated in March, 1808. When we consider that to the original thirty-nine poems Byron added twenty-nine others to these collections and wrote some forty others that we know of but that were not published in his life time, except for "Stanzas to Jessy", published in Monthly Literary Recreations, July, 1807, and the nine that appeared in 1809 in Hobhouse's miscellany, Imitations and Translations, the quantity of verse alone establishes him as a prolific writer. We have, of course, not taken into account the several works-in-progress mentioned in his letters to Elizabeth Pigot that have not come to light except for "British Bards", expanded into English Bards, and Scotch Reviewers

and published in March, 1809.¹ Such an obvious need to write requires that we take seriously Byron's interest in poetry as an outlet for expressing himself. Through these early poems and Byron's manipulations of them we can discover the foundations of his poetic theory and resolve yet another Byronic paradox that convinced generations of his critics that writing poetry was not important to him.

During the past twenty years, when Marchand's masterly three-volume biography had finally laid to rest the consuming concern with Byron the man, scholars have shown concerted interest in Byron the poet. Though many of the studies focus on Don Juan alone or on a selection of the major poems, many take a comprehensive view of Byron's total work. Even these broad studies, however, perhaps understandably, give little more than passing attention to Byron's work before English Bards.² Apart from the fact that scholars are usually dependent upon editions of the collected works which continue to group the juvenilia, both published and unpublished in Byron's lifetime, under the general heading of Hours of Idleness,

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1. MLJ, I, 136, October 26, 1807. Byron mentions having "written 214 pages of a novel... 560 lines of Bosworth Field, and 250 Lines of another poem...besides half a dozen smaller pieces", in addition to "380 Lines" of the satire that he expected to publish "in a few weeks" under the title "British Bards".
 2. Several exceptions to this generalisation should be noted: Marchand, Byron's Poetry, pp.15-20; Robert F. Gleckner, Byron and the Ruins of Paradise, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1967), pp. 1-26; McGann, Fiery Dust, pp.1-28; and Bernard Blackstone, Byron: A Survey (London: Longmann, 1975), pp.1-40. None of the studies, however, is concerned with what can be learned from the distribution of the poems in the

continued...

after Coleridge's usage in his edition of the poetry, little of Byron's early work in the long view merits the lasting interest of someone who is studying a particular aspect of Byron's poetic development. His adolescent and often sentimentalised beginnings hold little promise of what we know as the final achievement of his poetry; and a cursory and generalised view of the first poems is usually adequate for picking out themes, postures, and attitudes towards experience that hint at the mature Byron. In tracing Byron at work as he builds a theory of poetry, however, the poems of the early period are seminal, especially when considered in the order of their publication. What Byron published in these early volumes, what he eliminated from the successive printings, and, finally, what he wrote but chose not to publish, tell us more about his poetic development than the sum of his early work allows; the parts are indeed greater than the whole. In the introductory chapter of his study of Byron as a poet, Blackstone has described Byron's poetic development as "an unceasing quest for proportion: for the exact blending of the themes of love, wisdom and power in a synthesis which will adequately express that view of life that we still, even when we are not thinking of Byron's works, call 'Byronic'".³ Taken in the limited view implied,

Footnote 2 continued - separate volumes. Marchand searches the early poems for examples of Byron's "authentic voice"; Gleckner, for evidence of a pessimistic vision (while ignoring counter expressions of optimism); McGann, to discover Byron's self-portrait; and Blackstone, for embryos of the themes he believes central to Byron's later work.

3. Blackstone, Survey, p. 12.

the balancing of interests into a characteristic attitude towards life, Blackstone's statement takes into account only the kite in Byron's kite-child-wind image or one angle of the comparable equilateral triangle. Byron had, of course, to make a flyable kite; he had to put together the materials of his experience in a process of continued readjustment to achieve a design functional in its correlated parts. Or, as Stead has put it, the progress of the poet is "a gradual readjustment of an initial, necessary, aesthete's imbalance".⁴ To Blackstone's perception of Byron's poetic development we would add that major considerations in Byron's "quest for proportion" were his experiments in learning how to control the distance between himself and his poetry and himself and his audience. His first four volumes record Byron's developing view of himself and of reality, both shaped by his response to praise and blame, a view that culminates in the identity adopted in the first two cantos of Childe Harold.

The letters Byron wrote during the time his first volumes were appearing outline his rather rapid progress towards a greater detachment from his work, but his boyish pride dies painfully slowly for the reader. In sending a copy of Poems on Various Occasions to Dr. Falkner, his mother's Southwell landlord, Byron repeated sentiments similar to those he had shared with close friends in the prefatory material of Fugitive Pieces, now suppressed. Clearly, he thinks of his poems as spectacles worthy of

4. Stead, New Poetic, p. 14.

Dr. Falkner's admiration, though insecurity and the need to protect himself from hurt compelled him to treat them diffidently as no more than trifling efforts:

Such "Juvenilia," as they can claim no great degree of approbation, I may venture to hope, will also escape the severity of uncalled for, though perhaps not undeserved Criticism.--They were written on many, & various Occasions, and they are now published merely for the perusal of a friendly Circle. Believe me, Sir, if they afford the slightest amusement, to you and the rest of my social Readers, I shall have gathered all the "Bays" I ever wish to adorn the Head

of yours very truly,
Byron⁵

From visualising himself in the classical pose of the poet, he turns to his friend John Pigot who will appreciate his likeness to an earthy poet of the current world. He proudly reports that he has been called "a most profligate Sinner, in short a 'young Moore' ", as a result of the poem "To Mary" in the first volume.⁶ Or again, insufferably affected in response to the appreciative comments of Edward Long, his former Harrow schoolmate, he adopts the air of a poet plagued with the praise of the masses when he desires only that of the intimate few. Denying the classical image in preference for that of a modern-day dabbler, he nonetheless sprinkles his letter with Latin clichés:

"Odi profanum Vulgas" [;?] give me the approbation of my Friends, & I would resign all the Bays, that ever ornamented the "Sinciput & Occiput" of Homer; I had already secured the "vox populi" in my favour, that is to say, I had obtained the applause of all the Country Lords & Squires, more, I believe, on account of my youth, than my merits; but the praise of a Friend, particularly a Harrovian, is far preferable to the admiration of the "Turba Quiritum".

5. MLJ, I, 103, January 8, 1807.

6. MLJ, I, 103, January 13, 1807.

With feigned apprehension at the thought that Long had given a copy of his "poor effusions" to their friend William Bankes, Byron declares that Bankes has "too much of the Man, ever to approve the flights of a Boy", but is resigned to awaiting "in trembling Suspense, my Crucifixion from his Decree".⁷

When Byron replies not long after to Bankes's critique, however, we see evidence that he has already begun to submit himself and his poetry to critical analysis. Lacking Bankes's letter to Byron, it is not possible for us to say whether Bankes had raised questions that prompted Byron to begin to create a distinctive identity for himself, but certainly when we have strained off Byron's gushing gratitude for the comments "in which Flattery has borne so slight a part . . . [to one already] cloyed with insipid Compliments", we see a moody, melancholy forerunner of Childe Harold beginning to take shape. Byron assigns the "gloomy Turn of the Ideas" of the poems to the fact that many of them came into being "under great Depression of Spirits, & during severe Indisposition".⁸ In a second letter presumed to be written to Bankes at about this same time, Byron mentions that his "amatory pieces will be expunged, & others substituted in their place" in the new volume, Hours of Idleness, currently in preparation.⁹ To his friend Long as well, Byron

7. MLJ, I, 109-110, February 23, 1807.

8. MLJ, I, 111, March 6, 1807.

9. MLJ, I, 112.

enlarges upon this new identity. In response to what must have been a rather dispirited letter from Long announcing that he had joined the Guards and was therefore saying farewell to his "happiest Days", Byron comments on the wish Long had expressed that the best was not over for Byron:

To be plain with Regard to myself. Nature stamp't me in the Die of Indifference. I consider myself as destined never to be happy, although in some instances fortunate. I am an isolated Being on the Earth, without a Tie to attach me to life, except a few School-fellows, and a score of females. Let me but "hear my fame on the winds" and the song of the Bards in my Norman house, I ask no more and don't expect so much.¹⁰

Adding to his developing view of himself is the verse-letter that Byron sent a few days later to Long, speaking directly in answer to Long's bleak view of the future and first published in Hours of Idleness under the title "To E. N. L., Esq". Here, Byron amends the self-portrait recently drawn for Long to describe his personal approach to despondency. The result of a few more days of reflection on Long's admitted despair, the poem gives a more true-to-life picture of Byron that at intervals throughout his life reasserts a self who refuses to be destroyed by crises and is imaged at the last in the letters and the poetry in the buoyant-spirited voice that is willing to make the best of things as they exist. Though the "joyous days" of the past live now only in the imagination, he takes as a promising sign the rainbow that appears in a cloud-darkened noon sky and through an act of will refuses to give in to moodiness:

10. MLJ, I, 114, April 16, 1807.

Ah! though the present brings but pain,
 I think those days may come again;
 Or if, in melancholy mood,
 Some lurking envious fear intrude,
 To check my bosom's fondest thought,
 And interrupt the golden dream,
 I crush the fiend with malice fraught,
 And, still, indulge my wonted theme. (11-18)

Byron's is a nearly Wordsworthian confidence, but without a philosophical construct to support it, that "Age will not every hope destroy, / But yield some hours of sober joy" (25-26). Accepting that growth is a movement away from spontaneous moments of pleasure to that time when "cold controul / Confines the currents of the soul" (33-34), he yet hopes not to lose responsive feeling against "the censor stern" nor for "another's woes" (41-42): "Still may I rove untutor'd, wild, / And even in age, at heart a child" (44-45).

In putting behind him the joyous past he finds that he is also relinquishing those themes of love to which his "languid lyre" was once attuned and that now his "strains in stolen sighs expire" (58-61). It is now as fruitless to try to revive passion that once generated poetry as to fan a dying fire into flame:

As, when the ebbing flames are low,
 The aid which once improv'd their light,
 And bade them burn with fiercer glow,
 Now quenches all their sparks in night;
 Thus has it been with Passion's fires,
 As many a boy and girl remembers,
 While all the force of love expires,
 Extinguish'd with the dying embers. (79-86)

Byron accepts in the last lines the reality of the present moment; no longer lost in the imaginings of the cloud-dimmed noon--"But now, dear Long, 'tis midnight's noon", he declines to describe the cloud-covered "watery moon", a feature of "every stripling's verse" (87-90). The

lines that follow are a drastic revision from the Newstead manuscript of the poem and a strong statement of one of Byron's enduring principles for his own poetry. While originally the lines merely deplored versifying striplings who "Have left their deepen'd tracks behind", with the implication that they are temptingly easy to follow, in the revision Byron claims the need to be original in his poetry:

Why should I the path go o'er
Which every bard has trod before? (91-92)

Byron's thoughts, however, do not linger on the moon as a subject for poetry but use instead the moon as a bridge to the time when old school friends will gather at Harrow; when he, Long, and others will be reunited in their "youth's retreat" and will recapture through "many a tale of former days" their happy past, talking through the night "till Luna's waning horn, / Scarce glimmers through the mist of Morn" (107-108).

Byron won his new identity through the series of alterations and revisions made in the volumes of his juvenile verse. These volumes reflect changes forced upon him by the disapproving audience of friends and his own attempts to accommodate his integrity to his capitulation to public taste. When his Southwell friend the Reverend J. T. Becher advised him to recall Fugitive Pieces shortly after it had appeared in November, 1806, because the explicitly sexual poem "To Mary" was offensive to the town's matrons, Byron reacted in the manner that was to become characteristic of his response to critical attack throughout the remainder of his career. Though he took Becher's

advice and eliminated the poem in the reissue of the first volume in January, 1807, under the title Poems on Various Occasions, he began to use poetry as a weapon against what he considered an interference in his right to speak truth in his poems and against pressures to conform to a narrow-minded and hypocritical society. Two poems in the new volume are directly addressed to Becher, each showing Byron, in contention with opposition, beginning to shape a strong personality and to hone poetic principles that would serve his future. "Lines addressed to the Rev. J. T. Becher, on his advising the author to mix more with society" marks the emerging identity of the "isolated being", proudly aloof from the common herd of mankind, who was to haunt Byron's poetry through the middle phase and implies as well an instinctive realisation of the artist's need for both a concept of the individualised self and for a separate-ness of his existence that permits proper perspective. Admitting that while he would answer a call to some action that might lead to fame, he disdains any invitation to "descend to a world I despise". Stanzas 6 and 7, through the questions asked and answered, show pride wounded by the betrayal of friends retaliating in the manner most obviously available:

Yet why should I mingle in Fashion's full herd?
 Why crouch to her leaders, or cringe to her rules?
 Why bend to the proud, or applaud the absurd?
 Why search for delight in the friendship of fools?

I have tasted the sweets, and the bitters, of love;
 In friendship I early was taught to believe;
 My passion the matrons of prudence reprove,
 I have found that a friend may profess, yet deceive.

Byron closes the poem by insisting on his right to

independence from society's "hateful controul" because he has not yet learned the art of deceiving, because he is still "unpractised to varnish truth".

At the same time that Byron appeared to acquiesce gracefully to Becher's request to remove "To Mary", he found his satiric voice that expressed his resentment towards reader-interference with his poetry. His "Answer to Some Elegant Verses sent by a friend of the author, complaining that one of his descriptions was rather too warmly drawn" relies primarily on the epigraph, taken from Anstey's New Bath Guide, for expressing Byron's spirit of revenge against censorship:

But if any old Lady, Knight, Priest, or Physician,
Should condemn me for printing a second edition;
If good Madame Squintum my work should abuse,
May I venture to give her a *smack* of my muse?

The poem that follows is more an intellectual justification for writing the truth of his experience since the youthful poet cannot be expected to "hush the dictates of the heart" than a slap against his detractors. His mocking apology for being "the heedless and imprudent cause" for complaint does not obscure Byron's insistence on the freedom to write out of his own feeling:

Oh! how I hate the nerveless, frigid song,
The ceaseless echo of the rhyming throng,
Whose labour'd lines, in chilling numbers flow,
To paint a pang the author ne'er can know!
The artless Helicon, I boast, is youth;--
My Lyre, the Heart--my Muse, the simple Truth.

In his view poetry is clearly the end-result of a feeling response to experience, a natural as opposed to artificial expression of an actual circumstance. Thus, defending his right to describe his experience forces Byron to consider

the nature of his audience and to develop an attitude towards readers.

The poem that had caused the controversy begins as a forceful and genuine expression of the young lover's torment on discovering that his love has been unfaithful but ends, as often happens in the mature Byron, with a laugh as he sets aside his misery to look at the humour in the situation. "To Mary" is perhaps the least imitative love poem in the volume and doubtless would have been accepted by his select audience had Byron been less explicit in the twelfth stanza; and the poem is worthy of attention as an example of strong feeling matched with strong language. Like Moore's poem of amicable parting discussed in the previous chapter, the occasion is the ending of an affair, but in Byron's poem the lover's emotional investment has been heavy and parting is not without searing pain. Byron's choice of words, especially in the first two stanzas, communicates the violence of the lover's feelings at being betrayed:

Rack'd by the flames of jealous rage,
 By all her torments deeply curst,
 Of hell-born passions far the worst,
 What hope my pangs can now assuage?

I tore me from thy circling arms,
 To madness fir'd by doubts and fears,
 Heedless of thy suspicious tears,
 Nor feeling for thy feign'd alarms.¹¹

The mood of the lover moves during the course of the poem from these agonised cries of pain in the early stanzas to

11. *Fugitive Pieces*, 1806, p. 17. Subsequent references to "To Mary" are to this edition, pp. 17-19, and quoted passages are identified in parentheses according to the stanza in which they occur.

a recovery of poise in the middle stanzas and to a detachment finally that permits an amused speculation on how good their love once was. When he has faced the extent of his loss,

No more with mutual love we burn,
 No more the genial couch we bless,
 Dissolving in the fond caress;
 Our love o' erthrown will ne'er return, (5)

he can hope without rancour that she "sometimes will regret" (9) their parting

And smile to think how oft were done,
 What prudes declare a sin to act is,
 And never but in darkness practice,
 Fearing to trust the tell-tale sun. (10)

Having recovered his sense of humour, evident in rhyming "act is" and "practice", the lover considers the advantages the pair have enjoyed in not being afraid, or embarrassed, to love openly in the light:

Now, by my soul, 'tis most delight
 To view each other panting, dying,
 In love's extatic [sic] posture lying.
 Grateful to feeling, as to sight. (12)

Following this immodest description of the sex act, doubtless too frank for the Southwell matrons, Byron closes the poem on a transcendent note that lifts human sexual pleasure above the mundane and at the same time ridicules inhibited lovers:

And had the glaring God of Day,
 (As formerly of Mars and Venus)
 Divulg'd the joys *which* pass'd between us,
 Regardless of his peeping ray. [sic]
 Of love admiring such a sample,
 The Gods and Goddesses descending,
 Had never fancied us offending,
 But wisely followed our example. (13, 14)

Though the poem is flawed by careless grammatical and syntactical constructions and punctuation errors, Byron

shows a surprising degree of technical control. To match his changing mood, spondees and trochees that dominate the first stanzas gradually give way to regular iambic rhythm as the lover reconciles himself to his fate. We feel his returning self-control and sense of humour in the shift from masculine rhyme to a mixture of masculine and feminine culminating in the playful rhyme of stanza 10, to the final purely feminine rhyme of the last stanza. Similarly, Byron's point of view progresses from the self-centred, wounded, and indignant "I" of the first stanzas to acknowledge in the intermediate stanzas that both of the pair suffer loss, the "you" and "I" must go "our" separate ways. Byron then sets the lovers thus reunited against the larger world of "prudes", the "they" who are incapable of abandoned love and, in his imagination, puts the lovers on view as a model to the immortals. Personal anguish yields to common sense and witty determination to laugh at what he cannot change; heart yields to head, and ponderous seriousness dissolves in a comic perspective. The pattern is familiar.

Though the poem may have struck the Southwell matrons as excessively bold in acknowledging sexual desires and the pleasures of passionate fulfillment, a more sophisticated society perhaps would not have objected to the content. "To Mary" does not approach the impudence of many of Moore's poems that earned him the name of "lascivious Little". For example, "Impromptu", vaguely reminiscent of Donne in its startling thought, might genuinely be judged unfit for young maidens:

Look in my eyes, my blushing fair!
 Thou'lt see theyself reflected there,
 And as I gaze on thine, I see
 Two little miniatures of me.
 Thus, in our looks some propagation lies,
 For we make babies in each other's eyes.

Neither does Byron's poem engage in the suggestive seduction of "Epigram" that Moore excuses in a note as "originally French":

Your mother says, my little Venus,
 There's something not correct between us,
 And you're in fault as much as I:--
 Now, on my soul, my little Venus,
 I think 't would not be right between us,
 To let your mother tell a lie;

nor in the bluntly provocative titillation of the song "Away with this pouting and sadness" that closes with the often-quoted invitation "Be an angel, my love, in the morning, / But, oh!, be a woman tonight!"¹² "To Mary", on the other hand, is a direct statement of wounded feelings and a determination to see the situation finally in some salvaging manner.

Byron concludes his answer to Becher's charge that parts of this poem are "rather too warmly drawn" with the first of many expressions of scorn for the mass of readers:

For me, I fain would please the chosen few,
 Whose souls, to feeling and to nature true,
 Will spare the childish verse, and not destroy
 The light effusions of a heedless boy.
 I seek not glory from the senseless crowd;
 Of fancied laurels, I shall ne'er be proud;
 Their warmest plaudits I would scarcely prize,
 Their sneers or censures, I alike despise. (37-44)

The satire promised in the epigraph is reserved for the two other poems, written within a few days of his reply to

12. Moore, Little. The poems cited appear on pp. 26, 13, and 39-41, respectively.

Becher but not published until Coleridge's edition in 1898. "To a Knot of Ungenerous Critics" and "Soliloquy of a Bard in the Country" consider further the relationship between the poet and his audience. In the first, Byron merely enlarges upon the position he took at the end of "Answer to Some Elegant Verses". He is inclined to ignore those whom he considers inadequate to appreciate, and therefore ineligible to comment on, his verse:

Rail on, Rail on, ye heartless crew!
My strains were never meant for you;
Remorseless Rancour still reveal,
And damn the verse you cannot feel. (1-4)

Truth, the young poet believes, will champion "her votary's cause", as he imagines her armed with the spear of Ithuriel against their common enemy Fiction. When the Southwell matron is exposed as "Leader of the wrathful Band" of his attackers, Byron lashes out in ridicule that approaches invective. Characterising her as no more than a busybody who has no real interest to protect against his poem, neither an innocent child nor her own repugnant self, he asks what right she has to speak:

To her the strain was never sent,
For feeling Souls alone 'twas meant--
The verse she seiz'd, unask'd, unbade,
And damn'd, ere yet the whole was read! (65-68)

He then dismisses the matron and her censorious cohorts-- "Why should I point my pen of steel / To break 'such flies upon the wheel?'" (81-82) -- to take comfort in the fact that their attack will only enhance his reputation as a poet:

Your efforts on yourself recoil;
Then Glory still for me you raise,
Yours is the Censure, mine the praise. (98-100)

Too close to his subject matter, Byron fails to merit much admiration for this early effort at sustained satire. The tetrameter couplets, nearly all closed, inhibit any full-blown expression of indignation, lapsing instead into a childish petulance that whiningly asks whose is the right "to disturb a harmless Boy, / His humble hope and peace annoy?" (57-58) The poem is further marred by exaggerated and ill-conceived thought, often seized upon to satisfy rhyme: he says of the villainous Matron, "Yes! for one single erring verse, / Pronounc'd an unrelenting Curse" (69-70), and, self-pityingly, of himself, "My path with thorns you cannot strew, / Nay more, my warmest thanks are due" (89-90).

"Soliloquy of a Bard in the Country", on the other hand, has some creditable passages of satirical writing that foreshadow the more mature Byron. Though the poem is framed with regrettable portrayals of the unfairly abused boy-poet, in those moments when Byron can forget this maudlin self-dramatisation the sure voice of the satirist comes through. Picturing himself as "a hapless Rhymer" alone at midnight and unable to entice the Muse, he begins to doubt his requirement of an audience of the "chosen few" which had seemed sufficient in the two previous poems:

Ah, what avails it thus to waste my time,
To roll in Epic, or to rave in Rhyme?
What worth is some few partial readers' praise,
If ancient Virgins croaking censures raise!
Where few attend, 'tis useless to indite;
Where few can read, 'tis folly sure to write;
Where none but girls and striplings dare admire,
And Critics rise in every country Squire... (7-14)

Whereas earlier he had instinctively closed ranks against

readers whom he considered unfit to appreciate his youthful, amorous effusions, he now is able to see the incongruity of his predicament as an ironical joke on himself. In honesty Byron must admit that

When Peers are Poets, Squires may well be Wits;
When schoolboys vent their amorous flames in verse,
Matrons may sure their characters asperse. (16-18)

Having gained the objectivity to view his situation as it really exists, Byron proceeds to give "a smack of [his] muse" to his country critics, the matron, the parson, and the physician.

Assuming the pose of one too gallant to dispute the opinion of one of the fair sex, through flattery and modest behaviour he manages to make the matron appear foolishly narrow-minded. Her objections have grown out of "private pique" and have been unfairly based on "one light heedless line", yet he would not engage her in contest:

In Wars like these, I neither fight nor fly.
When dames accuse 'tis bootless to deny;
Hers be the harvest of the martial field,
I can't attack, where Beauty forms the shield. (33-36)

His gracious and gentlemanly refusal to fight may have cost him the battle, but the outcome of the war he turns to his advantage.

The parson and the physician, however, are fair game. Displaying a skill far superior to his attack on Pomposus in "On a Change of Masters . . ." in Fugitive Pieces and his only printed attempt at a satirical portrait to this time, Byron flashes forth a sample of the quality of satire known in the poetry of his mature years. Doubtless, his friend the Reverend Becher inspired Byron's view

of the parson, but he lifts any real-life model to the realm of the universal in his portrait of the subservient individual:

And if a little parson joins the train,
 And echoes back his Patron's voice again--
 Though not delighted, yet I must forgive,
 Parsons as well as other folks must live:--
 From rage he rails not, rather say from dread,
 He does not speak for Virtue, but for bread;
 And this we know is in his Patron's giving,
 For Parsons cannot eat without a Living. (19-26)

With the ease of a master satirist, Byron undercuts all clergymen, indeed, all men, of the type who sacrifice principle and good judgment in order to protect narrow, personal concerns. Byron gains his devastating effect through tone and through the antithesis of his own rational and tolerant understanding for the parson who fails to act according to higher reason. The parson is presented as the helpless pawn of circumstance, a mere follower where he ought to lead. He is a "little" parson because he "echoes back his Patron's voice", not speaking out of personal indignation but out of fear for his position. The "bread" he keeps secure for himself is weighed disasterously against sacrificed "Virtue". Byron, in contrast, appears heroic. He displays an intuitive and compassionate wisdom regarding human nature as he grants as unarguable the truth that "Parsons as well as other folks must live". By placing the parson in the category of "folks", however, with the connotations of the simple, common people, Byron both patronises and at the same time emphasises the littleness of the parson, thus elevating himself to the position of one who can afford to act

charitably to one beneath him. He also achieves a double measure of irony in the line "Though not delighted, yet I must forgive". The understatement, effective in itself, is enhanced by the reversal of roles between the poet and the parson. Though the parson ought to be the one who forgives the offending poet, it is the enlightened poet who assumes the Christian virtue found wanting in the parson. The final line, on the surface an assertion of simple truth, explores the paradox that hinges on the pun on "Living". The parson's "living" is both his means of sustenance and his benefice as a clergyman, the source of his indebtedness to his patron. The fact that the parson is dependent upon his living in order to "eat" implies that he merely lives to eat. Thus, Byron in this last line of his portrait turns the passage back to the fourth line to call into question the implications of "live" used there and to cause speculation on the quality of life enjoyed by such little people as the parson who reduce living to mere existence and are therefore contemptible.

Lastly, in spite of the fact that Byron was notoriously haphazard in attention to mechanical details in his writing, usually leaving such matters of his manuscripts to his publisher, his use of capital and lowercase letters in this passage seems to be a deliberate and conscious design to support his meaning. Through capitalisation the Patron receives status each time the word is used, thereby calling further attention to the little parson's position. Each time the word "parson" appears,

the clergyman is made subordinate by a lowercase "p" until in the last line of the passage he is placed in the category of all "Parsons" and again belittled in that he is completely denied individuality. Likewise, "Virtue" is capitalised in opposition to "bread", thus limiting the meaning to the literal and ordinary and precluding any symbolic interpretation of eucharistic bread that is life-giving. Byron subtly and damagingly relegates the parson to subsistence on his ration of daily bread doled out by a human superior. In the final analysis, the parson is no more than a groveller after favour and he anticipates Byron's satiric description of the trimmer-poet of Don Juan, as well as his attitude towards Southey whose fawning treatment of the death of George III provoked Byron's unmerciful characterisation of the Laureate in his own Vision of Judgment.

Byron's description of the physician, more than three times as long as the parson passage and therefore somewhat diffused in effect, also deserves examination for the different satiric mode Byron uses and for the support it lends to his decision to write truth in spite of an objecting audience.

But when a pert physician loudly cries,
 Who hunts for scandal, and who lives by lies,
 A walking register of daily news,
 Trained to invent, and skillful to abuse--
 For arts like these at bounteous tables fed,
 When S-- condemns a book he never read,
 Declaring with a coxcomb's native air,
 The moral's shocking, though the rhymes are fair.
 Ah! must he rise unpunished from the feast,
 Nor lash'd by vengeance into truth, at least?
 Such lenity were more than Man's indeed!
 Those who condemn should surely deign to read.
 Yet must I spare--nor thus my pen degrade,

I quite forgot that scandal was his trade,
 For food and raiment thus the coxcomb rails,
 For those who fear his physic, like his tales.
 Why should his harmless censure seem offense?
 Still let him eat, although at my expense,
 And join the herd to Sense and Truth unknown,
 Who dare not call their very thoughts their own,
 And share with these applause, a godlike bribe,
 In short, do anything, except prescribe:--
 For though in garb of Galen he appears,
 His practice is not equal to his years.
 Without improvement since he first began,
 A young Physician though an ancient man.

Like the parson, the physician is dependent on others for his living, and Byron continues the metaphor of incompetent critics who feed at the expense of poets. Unable to inspire confidence in patients with his medical skill, the physician must make himself acceptable at the tables of others as a gossip-monger. Gone is the aristocratic generosity shown the parson for his lack of virtue, as Byron lashes out in righteous indignation at S--'s presuming to criticize without having read the book. Appealing to basic understanding of human nature for his right to revenge, he is poised for retaliation when reason returns, and he is able to dismiss the physician's censure as "harmless". With logical good sense, Byron consigns the physician to "the herd to Sense and Truth unknown, / Who dare not call their very thoughts their own". Discovering in himself mercy to a degree unlooked for in mortals, with a "godlike" gesture he indulges the physician's ineptitude as a critic, reckoning it a greater service to humanity to prevent whatever harm the doctor might do in treating the sick. Byron effectively uses a closed couplet at the end of the passage to box in his opponent with the proverbial reminder that clothes do not make the man. Ironically then the

physician "in the garb of Galen" is set against the already established image of the physician wearing the red flannel coxcomb of the fool. In the end Byron again emerges the superior of his critic, but in the closing lines of the poem he loses the ironic detachment that had ennobled him and descends to the petulant self-consciousness of his opening lines. Daring his country critics to continue their attack and "crush, oh! noble conquest! crush a Boy", he turns to beg continued support from the "partial few"--from "silly girls" and from "Men of Taste and Reputation, too", admitting that if these fail he is destroyed.

For a brief space, however, Byron had achieved the distancing of himself from his concern over audience approval and a detachment from his subject matter that allowed him to express thoughts worthy of genuine admiration. His manner is, of course, strongly neo-classical, reminiscent of both Dryden and Pope. Even though the descriptions are too short to draw detailed comparisons, we are reminded of Dryden's technique in MacFlecknoe as Byron depends upon mock-heroic devices to ridicule little men who wear the clothes of importance in a small town and who pervert their callings to wage war against a boy-poet. Byron also imitates Dryden in the subtlety with which he blends direct and indirect satiric statement. What he owes to Pope is his ability to turn an object of personal animosity into an identifiable general type. Just as Becher is certain to be the acquaintance who stands behind the little person to cast a shadow that envelopes all who earn their living

through obsequious attention to patronage, so the physician in Byron's mind may have grown from one of the incompetent quacks upon whom Mrs. Byron prevailed to treat her son's lame foot, transformed here to the model for all professional deficiency that must cultivate social charm to compensate for a lack of skills. Byron; like Pope, is not attacking either the parson or the physician but the destructive qualities that they symbolise.

While neither of these last discussed poems appeared in print in Byron's life-time, they are part of a cluster of poems written in December, 1806, that show the set of his mind as he prepared to revise his first volume for reprinting under the title Poems on Various Occasions. Clearly, he is searching for an identity as well as an emphasis that would render him inviolable from petty critics without the necessity of sacrificing an outlet for his strong feelings. "L'Amitie Est L'Amour sans Ailes" and "The Prayer of Nature", both written also at this time, reflect Byron's dilemma. "The Prayer of Nature" is a heart-felt seeking after permission to be his individual self and a curious pact of mutual assurance of respect for God and for himself. While he cannot submit to institutionalised worship, he admits his need for God's care and his faith in God's grace. Acknowledging his human weakness and his confidence in divine protection (11-13), Byron is nonetheless prepared to accept uncomplainingly the consequences of his personal decision:

If, when this dust to dust's restor'd,
 My soul shall float on airy wing,
 How shall thy glorious Name ador'd
 Inspire her feeble voice to sing!

But, if this fleeting spirit share
 With clay the Grave's eternal bed,
 While Life yet throbs I raise my prayer,
 Though doom'd no more to quit the dead. (14-15)

These thoughts are the early sober seeds of the Byronic personalities of the verse tales and the dramas, individuals who must act out of their own sense of self and of circumstances whatever the outcome. In the poem also is the budding of his mature philosophy that allowed Byron finally to accept with equanimity the uncertainties of human existence. The poem is saved from sentimentality by the display of self-control in the poet's voice: he admits guilt without breast-beating, dependence without fawning, and acceptance of his fate without whining.

"L'Amitie est L'Amour sans Ailes" *likewise* rehearses the increasing self-control that begins to show itself in the second volume of poems and comes to fuller flower in Hours of Idleness and the second edition of that work, Poems Original and Translated. No doubt prompted in his thinking by the outcry of the Southwell matrons against some of his love poems, Byron retreats to the security of his earlier feelings of affection for his school friends. With a great deal of rationalising, he removes himself as a worshipper at the "glowing shrine" of Love to find friendship a more rewarding and only a little less satisfying object for his attention: friendship is, after all, "Love without his wings". More importantly, as he sees his philosophy of poetry taking shape, he recognises that he must express honest, durable emotion.

Fictions and dreams inspire the bard,
 Who rolls the epic song;
 Friendship and Truth be my reward--

To me no bays belong;
 If laurell'd Fame but dwells with lies,
 Me the enchantress ever flies,
 Whose heart and not whose fancy sings;
 Simple and young, I dare not feign;
 Mine be the rude yet heartfelt strain,
 "Friendship is Love without his wings!" (9)

On the advice of Becher, and in keeping with a developing distrust of amatory verse, Byron eliminated the Mary poem, along with one of the four Caroline poems, the one beginning "You say you love, and yet your eye".¹³ Whether "To Caroline" had also received objections is not known, but, as we shall see, Byron divided and recast the thought of this poem into the two poems addressed to M. S. G. and added to the new volume. Most significantly, "Childish Recollections", the major addition to the edition, heralds the new preoccupation with friendship in preference to love as a theme for his poetry. In the opening lines of this poem Byron states uncompromisingly his changed attitude towards love poems:

Hence! thou unvarying song, of varied loves,
 Which youth commends, maturer age reproves;
 Which every rhyming bard repeats by rote,
 By thousands echo'd to the self-same note!
 Tir'd of the dull, unceasing, copious strain,
 My soul is panting to be free again.

.

Censure no more shall brand my humble name,
 The child of passion and the fool of fame.¹⁴

Ingenuous and tractable in his desire to please, Byron allows us to see in the brief time between this passage

13. PW, I, 9, note 1.

14. PW, I, 84, note i. Subsequent references to lines from the first printed version of "Childish Recollections" are to Coleridge's notes as the most generally available source. Reference to the final printing of the poem in Hours of Idleness are given in parentheses in the text.

and the revision of the poem for Hours of Idleness his artless pursuit of poetic principles that would endure a lifetime. Not only does he express his need to write poetry that is not imitative but original, but he begins to examine his position towards criticism. Throughout his career, because of his sensitivity to criticism, Byron was willing to alter his poems if convinced he was in error. Once convinced of the rightness of his own position, however, he was equally determined not to alter his course in favour of outside opinion in spite of his often desperate need for approval. In the case of the introductory lines to "Childish Recollections", he accepts the reproof of "maturer age", that of his readers and of himself rather than the tag "child of passion and the fool of fame".

The additions made to Poems on Various Occasions do not create a clearly defined identity for Byron, but they point the direction towards the more integrated personality that will dominate Hours of Idleness and they are conscious efforts to shift the focus away from the "unvarying song, of varied loves" to satisfy his need for originality and approval. In the first instance, he added more love poems than he subtracted--the two poems to M. S. G. already mentioned, "Stanzas to a Lady, with the Poems of Camoens", "The First Kiss of Love", and "Love's Last Adieu". These poems, however, in keeping with his growing resolve to abandon amatory verse, treat the subject more dispassionately than many of his earlier works. The rehandling of the material from "To Caroline" for the

new poems to M. S. G. is a case in point. In the Caroline poem, the lover is painfully aware that his feeling for the beloved is more ardent than hers for him. She says she loves him and sweetly speaks his name, but neither her eyes nor any blushing cheeks confirm her words. Only in his dreams does he find her warmly responsive to his love, a condition that heightens the sad contrast when, awake and embracing her, he holds "a cold statue" in his arms. The only available conclusion closes the poem:

If thus, when to my heart embrac'd,
 No pleasure in your eyes is trac'd,
 You may be prudent, fair, and chaste,
 But ah! my girl, you do not love.

The poem lacks essential dramatic interest and is reduced to an expression of sentimentality. We have no more than a parade of complaints from a young man who finds himself full of ardour for a young lady who for no reason known to the reader says she loves him but doesn't act as if she does.

The roles are reversed in the first poem to M. S. G. in which Byron posits a dramatic situation that calls for our sympathy. The lover feels as fervently towards the loved one as in the earlier poem and her eyes tell him she could love him as well, but he will not speak his love for her because she is married. To spare her from scandal he will "let the secret fire consume" him; he will

seek despair,
 And hope no more thy soft embrace;
 Which to obtain, my soul would dare
 All, all reproach, but thy disgrace.

The lover of the unattainable is made noble by his silent suffering that protects the reputation of the beloved. In the second M. S. G. poem, Byron takes another look at love

fulfilled in dreams, exploring the condition in the religious terms of sin and forgiveness, atonement and penance. Asking her forgiveness, he contrasts the pain of being awake and without her love with the pleasure of possessing her in his dreams,

For in visions alone your affection can live,--
I rise, and it leaves me to weep.

Whatever pleasure he enjoys in dreams he atones for in waking to the realization that he is "doomed, but to gaze upon bliss".

Though in visions, sweet Lady, perhaps you may smile,
Oh! think not my penance deficient!
When dreams of your presence my slumbers beguile,
To awake, will be torture sufficient!

Here again, Byron shows increasing control over his effusions. The triple-rhyme that closes the poem indicates intellect operating above the heart in this courtly compliment to the beloved and the discovery of a device that belittles the depth of feeling already confessed with the sudden intrusion of ironic, diminishing rhyme.

In the other poems about love Byron also handles the subject more dispassionately than he had in Fugitive Pieces. Each represents a more mature view that can treat love as an abstract concept separate from specific, personal involvement. The poem accompanying the book of love poetry makes no apologies for the subject matter:

It sings of Love's enchanting dream
A theme we never can despise.

There is value in reading the poems "with feeling" sympathetic for "the Poet's woes", because the poetry is a

true expression of Camoens' experience:

He was, in sooth, a genuine Bard;
His was no faint, fictitious flame:
Like his, may Love be thy reward,
But not thy hapless fate the same.

He speaks as the man of experience expressing no more than an avuncular interest in the girl who receives the book of poems.

"The First Kiss of Love" celebrates the creative potential of the usual token of new love. Love's first kiss can inspire genuinely warm poetry:

I hate you, ye cold compositions of art,
Though prudes may condemn me and bigots reprove;
I court the effusions that spring from the heart,
Which throbs with delight, to the first kiss of
love.

Or, again, it can remake the lost and perfect world:

Oh! cease to affirm that man, since his birth,
From Adam, till now, has with wretchedness strove;
Some portion of Paradise still is on earth,
And Eden revives in the first kiss of love.

But the final, enduring value of the first kiss of love is to be found in the pleasure it will bring to the memories of age. To counterbalance these sweet sentiments, Byron offers "Love's Last Adieu", his bleak acknowledgement that the pain of an end to love inevitably follows the pleasures of loving: "The roses of Love" found in the "garden of life" grow "'mid weeds dropping pestilent dew". Again, in the language of religious doctrine Byron describes a view of the world governed impartially by a force that balances pleasure against pain. In the ordinary understanding of Calvinistic theology here given a decided voluptuously pagan flavour, pleasure is equated with a sin that requires atonement through punishing pain:

In this life of probation, for rapture divine,
 Astrea declares that some penance is due;
 From him who has worshipped at Love's gentle shrine,
 The atonement is ample, in Love's last adieu!

Who kneels to the God, on his altar of light
 Must myrtle and cypress alternately strew:
 His myrtle, an emblem of purest delight--
 His cypress, the garland of Love's last adieu!

These new poems about love added to Poems on Various Occasions show Byron beginning to shape the attitude towards love that marks even his last works. He never denies the importance of love as the moving force of existence. Perfect love exists as the desired goal occasionally and briefly attained among the young and naive--Haidee and Juan, Neuha and Torquil, perhaps Juan and Aurora Raby. The reality of experience, however, weighs against this concept of ideal love to indicate that fulfilment is unlikely: "Youth flies, life decays, even hope is overcast", as he says in "Love's Last Adieu". Yet, significantly, hope is not destroyed. The idea of perfect love continues to inform and inspire the routine of living. Contrary to the opinion of Byron scholars who find the poet essentially pessimistic in his outlook on the world, throughout his life--in his poetry, his letters, and his actions, Byron turns from disappointment, seeming defeat, a mood of despair, with confidence that some compensating experience can be discovered. After all, the corollary of the truth that pleasure merits the punishment of pain must surely be that pain is rewarded with pleasure. His view of life is realistic to the extent that he can accept that the whole is a mixture of good and bad times and positive to the degree that he

anticipates and even seeks out restitution for his suffering. When he left England in 1816, humiliated by the public response to his domestic affairs, more than mere bravado caused him to assert his faith in "a world elsewhere". One of the positive values of Byron's early indoctrination in Calvinism is the not uncommon response aroused by that grim system, the rebellion it sparks against rigid limits to human choice forcing the individual to insist on the right to assume responsibility for his destiny. Byron's confession in "Epistle to Augusta", written from Switzerland in 1816, is an acknowledgement of his share in his current misery:

I have been cunning in mine overthrow,
The careful pilot of my proper woe. (iii)

But he is neither negative nor despairing in his view of the future. Though in the depths of his defeat he had thought of destroying himself,

now I fain would for a time survive,
If but to see what next can well arrive. (iv)

Johnson comforts the despairing young Juan who stands next to him in the slave market with the Byronic wisdom that the wheel of fortune turns and that meanwhile something can be learned from the present misfortune. The middle-aged narrator of Don Juan, concluding that the possibilities of love are over, readjusts his sights to discover stimulus in the pursuit of money.

Byron's almost fundamental habit of adapting to circumstance strongly manifests itself in the poems added to his second volume. In renouncing love poetry as worthy of his efforts, Byron turns to friendship as a theme safer

from criticism than effusions about love, yet a viable source for inspiring poetry as he understood its nature at this stage in his development - an outpouring of feelings in response to strong inner emotions. Harking back to happy Harrow days in "Childish Recollections", Byron revels in that time of innocence from the world's corruption:

Hours of my youth! when nurtur'd in my breast,
 To Love a stranger, Friendship made me blest,--
 Friendship, the dear peculiar bond of youth,
 When everyartless bosom throbs with truth;
 Untaught by worldly wisdom how to feign,
 And check each impulse with prudential rein;
 When, all we feel, our honest souls disclose,
 In love to friends, in open hate to foes;
 No varnish'd tales the lips of youth repeat,
 No dear-bought knowledge purchased by deceit.
(55-64)

He tenderly salutes dear, remembered friends, disguised in classical names--Alonzo, Davus, Lycus, Eurylaus, and Cleon - and measures the loss of those glorious days of friendship in the disparity between that warm and comfortable past and his cold, present condition which finds him

A mourner, midst of mirth ...
 A wretched, isolated, gloomy thing,
 Cursed by reflection's deep corroding sting.¹⁵

Before the end of the passage Byron has developed a portrait of himself as one embittered by the loss of happiness and without hope of future bliss but cursed forever with the pain of remembering former pleasures. As we have seen in his letters, it was an identity he tried on for a brief time as he sought protection during his first skirmish with criticism from readers. In revising the poem for Hours of

15. PW, I, 103-104, note i.

Idleness, published less than six months later, Byron removed this uncharacteristic image of himself; and though the cursed and moody wretch resurfaces in his unpublished poems and in the anonymous contributions to Hobhouse's volume, and later, of course, in Harold, in the heroes of the verse tales, and in Manfred and Cain, Byron took great pains in his letters and in the preface to Childe Harold to deny his kinship with so gloomy a being. The ideal identity towards which the adolescent Byron seems to be working can be found in the translation from Horace, included in the additions to Poems on Various Occasions. Here, in heroic proportions stands a model worthy of emulation and familiar to us also in Byronic heroes and in glimpses we have in the letters of Byron's view of himself:

The man of firm and noble soul
 No factious clamours can controul;
 No threat'ning tyrant's darkling brow
 Can swerve him from his just intent.

He is also the man of "fix'd, determin'd mind", unperturbed by "gales"; "unmov'd, unaw'd" by the lightning bolts of Jove and the prospect of world-destroying flames, "Still dauntless 'midst the wreck of earth he'd smile". The images of this second stanza will be heard again and again in the words of the storm-tossed but undaunted survivor who steers his boat around the threatening rocks of life through to the last of Byron's poetry.

We have heard the voice already in the verse-letter "To E. L. N., Esq."--already written but not published until Hours of Idleness, and we hear it again in "Elegy on

Newstead Abbey", placed last in Poems on Various Occasions. Whether Byron or Ridge, the printer, made the decision to close the collection with this new poem on Newstead Abbey cannot be known. In any case, the poem contrasts with "On leaving Newstead Abbey" that opens the volume, and the arrangement is an effective aesthetic gesture towards symmetry. When we compare the two poems, we are struck by how strengthened Byron's concept of himself has grown in the three to four years intervening. In the first, a boyish, effusive pride in his ancestors and in their deeds evokes an earnest vow to live up to the example they have provided. The occasion for the poem was the financial necessity of leasing Newstead to Lord Grey de Ruthyn, but the poet suppresses that information and does not mention the stranger to whom he alludes in the other Newstead poems. Instead, the poem is a surface response to his last look around before leaving and a promise not to bring disgrace on the family name, feeling perhaps that leaving Newstead, even temporarily, is in itself disgraceful. The litany-like recitation of the deeds and the deaths of his ancestors in the three middle stanzas is intended to honour the dead forefathers and console their survivor. The mechanical nature of the exercise, however, coupled with the anapestic rhythm, serves more to heighten our impression of the poet's immaturity and lack of control or skill than to gain our sympathy. The poem remains an unmediated and a self-pitying response to his immediate feelings about leaving his home. Sentimentality rules the poet's expression from the opening stanza which

describes the crumbling building in a setting of decay--

In thy once smiling garden, the hemlock and thistle
Have choak'd up the rose which late bloom'd in the way,

to the wish in the last line, addressed to his dead ancestors, anticipating his own death--"When decay'd, may he mingle his dust with your own!"

In the "Elegy", on the other hand, the poet's point of view towards the ruined abbey and the evidence of decay has shifted drastically, reflecting in the change a new sense of identity in the poet. Again, the poet recounts the history of Newstead but, in this instance, the purpose is to celebrate the fact that it has endured and survived the vicissitudes of time and fortune. The signs of decay are in themselves badges of honour to the "majestic" ruins that stand "Scowling defiance on the blasts of fate". Byron enters imaginatively into the past of Newstead to visualise the train of people and events that made up the history of Newstead from the time it served as a refuge to the monks who first lived there through the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII that placed the priory in private hands to the present when it is the possession of the "last and youngest of a noble line". He has submitted his feelings about the ancestral home to reflection and marks his progress from the self-pitying tears of regret in the first poem: he now sheds tears of "Cherish'd Affection"--"Pride, Hope, and Love forbid him to forget". He has himself identified with the ruined structure and, like the "man of firm and noble soul" who could smile "dauntless 'midst the wreck of earth", Byron "lingers 'mid

thy damp and mossy tombs, / Nor breathes a murmur
'gainst the will of Fate". The poem closes with an
expression of forward-looking hope that the good days
may come again, "Hours, splendid as the past, may still
be thine". The predominately iambic measure is dignified
and emphasises the increased control of feeling that Byron
has gained through reflective thought. Further, the poem
indicates his increasing ability to think conceptually
and metaphorically.

The fine praise that Byron received for his
"vastly correct, & miraculously chaste" Poems on Various
Occasions, both from friends and from Lord Woodhouslee,
"the head of the Scotch Literati", and Henry Mackenzie,
supported Byron's decision to publish for the public the
further revision of his first works as Hours of Idleness.¹⁶
Apparently the only voice that raised a question about
the worth of writing poetry belonged to John Hanson,
Byron's financial agent and adviser in loco parentis
and the circumstance forced Byron into the earliest of his
rationalisings on the subject:

...I coincide with you in opinion that the poet
yields to the Orator, but as nothing can be done
in the later Capacity till the expiration of my
minority, the former occupies my present Atten-
tion; & both ancients & moderns, have declared,
that the 2 pursuits are so nearly similar, as to
require in a great measure the same Talents, & he
who excels in the one, would on application suc-
ceed in the other.¹⁷

16. MLJ, I, 103, January 13, 1807; I, 112, undated but
presumably written March, 1807. See also Byron's
letter to Hanson on April 2, 1807, where he remarks
on the praise he has received "from men of high
Reputation in the Sciences", MLJ, I, 113.

17. MLJ, I, 113, April 2, 1807.

Byron's ambivalent attitude towards devoting his life to poetry begins in the course of publishing these early volumes in his contentious response to his own misgivings about the role, strongly influenced by how others might view such an activity. Hanson's opinion that trivialised a literary career taught Byron to call poetry-writing a time-filling occupation that was not altogether a waste of effort. To support his claim that writing poetry was training for the parliamentary career he expected one day to pursue, he cited several figures known for their poetical and oratorical achievements, including Young, "a celebrated Preacher & a Bard", Sheridan, and Fox. The face he puts on for the practical-minded Hanson is far different from the laurelled brow he had revealed to Dr. Falkner, but Byron learned early to adapt his identity to the situation of the moment. Throughout most of his life, his commitment to poetry fluctuated in accordance with his estimate of the amount of reader-approval he was likely to gain. As he approached the publication date of Hours of Idleness, he confided to Edward Long that he planned to end the volume with "an eternal Adieu to the Muse". Protecting himself from the criticism of an unselected audience, Byron justified both the forwardness of his venture and his decision to write no more:

I am tired of versifying, & am irrevocably determined to rhyme no more, an employment I merely adopted "pour passer le Temps" when this work is accomplished, I shall have obtained all the Eclat I desire at present, when it shall be said that I published before I was 20; the merit of the contents is of little Consequence, provided they are not absolutely execrable, the novelty of the Deed

(which though not unprecedented, is at least uncommon, particularly amongst Patricians) will secure some share of Credit.¹⁸

Yet when the first reviews surprised Byron with praise, he fairly sings to his Southwell confidante "Who would not be a Bard, Elizabeth". Though he had decided against publishing his "Farewell to the Muse" with the volume and had instead announced in the preface to Hours he would write no more poetry, he tells Elizabeth Pigot that he has written in his "Intervals of leisure, after 2 in the Morning. 380 lines in blank verse, of 'Bosworth Field'" that he hopes to complete in "8 or 10 Books" within a year, with publication depending "on circumstances".¹⁹ Only days later he again writes to Elizabeth of his plans to visit the Scottish Highlands where he plans "to collect all the Erse traditions, poems, & & c. & translate, or expand the subjects, to fill a volume, which may appear next Spring, under the Denomination of 'the Highland Harp' or some title equally picturesque".²⁰ These may not be the sentiments of a dedicated poet, but they show Byron's momentary commitment to poetry for the rewarding attention it may bring him. In the same letter he also mentions his continued progress on "Bosworth Field", finding now that "it will be a work of 3 or 4 years, & most probably never concluded". Byron's meaning in the last phrase is ambiguous, but the likely interpretation

18. MLJ, I, 118-119, May 14, 1807.

19. MLJ, I, 131, August 2, 1807.

20. MLJ, I, 132, August 11, 1807.

suggests that he had already discovered agreeable the kind of poetic project that lends itself to extension over a long period of time through simply adding books as readers demanded them or as the spirit moved him.

In choosing the poems to be included in Hours of Idleness, Byron as self-consciously devised an identity for the reading public as was his custom in posturing privately before his friends in his letters of these years. He lacked the artistry of Moore, however, who through his mock-serious preface with its discussion on classical love poets created for the "dead" Thomas Little the personality of an unpretentious, young man, fond of girls and of versifying his feelings about them. Moore, as the anonymous editor, calls it a "liberty" that he takes in publishing the poems that were meant only to be circulated among friends and were the private amusement of one "as unambitious as indolent ... [who] wrote as he pleased, careless whether he pleased as he wrote."²¹ The portrait is consistent with the poems; the first poem "To Julia, in allusion to some illiberal criticism," sets the tone and the limits of the poet's ambition. Content to "please the elect, the sacred few" who like him have a sensitivity of feeling, "Passion's warmest child" asks no more:

Oh! let my song, my memory find
A shrine within the tender mind;
And I will scorn the critic's chide,
And I will scorn the fume of pride,
Which mantles o'er the pedant fool,
Like vapour on a stagnant pool.²²

21. Moore, Little, pp. v-vii.

22. Moore, Little, pp. 1-2.

In the entire volume of close to a hundred poems only the two named previously, "Fragments of College Exercises" and "To a Boy, with a Watch", depart from the amatory theme.

Byron had no such comprehensive and artfully simplistic view of himself, but the personality that emerges from his preface, though limited in detail, is not incompatible with the identity discovered in the poems. Apart from the dwelling upon his youth and his rank that challenged Brougham to destroy the defences of such pretension, Byron makes a further bid for admiration in his rather liberal use of quotations from the greats--Caesar, Cowper, and Johnson. He is anxious both to make a graceful case for his poems and to display a degree of learning, a fact supported by the heavy emphasis on translations (about one-fourth of the total number of poems) in the volume. Though Byron with youthful hyperbole greatly exaggerates the importance of his decision to publish in equating it with crossing the Rubicon, he recoups some of our good opinion in challenging Cowper's belief that a poet cannot hope for praise from critics who do not know him. Without much conviction he says he believes that "these trifles will not be treated with injustice."²³ Underneath the sense of insecurity Byron is developing a measure of detachment from his work that will later grow into a principle. While he cannot overcome the feeling of "solicitude for the fate of these effusions", nonetheless, as he told Dallas after receiving

23. Hours, p.vii.

several favourable reviews, he recognises that the poems must be judged for what they are: "The Compositions speak for themselves, and must stand or fall by their own worth or Demerit".²⁴ We cannot be certain that he is not merely making an opportunity to refer again to his rank, but Byron closes his preface by underlining his belief that he will receive fair treatment from impartial critics in insisting that he does not want the praise awarded his relation, the Earl of Carlisle, that Johnson claimed was due automatically "'when a man of rank appeared in the character of an author'". Seen in the light of the devastating effect of the Edinburgh Review and the image of that unidentified critic whom Byron could never forget, his concluding statement is ironic:

...I should be loth to avail myself of the privilege, and would rather incur the bitterest censure of anonymous criticism, than triumph in honours granted solely to a title.²⁵

In tracing Byron's poetic theory, the preface is important because it contains his first publically expressed attitudes about poetry and poets. We suspect that Byron imitates Moore's lead in asking indulgent understanding for Little's youth and his lack of serious commitment to writing poetry when he disparages his own efforts as "the fruits of the lighter hours of a young man, who has lately completed his nineteenth year" and, in certain cases, the product of "illness, and depression of spirits".²⁶ This stance is, of course, protective; but

24. Hours, p. vi; MLJ, I, 146, January 20, 1808.

25. Hours, pp. ix-x.

26. Hours, p. v.

it also introduces the genuine conflict that plagued Byron throughout his career, only tentatively reconciled during the last of his Italian days and soon dissolved in his decision to join the Greeks in their struggle for independence. The crux of the contest between the life of a poet and the life of a political figure or soldier opposes for Byron questions about the nature of the passive versus the active man which, simply answered, find the one sick and the other healthy. The Romantic reverence for the poet as the passive instrument of divine inspiration led Byron, more strongly than his contemporaries, to conclude and to struggle against the conclusion that the poet is diseased.

He returns to the notion as he nears the end of his preface to insist that writing poetry is not his "primary vocation", but a pastime, an occupation of "the dull moments of indisposition, or the monotony of a vacant hour".²⁷ The idea grows, however, in his letters and works to become almost obsessively dominant during the middle phase of his career in his concept of himself and the poet. Late in November, 1818, he prepared an annotated catalogue of poets beset with physical and social ills:

...poets especially seem to be a marked race--who has not heard of the blindness of Milton--the wretched life, and still more unhappy death of Otway--the long sufferings & unrequited services of Cowley and of Butler--the struggles against poverty & malice which occupied the life of Dryden--the constitutional infirmities which embittered the existence of Pope--the lamentable idiocy & madness of Swift--the almost unparalleled

27. Hours, p. vii.

miseries and unhappy end of Savage--the frenzy of Collins--the indigence of Goldsmith--the morbid melancholy and sullen discontent of Johnson--the hypochondrianism of Gray and of Beattie--the tragical catastrophe of Chatterton--the disappointed hopes and premature death of Burns--and the sickness, despondency, and madness of Cowper? To this deplorable list many additions might be made.²⁸

These thoughts are the bulk of a letter to Hoppner, the British Consul in Venice who frequently accompanied Byron on his daily rides on the Lido, in response to a note from Hoppner which Byron found "pertinent" to the general lot of man. The tone of the letter gives every indication that Byron's listing comes spontaneously from information already arranged in his mind. Certainly his preoccupation with examples of sick poets underlies his realisation in the fourth canto of Childe Harold that art is the creation of the "mind diseased", that neither "Worth nor Beauty dwells from out the mind's / Ideal shape of such" (cxxxii, cxxxiii).

Before the end of the canto, however, Byron had begun the ascent from the nadir of despair towards a new understanding of the poet and poetry. The culmination of his final vision is poignantly summed up in one of his last letters. On the eve of his leaving Cephalonia for Missolonghi, Byron wrote to Moore to ask that, in the event of his death there, he be remembered among a small group of little-known poets who had died in battle, a listing that must have cost him some research:

If any thing in the way of fever, fatigue, famine, or otherwise, should cut short the middle age of a brother warbler,--like Garcilasso de la Vega, Kleist, Korner,

28. MLJ, VI, 85, November 25, 1818.

Joukoffsky (a Russian nightingale--see Bowring's Anthology), or Thersander, or,--or somebody else--but never mind--I pray you to remember me in your "smiles and wine".²⁹

Byron begins the process of coming to terms with an acceptable view of the poet in the preface of Hours of Idleness that for him could only be resolved in the triumph of the active over the passive life. Meanwhile, he tried on many poetical garbs before finding the one that suited his identity.

In the final paragraph of the preface he also first subscribes to the Romantic belief in a close contact with nature as a source of poetic inspiration.¹ Explaining why he will write no more poetry nor attempt to "enter the lists with genuine bards", he introduces the theme of pleasure in the sublime aspects of nature, the recurrent motif in his nature poetry, and suggests the view of the early Romantics that inspiration for poetry comes from "outward forms". He declines further competition because,

Though accustomed, in my younger days, to rove a careless mountaineer on the Highlands of Scotland, I have not, of late years, had the benefit of such pure air, or so elevated a residence.³⁰

We wonder if, when the reviews of Hours of Idleness were good and he plotted with Elizabeth Pigot his autumn trip to the Highlands, he was consciously reconsidering and preparing to seek his place among "genuine bards". The most enduring of his adolescent poems, "When I Roved a Young Highlander" and "I Would I Were a Careless Child",

29. PLJ, VI, 294-295, December 27, 1823.

30. Hours, p. ix.

both added to the second edition of Hours of Idleness, commemorate Byron's attachment to the days of his childhood spent among the wild scenery of Scotland.

When we lay aside Byron's irritating affectations that mar his preface, we have remaining much of the raw material that goes to make up the image of the poet as it is constantly refined to the last view of Byron the poet. Underneath the mock modesty, Byron speaks out of an aggressively competitive spirit to tell of his need for recognition, for honour, and for approval, but perhaps, more importantly, he speaks of his need to see writing poetry worthwhile in the sense that heroic physical action has merit. The portrait coincides in the major details with the personality behind the poems in Byron's first public volume. This "'Old friend with a new face'", as Byron described the volume to Long, presents a more contained persona than had the earlier volumes. He rids the work of all love poems that cannot be construed either as expressions of a detached and wise advisor to a beautiful lady or the sufferings of the lover reconciled to a hopeless love. "To M-- --" is a pretty compliment to a lady whose eyes shine with fire, but who might attract "Love, more than mortal" if they only glowed with "mild affection". "To Woman" acknowledges the lesson he has learned from "Woman, that fair and fond deceiver" summed up in the *epigrammatic thought* that closes the poem-- "'Woman, thy vows are trac'd in sand'". "To a Beautiful Quaker" describes an unforgettable, single encounter with the lady and, making clever

use of terms associated with the worship service of the Quakers, Byron recalls their "meeting" in which "we never silence broke" as a time when "the spirit mov'd us". The last love remnant from Fugitive Pieces, "To Mary, on receiving her picture", is another hyperbolic compliment, promising to keep the likeness near his heart "Thro' hours, thro' years, thro' time". Byron also retained "The First Kiss of Love", panegyric but impersonal; "Love's Last Adieu", an equally impersonal, semi-philosophical expression; one of the M. S. G. poems, "When I dream that you love me", a display of wit rather than feeling; and "Stanzas to a Lady", asking for a sympathetic reading of Cameons' love poems.

The poems to women or about love that Byron added to Hours of Idleness are of this same uninvolved, dispassionate cast, with the exception of the final poem of the volume. "To Marion" urges on the lady the friendly advice to smile rather than frown if she would be more attractive to her admirers. Two translations from Anacreon's odes record the poet's difficulty in avoiding love as a theme for his poetry or as a fact of his life: in the first, when he wishes to sing of heroic deeds, his lyre refuses to co-operate and will only tell of the love the heart feels; and the second describes Cupid's invasion of the poet's sanctuary. The "Translation from the 'Medea' of Euripides" is a sympathetic address of the Chorus to Medea, whose exiled plight calls forth reflections on the destructiveness of strong passions as contrasted with love, the gentler affection. Byron no doubt thought of the

translations as displays of skill to draw admiration from a reading audience, but, more than this, they help to identify the poet of the volume as one seeking to master his emotions: "The man of firm and noble soul / No factious clamours can controul".

The love poems are set against poems celebrating friendship as a more comforting and durable emotion. Byron pictures himself as one worn out in the frivolous pursuit of love who turns to the steadying influence of the bond between friends. He was not, however, unaware that friendships, like love relationships, are subject to misunderstandings. Soon after printing the original version of "Childish Recollections" in Poems on Various Occasions in which Byron had portrayed his friend Lord Delawarr as Euryalus, he wrote to the Earl of Clare, another friend of Harrow days, of his efforts to mend that friendship, having found himself in Southwell with the "leisure to devote some hours to the recollection of past, regretted friendships".³¹ Apparently an unsuccessful attempt, in "To George, Earl Delawarr", added to Hours of Idleness, Byron accepts the unpleasant truth that friendships sometimes fail but holds out the hope that past feelings will be recaptured. He also added "The Episode of Nisus and Euryalus", translated from the ninth book of the Aeneid, what he called "the best in point of Versification I have ever written",³² perhaps playing "Nisus" to his "Euryalus" to demonstrate that "my soul, that my heart, my existence, / If danger demanded, were wholly your own", as he had claimed in the poem to Lord Delawarr (7).

31. MLJ, I, 107, February 6, 1807.

32. MLJ, I, 118, May 14, 1807.

The much-revised "Childish Recollections", however, is the heart of Hours of Idleness and the foundation of his attitude towards the past, memory, and time--each important in the development of his concept of reality and the materials of poetry. The poem also gives us a fairly comprehensive view of the identity that Byron wishes to project as he visualises himself as a poet. It pleased Byron in this new version to introduce the poet as diseased, an impression he would have strengthened in the further revisions intended for the second edition of Hours had he not suppressed the poem altogether when he had repaired his friendship with Dr. Butler, the "Pomposus" of "Childish Recollections".³³ He told Henry Drury that he was "laid on [his] back when that Schoolboy thing was written, or rather dictated, expecting to rise no more"; and, in correcting the proofs of the last edition, he told Ridge that he must add "written during Illness" to the title in order to make sense out of the Latin motto also to be added.³⁴ Even without these emendations, however, we have the image of the poet, victim of "slow Disease, with all her host of Pains" (1), finding relief from his suffering as he "Calls back the vanished days to rapture given, / When Love was bliss, and Beauty form'd our heaven" (13-14). Byron's image seems an elaboration of Wordsworth's poet who lies upon his couch "in vacant or in pensive mood". Byron must have been

33. See Byron's letter to Ridge, MLJ, I, 154-155, February 11, 1808, and note 1 to that letter, I, 155.

34. MLJ, I, 145, January 13, 1808; MLJ, I, 152, February 3, 1808.

reading Wordsworth's 1807 edition near the time of his revising "Childish Recollections" since his critique of that two-volume set was published in the July issue of Monthly Literary Recreations. We hear echoes of Wordsworth's language of the daffodil poem as Byron exchanges flowers for trees and school-mates in his mind's eye:

The woods of Ida danc'd before my eyes;
I saw the sprightly wand'ers pour along,
I saw, and join'd again the joyous throng.
(204-206)

For Wordsworth's poet the pleasant past revives unbidden in moments of passive tranquillity, but for Byron the past is a consciously sought-after escape from the painful present.

"Childish Recollections" has been called Byron's "Tintern Abbey",³⁵ but a more profitable comparison can be made with the early books of The Prelude. The poem is an unconscious record of the "fair seed-time" of Byron's soul; and while "Childish Recollections" in no way approaches, either in detail or intention, those comparable sections of The Prelude in which Wordsworth traces the childhood roots of his poetic development, Byron's reflections on his happy days at Harrow document the origins of qualities and concepts essential to the later poet. Wordsworth, with the advantage of writing from a more mature point in time and with a defined purpose, searches out those experiences that fostered his growth as a poet. He acknowledges the importance of his observing, frequently "despotic", eye that stored up scenes and impressions; the value of his close association with nature,

35. Blackstone, Survey, p. 33.

which not only furnished him material to be absorbed through the senses, but also taught him themes for poetry; and of the worth of experience gained through books and through contacts with men. On a much smaller scale, Byron presents in "Childish Recollections" a record of the mind of the poet as he begins to order experience into an understanding of himself in relation to the world and to lay the foundations for principles and themes of his later poetry.

The poem brings together the dichotomy of the happy years spent at Harrow in the company of friends and the painful present in which Byron finds himself both sick and alone. The idyllic past, retrievable only in the memory, is his sole prospect of happiness, as we see in Byron's alteration of the poem in Hours of Idleness. For Byron, unlike Wordsworth, memory, not the eye, is the despotic ruler needing to be brought under control. Two passages in the early version of "Childish Recollections" deplore the tyranny of memory, each following a somewhat morbid farewell to the world:

Yet though the future, dark and cheerless gleams,
The curse of memory, hovering in my dreams,
Depicts with glowing pencil all those years,
Ere yet, my cup, empoison'd, flow'd with tears,
Still rules my senses with tyrannic sway,
The past confounding with the present day.³⁶

The second passage reiterates the "curse of memory", particularly as it provokes brooding thoughts and introduces as well the theme of the wretched and lonely wanderer.

36. PW, I, 84, note i.

Finding the world a place where pleasure is no more than illusion, where "virtue" is only "visionary", and

...years of vice, on years of folly roll,
Till grinning death assigns the destin'd goal,
Where all are hastening to the dread abode,
To meet the judgment of a righteous God;
Mix'd in the concourse of a thoughtless throng,
A mourner, midst of mirth, I glide along;
A wretched, isolated, gloomy thing,
Cursed by reflection's deep corroding sting.³⁷

Thus, memory of the past has the power to blight the present; but in revising the first passage above for publication in Hours of Idleness, Byron came to more mature terms with memory and paid tribute to its other aspect, the "genial power" to restore "the vanish'd days to rapture given", the scenes "dear to youth . . . those fairy bowers, where all in turn have been".

In this revision, he compares the sun reappearing after rain, as it "gilds with faint beams the crystal dew of rain/And dimly twinkles o'er the watery plain", with the "Sun of Memory", transformed here from the "curse of memory":

Thus, while the future dark and cheerless gleams,
The Sun of Memory, glowing through my dreams,
Though sunk the radiance of his former blaze,
To scenes far distant points his paler rays,
Still rules my senses with unbounded sway,
The past confounding with the present day. (21-26)

He does not let go the belief that the future will be anything but "dark and cheerless", but the sinister aspects of memory, no longer appropriate, are eliminated. Whereas the "curse of memory" was described as "hovering" in his dreams, a ghostly personification of a figure eerily

37. PW, I, 103-104, note i.

drawing pictures "with glowing pencil" of those days before his life was turned to bitterness, and holding "tyrannic sway" over his senses, now the "Sun of Memory", though faded from its former brightness, benevolently illuminates the distant scenes and rules the senses with "unbounded sway". The shift from "tyrannic" to "unbounded" implies a subtle, yet profound change of attitude.

Though tyrannical rule is without bounds, such a limitless rule represents a usurpation of rights from victims rendered powerless, whereas unbounded rule, also limitless but likewise measureless, unrestrained, implies the assent of the ruled. The only line unchanged in any way in the two passages is the final line--the effect, or perhaps function, of memory, the intermingling of past and present so that their separate natures are indistinguishable.

Thus, memory comes to represent the continuity of experience. A few lines earlier Byron had commented on the scenes "dear to youth. . . where all in turn have been" [italics mine]. This revision of his former attitude signifies Byron's acceptance of memory in its dual role.

Though memory may bring pain, it is also the means of connecting the past with the present and, by implication, with the future. Not only will memory be reinvoked to lessen the burden of "dark and cheerless" days inevitably to come, but generations yet unborn will in their turn share similar memories. This early apprehending of the commonality of experience prepares a basis on which Byron builds both his astute perceptions of much that is universal in human nature and his sense of the inter-

relatedness of time and events.

In his recollection of the names of former generations of students carved on the wall of a hall at Harrow (151-184), Byron found concrete evidence of the continuity of time fixed in space. Foreshadowing the increasing complexity and importance of this concept in his later poetry, notably, in the last cantos of Childe Harold, The Deformed Transformed, and in the last cantos of Don Juan, Byron explores time as it is held in memory and events. The wall, like Thoreau's image of time as the stream he fishes in, intermingles names in the flow of past generations with present students and will receive the names of generations yet to come. Going further, he explores the power of time to destroy. He imagines the names of himself and his friends serving as reminders to the succeeding generation who recount stories of their deeds, mingling them "with the Tales of ancient day", but he also envisions that time when only the names will survive, the deeds forgotten:

While thus they speak, the hour must soon arrive,
When names of these, like ours, alone survive:
Yet a few years, one general wreck will whelm
The faint remembrance of our fairy realm. (181-184)

Time blends and preserves events in the memory but eventually destroys even "faint remembrance" of the past. In the long run, we must view Byron's poetics as essentially concerned with poetry related to history and the continuity of human passions in a refining of the ideas he expresses here in "Childish Recollections".

Feelings held in the memory form the fabric of Byron's poetry. While the mind of Wordsworth's poet

unselfconsciously gathered through the child's senses the impressions from nature which became the foundations of his mature philosophical thought, his feelings about himself and mankind, Byron from childhood stored up feelings derived directly from his emotional response to his relations with people. Wordsworth's orientation is solitary and Byron's is social. The days of "Childish Recollections" are memorable to Byron as an interlude of comfortable acceptance in a society of agreeable friends. The happy time occurs in the life of a child who had already felt unloved and alone and now rises in the memory of one who looks back on that time from a similarly alienated position. Throughout his life and his poetry, Byron's feelings reflected his social situation, as he saw himself alternately accepted, rejected, reprov'd, neglected, or abused. His poetry then is a coming to terms with his memories of these feelings and the society that generated them--a memory sometimes genial, sometimes tyrannic in its power. His sense of man as a social animal allows him to articulate the despairing and popular weltschmerz theme that grows out of the feelings of lost community, to attack social abuse in its various forms, and to accept ultimately that society can be changed.

The created identity of the Hours of Idleness version of this poem is consistent with the identity behind the other poems in the volume and more subtly drawn than in the original version in which he had blatantly denounced and renounced the world--

Weary of love, of life, devour'd with spleen,
I rest a perfect Timon, not nineteen,³⁹

and deprived of "social solace from a friend", had questioned the worth of writing poetry:

Ah! vain endeavour in this childish strain
To soothe the woes of which I thus complain!
What can avail this fruitless loss of time,
To measure sorrow, in a jingling rhyme?⁴⁰

Byron replaces this overly moody and melancholy being with a more calmly reflective man who, ill and lonely, finds pleasure in his memories of happy youth. He is able to enter imaginatively and without bitterness into his lost world:

Oft does my heart indulge the rising thought,
Which still recurs, unlook'd for and unsought;
My soul to Fancy's fond suggestion yields,
And roams romantic o'er her airy fields.
Scenes of my youth, develop'd, crowd to view,
To which I long have bade a last adieu!
Seats of delight, inspiring youthful themes;
Friends lost to me, for aye, except in dreams. (27-34)

The emphasis here and in much of the poem falls on the sense of belonging and of companionship which he had enjoyed both in the learning activities and in sports in this atmosphere of friendship: "The social smile of every welcome face" (50). Alongside that ideal world of dream and memory, however, a real world of harsher truth exists. Byron is pensively aware of innocence destroyed by time as youth learns to dissemble, conceal feelings, avoid truth, become hypocritical (57-76); but these thoughts he would put aside for the comfort of his memories. In his new portrait Byron plays down the self-pitying futility that depreciates

39. PW, I, 84, note i.

40. PW, I, 103, note i.

his poetic efforts as a "fruitless loss of time" and almost takes pride in his inadequate "jingling rhyme". Though he still feels unskillful, he shifts the emphasis away from his personal self-consciousness to his desire to honour Probus with his poetry and to allow the possibility of some good surviving:

Oh! could I soar above these feeble lays,
 These young effusions of my early days,
 To him my Muse her noblest strain would give,
 The song might perish, but the theme might live.
(357-3600)

Byron pictures himself as a desolately lonely individual, but not inconsolable. He is pleasurably drawn to his memories of "dear Ida", the place that had been "A home, a world, a paradise" to one who had not known love of family (213-226). Ignorant of "future hope and fear", he is content to "chase the phantom" of his happy past (375-377), confident that the best time of life is those days

When Friendship bow'd before the shrine of Truth,
 And Love, without his pinion smil'd on Youth. (411-412)

This is a more self-contained identity than in the original version in which he saw himself desperately miserable because of happiness lost forever:

My heart is bitter, though my cheek may smile;
 No more with former bliss, my heart is glad;
 Hope yields to anguish and my soul is sad;
 From fond regret, no future joy can save;
 Remembrance slumbers only in the grave.⁴¹

The verse is laboured in a way that even the weakest passages of the revised poem are not because Byron resorted to clichéd thought to express a condition he did not actually feel. As Blackstone has observed, "The most

41. PW, I, 104, note i, continued from previous page.

attractive portions of 'Childish Recollections' are those which celebrate and commend".⁴² This is so, we might add, because poems that commemorate and praise are in harmony with the figure of the poet behind the poems that Byron wished to project--a "man of firm and noble soul" who, even in sickness and loneliness, maintains a kind of cheerful resoluteness of spirit.

Poems that "celebrate and commend" dominate Hours of Idleness, both in the selections carried forward from the two previous volumes and the additions, and almost exclusively form the additions to Poems Original and Translated, the fourth volume of Byron's juvenile poems. Clearly, at this stage in his poetic development he thinks that the primary business of the poet and the purpose of poetry is to pay tribute to worthy persons or places and to honour what is good and heroic. Whether celebrating friendship in "Childish Recollections", "To E. L. N., Esq.", "Epitaph on a Beloved Friend", "To George, Earl Delawarr", "To the Duke of Dorset", "To the Earl of Clare", the translation from The Aeneid, and his imitation of Ossian in "The Death of Calmar and Orla"; or commemorating his ancestors in the Newstead poems and his Highland heritage in "Lachin y Gair", "When I Roved a Young Highlander", and "I Would I Were a Careless Child"; Byron uses poetry as a means of preserving what is honourable or affective but which might be otherwise lost to memory through time, and as a means of bringing

42. Blackstone, Survey, 33.

praise to himself. This classical concept of the poet receives support in the tribute he pays to individual friends in "Childish Recollections". To Alonzo he modestly protests his own verse unfit to his task but foresees

Some loftier bard shall sing thy glorious name,
To build his own, upon thy deathless fame. (249-250)

That this is a thought Byron laboured over to get right is apparent when we consider that it is one of the minor revisions from the first printed version:

Could aught inspire me with poetic fire,
For thee alone, I'd strike the hallow'd lyre;
But, to some abler hand, the task I wave,
Whose strains immortal may outlive the grave.⁴³

His lines to Davus are expressions of gratitude for having saved Byron's life in a school incident, though he admits that "all the labours of a grateful lay" are insufficient repayment (283-284). To Lycus as well he laments the inadequacy of his verse:

Thy milder virtues could my Muse relate,
To thee, alone, unrivall'd would belong
The feeble efforts of my lengthen'd song.
(288-290)

Even those poems that jar against the laudatory note of the volume as a whole, such as "Thoughts Suggested by a College Examination" and "Granta, a Medley", satiric views of Cambridge life, act as foils to the poems and passages celebrating the Harrow years and reflect added glory on the uncorrupted days of youth.

The identity that Byron created for these poems is, as McGann at one point has termed it, a "self-portrait",⁴⁴

43. PW, I, 97, note i.

44. McGann, Fiery Dust, p. 21.

only in the sense that Byron had presented a stylised portrait of himself. The poems not published or published anonymously in Hobhouse's 1809 volume offer another and more complete portrait of Byron.⁴⁵ In Hours of Idleness and the second edition he has almost entirely suppressed the self-pitying identity that had dominated the first "Childish Recollections". A trace of this image appears in "To a Lady", which closes Hours of Idleness, as Byron addresses Mary Chaworth Musters with the idea that had his love for her been returned he might not have fallen into the folly of

...all this giddy waste of years,
 This tiresome round of palling pleasures;
 These varied loves, these matrons' fears,
 These thoughtless strains to Passion's measures;
 (7)

nor have been forced to "seek for other joys" in the distraction of "thoughtless throngs, and empty noise" (10). Again, in "Lines Written Beneath an Elm in the Churchyard of Harrow", placed at the end of Poems Original and Translated, Byron indulges in a more melancholy than pensive mood as he looks towards the time of his death with the wish to be buried in this place, "Mourn'd" and "Deplor'd" by childhood friends but "unremember'd by the world beside" (32-34). The chief purpose of the poem, however, is to pay thoughtful and appreciative respect to this loved spot. "The Adieu", not published in his lifetime, is an orgy of self-pity for which the sub-title prepares us: "Written under the Impression that the Author Would Soon Die". After several stanzas of emotional leave-

45. PW, I, 237-288.

taking of scenes, places, and people dearly remembered, Byron imagines himself in his grave, "Unheeded in the clay", and unwept for except "By nightly skies, and storms alone":

No mortal eye will deign to steep
With tears the dark sepulchral deep
Which hides a name unknown. (10)

Clearly the poem could not be published without giving a false emphasis to his portrait. Byron likewise wrote a number of love poems in 1807 and 1808, with only a half-dozen of them published in the *Hobhouse* collection. Among the unpublished poems, several deal with infidelity and fickleness in women--"To--", "To Anne" (two by that title), "On the Eyes of Miss A--H--"; "To a Vain Lady" upbraids foolish gullibility in a girl who believes "what striplings say"; and "Song" is an appeal to the night winds not to disturb the sleeping fair.

Most importantly, in Hours of Idleness Byron has suppressed his humourous and ironic voice. He had excluded the light and witty poems already printed in Fugitive Pieces and Poems on Various Occasions - "To Eliza", a specious argument against wedlock, and "Reply to J. M. B. Pigot, Esq., On the Cruelty of his Mistress". These and several of the posthumously published poems--"Egotism, A Letter to J. R. Becher", "To the Author of a Sonnet", "Queries to Casuists", and "To Harriet", show a spontaneity, facility of mind, and playful love of language that we find in his letters and in the poems from Italy intended for private circulation in Murray's rooms, but not seen in his published works before Beppo and Don Juan.

McGann quite rightly has observed that "a spectacular element insinuates itself throughout Hours of Idleness which lends the volume not so much a self-dramatizing as a self-propagandizing quality".⁴⁶ Byron's concern is to launch poems and a poetic self which, like kites, will win approval from an admiring audience while the real self goes unnoticed. The dramatised self leaves unexpressed the total personality but exercises the talent that when fully developed allows Byron to create his best poetry from dramatic speech. An obvious and logical development from the created self who hovers outside the poetry is to place him for even greater dramatic effect inside the poem as a narrator with an identity distinguishable from the protagonist's, as in Childe Harold and Don Juan. Following Moore's example with the Thomas Little poems, Byron's figure in the preface and behind the poems of Hours of Idleness prepares in a rudimentary way for the familiar pattern of his later poetry. Meanwhile, he took pains to keep uncluttered and inviolate the poetic identity he had formed for his first published volume. From Cambridge he wrote to the publisher Ben Crosby, who handled the London sales of Hours of Idleness, offering him as a joint publication Hobhouse's "Satire in imitation of Juvenal" and his own "British Bards". Byron was quite explicit in his proviso of anonymity:

It must be published (if at all) anonymously, & in such a manner that my name as the author, may never transpire at any future period, as I feel no inclination to give it to the world a second time, particularly so soon after my DeBüt.--I believe it

46. McGann, Fiery Dust, p. 23.

is my Coadjutor's first appearance, but he must also wear a mask, though from a different Reason.⁴⁷

Byron's insistence on the mask of anonymity for himself most likely stemmed from his desire to avoid lifting the mask of the persona of Hours of Idleness. Since the reviews to *date* had been generally flattering in their praise, Byron had no wish to confuse the identity of his contemplative and introspective man.⁴⁸

The concept of the poet that Byron holds at this point is at variance with the classical attitudes about the nature and purpose of poetry already mentioned. His is the romantic and egotistical understanding that individual experience and feelings form the materials of poetry. The poet in a subjective reaction to strong passion expresses his feelings which are presumably shared by beings similarly sensitive and are to be taken as truth. Paradoxically, the poet is laying claim to the validity of personal experience as an index of universal judgment. In responding to Becher's objection to his love poems, Byron asserts his independence from outside control and the right to speak from his feelings--"My Lyre, the Heart-- My Muse, the simple Truth". He dramatises the triumph of Truth over Fiction in "To a Knot of Ungenerous Critics". Yet, in "To Romance" Byron cuts himself off from what has to now been the source of his poetic truth, albeit

47. MLJ, I, 141, December 22, 1807.

48. Up to this time the reviews of Hours of Idleness had been rather evenly divided in praise and blame. Favourable reviews had appeared in Monthly Literary Recreations (July 1807), the Critical Review (September 1807), and the Monthly Review, or Literary Journal (November 1807). The Satirist (October 1807) and the Eclectic Review (November 1807) had been less favourable. The unsympathetic Monthly Mirror and the Edinburgh Review, both January 1808, were yet to come.

reluctantly. The poem is a farewell to Fancy's feelings, whether feelings of love for women or affection for friends (3); and Byron's note to the poem indicates the depth of his disillusionment in the remark that legendary friendships of the past "in all probability never existed beyond the imagination of the poet, or the page of an historian, or modern novelist".⁴⁹ Poetic truth is no more than fiction. "Farewell to the Muse", which Byron had first meant to publish in Hours of Idleness, is a logical outgrowth of the impasse. As Wordsworth and Coleridge recorded earlier when they had arrived at similarly static positions in the imaginative life, the loss of "the visionary gleam" mourned in the Intimations Ode and the unreliability of "outward forms" as an impetus to the imagination in the Dejection Ode, Byron notes his own apathetic spirit as he sets aloft what he thinks of as his farewell poem:

Then rise on the gale this the last of my lays,
The coldest effusion which springs from my heart. (1)

Since "drain'd is the nectar that gladdens the bowl", Byron is left with nothing to sing about (4). He enumerates his former themes--"Love", "friends", "the deeds which my Fathers have done", and the reasons why these are now closed to him--the hopelessness of fulfilling love, separation from friends, and his inadequacy to the demands of poems that praise (5-7). In the doleful closing stanza Byron seems unwittingly to have touched upon the flaw central to his juvenile poems. They have been "languid" because they have been forced from an ill-conceived

49. FW, I, 175, note 1.

identity, the self he had determined to present.

Byron's view of the poet is of course rooted in the thought of Rousseau that permeates Romanticism. The opening sentences of the Confessions read as if Byron might have written them as a retrospective comment on his poetic life:

I have resolved on an enterprise which has no precedent, and which, once complete, will have no imitator. My purpose is to display to my kind a portrait in every way true to nature, and the man I shall portray will be myself.

Simply myself. I know my own heart and understand my fellow man. But I am made unlike any one I have ever met; I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world. I may be no better, but at least I am different. Whether Nature did well or ill in breaking the mould in which she formed me, is a question which can only be resolved after the reading of my book.⁵⁰

Rousseau, however, presented his "vile and despicable" self, as well as his "good, generous, and noble" self, while Byron in the juvenile volumes virtually silenced all but the noble voice in the belief that attention to propriety would win acclaim for his poetry. The juvenile volumes succeed to the extent that Byron integrates a dramatised self with a body of poetry but they fail as an expression of the authentic Byron. The straining after attention, which Brougham could not let go unchallenged, obscures much that is good in the early poems - Byron's sensitive response to places, his concern with man as a social being, his often surprising technical control that surfaces more as unconscious insight into the details of

50. The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, trans. J. M. Cohen (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1977), p. 17.

his craft than studied effect. In such moments instinct and vision overcome his self-conscious contrivings and we feel the presence of the later Byron who, like Rousseau, in the end dared to be simply himself.

Byron's early work, like that of Keats, was a product of the Romantic movement, but it was not until the publication of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage in 1809 that he became a major literary force. Byron's suppressed political passions were vividly shown in his early work, but his real poetic and ideological attitudes were revealed in a savage review brought the same year to light by his friend, the poet, William Gifford. In the years between the publication of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage and his first major work, Don Quixote, Byron had practiced his satiric voice in Mazeppa and The Corsair of Minerva, both intended for the second edition of English Bards, and in Childe Harold. These poems and the poems that followed in the wake of the unprecedented success of Childe Harold, the tales that soared high on the winds of popular approval, bring Byron's poetic theory to the next stage of its development through the necessity of re-inventing a poetic self and a re-thinking of his intention.

Byron had been warned that the Edinburgh Review planned "a most violent attack" on his poems, supposedly "unmerciful", and took it as a sign of his "importance" even to be noticed.¹ Yet when the critique appeared at

1. MSJ, I, 157, February 20, 1808. See also Macpherson's note on the back of issue of the January number of the Edinburgh Review.

CHAPTER III

THE EARLY SATIRES, POEMS OF PUBLIC WEAL

The good that Byron gained from the apparent evil of the Edinburgh Review's attack on Hours of Idleness was the rousing of his satiric voice. Byron's letters and suppressed juvenile poems have already shown us a personality both realistic and sceptical in attitude, but Brougham's savage review brought the voice into print and Byron to his first success as a poet. In the three years between the publication of English Bards, and Scotch Reviewers in March 1809 and the first two cantos of Childe Harold in March 1812 that gave Byron instant fame, Byron also practised his satiric voice in Hints from Horace and The Curse of Minerva, both intended for the fifth edition of English Bards, and in Childe Harold as well. These poems and the poems that followed in the wake of the unprecedented success of Childe Harold, the verse tales that soared high on the winds of popular approval, bring Byron's poetic theory to the next stage of its development through the necessity of rediscovering a poetic self and a re-thinking of his intention.

Byron had been warned that the Edinburgh Review planned "a most violent attack" on his poems, reportedly "unmerciful", and took it as a sign of his "importance" even to be noticed.¹ Yet when the critique appeared at

1. MLJ, I, 157, February 26, 1808. See also Marchand's note on the time of issue of the January number of the Edinburgh Review.

the end of February, he seems to have been unprepared for the severity of Brougham's unrelenting scorn for his efforts. It is a mistake to see the debauchery of the weeks that followed as Byron's response to the public humiliation since this coincided with the time when Byron was already in London enjoying "dissipated Chaos", but the review was a lesson he never forgot. Years later, when Shelley had told him that the review of Endymion in the Quarterly Review had been the death of Keats, Byron recalled for Murray his pain and his response to the review of his early poems:

I know by experience that a savage review is Hemlock to a sucking author--and the one on me--(which produced the English Bards &c.) knocked me down--but I got up again.--Instead of bursting a blood-vessel--I drank three bottles of Claret--and began an answer --finding that there was nothing in the Article for which I could lawfully knock Jeffrey on the head in an honourable way.²

For the remainder of his life he wore English Bards as a badge of his resilience and, when necessary, he flashed it as a warning that he could be provoked to damaging assault. When the "trash of poetry" that Murray sent from England and the neglect and abuse of his early Don Juan cantos and dramas had sickened him, he frequently threatened to return to England solely for the purpose of writing another poem on the state of English poetry. Of The Vision of Judgment he said, "I just piddle a little with these trifles to keep my hand in for the New 'English Bards &c' which I perceive some of your people are in want of".³ A

2. MLJ, VIII, 102, April 26, 1821.

3. MLJ, VIII, 236-237, October 9, 1821. See also MLJ, VIII, 201, September 12, 1821; and MLJ, 221, September 24, 1821.

month after the Edinburgh reviewer had done his work, Byron had recovered some of his lost dignity so that he could say with pride that "these 'paper bullets of the brain' have only taught me to stand fire" and could find a challenge in the ridiculing reproach with the claim that he "could write a more sarcastic critique on myself than any yet published".⁴ From the first edition English Bards shows that Byron had been led to view his juvenile effusions with a small measure of self-criticism and much needed detachment.

To Byron's further credit, he did not rush into his answer to the Edinburgh Review. Though he had already planned to have his say about the lamentable state of English poetry in the present age in the anonymous company of Hobhouse's translation of Juvenal, he took a year to adapt and expand "British Bards" into his published satire. As in the case of the juvenile volumes, the alterations that Byron made to include Scottish reviewers in the broadened scope of the first edition of his satire and the much more extensive additions that he made for the second edition before leaving England allow us to look at his method of composition to see something of his mind at work.⁵ English Bards, surviving today in the fifth edition form that Byron revised but then did not publish during his life, is little changed from the second, third, and fourth editions, but the changes Byron made when he revised English Bards for the second edition before leaving England for his grand tour aid our understanding of his poetic development.

4. MLJ, I, 162-163, March 28, 1808.

5. PW, I, xv-xvi, contains a fairly detailed account of the changes which Byron made in the several editions.

"British Bards" is a work rather unimaginatively conceived in imitation of the popular fashion of the day. Coleridge has pointed out in his introduction to English Bards that Byron followed models that had taken their pattern from the Dunciad and the Rosciad, "ephemera" that filled the air while Byron was at Cambridge.⁶ In order to make his survey of the ills of current poetry fit his enlarged purpose, Byron had only to patch in his additional material on detestable reviewers. The finished product, the first edition of English Bards, is therefore a functional if somewhat plain garment for Byron's thoughts. The poem's appeal lies in the occasional incisive judgments, Byron's opinion on what is still seen to be the worst of Wordsworth and Coleridge, for example, and in the several splenetic passages that were added to the original work in which we hear strong language matching Byron's strong feelings against the alliance between "politics and poesy", the league presumed to exist between the Edinburgh Review and the Holland House set, and his indignation against Lord Carlisle whom Byron judged negligent in his obligations to his young relation. Otherwise, the piece proceeds for the most part in the manner of an often poor or only adequate imitation of the models. What Rutherford has said of the satire is particularly true of the first edition: "it is very much a young man's poem, brash, rudely assertive, technically crude".⁷

The exercise, however, was for Byron both valuable and essential at this stage of his development.

6. PW, I, 294-295.

7. Rutherford, Byron, p. 23.

Since satire by its nature demands a distancing from the material and the audience alike, as well as a certain disregard for consequences, Byron could drop most of the pretentiousness of the identity he had devised to ingratiate himself into public favour in Hours of Idleness and speak from the feeling that he had something to say that was not only necessary but useful. The abbreviated preface that accompanied the first edition establishes the author as one who speaks with some reticence, aware that others are better suited to the task, but willing to try to fill the void. He presumes that the opinions he holds about the poetry of the present day are no different from the general view and is thus encouraged to treat the current "rabies for rhyming". The chief cause of Byron's complaint is the "perverted powers" of the present-day poets, the "mental prostitution" of poets who waste their "considerable genius".⁸ The tone is low-key, even staid, and Byron's thoughts must have returned to his unpublished satire, "Soliloquy of a Bard in the Country", where he had first challenged the right of the quack country physician to criticise authors. In assuming the role of critic Byron claims that when the "regular physician" is not available, "a country practitioner" may treat an outbreak of disease "provided there is no quackery in his treatment of the malady".

The rational voice prevails in the logically organised poem that followed this first preface. Beginning with line 103, the opening of the first edition of English

8. PW, I, 292. The original preface consists of only the final paragraph of the enlarged preface of the later editions.

Bards, Byron pays brief tribute to the past great age of poetry "When Sense and Wit with Poesy allied" (105) was the hallmark of English verse, both sustained by and sustaining the taste of the times. In contrast, Byron finds, in the present age taste as well as poetry has declined. He supports this observation with a systematic survey of contemporary poets from the immensely popular Scott through the "smaller fry, who swarm in shoals", to point out their failings either as they denigrate their art to write for money and the popular demand for variety or as they offend the serious reader's taste and judgment. Byron pauses in his viewing of poetry to take the traditional look at the state of drama and closes his satire with praise for the poets whom he judges have the power to reverse the decline and "Restore Apollo to his vacant throne" (807). Even his attack on Jeffrey required no disruption of the order of the original "British Bards". In that poem Byron had already reproved the "Northern Wolves" of the Edinburgh Review for their unfavourable treatment of James Montgomery, the "classic Sheffield". He merely had to insert his more personal response to Jeffrey at this point (438-517).

Though Byron maintained the mask of anonymity as far as the public was concerned, the identity of the author might have been discovered in the last-minute revision he made to his lines on Carlisle as the first edition was preparing for the press. Disappointed that Carlisle had declined to introduce him in the House of Lords when Byron had achieved his majority, Byron altered his former flattering praise of Carlisle as it had appeared

in couplet in "British Bards"--

On one alone Apollo deigns to smile,
And crowns a new Roscommon in Carlisle,⁹

to eighteen lines that seethe with his sense of injustice and betrayal. Describing Carlisle's verse as "paralytic puling", Byron gives a clue to his identity in what hindsight tells us is a reference to Hours of Idleness:

The puny schoolboy and his early lay
Men pardon, if his follies pass away;
But who forgives the Senior's ceaseless verse,
Whose hairs grow hoary as his rhymes grow worse?
(727-730)

Here and in the mocking attack on Jeffrey and the Holland House "hirelings" Byron breaks from the modulated voice of the man of common sense with a reasonable claim to try with skillful phrasing to correct the wrongs he sees.

In the significantly revised second edition, however, Byron retails his satire, adding the touches that reveal the Byron style. What the resulting poem lacks in orderly design it makes up for in flair. Though Arnold regretted Byron's habit of hasty composition and that he lacked the mind of the artist who sees a work as "an organic whole", he was also astute in recognizing that though Byron's method resulted in "'a string of passages', pored out, as he describes them, with rapidity and excitement, and with new passages constantly suggesting themselves, and added while his work was going through the press", the method itself was at the same time the source of much of Byron's appeal,

the wonderful power of vividly conceiving
a single incident, a single situation; of throwing
himself upon it, grasping it as if it were real and

9. FW, I, 354, note 4.

he saw it and felt it, and of making us see and feel it too.¹⁰

The additions to English Bards give something of the Byronic energy and gusto generally lacking in the first edition and infuse the whole with a spirit that predicts the maturer satires.

His enlarged preface to the second edition adds a new dimension to the character of the author. To the conscientious but modestly unassuming figure behind the first poem, we have Byron revealing himself against the advice of his friends, declaring that he is "not to be terrified by abuse, or bullied by reviewers". Made bold by the success of the first edition, Byron invites any who would contest his opinions while denying any delusions about the merit of his work: "...my object is not to prove that I can write well, but, if possible, to make others write better".¹¹ The disclaimer is of course self-protective but it also echoes the neo-classical zeal for improving those guilty of follies that detracted from decorum. The sentence hints too at Byron's innate, competitive spirit, his love of opposition. We should accept that Byron, having survived the effects of the Edinburgh Review to write a successful poem, would have taken pleasure in a battle of pens and wits. He believed that English Bards proved that he could "write well" and in the end remained disappointed that Jeffrey had taken no notice of English Bards. Much of the long passage that Byron added to the end of the second edition is a re-

10. Matthew Arnold, Essays in Criticism, First and Second Series, Everyman's Library, New Edition (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1964), p. 314.

11. PW, I, 291.

stating of Byron's challenge and confidence in his developing powers. In the following lines he takes the measure of his poetic development:

And though I hope not hence unscathed to go,
 Who conquers me shall find a stubborn foe.
 The time hath been, when no harsh sound would fall
 From lips that now may seem imbued with gall;
 Nor fools nor follies tempt me to despise
 The meanest thing that crawled beneath my eyes:
 But now, so callous grown, so changed since youth,
 I've learned to think, and sternly speak the truth;
 Learned to deride the critic's starch decree,
 And break him on the wheel he meant for me;
 To spurn the rod a scribbler bids me kiss,
 Nor care if courts and crowds applaud or hiss.
 (1051-1062)

Though Byron had not yet found the style and verse form amenable to his genius, he asserts the fearless courage and disregard for opinion necessary for his greatest satires. The Vision of Judgment especially draws us back to this first public declaration of independence from the reaction of "courts and crowds".

There is a greater difference between the first and second editions of English Bards than between the first edition and "British Bards"; and the changes, on the whole, reflect Byron's sense of release from the worry of what readers might think. The new beginning is lively and defiant. Byron has mustered his fighting spirit and gives fair warning to his opponents:

Prepare for rhyme--I'll publish right or wrong:
 Fools are my theme, let Satire be my song. (5-6)

He offers heroic praise to his weapon who will aid him in the battle, his "grey goosequill . . . mighty instrument of little men" (7-10). Admitting that he is not skilled enough to attack the "royal vices" of the time, he limits

his hunt to "follies" and commands the reader to

Laugh when I laugh, I seek no other fame,
The cry is up, and scribblers are my game. (43-44)

Byron then laughs at himself and the folly of his youthful verse, matching the change of thought and mood with an easy, conversational style:

I, too, can scrawl, and once upon a time
I poured along the town a flood of rhyme,
A schoolboy freak, unworthy praise or blame;
I printed--older children do the same.
'Tis pleasant, sure, to see one's name in print;
A Book's a Book, altho' there's nothing in't.
(47-52)

The confession is liberating to Byron-- any one would forgive a schoolboy's vanity romp, but damaging to Jeffrey, the presumed reviewer, who is made to look foolish for having taken so much notice of worthless verse.

Byron also adds lines that allude to contemporary social fads and foibles, thereby widening the field of his satire while sharpening his attack on the poetry. Juxtaposing the current love for the new wonders of science with the new poetry, all are shown to be mere harking after sensationalism:

The Cow-pox, Tractors, Galvanism, and Gas,
In turns appear, to make the vulgar stare,
Till the swoln bubble bursts--and all is air!
Nor less new schools of Poetry arise,
Where dull pretenders grapple for the prize.
(132-136)

The passion for novelty that infects the age finds satisfaction in the public demonstrations of scientific and pseudo-scientific wonders that hold attention for a time. Byron joins the new poetry to his unpoetical list of popular fads to comment on its transitory nature and its lack of qualities that would give it claim to supplant the

poetry of tradition. The taste of the age puffs up "pretenders", "Pseudo-bards", at the expense of "lawful Genius" (138-140).

He expands the idea in an addition to a later section of the poem with stronger implications of his concept of poetry. The popular interest in marvels expressed itself among the cultured classes, especially, in a search for natural poets, artisans and plough-boys who wrote verse. These were seen as demonstrations of the Romantic theory that poetry was the result of an instinctive response to affective experience:

When some brisk youth, the tenant of a stall,
Employs a pen less pointed than his awl,
Leaves his snug shop, forsakes his store of shoes,
St. Crispin quits, and cobbles for the Muse,
Heavens! how the vulgar stare! how crowds applaud!
How ladies read, and Literati laud! (765-770)

In these lines referring to Joseph Blacket, shoemaker turned poet, whose verse had caught the attention of the reading public,¹² Byron's indignation touches not only the absurdity of the pursuit of native genius but the exploitation of the uneducated by those who ought to know better. He returns to the subject in Hints from Horace (734)¹³ and in his letters in the summer of 1811 after Blacket, still a very young man, had died, as Byron supposed, from "poetry, patronage, and strong waters".¹⁴ Byron's objection is not founded on elitist principles that would deny a member of the lower classes access to

12. PW, I, 359, note 1.

13. PW, I, 441-442, note 2.

14. MLJ, II, 53, June 28, 1811.

literary circles, but quite the reverse. Fundamentally, Byron is protective of the "industrious poor", as he called them in his long note about the cobbler-poet, Blacket, in Hints from Horace, and critical of patrons, Pratt, Loftt, and other Della Crusicans, who elevate their discoveries of poets of native genius into positions of intolerable pressure.

He was particularly critical of Pratt's decision to print a subscription edition of Blacket's works to benefit the shoemaker's widow and child: "by a refinement of barbarity, they [Blacket's patrons] have made the (late) man posthumously ridiculous, by printing what he would have had sense enough never to print himself".¹⁵ Though Byron never forgot his own aristocratic status, he held a genuine and sympathetic regard for the lower classes as incidents throughout his life testify. Like Pope, and Horace before him, however, he accepted that poetry grew out of a combining of art and nature, that learning from books and experience fitted the poet for life in the larger world. The uneducated poets so admired by the age were therefore no more than objects of amusement, in Byron's view, victimised by the upper classes. "Cruel Patronage!" Byron called this when Pratt prepared to publish Blacket's Remains, "to ruin a man in his calling, but then he is a divine subject for Subscription".¹⁶

Byron's estimate of his major contemporaries also shows his neo-classical biases, but blended to a degree

15. PW, I, 442.

16. MLJ, II, 76.

with the interests of Romanticism. These portions of the poem are carried directly from "British Bards" into the first and second editions of English Bards, with the exception of the lines on Bowles that Hobhouse had contributed for the anonymous edition. In the main, the drift of Byron's critical judgment expressed in this early piece remained the same throughout his life. His criteria for both praise and blame did not grow out of any identifiable set of beliefs commonly used to distinguish good from bad literature but out of his individualised interpretation and adaptation of standards. Ruskin, in praise of Byron, cites the often-quoted letter that Byron wrote from Venice describing how he had measured poets of the current age against "the little Queen Anne's man" to find Pope superior to all "in point of sense, learning, effect, and even imagination, passion, and invention". Ruskin calls the list a "distinctive and exhaustive enumeration of the qualities of great poetry" and has even greater admiration for "the order in which he places these".¹⁷ Though the terms Byron uses are liable to a variety of subjective meanings, especially imagination and invention, the hierarchy can be accepted as those qualities *functioning with* the mind of the poet, imagination, *and transforming* nature *into a* work of art. Invention thus may be accepted as both the poet's choice of subject and his handling of his materials, and the extremes of the range are subsumed in the range *implied in*

17. John Ruskin, Praeterita (London: George Allen, 1900), I, 263-265.

these earlier lines: "When Sense and Wit with Poesy allied . . . flourished side by side" (English Bards, 105-106).

Scott is the first to come under Byron's fire, primarily because he writes for money, is a "hireling bard" who prostitutes his art. The Lay of the Last Minstrel, in which "mountain spirits prate to river sprites", violates good sense and strains credibility and Marmion, that "mighty mixture of the great and base", is a "stale romance" (153-182 passim).¹⁸ Aside from the obvious principle at work here, Byron's insistence on good judgment, the question of artistic integrity arises-- whether the writer remains true to his art or yields to the temptation of popularity and to the lure of money. Ironically, this was a question the idealistic young nobleman himself faced later in his own career, first, with his verse tales and, later, during the last years in Italy when he had decided to accumulate money to "do some good in the world".

From among the other poets Byron singles out further examples of those who encourage the corrupt taste of the reading public, attacking Southey for the quantity of epics and other verse pouring from his pen, concocted of miraculous events and novelties; Monk Lewis, whose Gothic romances feed the desire for sensation; and Moore, for the love poems of Little that encourage lust in the young. Only in his estimate of Wordsworth and Coleridge

18. See also Byron's long note elaborating on the objections to Scott's works named, PW, I, 309-310, note 2.

does Byron rise above mundane and obvious critical comment to the happy, epigrammatic phrasing that survives when the remaining lines of English Bards are largely forgotten. These two poets especially fail in "effect" if we accept Ruskin's test for the effectiveness of a poem: "does it tell on the ear and the spirit in an instant?"¹⁹ Wordsworth, "mild apostate of poetic rule", is chastised for his system that finds subjects for poetry in the simple incidents of the lives of simple folk and the language for poetry in the ordinary speech of common men. Byron memorialises him as one

Who, both by precept and example, shows
That prose is verse, and verse is merely prose.
(241-242)

He was equally incisive in uncovering Coleridge's weaknesses, his "turgid ode and tumid stanza", his frequently muddled meaning, and his sentimentality. Most telling of all, however, is Byron's estimate of the occasional Coleridgean absurdity:

Yet none in lofty numbers can surpass
The bard who soars to elegize an ass:
So well the subject suits his noble mind,
He brays, the Laureate of the long-eared kind.
(261-262)

Byron's criticism of Wordsworth is consistent with objections he had raised earlier when reviewing the two-volume edition of Wordsworth's work in 1807, though in that piece they were cautiously raised and politely balanced against complimentary remarks. Byron found the poems of the 1807 issue on the whole inferior to the Lyrical Ballads collection. In the best of the poems,

19. Ruskin, Praeterita, p. 268.

however, he found "a native elegance, natural and unaffected", and absence of "tinsel embellishments and abstract hyperboles", and particularly admired the stirring, patriotic sonnet that begins "Another year! another deadly blow". Byron quoted the whole of the sonnet, appreciating it not for "any novelty in the sentiments", but because in his judgment it met his requirement for good poetry: "the force and expression is that of a genuine poet, feeling as he writes".²⁰ McGann has noted that in this statement Byron "articulates a criterion for judging the worth of poetry that was to remain for him a life long principle (one of the few he had)", and relates this to Byron's customary responsiveness to discovering "a living personality . . . projected by a poem", or "a man in person, dramatically present and humanly interesting".²¹ There is no cause to disagree with this view since Byron's letters and works, as well as his preferences for particular authors, demonstrate this fact again and again. We do not have to go far into Wordsworth's sonnet, however, to discover that the thought of the poem expressed sentiments appropriate to the identity Byron had created for himself in his Hours of Idleness of 1807, the heroic "man of firm and noble soul" increasingly experiencing isolation that forced upon him self-reliance. In the sonnet, Wordsworth records England's plight as year by year Napoleon conquered Eastern Europe nation by nation and made alliances

20. Monthly Literary Recreations, II (July 1807), 65.

21. McGann, Fiery Dust, p. 3.

with Austria, Prussia, and Russia:

Another mighty empire overthrown!
 And we are left, or shall be left, alone--
 The last that dares to struggle with the foe.
 'Tis well!--from this day forward we shall know
 That in ourselves our safety must be sought,
 That by our own right-hands it must be wrought;
 That we must stand unprop'd, or be laid low. (2-8)

The lines are inspirational oratory for an isolated, besieged nation or a lonely young lord who merely wrote poetry to while away the time until he could take his place as an orator in the cause of his nation. Nor, as Byron observed, is there "any novelty in the sentiments", yet we must assume that the sentiments, not the personality behind them, first appealed to Byron. Much of the charm of his own best poetry is his apt phrasing of familiar ideas, and Wordsworth here expressed what Byron had often thought "but ne'er so well expressed".

Byron names three more of Wordsworth's poems as examples that "possess all the beauties, and few of the defects" of the author--"Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle", "The Seven Sisters", and "The Afflictions of Margaret----- of -----".²² In each case, they are particularly relevant to Byron's feelings about himself, to sentiments he holds dear. The full title of the "Feast" poem is sufficient to explain Byron's approval--". . .upon the restoration of Lord Clifford, the Shepherd, to the Estates and Honours of his Ancestors". Byron could also identify with Margaret's affliction, a profound loneliness because her only son has been away without any word for seven years. Plaintively recalling that he was "An object

22. Monthly Literary Recreations, II, 65.

beauteous to behold; / Well born, well bred . . .
 Ingenuous, innocent, and bold", Margaret affirms that no matter what loss of honour, what disgrace, her son may have sustained, he is welcome to return since she has "no other earthly friend". "The Seven Sisters", an affective piece of Scottish legend, is the story of the seven daughters of Lord Archibald who drowned themselves in a lake rather than yield to a band of "youthful rovers" from Erin and were changed into seven islands by the fairies. To understand Byron's partiality for this tale we need only remember that at the time that he was writing his review he was planning to go to Scotland to collect Erse legends and traditions for a volume he planned for the spring. The poems Byron praises all reflect Byron's subjective understanding and appreciation of the sentiments.

Byron was more astute in detecting Wordsworth's flaws, finding that "when Mr. W. ceases to please, it is by 'abandoning' his mind to the most common-place ideas, at the same time clothing them in language not simple but puerile".²³ To support his view Byron impatiently quotes the opening passage of "Lines written at the foot of Brother's Bridge", not entirely inappropriately comparing the poem with "Hey de diddle".²⁴ He objects here as he

23. Monthly Literary Recreations, II, 66.

24. Byron can perhaps be forgiven for his failure to appreciate this lyric. The primary appeal of the poem today is its association with the group of lyric poems that Wordsworth composed between March and May, 1802, as he sought to recapture his feeling of closeness with nature in a number of poems addressed to the creations of nature--the butterfly, the cuckoo, the celandine, etc. We know from Dorothy's Journals that Wordsworth composed "Lines . . . at the foot of Brother's Bridge"

does again in English Bards to Wordsworth's banal ideas, prosaic subjects, and unpoetic language. In the satire Byron capitalises on the loss of effect Wordsworth's poetry suffers when, for example, he creates a hero from the pathetic figure of an idiot boy, so that "all who view the 'idiot in his glory' / Conceive the Bard the hero of the story" (253-254). His criticism of Coleridge also derives from not only his occasional obscurity but from elevating the ridiculous to a sublime position, as in his elegy on the ass. In the case of both poets, Byron has chosen selections from their works which, in Ruskin's words, fail "to tell on the ear and the spirit in an instant". Though Byron later considered that he had treated these poets unfairly,²⁵ his objections are sustained in an overall view of poetry. Both poets in the instances he cited were victims of bad judgment and the verses produced ineffective because they had not combined sense and wit.

Footnote 24 continued

on Good Friday, April 16, 1802, while the two were spending a happy day enjoying the sunshine and the planting activities of the country people (The Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth, ed. Mary Moorman, Oxford Paperback Series [London: Oxford University Press, 1971], p. 111). As the entries in Dorothy's Journals covering the preceding winter show, Wordsworth was often ill, depressed, and agitated. The opening stanzas of the Intimations Ode, begun in March, 1802, reveal the cause of his despair as his sense of loss of the "visionary gleam", summed up in the last line of the first stanza: "The things which I have seen I now can see no more". Wordsworth had been poetically inactive for more than a year except for intermittent work on The Pedlar and his Chaucer tales before he began to find his way back with the series of nature poems starting with the Rainbow poem in late March. The "Brother's Bridge" poem, then, as Byron discerned, is Wordsworth's almost nonsensical, certainly spontaneous and exuberant celebration, of the return of his power to respond visually to nature, a return of the source of his poetic life, as he believed at that time.

25. See Coleridge's note (PW, I, 315, note 3) describing the
continued....

Byron has often been condemned for poor critical judgment. Certainly he missed the mark miserably in the poets he praised in English Bards--Gifford, Campbell, Crabbe, Rogers, and even lesser lights, if these are to be taken as a forecast of poets whom he thought would endure. That is not the claim he makes for them, however; he admires them because they follow in the tradition of Pope whom Byron praised not for the usual neo-classical virtues appealing directly to sense and reason but for the power of his "pure strain" to move "the rapt soul" (109-110). Unlike the "spurious brood" of contemporary writers who both pervert and profit from the taste of a now degenerate reading public, those "who rhyme from folly, or for food", Pope's inheritor's, "genuine sons", "Feel as they write, and write but as they feel" (812-817). Though Byron states here in the Romantic tradition a preference for poetry appealing to the emotions, the "genuine poet . . . feeling as he writes" that he had detected in Wordsworth, the sentiment Byron expresses most strongly in this praise of his contemporaries is his regard for the poet's independence from the demands of audience taste, a problem that beset him for much of his days. Other specific qualities he admires in these poets are the absence of affectation and "strained Invention" (512,851) and their ability to capture the truth of their poetic vision, as in the case of Crabbe, "Nature's sternest painter" (858) and Shee, author of Horae Ionicae that Byron much admired,

Footnote 25 continued.....

markings in the copy of English Bards Byron had with him in Switzerland.

Who rends the veils of ages long,
 And views their remnants with a poet's eye.
 (875-876)

We could wish that Byron had possessed the insight of Hazlitt who, recalling years later the day in 1798 when still only a boy he had gone with Coleridge to Racedown and had heard him read aloud from Wordsworth's manuscript of Lyrical Ballads, remembered the effect on him of poems like "The Thorn", "The Mad Mother", and "The Complaint of a Poor Indian Woman": "I felt that deeper power and pathos which have since been acknowledged . . . and the sense of a new style and a new spirit in poetry came over me".²⁶ It is not those sentimental poems, however, that Hazlitt praises but the prophecy of greatness that he detected underlying the poems. To Byron's credit as a critic, he did not find against the poems of Wordsworth that have stood the test of time, and the works of Wordsworth, whose influence he adapted to his special use, particularly in Switzerland in 1816, were those of the first order. He also always admired the best of Coleridge--The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Christabel, and "Kubla Khan". The latter he admitted to Medwin was

26. William Hazlitt, "My First Acquaintance with Poets", The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, ed. P.P. Howe (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1933) XVII, 117. The essay appeared first in The Liberal, No. III, April 1823.

beyond his comprehension but he liked it because "it delights me",²⁷ in the long run perhaps the truest thing that can be said for that baffling poem. Byron's purpose as avowed in the preface to English Bards was "to make others write better", and the faults he singled out for attention have proven to be deserving of criticism. Wordsworth's tendency to prosiness, for example, is the first defect that Coleridge mentions in his assessment of the "characteristic defects" of Wordsworth's poetry.²⁸ Byron was correct in his estimate of specific works he found to be inferior from Scott through Moore. Whatever interest survives today in The Lay of the Last Minstrel or Lewis's Tales of Wonder or Coleridge's "Lines on an Ass" is limited to students of literature who, like archaeologists, dig among the relics to trace the evolution of higher forms of the poet's art or search for the ancestors of a newly discovered breed of poetry.

In part, English Bards fails for the same reason that the poems of the day to which Byron objected are no longer read. Though he was not writing for money, he had one eye on fame and was writing towards the particular interest of a large segment of the reading audience who favoured satire. The scope and the focus, however, are too narrow, the work as a whole too imitative, and the talent too immature to survive as literature. We listen in vain for the sound of the

27. Medwin's Conversations of Lord Byron, ed. Ernest J. Lovell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 178.

28. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, ed. George Watson (London: J.M. Dent, 1977), p. 248.

worldly-wise and witty critic of kings and countrymen, who could turn "honest simple verse" to precise account. Byron's brand of satire in English Bards is perhaps best defined in Johnson's loose description, "a poem in which wickedness or folly is censured". The first edition, following no particular model, closely resembles a speech organised according to rhetorical principles and largely concerned with eloquence of expression designed to persuade an audience. Byron's personal emotions are controlled, even effaced, as he sets out on a methodical contrast of time past with time present, then and now, relying on reason and example, coupled with dignity of expression, to arouse a corrective response in his audience: "Time was, ere yet in these degenerate days" (103); "Then, in this happy isle . . ." (109), "Then Congreve's scenes could cheer . . ." (115); "Now look around and turn each trifling page" (121). From this point he is logically prepared to survey and describe the current offenders. Though he frequently alludes to the progenitors of his satire, especially to Gifford and to Pope, he does not match their style either in the scurrility of The Baviad, The Maeviad, and The Dunciad or in the concise construction of epigrammatic thought so easily enhanced by the heroic couplet. Yarker has noted this tendency to discursiveness and over-emphasis, "always expanding and elaborating", as evidence that "Byron seems too amused and excited by the poem to consider its effect on its

victims, whom he had no real wish to harm".²⁹ These weaknesses, however, owe as much perhaps to the qualities determined by Byron's original conception of purpose in "British Bards" and to self-delight. The first edition of English Bards deviated little from Byron's sense of poetry as oration so that the main body of his satire is rhetorical (in the best sense of that word) rather than pointed ridicule, argumentatively persuasive rather than confidently mocking, the orator restraining his own emotions and depending upon the eloquence of his language to evoke appropriate emotion in his audience.

The attack on Jeffrey, Byron's major addition to the first edition of English Bards, lines 438 to 527, comes closer to the incisiveness and spleen of worthy satire because Byron wrote these lines directly out of his sense of personal injustice. Byron's portrait of Jeffrey as heir to England's hanging-judge Jeffries reveals, as Yarker says, "something of the authentic quality" of satire and his expression has "an appropriate crispness".³⁰ Further, Byron made more perceptive use of his models in the description of the duel between Moore and Jeffrey, indebted to the mock-heroic devices of The Rape of the Lock, as well as to The Dunciad. Again, as he warmed to his subject, the lines Byron prepared for Jeffrey in the suppressed fifth edition, lines

29. P.M. Yarker, "Byron and the Satiric Temper", in Byron: A Symposium, ed. John D. Jump (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 82.

30. Yarker, p. 81.

528 to 539, approach Gifford's gross abusiveness:

Then prosper Jeffrey! pertest of the train
 Whom Scotland pampers with her fiery grain!
 Whatever blessing waits a genuine Scot,
 In double portion swells thy glorious lot;
 For thee Edina culls her evening sweets,
 And showers their odours on thy candid sheets,
 Whose Hue and Fragrance to thy work adhere--
 This scents its pages, and that gilds its rear.
 Lo! blushing Itch, coy nymph, enamoured grown,
 Forsakes the rest, and cleaves to thee alone,
 And, too unjust to other Pictish men,
 Enjoys, thy person, and inspires thy pen!

Though Byron felt it necessary to gloss the word "rear", directing the reader to "See the colour of the back binding of the Edinburgh Review", the lines reflect a sharpening of his satiric skills gained through the hatred for Jeffrey that he had incubated during his travels of 1810 and 1811 and through the additional practice in satire in the poems he wrote while away from England.

The poem had begun to acquire stronger satiric qualities in the second edition, the version first bearing Byron's name. In what amounts almost to a reconceiving of purpose, or an opportunistic move to define himself in his role as the poem's persona, Byron adopts the techniques of the formal verse satirists, Juvenal and Horace, to frame the poem with the indignant or conscientious "I" who speaks out against observed wrong-doing. The mode is of course compatible with the discursive, rhetorical core of the first edition and with the Theophrastian "character" of Clarke (973-980) or the anecdotal description of an evening's entertainment in the Argyll Rooms (638-713) where "vice and folly" reign and the rich indulge their pleasure without regard for the "starving sons of trade"

whose "piteous ruin" they have caused. Though the latter is something of a digression from the main theme, it fits loosely into Byron's view of the decline of the stage which led to a taste for opera, one of Byron's personal abhorrences, and to the private theatrical productions offered as a part of an evening's entertainment in the various hired rooms where the fashionable gathered for gaming and dancing. It also provides Byron with another opportunity to entice Gifford to "raise the chastening song" and to tell again of his own inadequacy to the task of reforming taste. The Horatian posture of the satirist, a plain and honest man guided by his conscience to speak against wrongs, exactly suits Byron's desired image and is the identity he cultivates in the enlarged preface and the expanded second edition of English Bards. The closing lines, added to the revised version (1011-1070), reassert his imperturbable spirit, propped by the Juvenalian right "to think, and sternly speak the truth", as well as the hope of challenge. Byron amended the second-edition promise that when he had returned from "stray[ing] through Beauty's clime" he would not "stun mankind, with Poesy or Prose"³¹ to simply "stun the public ear--at least with Prose" (1035) in the final edition and obviously looked forward to a contest of satiric strength when someone picked up the "gauntlet" that he flung "To Scotch marauder and to Southern dunce". The final lines are more aggressive and confident than the original closing in which Byron merely retired from the scene to "confine"

31. PW, I, 380, note i.

his poetry to "themes less lofty", leaving it to "fair Albion" to "urge thy Bards to gain a name like thine" (991-1010). In his new closing, Byron is humble as befits one of his rank as a novice poet daring to challenge the popular poets of the day and the Edinburgh Review, but he is not self-effacing:

Thus much I've dared; if my incondite lay
Hath wronged these righteous times, let others say:
This, let the world which knows not how to spare,
Yet rarely blames unjustly, now declare.
(1067-1070)

He has spoken as fair-mindedly as he was able and anticipates an equally fair-minded response.

The overriding weakness of English Bards is Byron's lack of general experience and maturity that invites the satirist to apply his "dual vision". Another reviewer of Hours of Idleness, gentler than Brougham and, we can say now, one who possessed more foresight than the Edinburgh reviewer, detected Byron's talent for satire and offered constructive criticism and encouragement:

The grave and laborious follies of collegers and schoolmen, which occupy the largest theatre on which our author has hitherto been able to witness the farce of life, call forth his talent for satire. Prudence has not yet taught him to be very sparing in the exercise of his weapon, nor experience, to be always judicious in the choice of subjects; but a few years or months will let loose to his pursuit the 'higher game' of the world; and he has enough within him to constitute a keen and successful sportsman.³²

Byron's revisions for the second edition of English Bards were made in the midst of his preparations to embark on

32. The Critical Review; or Annals of Literature, Third Series, XII (September 1807), 50.

the first leg of his journey to discover the "farce of life", a journey that occupied the rest of his days whether in the countries of Mediterranean or the near-East, in London society or the English country house, in Italy or in Missolonghi, at the last. Having whetted his appetite for satire and bolstered by his first success, Byron increasingly indulged his ironic voice to describe his vision of the "farce of life", and when the years had "let loose" to him the "'higher game' of the world" he spoke in almost no other voice.

Byron's plans to travel grew out of ordinary restlessness and the desire to see new places and the belief that the experience would prepare him for the political life he intended to follow once he had taken his seat in the House of Lords. While still at Cambridge, he had told Elizabeth Pigot of his plans to go to sea for several months with his cousin Captain Bettsworth, who commanded a naval frigate: "I have seen most scenes, and wish to look at naval life.--We are going probably to the Mediterranean, or the West Indies, or to the Devil...."³³ A few months later, he invited a friend from Harrow days to join him in the spring of 1809 on an unconventional tour abroad: "what say you . . . for a view of the Pelopennesus? [and a?] voyage through the Archipelago?"³⁴ Not long after, he was planning his "departure for Persia in March (or May at the farthest)",³⁵ as he told his mother; and less than a month after that announcement,

33. MLJ, I, 135, October 26, 1807.

34. MLJ, I, 151, February 2, 1808.

35. MLJ, I, 172, October 7, 1808.

he told Mrs. Byron that he expected to "sail for India" in March and asked her to inquire from a Southwell relation, "an old East Indian", what preparations he ought to make. To his mother Byron rationalised the trip on the grounds that he had the time and opportunity at the present moment, and

...if I do not travel now, I never shall, and all men should, one day or other....and when I return, I may possibly become a politician, a few years knowledge of other countries than our own will not incapacitate me for that part.--If we see no nation but our own, we do not give mankind a fair chance, it is from experience not Books, we ought to judge of mankind.--There is nothing like inspection, and trusting to our own senses.³⁶

The advantages to his political career became more firmly fixed in his mind as he had to justify the expenses of such a journey to Hanson who was already too painfully aware of Byron's straitened financial circumstances. He told Hanson that he would "study India and Asiatic policy and manners" and would return with "judgment . . . more mature", yet a man "young enough for politics".³⁷ In the end, Byron settled for the less daring, though still unconventional, journey with Hobhouse; and while he no longer mentioned his political career as the proposed beneficiary of the trip, the two satires written in Athens and many of the Childe Harold stanzas, especially those commenting on the Convention of Cintra, indicate his keen interest in socio-political affairs, an interest that grew increasingly perceptive as he took the measure of Britain against the places that he visited

36. MLJ, I, 172-173, November 2, 1808.

37. MLJ, I, 175, November 18, 1808.

and across the distance that lay between.

In the closing lines of "British Bards" and the first edition of English Bards, Byron had stated with emotional pride his feelings of patriotic zeal for Britain as he saw coalesced in her the varied achievements of the past great centres of empires, Athens, Rome, and Tyre; but he warned,

Like these, thy strength may sink, in ruin hurled,
And Britain fall, the bulwark of the world.
(1005-1006)

These lines are part of a passage meant to be a stirring, eloquent conclusion to his oration of "inglorious lays", on the degenerate times, but the expression is noble and heroic, not satiric, appropriate to his view of himself as a figure in the political world. His orientation is the same in the Hints, in The Curse of Minerva, and in Childe Harold, I and II. As McGann has noted, Byron during these years "writes not to establish a literary reputation or career but to illustrate his political-social aspirations. . . .the vocation that will consciously occupy his mind throughout the Years of Fame".³⁸ In the last years when poetry does become his vocation, however reluctantly and tentatively regarded, his attitude towards England and the English continues to shape his work and his identity. Wherever he was, he kept his eye on social and political developments and set his knowledge of his homeland against his widened view of the world. The bitter feelings against the English that he carried into his exile return to him

38. Jerome J. McGann, Don Juan in Context (London: John Murray, 1976), p. 14.

at times quite unexpectedly, as when he begins the English Cantos of Don Juan, but the best of his mature work reflects his deep feeling for England. Beppo is the grand achievement and first evidence of that bitterness overcome in which, as Yarker has observed, Byron contrasts English and Italian manners to say "England! with all thy faults I love thee still".³⁹ The same message is heard from the quite different Vision of Judgment even as Byron punishes a bumbling king and worse poet and ultimately in the English Cantos where he could at last observe without rancour "Life's infinite variety".

Though English Bards must remain a minor work in terms of Byron's total accomplishment, in a consideration of his poetic theory the satire, like his juvenile volumes, is fundamental to our understanding of his view of himself as a poet and his sense of his purpose. The works which followed reflect these concepts, but they take on added interest whenever they give evidence of Byron's developing poetic powers or hint at the inevitable reorientation to adapt to changing demands that Peckham has described as a feature of the Romantic poet. Perhaps the best that can be said of these works then, seen in this light, is that they are not as bad as we have generally assumed. They are valuable as a record of Byron's growing ability to manoeuvre the materials of affecting experience into poetic form as he develops depth and breadth of feeling.

Byron wrote both Hints from Horace and

39. Yarker, p. 92.

The Curse of Minerva during two weeks in March 1811 at a time when he had been agitated and undecided whether to return to England or spend another year travelling in Egypt and the Holy Land.⁴⁰ A gap in his letters - between March 18 when he reports to Hobhouse that he has finished his Horace translation and May 9 when he writes to Cawthorne from Malta that he is returning with a poem "designed" for him to publish - prevents our knowing the process of his decision to return, but what is clear is that as Byron's thoughts turned homeward they turned also to satire. He had spent a good deal of time during the winter in Athens evaluating the effects of his travelling to conclude that it was an ideal way to overcome "all the narrow prejudices of an Islander". His contact with a cosmopolitan set of acquaintances in Athens that allowed him to measure his country against theirs was a source of pride with him. "Where I see the superiority of England", he told Mrs. Byron, "(which bye the bye we are a good deal mistaken about in many things) I am pleased, and where I find her inferior I am at least enlightened".⁴¹ In the absence of contrary evidence, the satires presumably were written after Byron had decided to return to England and to resume his role of social and political critic. The manuscripts of the Hints and The Curse are dated March 12 and March 17, respectively, a little more than a month before he

40. See especially the letters to Hanson, MLJ, II, 35, January 18, 1811; and MLJ, II, 41, February 28, 1811; and to Mrs. Byron, MLJ, II, 40-41, February 28, 1811.

41. MLJ, II, 35, January 14, 1811.

sailed from Athens on his return voyage. Each in its own way is a logical extension of English Bards that had continued into a fourth edition--Hints, of course, a "sequel", in Byron's words, directed towards "our new school of Poetry"; and The Curse, an elaborating of the Cassandra-like warning in the closing lines of the first edition of English Bards in which Byron had foreseen the decline of "Ocean's mighty Queen".⁴²

Byron had already vented his wrath against Lord Elgin in the second canto of Childe Harold, but he had no thoughts of publishing that work. He had told his mother, "I have no intention of scribbling my travels" and, as to some poems that he had "in manuscript", he would "leave them for those who come after me". He was content with the critical praise he had won for English Bards and would not risk "that reputation by a future effort".⁴³ In Byron's mercurial mind, however, his earlier stanzas on Lord Elgin, recast into a separate poem and his imitation of Horace could be seen to further his reputation. No matter how frequently Byron determined to be "done with authorship", he inevitably took up his pen again, with greatest pleasure in these early days when he could think of it as a weapon in an heroic struggle against wrong. He wrote animatedly to Hobhouse when he had completed the Hints that he was "very fond of this bantling" and indicated that he would like to find an outlet for future corrective efforts:

42. MLJ, II, 43, March 18, 1811; PW, I, 376, note iv.

43. MLJ, II, 35, January 14, 1811.

Pray what are you doing? have you no literary projects in hand? can't you & Matthieu, & some of our wits, commence some literary journal, political critical or or [sic] what not? I don't mean however like a common magazine or review, but some respectable novelty.... You see my scribbling propensities though "expelled with a fork" are coming on again.⁴⁴

Byron's enthusiasm for this scheme increased the nearer he came to England. From his boat anchored in the Bay of Biscay, he wrote to Hobhouse that he had been "thinking again & again of a literary project ... a periodical paper, something in the Spectator or Observor way". He dreamed that it would appear on "Tuesdays & Saturdays" and would contain articles reflecting current interests, "but now & then politics, and always a piece of poetry of one kind or another".⁴⁵ We can imagine that at least one kind of poetry that Byron envisioned would be contributed by him and would deal with some current topic worthy of satire.

When Dallas later recalled how he had got the Childe Harold manuscript, he sets his memory of the delayed joy of that discovery against the palpable disappointment he felt to learn that Byron had not kept a record of his travels. Byron told him that "he believed satire to be his forte", that he had written "a paraphrase of Horace's Art of Poetry" as "a good finish" to English Bards, and, in Dallas's interpretation, Byron "seemed to promise himself additional fame from it". Dallas himself was moved to poetic lament to describe his feeling when he had read the manuscript and thought of the wasted opportunity:

44. MLJ, II, 43, March 18, 1811.

45. MLJ, II, 55-56, July 2, 1811.

Not that the verse was bad, or the images of the Roman poet badly adapted to the times; but a muse much inferior to his might have produced them in the smoky atmosphere of London, whereas he had been roaming under the cloudless skies of Greece, on sites where every step he took might have set such a fancy as his "in fine phrenzies rolling".

46

Dallas's estimate of the Hints holds today: the poem is not "bad" as an example of Byron's handling of the heroic couplet and his model not "badly adapted" to suit the contemporary English literary scene. Byron's personal fondness for the piece that continued long after he had abandoned his first plans to publish the Hints is difficult to explain in terms other than an abiding interest in the state of literature in his time and in the belief that the precepts of the poem offered good advice to writers. His last serious effort to get the poem into print coincided with his involvement in the Pope-Bowles controversy and his despair over reader-reaction to the early cantos of Don Juan.⁴⁷

When we look at the Hints objectively in terms of a developing poetic theory, we see by way of positive recommendation definite signs of progress from the earlier satire. Time that permits experience and the confidence that came from his earlier success account for the most obvious gain over English Bards. In contrast to the sometimes strident tones of English Bards that occasionally forced their way into the voice of controlled indignation that Byron had adopted, in Hints Byron's mood is alternately serious, bemused, flippant, indulgent, even angry

46. R.C. Dallas, Recollections of the Life of Lord Byron (London: Charles Knight, 1824), pp. 103-104.

47. MLJ, VII, 60, March 23, 1820; MLJ, VII, 179, September 23, 1820; MLJ, VIII, 56, January 4, 1821; MLJ, VIII, 178, August 13, 1821.

--all moods appropriate to the concerned, experienced teacher. In general, we feel that Byron speaks with an easy congeniality and relaxed good humour that he had not displayed often in the first satire. Though he took pride in having kept close to his model, Byron goes beyond Horace in a freer use of contemporary figures and events to illustrate his generalisations. He drew examples from his own experience and observations, supplemented with tit-bits of news and gossip gleaned from English newspapers which he habitually read wherever he found them during his travels, to leaven Horace's already familiar advice.⁴⁸ He mentions, for instance, the caricature by "low Dubost" that had recently been the cause for outrage (7-8); attacks the Methodists who continued their puritannical disapproval of the stage (370-382); makes the point that unskilled poets, like untried fighters, "Must go to Jackson ere they are to box" (638). Looking forward to the method of Don Juan, Byron ranges from Horace's text, what could be called the "narrative" line, to expand an idea that interests him or he digresses on a topic that has only a tenuous connection before bringing himself back to his main subject. Marchand has in fact suggested that Byron's attachment for the poem may have resulted from the "scope and range" of the Hints that "anticipated the free form of Don Juan".⁴⁹

48. Byron told his mother from Patras, "...you fill your letters with things from the papers, as if English papers were not found all over the world, I have at this moment a dozen before me" (MLJ, II, 9, July 30, 1810). See also PW, I, 390, note 1, Byron's explanation of the Dubost allusion, taken from a newspaper account.

49. Marchand, Byron's Poetry, p. 31.

When we have Don Juan as the constant yardstick of Byron's genius and ability, there can be no question that the heroic couplet restricted the normally unpatterned flow of thought especially apparent in Byron's letters. He complained of his lack of facility with the couplet when he was labouring over the address for the opening of the new Drury Lane theatre and told Lord Holland that since writing Childe Harold in the Spenserian stanza he could "weave a nine line stanza faster than a couplet".⁵⁰ Once the rhythm and rhyme became familiar to him, the pattern rang in his mind and took possession of his thoughts. Most of the stanzas of Canto II, as well as the late additions to the first canto, show a marked improvement in control. Yet Byron returned ^{to the heroic couplet} at the end of his career in The Age of Bronze and The Island, especially in the latter to good effect and deservedly called an "old friend with a new face". In the Hints as well, he occasionally employs the couplet to his advantage. He breaks away from Horace's advice on how to delineate character through close observation of the traits appropriate to a particular age into a digressive illustration of the adolescent university student that rings with the truth of his own experience during his Cambridge days:

He flies from Tavell's frown to Fordham's Mews,
 (Unlucky Tavell! doomed to daily cares
 By pugilistic pupils and by bears),
 Fines, Tutors, tasks, Conventions threat in vain
 Before hounds, hunters, and Newmarket Plain.
 Rough with his elders, with his equals rash,
 Civil to sharpers, prodigal of cash;

50. MLJ, II, 210, September 26, 1812.

Constant to nought--save hazard and a whore,
 Yet cursing both--for both have made him sore:
 Unread (unless since books beguile disease,
 The P-x becomes his passage to Degrees);
 Fooled, pillaged, dunned, he wastes his terms away,
 And unexpelled, perhaps, retires M.A.
 (228-40)

Except that some of the details in this passage are too blunt for her ears, we might imagine we are reading one of Byron's letters to Elizabeth Pigot. Using a similar cataloguing device, he had written to her a few years earlier that Cambridge was "a villainous Chaos of Dice and Drunkenness, nothing but Hazard and Burgundy, Hunting, Mathematics and Newmarket, Riot and Racing".⁵¹ In letters to close male friends he frequently brags of his sexual exploits and the painful aftermath in phrasing remarkable similar to the punning last lines of the quoted passage. The lines as a whole, with the irregular rhythm, two parenthetical asides, the basically normal syntax and ordinary colloquial diction, come closer to prose than to poetry. Even the rhyme serves Byron's purpose by establishing the tedium and confinement of university life which the sense of the lines then negates in describing the student's rebellious behaviour. More importantly, the couplets compact the wit in a way that the prose letters cannot do and point up the farce of Byron's university days in the rhyming that equates the tutor's "cares" with "bears" and "disease" with "Degrees".

Part of the charm of the Hints lies in the effortless way in which Byron can slide from Horace's

51. MLJ, I, 135, October 26, 1807.

text into a digression that reflects his personality. In another instance, as he warns against resorting to non-human devices to resolve a plot, he is reminded of the most "monstrous" thing he knows--opera, and allows himself a wide-ranging but logically conceived discussion that expresses his personal grievances against opera as a form of entertainment and permits observations on social, economic, and political conditions, as well. The digression hinges on that mobility of mind that can leap from the idea of "ghosts" as an unsatisfactory literary device to opera as a monstrosity that offends credibility:

Of all the monstrous things I'd fain forbid,
I loathe an Opera worse than Dennis did;
Where good and evil persons, right or wrong,
Rage, love and aught but moralise--in song.
(295-8)

Byron's feeling that opera is boring and silly contrasts effectively and anti-climatically with Dennis's pomposity. Though it is the artificiality of opera that Byron finds objectionable, he broadens his attack to include opera singers themselves and at the same time comments on England's anomalous political relationship with France. Though Napoleon's Decrees prevent ordinary trade between England and Europe for necessary goods, there is no dearth of undesirable items which penetrate the blockade:

Hail, last memorial of our foreign friends,
Which Gaul allows, and still Hesperia lends!
Napoleon's edicts no embargo lay
On whores--spies--singers--wisely shipped away.
(299-302)

Here again is the technique of Don Juan, not only the listing of items but the mixture of poetic and colloquial diction. Byron skillfully undercuts the elevated language

and sentiment of the first line of this quatrain with the last line where, in plain English, he places opera singers in the category of universally despicable things. In the remaining lines of the passage, Byron directs a lenient and amused attack on the misplaced values of the citizenry of London, and especially of the rising middle class, both suffering, as it were, the growing pains of social and economic readjustments in the upheaval of society in the early nineteenth century:

Our giant Capital, whose squares are spread
 Where rustics earned, and now may beg, their bread,
 In all iniquity is grown so nice,
 It scorns amusements which are not of price.
 Hence the pert shopkeeper, whose throbbing ear
 Aches with orchestras which he pays to hear,
 Whom shame, not sympathy, forbids to snore,
 His anguish doubling by his own "encore";
 Squeezed in "Fop's Alley," jostled by the beaux,
 Teased with his hat, and trembling for his toes;
 Scarce wrestles through the night, nor tastes of ease,
 Till the dropped curtain gives a glad release:
 Why this, and more, he suffers--can ye guess?
 Because it costs him dear, and makes him dress!
 (303-16)

Byron treats the shopkeeper's self-induced misery with the sort of indulgent understanding we meet in his tolerance for human foibles in Don Juan. Not only are we given a glimpse of antithetical human behaviour that sacrifices comfort and money for the sake of false values, but we see Byron beginning to explore the irony of circumstance and the paradox of progress that destroys the land and livelihood of individuals as the city encroaches on the country spaces. The passage is made as immediate and resonant as Byron's letters by the question of the final lines as if we were listening to his own voice

giving his bemused answer.

Byron's longest digression is addressed to Jeffrey and can only be accommodated by the structure and purpose of the Hints if we concede that Byron allowed himself to anticipate the loose structure of Don Juan. Certainly the passage tells us that Byron considered his poetic efforts as a serious undertaking, and Jeffrey's refusal to take any notice of English Bards or of his direct challenge to him in the closing lines of the satire has only added to his humiliation. The tenuous connection to the whole is Horace's observations that mediocrity in a poet merits attack from "Gods, and Men, and Columns", a reminder to Byron of the fate of Hours of Idleness. The main portion of the digression is phrased in a series of questions addressed directly to Jeffrey that begin in satiric bitterness and his desire for retribution:

Inhuman Saxon! wilt thou then resign
A Muse and heart by choice so wholly thine?
Dear d----d contemner of my schoolboy songs,
Hast thou no vengeance for my Manhood's
→ wrongs? (603-606) →

As the passage continues, however, the frustration and hopes thwarted by an opponent who remains silent force Byron's thoughts back on himself so that the closing lines become almost lyrical in their expression of personal grief:

Is it for this on Ilion I have stood,
And thought of Homer less than Holyrood?
On shore of Euxine or Aegean Sea,
My hate, untravelled, fondly turned to thee.
(615-618)

In a moving confession, Byron reveals his abiding hatred

for Jeffrey that has not ceased to pull his thoughts back to Scotland during his travels and continues to interpose itself between himself and the usual pleasures to be expected from his experiences. He, the would-be destroyer of Jeffrey, is in fact allowing himself to become the victim of his consuming malice and obsession with his injury. This theme will of course receive extensive treatment in the Byronic heroes, especially in the verse tales, and in his handling of Napoleon in the third canto of Childe Harold and will find resolution definitively in Byron's treatment of Fletcher Christian in The Island.

Byron's bias towards the poet as a social reformer involved in all aspects of life shows particularly clearly as he departs once more from Horace's text to trace the importance of poets and poetry in pre-historic ages. Byron makes no effort to conceal his pleasure with this topic as he imagines with irreverent wit what might have been if the poets of legend had visited London:

Orpheus, we learn from Ovid and Lampriere,
 Led all wild beasts but Women by the ear;
 And had he fiddled at the present hour,
 We'd seen the Lions waltzing in the Tower;
 And old Amphion, such were minstrels then,
 Had built St. Paul's without the aid of Wren.
 Verse too was Justice, and the Bards of Greece
 Did more than constables to keep the peace;
 Abolished cuckoldom with much applause,
 Called county meetings, and enforced the laws,
 Cut down crown influence with reforming scythes,
 And served the Church--without demanding tithes;
 And hence, throughout all Hellas and the East,
 Each Poet was a Prophet and a Priest,
 Whose old-established Board of Joint Controls
 Included kingdoms in the cure of souls.

(663-678)

Through the association of English institutions with the lost mythic age when poetry directed men's daily lives, Byron not only makes the point that the present institutions are corrupt and in need of reform, but he implies that poetry still has the potential to bring about change. Earlier he had deviated from Horace's poem to offer a portrait of the poet, a view that suggests Byron's idealised image of himself in the role of poet:

He who has learned the duty which he owes
 To friends and country, and to pardon foes;
 Who models his deportment as may best
 Accord with Brother, Sire, or Stranger-guest;
 Who takes our Laws and Worship as they are,
 Nor roars reform for Senate, Church, and Bar;
 In practice, rather than loud precept, wise,
 Bids not his tongue, but heart, philosophize:
 Such is the man the Poet should rehearse,
 As joint exemplar of his life and verse. (495-509)

The definition of the poet that Byron offers in these lines is not a description with pretensions to dignity beyond his reach nor to influence in a remote and unattainable sphere. On the contrary, it is a rather modest, self-effacing statement of his ideal, appropriate to Byron's position in the work as a whole. Indeed, as McGann has noted, in choosing to paraphrase Horace's work, Byron's form is "the perfection of modesty" that speaks of the judgment he has gained since English Bards.⁵² Still making no claims to writing well himself, content, like Horace, "to teach the art / To those rehearsing for the Poet's part" (487-488), Byron's tone throughout the Hints has repudiated the schoolboy presumptuousness of English Bards while the act of his labouring through the

52. McGann, Don Juan in Context, p. 16.

old Latin piece he had hated as a schoolboy implies a willingness to learn whatever rules can teach about how to write poetry. Both English Bards and the Hints, concerned as they are with examining good and bad poetry and the art of writing better, affirm that Byron's interest is at least as much in his personal desire to improve his ability as in reforming others. He did not think of himself as a born poet, but a learning one throughout his career, even into the last cantos of Don Juan, chatting frankly to the reader about the technique of composition. Thus, as the above lines indicate, as a man learns manners and courtesy through the rules of social custom and imitation of worthy examples, so the poet studies and practises ways of writing. Significant in the definition is the awareness of obligation: the poet's duty is public. As a member of the community of mankind, he observes and, when necessary, chastises. He speaks because he cares, but he keeps control of his feelings.

Byron assumes just this stance at the outset of The Curse of Minerva, but with the attack on Elgin he loses the goal of restrained passion, owing perhaps to the fact that Elgin shares the same heritage as Jeffrey and Byron had become practised in venting splent⁺₁ic feelings against that Scot. Further, the bitter curse of the goddess detracts from the poem's effectiveness. In a manner reminiscent of a medieval dream poem, The Curse presents a persona who is deeply moved by the evidence of corruption in the world and

while in an agitated state receives a vision of the future. Unlike the dreamers of the Middle Ages, however, who frequently gained glimpses of a better world, Byron receives a graphic account of the disorder and decline that awaits England as a consequence of Elgin's evil deed. The poem is in certain ways also comparable to the Coliseum stanzas of Childe Harold IV where, in the moonlight as stars twinkled "through the loops of time" (cxliv), Byron was suffused with a sense of the living past. Though he had first attempted the technique in "Elegy on Newstead Abbey" in Hours of Idleness, The Curse is Byron's first sustained effort at imaginative excursions into a revived past that leads him to insights regarding the future. At this stage in his development, however, he remains hampered by his sense of self, a vatic intermediary between past and future, and is unable to communicate his later understanding of the simultaneity of time that he shows in The Deformed Transformed, for example.

In The Curse, the sun setting on the Acropolis in "one unclouded blaze of living light" (4), reanimates for Byron the last evening of Socrates, which marked the death of mortal wisdom. As he wanders through the Parthenon in the cold illumination of the moon, he imagines that

The Past returned, the Present seemed to cease,
And Glory knew no clime beyond her Greece. (61-62)

The ruins are bitter reminders to Byron of the wanton desecration of this ancient shrine as he "mused, and treasured every trace / The wreck of Greece recorded

of her race" (71-72). In this mood of meditation upon the relics of the past, battered Wisdom appears to him to pronounce her curse on the nation that spawned her most recent desecrator and to unfold before his eyes the ruin in store for man and nation. In this poem Byron briefly tries on the mantle of the poet as privileged holy man, instrument of divine revelation. The Curse as prophecy is quite obviously a continuation of Byron's search for a means of becoming an influential voice in the affairs of his country, to combine the roles of orator and poet according to his explanation of that possibility to Hanson some years earlier. In quickly dissociating himself from Lord Elgin, explaining that he is "a true-born Briton" while the "plunderer was a Scot" (126, 128), Byron reasserts his belief in England's potential to be the model for freedom and goodness in the world, and the poem attests to his conviction that his country is in need of a moral revitalising. He accepts his responsibility to serve as an instrument for change under the self-protective device of messenger of the gods; he merely reports his vision.

On the whole, The Curse is an infelicitous blending of lyrical meditation and satire. The poem breaks into two, if not three, distinct parts. The first 156 lines are a prologue for the curse that takes up the last 156 lines. But the first half also falls into two nearly equal parts with the first 74 lines devoted to the poet's reveries during the evening on the Acropolis, preliminary to his encounter with the

Goddess of Wisdom, and the next 84 report the poet's dialogue with the Goddess. In the latter we feel the poet is somewhat niggling in the distinction that he makes between a Briton and a Scot, that he has contrived an opportunity to attack the "land of meanness, sophistry, and mist" (139), which diminishes our image of the "firm and noble soul" only recently meditating upon the past glory of Greece. Before the end of his opinionistic tirade on the land "Whose thistle well betrays the niggard earth", the "barren soil . . . [that] can stint the mind" and the dampness that "Dilutes with drivel every drizzly brain" (133-140, passim), he recoups some of his poise to admit that a few of Caledonia's children rise above their circumstance to "Shake off the sordid dust of such a land" (153). The poem is interesting, however, in Byron's development as a poet for his almost mathematical attention to structure. Byron shows the poet's inherent need for order, but his unsatisfactory effort to unite the lyric and satiric modes in this poem reminds us of his need to discover the form that would satisfy his particular way of seeing and feeling.

Such experimenting with a diversity of forms since the days of his earliest poetry and his attempts to combine a variety of voices and genres in these last three "public" poems, indeed, reveal several important aspects of Byron's poetic theory to this stage. First, Byron asserts the view shared by other Romantics that there are no rules for poetry, an idea which he later

expressed directly in the Pope-Bowles controversy and in his poetry, especially Don Juan, but a right he consistently exercised from early times. Related to the poet's independence from rules is Byron's belief that poetry must express spontaneity, variety, and breadth--the totality of life as it is perceived by the poet. Byron's view of the poet is therefore inseparable from either of these concepts. He is a man whose experience encompasses as fully as possible the widest range of human engagement with the facts of existence. Out of this involvement he discovers his version of reality and, because for Byron poetry is a social function, must share his truth. Perhaps this insistence on writing poetry that served the public welfare, which tradition and his immaturity told him was oratorical, thwarted Byron's early discovery of a form appropriate to his principles. At any rate, when he returned to England after his first voyage, Byron believed his poetic future lay in didactically rhetorical satires like those he had written in Athens. He had the Hints from Horace ready for the press by the time he arrived, as he told Cawthorne, and The Curse of Minerva was soon joined with it to be published with the fifth edition of English Bards.⁵³ Against these two poems that Byron intended to publish, we must follow the mainstream of his poetics, carried in the Childe Harold cantos that he had no plans to publish.⁵⁴ It is

53. MLJ, II, 58, July 7, 1811; MLJ, II, 131, November, 17, 1811.

54. McGann's arguments, based on the evidence of the manuscripts which show that Byron had made revisions
 footnote continued.....

one more Byronic paradox that, in private and without regard for reader opinion, Byron wrote the poem which brought him instant fame at home and led to that position of rank and influence in literature abroad that remains unsurpassed.

Footnote 54 continued....., to the poem before returning to England, do not support a theory that Byron was planning to publish Childe Harold. The revisions that McGann has noted as occurring after the poem was completed on March 28, 1810, and before Dallas received the manuscript on July 16, 1811, are the replacing of the original stanzas 7 and 8 of Canto I with stanzas 8 and 9 of the published poem and the additions to Canto II of stanzas 15, 52 and 88. The first alteration returns the focus to the melancholy nature of Harold's character rather than fragment the poem's effect with Harold's relations with his entourage, and the latter are accretive stanzas that merely reflect Byron's life-long habit of additions to his works. As Byron told his mother, the manuscripts he had in his possession (before Hints or The Curse) he would leave "for those who come after" rather than jeopardise the approval he had won for English Bards. Byron's note on the Vathek stanza, which McGann cites as further evidence that Byron was already preparing Childe Harold for publication, "If ever published I shall have this stanza omitted", seems to mean no more than it says. If he were preparing the poem for publication, would he not have omitted it on the spot? (See Fiery Dust, pp. 94-104 and p. 99, note 12).

CHAPTER IV

THE CHILDE HAROLD YEARS, POETRY OF PRIVATE WOE

Childe Harold I and II, written for Byron's amusement and personal insight, is the fore-runner of the poetry of his middle career in which he makes public the spectacle of the poet's search for an identity and a philosophic stance that will accommodate his sense of self with his view of reality. The verse tales, the last Childe Harold cantos, Manfred, and the studies of Tasso and Dante, to name only the obvious examples, explore Byron's agonising progress through despair and defiance to emerge finally reconciled to the human condition. Don Juan therefore became possible not simply from the fortuitous discovery of the comic potential of the ottava rima stanza but because Byron had already been through "the dark night of the soul" to accept the role of poet and the value of poetry. Both Bostetter and Ball have appreciated the link between Byron's vastly different major poems. "What in Childe Harold was cause for despair and aimless rebellion becomes in Don Juan", according to Bostetter, "a cause of laughter and vigorous creative activity".¹ Ball, on the other hand, sets up an analogical equation which implies how valuable the poem is in revealing

1. Edward E. Bostetter, The Romantic Ventriloquists: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963; rev. ed., 1975), p. 254.

Byron's poetics: "Childe Harold is to Don Juan as The Prelude to The Excursion", so that the poem is thus "a full-scale display of the creative temperament and its demands, not merely the offspring of its activities".²

With the first cantos of Childe Harold, we begin to realise how aptly Byron's metaphor of the kite as poet and poetry describes his concept of poetry. The poem is the spectacle of a poetic self defining itself through perceiving and interpreting a particular encounter with external reality. The despairing self and the world which has shown adequate cause for despondency are mirror-reflections each of the other, but Byron merely observes this display of his soaring imagination, maintaining a measure of artistic detachment. Although he may catch glimpses of himself in the moody Harold, "a being whom he may have feared he might one day become",³ and a being whom he resembled more closely in the final shaping of the poem for publication, Byron openly resisted being mistaken for the bleak Harold. Unlike Keats, who in the flight of his imagination could become one with the nightingale, unseen but embodied in his song, and thus release himself temporarily from his own painful reality, Byron rarely lost his earth-rooted stance. In the disclaimer which he had prepared for the Preface to Childe Harold I and II, Byron asked the reader to notice the "very different tone" between the poet's voice "in his own person" and Harold's tone.⁴ If he were to be identified within the poem, Byron

2. Ball, Central Self, p. 118.

3. PW, II, xiv.

4. Dallas, Recollections, p. 155.

wished to establish his affinity with the narrator. But the statement itself is a ploy which reveals the narrator-poet's identity as much a device as Harold's. Dallas's urging that he give up worrying whether readers would confuse Harold with the young Lord of Newstead and get on with completing the poem brought out of Byron a practical and aesthetically-sound explanation for the autobiographical elements in the poem: "I could describe what I had seen better than I could invent".⁵ Eventually, when Byron abandoned the pretence of separate identities along in the third canto and dismissed Harold towards the end of the fourth, he had then arrived at another attitude towards his subject and greater skill in handling autobiographical material. Meanwhile, in the early cantos he watches a display of divided impulses coming to terms with external reality.

The poem taken as a whole tells us both that Byron was serious in his desire to write poetry and that he was curious about the aesthetics of poetry. His decision to write Childe Harold without particular thoughts of publishing it indicates that writing poetry was important to him in spite of his repeated protests to the contrary. What must have begun, as he claimed, as "a poem on Ariosto's plan that is to say on no plan at all",⁶ yet a record of his journey in poetic stanzas, illustrates a seriousness. Byron was even now aware that poetry had the power to give intensity to the experience of ordinary

5. MLJ, II, 122, October 31, 1811; Dallas, Recollections, p. 159.

6. MLJ, II, 63, July 30, 1811.

life. Early in the third canto of Childe Harold he would put into words this tenet of his poetic theory which the first two cantos demonstrate:

'Tis to create, and in creating live
A being more intense, that we endow
With form our fancy.... (III, vi)

It is therefore not difficult to imagine Byron's desire to translate the new experiences of his unorthodox tour into a poetic account and to devise a means of making it into something more than a journal of poetic descriptions of scenery and manners. Byron had no great admiration for description for its own sake. Even in the letters of his travels he rarely subsides into pure description. He sums up his view of such indulgence in the letter to Hodgson in which he had very nearly lapsed into describing the "very sufficient mountain" of the Sierra Morena which he had crossed: "but damn description, it is always disgusting".⁷ Yet Childe Harold owes an obvious debt to the accounts of travellers in search of the picturesque, a popular pastime before the war, as well as to the great numbers of poems currently expressing the effects upon the viewer of beautiful and sublime scenes from nature. The impulses of the cult of nature poets that surrounded Byron originated from a belief in the powers of nature over man which Thomson compactly stated in the Preface to the second edition of

7. MLJ, I, 216, August 6, 1809.

Winter:

I know no subject more elevating, more amusing; more ready to awake the poetical enthusiasm, the philosophical reflection, and the moral sentiment, than the works of Nature.⁸

In time, a keen appreciation for nature becomes an important criterion for a poet.

Beyond an apparent indebtedness to this well-established fervour for nature's ability to enhance the individual, Byron may have had an obligation to Beattie's The Minstrel further than adopting Spenser's stanza which Beattie had found suitable to express a variety of moods.⁹ In the Preface to The Minstrel Beattie had announced that it was his "design"

to trace the progress of a Poetical Genius, born in a rude age, from the first dawning of fancy and reason, till that period at which he may be supposed capable of appearing in the world as A MINSTREL, that is, as an itinerant Poet and Musician;--a character which, according to the notions of our forefathers, was not only respectable, but sacred.¹⁰

Harold is in every way the antithesis of Edwin, the simple shepherd boy of Beattie's poem, who lived his young life happily nurtured by his intimate association with the wild beauty of the Scottish Highlands. But, as dull as The Minstrel is, the poem must have brought back to Byron memories of the days when he was "a careless mountaineer" among similar scenes, whose powers to nourish the poetic

8. The Complete Poetical Works of James Thomson, ed. J. Logie Robertson (London: Oxford University Press, 1908; rpt. 1951), pp. 240-41.

9. PW, II, 5.

10. James Beattie, The Minstrel; or, The Progress of Genius (London: C. Dilly, 1797), Preface, n.p. Subsequent references to the text of the poem refer to this edition and are given according to book and stanza in parentheses within the text.

soul he had admitted in the Preface to Hours of Idleness.¹¹ In significant ways the first Childe Harold relates to Book II of The Minstrel in which Beattie's narrator-poet reluctantly destroys Edwin's illusions of a blissful world by introducing him to the woes of the world. Recognising that the poet cannot "always haunt the sunny realms of joy", but must "the shades of life explore" (II, iv), and noting in passing that "sure to foreign climes we need not range / ...To learn the dire effects of time and change" (II, ii), Beattie sets his young poet to learn of the wider world at the feet of the Hermit-Sage who teaches Edwin the lessons of history and arouses his philosophic spirit. It is, however, through "foreign climes" that the narrator-poet and Harold, so satiated with "pleasure" that "he almost longed for woe" (I, vi), journey to discover similar truths. McGann has in fact identified "Consciousness awaking to her woes" (I, xcii) as the theme of the first two cantos of Childe Harold.¹² With Harold in opposition to Edwin, Byron in Childe Harold explores certain assumptions about poetry and poets which underlie The Minstrel and which occur in the poetry of Byron's Romantic contemporaries. Such a scheme suits Byron's contentious habit of mind that liked looking at the other side of a question or testing and challenging ensconced presumptions.

Childe Harold I and II, on a fundamental level, relates to Byron's poetics in the questions that it raises

11. Hours, p. ix.

12. McGann, Fiery Dust, p. 58.

regarding the creative process. The poem rises from the same springs that fed his juvenile poetry, strong passions that overflow in effusive expressions of feeling. The major difference, however, between Childe Harold and earlier poems such as "Childish Recollections", "To E.N.L., Esq.", and "I Would I Were a Careless Child" which flow from similar meditative-reflective processes is to be found in the nature of the experience which forms the matter of the poem and the attitude of the poet towards the external world. In the juvenile poems Byron looks backward to his memory of scenes from some happy but irretrievable past and makes his sense of personal loss the cause of his emotional outpourings; the process is not only passive but a retreat from reality. But in Childe Harold Byron began to participate consciously and actively in the creative act. The poetry is a response to surroundings, treated largely as if present and immediate; and the poem develops generally along a pattern of praise for a moving landscape or sight followed by lament for beauty spoiled by whatever causes, seen collectively as man, war, death and time. The picturesque beauty of Portugal is everywhere marred by man's "impious hand" (I, xv); crumbling castles "Swept into wrecks anon by Time's ungentle tide" provide "Fresh lessons to the thinking bosom" (I, xxiii); the army of the Triple Alliance massed in Spain is a colourful and "splendid sight to see", like a great hunt prepared to begin the chase, but "The Grave shall bear the chiefest prize away" (I, xl). The lessons continue through Albania and Greece.

The wild and savage beauty of Albania, reflected in the sublime scenes and the fierce people, only serves as a bitter reminder of civilised man's inferiority (II, lxxv-lxxviii), but the desecration and degradation of Greece are the most difficult instances of ruined beauty which the narrator-poet must bear. Despite the pillaged Acropolis (II, x-xv) and the spiritless indolence of the Greeks who do not take up the cause of their own freedom (II, lxxiii-lxxxvi), reasons enough for despair, the narrator sounds a positive note in his delight over the natural beauty and fertile fields of Greece to admit that "Art, Glory, Freedom fail--but Nature still is fair" (II, lxxxvii) and to acknowledge Greece as a spiritual home for the world's dispirited (II, xcii). In the end Harold and the narrator-poet reflect Byron's personal "Consciousness awaking to her woes".

Byron's deliberately contrived journey through, except for Greece, unconventional parts of the world in order to gain experience useful to his political career would also in Byron's view have aided his poetic career. Experience in the broad world became one of his requisites for the good poet. Years later he told Moore, "strong passion", "the poetry of life", comes from "travel, and turmoil".¹³ Lack of travel was the single common weakness that he identified in the imitators of the Lake Poets, those members of the Cockney School who were "enthusiastical for the country" without ever having travelled outside London. Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, he

13. MLJ, VII, 170, August 31, 1820.

conceded, had "rambled over half Europe, and seen Nature in most of her varieties. . .but what on earth--of earth, and sea, and Nature--have the others seen?"¹⁴ Although self-knowledge is an inevitable dividend of travel, the more obvious value for Byron lay in the empirical evidence of places, men, and manners that furnished the mind in order to entertain ideas. Further, experience provided the foundation of fact which was the basis of poetic truth in Byron's view. When he began to defend his integrity as a poet and his right to show "things existent", he recurred for authority to the evidence of the real world. Fidelity to the truth of experience became for Byron the highest achievement of poetry.

The literal journey through Spain and Portugal, Albania and Greece, expands in Childe Harold into a metaphorical statement of the poetic process as Byron understood it at this stage in his development. The poem stands as proof that the poet in response to strong sensuous stimuli produces poetry. At the most basic level, Childe Harold has its origins in the interaction of the poet's mind and his responses to affective experience: the poem is the result of the poet's quest for feeling. But in Childe Harold Byron also examines current assumptions and perhaps his own fears about the role of sensuous experience in the creative process.

When Byron explained in his "Addition to the Preface", printed with the second edition of Childe Harold I and II, why he had created so indifferent a

14. PLJ, V, 587-588; Pope-Bowles Letters.

character in Harold, he seems to have had his original concept of the poem firmly in his mind. The statement is in certain ways more appropriate to Childe Harold in manuscript, before the concessions he made to Dallas and Murray when altering the poem for publication and the additions which his personal grief virtually forced upon him when he returned to England, than it is to the published poem.

It had been easy to varnish over his faults, to make him do more and express less, but he never was intended as an example, further than to show, that early perversion of mind and morals leads to satiety of past pleasures and disappointment in new ones, and that even the beauties of nature and the stimulus of travel (except ambition, the most powerful of all excitements) are lost on a soul so constituted, or rather misdirected.¹⁵

The sentence requires some rewriting to correct the faulty construction enclosed in the brackets, but the sense is that neither nature's beauties nor the novelties of travel provide stimulus sufficient to renovate depleted spirits, although ambition, which is not under consideration, might. Byron's explanation thus requires that we read the poem as a test and refutation of the current and widespread assumption of the inspiring and morally uplifting effects to be gained from "excitements", in this instance, from the doubling of stimuli by combining travel with the beauties of nature. In the course of testing the power of outside influences on the inner man, Byron reveals the general Romantic understanding of perception as a

15. FW, II, 7-8.

reciprocal exchange between the perceiver and the thing perceived.¹⁶ Harold's dark, brooding thoughts project their colouring on whatever he sees which in turn is reflected back to him to confirm and strengthen his particular way of seeing. Throughout most of the pilgrimage Harold is only passively involved in affective scenes and events. As an aeolian lyre, he is an unstrung or ill-tuned harp from which the changing winds produce discords, not harmony.

When Byron began Childe Harold, he apparently planned to reveal contrasting examples of responsiveness to the pleasures of travel and natural beauties. Especially in the first canto, the narrator-poet is actively engaged in each new experience, whether the lush beauties of Portugal (I, xiv-xvi), the pageantry of the bull-fight in Cadiz (I, lxxi-lxxx), or hallowed Parnassus (I, lx-lxiv); and though he is not blind to the discrepancies between appearance and reality, he is not unreasonably perturbed by this discovery but is led instead to make moral reflections on the whole array of "ruined Splendour". The narrator's repeated comments that Harold is "unmoved" by a particular scene heighten the sense that the narrator is moved and is pleased that he is. Superior in every way to the apathetically indifferent Harold shrouded in his impenetrable cloak of gloom, the narrator accompanies Harold on a journey meant to be rehabilitating to the passive Childe and

16. M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953; rpt. 1976), discusses this aspect of Romanticism generally in Chapter III of his valuable study of Romantic aesthetics.

educationally broadening to the narrator-poet.

The unexpected savage beauty of Albania and the antiquity of ruined Greece, a land already known to Byron through reading and imagination, stirred his poetic powers to a higher achievement that anticipates the mature Byron. In these portions of the poem, the heretofore distinct identities of the narrator-poet and the pilgrim Harold come close to merging, a circumstance which Joseph considers a blurring of Byron's vision.¹⁷ What seems to have happened, however, is that the psychology that posited the journey as therapy for Harold has turned back on itself. The meditative nature of the narrator-poet and his responsiveness to affective experience bring him first to an appreciation of the virtues of the wild men of Albania which put to shame so-called civilised men (II, lxxv-lxxii). "Albania's children" were fierce and fearless, unyielding to a foe and gracious to friends, reliable to act with the simplicity of the purely virtuous. This ideal, when added to the experience of Greece, a land ravaged by time and man, led the narrator to discover his own cynical centre, different only in degree from Harold's.

Even the lesson of Greece, however, did not bring Byron to the mood of despair that closes the poem. The elegiac stanzas added to his original manuscript considerably alter the tone of the original. Canto II would have ended on a panegyric note that takes its theme from stanza lxxv:

17. Joseph, Byron, pp. 15, 17.

And yet how lovely in thine age of woe,
 Land of lost Gods and godlike men, art thou!
 Thy vales of evergreen, thy hills of snow,
 Proclaim thee Nature's varied favourite now.

The narrator poet can cease fretting about insensitive man and take comfort in natural beauty. The idea that nature endures fruitfully and remains beautiful reaches an essentially optimistic climax in the image of the bee two stanzas later: "still his honied wealth Hymettus yields" (lxxxvii). An important part of Greece's wealth is the inspiration of her "Splendour past", however, which still can be traced in her ruins; and Childe Harold would have ended on this consolatory note that celebrates Greece as the worthwhile shrine of "pilgrims, pensive, but unwearied".¹⁸ Byron himself admitted that he would not have become "The cheerless thing" that Harold was "at least till death had deprived him of his nearest connections".¹⁹ In the original poem, then, the narrator-poet discovered the moral powers of nature and the benefit of travel to the philosophic mind.

In the beginning of Childe Harold, the narrator reveals himself as half-amused by the melancholy Harold and disapproving yet understanding of the creature. His "Ah! me's" and Spenserian archaisms mock Harold on the

18. The order of the final stanzas in the manuscript given to Dallas is represented in what is now stanzas lxxxv, lxxxvi, lxxxvii, xci, and xcii. See FW, II, xix; and McGann, Fiery Dust, p. 100, and Appendix B, p. 303.

19. A point of coincidental interest is the fact that at the time that he was completing The Minstrel, Beattie experienced the death of a dear friend, as he explains in a note (p.68). Thus he added four stanzas of lament for his loss that significantly alter the effect of the whole. Not only does
 footnote continued.....

one hand but also show an almost affectionate toleration for his shameless indisposition.²⁰ He is pleased to observe that Harold is somewhat moved by the mountain scenery as he crosses from Portugal into Spain despite the fact that the "Sweet . . . scene" provoked in Harold the desire "to flee" and he became "More restless than the swallow in the skies" (I, xxvii). The narrator accepts patiently Harold's moodiness and takes pleasure in the small show of progress towards a rehabilitation of his spirit:

Though here awhile he learned to moralise,
For Meditation fixed at times on him;
And conscious Reason whispered to despise
His early youth misspent in maddest whim;
But as he gazed on truth his aching eyes grew dim.
(I, xxvii)

The scene, however, has not affected the inner Harold; the perceptions of the outward eye have given him no insight. The narrator takes an almost clinical interest in Harold's reactions, noting his glazed eyes and his feverish haste to escape that "scene of peace, though soothing to his soul". Remarking that Harold's "moping fits" do not now drive him to "the harlot and the bowl", the narrator risks an optimistic prognosis:

Footnote 19 continued.....Beattie force his presence into the poem which had largely been left to the voices of a narrator-poet and Edwin, but his reaction to the discovery of woe contrasts with Edwin's, who under the guidance of the Sage had progressed from a loss of his "calm, contented mind" (II, xxix) towards what the Sage calls a "comprehensive mind" which can endure "midst the wrecks of time" (II, iv). In contrast, Beattie in the concluding stanzas (II, lx-lxiii) finds himself "left to unavailing wo" and cries despairingly, "Ah, now for comfort whither shall I go!" (lxiii)

20. McGann, Fiery Dust, pp.60-63, sees in these introductory stanzas evidence of the narrator's cynicism as well. In my interpretation, however, that seems fairly well concealed until the narrator has begun to make discoveries about the world he travels.

And o'er him many changing scenes must roll
 E'er toil his thirst for travel can assuage,
 Or he shall calm his breast, or learn experience sage.
 (I, xxvii)

The narrator loses patience with Harold only once when, in meditating upon the ravaged ruins of Greece, he contrasts his own feelings with Harold's unresponsiveness and cannot conceal his irritation over the moody wretch:

But where is Harold? shall I then forget
 To urge the gloomy Wanderer o'er the wave?
 Little recked he of all that Men regret...
 Hard is his heart whom charms may not enslave;
 But Harold felt not as in other times,
 And left without a sigh the land of War and Crimes.
 (II, xvi)

Nor does he waste much sympathy on hard-hearted Harold later as he observes him impervious to the charms of "Fair Florence". The "Lady's eye", which should have inspired love in him, evoked no more than "Admiration glancing harmless by" (II, xxxi); and the lady was not amused, though the narrator is:

Fair Florence found, in sooth with some amaze,
 One who, 'twas said, still sighed to all he saw,
 Withstand, unmoved, the lustre of her gaze,
 Which others hailed with real or mimic awe,
 Their hope, their doom, their punishment, their law;
 All that gay Beauty from her bondsmen claims:
 And much she marvelled that a youth so raw
 Nor felt, nor feigned at least, the oft-told flames,
 Which, though sometimes they frown, yet rarely
 anger dames. (II, xxxii)

In the main, the narrator is seen at first to be more genial and more responsive than Harold to the world about him. In the course of the journey, however, he takes on an identity closer to Harold's melancholy than his own earlier humane and liberal-minded self.

Harold remains "unmoved" by the Spanish moon shining on dancing Spanish maidens, a scene that inspires

the narrator to rhapsodic thoughts (I, lxxxii-lxxxiii), and "unmoved" by the "scenes of vanished war, / Actium--Lepanto--fatal Trafalgar" (II, xl); but he at last finds something to interest him as the boat nears the cape and the rock renowned as the place of Sappho's suicide. This was "A spot he longed to see, nor cared to leave"; and when he had seen that "far-projecting rock of woe", Harold, with some equivocation, "felt, or deemed he felt, no common glow" (II, xl). The narrator examines Harold's outward signs to record with approval "More placid seemed his eye, and smooth his pallid front" (II, xli). It is ultimately in a setting more menacingly sublime than the overhanging rock of Leucadia that Byron reveals a deepening understanding of the relationship of the outer world to the inner man. The impact of Albania, unknown and uncivilised-- "The scene was savage, but the scene was new" (II, xliii)-- delighted both Harold and Byron, for there in Janina he began to write Childe Harold. Here we begin to see distinctly the pattern of Byron's imagination that soars beyond the self yet remains grounded in reality.

Like his fellow Romantics, Byron values the sensuous response to external reality but he can rarely surrender himself simply to the feelings generated by the encounter or transcend the self in a mystical union with the perceived object. Wordsworth, in The Prelude, describes his response to nature in a passage which might stand for a topographical outline of the early Childe Harold and serves to show a striking difference between

Byron and other Romantic poets:

my delights,
 Such as they were, were sought insatiably,
 Though 'twas a transport of the outward sense,
 Not of the mind, vivid but not profound:
 Yet often was I greedy in the chace,
 And roam'd from hill to hill, from rock to rock,
 Still craving combinations of new forms,
 New pleasure, wider empire for the sight,
 Proud of its own endowments, and rejoiced
 To lay the inner faculties asleep.
 (XI, 186-95, 1805 ed.)

Byron's travels take him over mountains, among rocks and torrents, to discover striking combinations of sublime forms that in their effect on the imagination arouse his mind to restless thoughts. His description of the view as he approached Albania along the western coast of Greece illustrates the process:

Morn dawns; and with it stern Albania's hills,
 Dark Suli's rocks, and Pindus' inland peak,
 Robed half in mist, bedewed with snowy rills,
 Arrayed in many a dun and purple streak,
 Arise; and, as the clouds along them break,
 Disclose the dwelling of the mountaineer:
 Here roams the wolf--the eagle whets his beak--
 Birds--beasts of prey--and wilder men appear,
 And gathering storms around convulse the closing
 year. (II, xlii)

Byron's entire life led him on an insatiable search for new experience. It was not, however, the tyranny of a "despotic eye" which ruled Byron but the need to gratify a more complex set of sensuous desires. "The great object of life is Sensation", Byron told Annabella Milbanke, "--to feel that we exist--even though in pain--it is this 'craving void' which drives us to Gaming--to Battle--to Travel--to intemperate but keenly felt pursuits of every description whose principal attraction is the agitation inseparable from the

accomplishment".²¹ What he seeks are experiences of a kind which assault the physical being and have the power to provoke an actual physical response, things which strike terror into the heart and cause trembling limbs and changes in breathing. Thus in his scene of hills and rocks on the Albanian coast Byron heightens the sense of peril by imagining and projecting himself into the mountaineer who lives high among the clouds with anxiety and the constant threat of destructive storms and dangerous wild animals. The purpose of Byron's search for "New pleasure, wider empire" is the opposite of Wordsworth's laying of "the inner faculties asleep".²² Byron yields to irrational impulses, is driven to "intemperate but keenly felt pursuits" in order to delight the nerves and arouse the mind through the alerted senses, to live vicariously at the highest possible level of intensity in the Romantic's appreciation for energy and vigour. The resulting "agitation that is inseparable from the accomplishment" is Byron's tribute to the Romantic experience of the interchange between the external and the internal, the perceived and the perceiver. Byron's goal, however, is not imaginative union with the object, which in the end is a finite achievement. His imagination works to apprehend, not comprehend, experience and in so doing he insures the continuing possibility of discovering new

21. MLJ, III, 109, September 6, 1813.

22. In selecting and considering the passage from The Prelude in isolation, I do not intend to imply that Wordsworth did not participate in the general Romantic appreciation of the thrilling experience. The boat-stealing episode is only one example.

identities in new experiences. Byron is both the agonist ("--to feel that we exist--even though in pain") and the persistent antagonist; and the conflict between the two resolves itself in creating new identities and further potential for renewed agitation. The effect of the imagination's power to lift Byron (Harold) into participating in the sublimity of the mountaineer's terrifying existence heightens his sense of alienation rather than affording union with or absorption into the experience. In the stanza that follows the description of the affecting scene, "Harold felt himself alone". But he exploits the situation towards an even greater sense of alienation in bidding farewell "to Christian tongues" and debarking onto "a shore unknown" to test himself as a man "'gainst fate ":

Peril he sought not, but ne'er shrank to meet:
 The scene was savage, but the scene was new;
This made the ceaseless toil of travel sweet,
 Beat back keen Winter's blast, and welcomed Sum-
 mer's heat. (xlili)

The apprehension of the heights of intense experience, whether of an aspiring Napoleon in Childe Harold III, the viewer in the presence of St. Peter's in Rome in the fourth canto, or Keats first seeing the Elgin Marbles, has the immediate effect of diminishing the self to cause its own Icarus-plunge into self-consciousness and defeat. But Byron translates this alienation into a new orientation towards the glorious heights of individuality and self-expression, an ability which leads him ultimately to the undespairing acceptance of all of life in the final cantos of Don Juan.

Apart from the power of the imagination to lead to ideas, Byron also acknowledges in Canto II its other function to provoke memory. As the boat moves through the Straits of Gibraltar on a moonlit evening, when the imagination is unable to feast upon the grand scenery available in daylight but turns upon the dark and shadowy cliffs of the Spanish coast (II, xxii), the narrator watches the moon's reflection in the water and experiences a loss of the present in a recollection of the past:

Thus bending o'er the vessel's laving side,
To gaze on Dian's wave-reflected sphere,
The Soul forgets her schemes of Hope and Pride,
And flies unconsciously o'er each backward year;
None are so desolate but something dear,
Dearer than self, possesses or possessed
A thought and claims the homage of a tear;
A flashing pang! of which the weary breast
Would still, albeit in vain, the heavy heart
divest! (II, xxiv)

What begins, however, as a pleasurable though bittersweet activity of the mind--the imagination "flies" unwilling to select the "dear" from the "desolate" of the past years--ends with the spirit overwhelmed by the acute reminder, the "flashing pang", that the dear and the desolate are inseparable. The "weary breast" cannot escape the "heavy heart" when thoughts turn inward. The sensation-seeking pilgrim requires a constant supply of fresh experience; otherwise, he finds himself in the situation which Keats described in Endymion:

...when new wonders ceased to float before
And thoughts of self came on, how crude and sore
The journey homeward to habitual self!
A mad pursuing of the fog-born elf,
Whose flitting lantern, through rude nettle-briar,
Cheats us into a swamp, into a fire,
Into the bosom of a hated thing. (II, 274-280)

When the pressures of early success, the confusion of his personal life, and the fear that "Actions—actions" would be denied him so that there would not be "any thing better to do" but "scribbling", Byron handled the restlessness that overwhelmed him by returning in his imagination to the "new wonders" that had unfolded before him in the exotic settings of Albania and the Greek peninsula.²³ The verse tales of 1813 and 1814 demonstrate Byron's theory that poetry is a means of coming to grips with reality, both through escaping the self into a world created from a factual world acted upon by the imagination and through discovering another self and world where action can occur. The tales are literal examples of "the lava of the imagination whose eruption prevents an earthquake".²⁴ The popularity of the tales did nothing to raise his "opinion of the public taste" nor did the tales, all written in feverish haste, increase his admiration of his abilities as a poet. What he said of The Bride of Abydos is true of the tales as a whole: "...I can have no great esteem for lines that can be strung as fast as minutes".²⁵ Yet the composition of the tales taught Byron an essential understanding of poetic inspiration and the creative process. He had replied to Dallas's request for more cantos to complete Childe Harold with a convenient excuse which doubtless

23. MLJ, III, 220, 1813-1814 Journal.

24. MLJ, III, 179, November 19, 1813.

25. MLJ, III, 168, November 17, 1813.

also reflected what he actually believed about the way his poetic mind worked. He felt that to continue the poem in England was impossible:

...to do that I must return to Greece and Asia; I must have a warm sun and a blue sky; I cannot describe scenes so dear to me by a sea-coal fire. I had projected an additional canto when I was in the Troad and Constantinople, and if I saw them again it would go on; but under existing circumstances and sensations, I have neither harp, "heart nor voice" to proceed.²⁶

The circumstances of late 1813, however, the strong mixture of feelings rising out of his involvement with Augusta and the frustrations of his career, drove him, as he liked to say, from "reality to take refuge in Imagination". There is much of the poseur in Byron's repetition of the experience of writing The Bride in a number of letters towards the end of 1813, but there is insight as well into the creative act and the role of memory in it. His explanation to Madame de Stael of the purpose served in composing that tale is typical:

...it wrung my thoughts from selfish & sorrowful contemplation--& recalled them to a part of the world to which I am indebted for some of the brightest and darkest but always the most living recollections of my existence.²⁷

Byron was discovering that when the poet has "lived and felt", he is then provided with a store of sensations and impressions guarded in the memory, which may later find poetic expression in some future time of emotional crisis. Byron's comprehension of the source of poetry is not unWordsworthian:

26. MLJ, II, 92, September 7, 1811.

27. MLJ, III, 185, November 30, 1813. See also MLJ, III, 157, November 4, 1813; III, 184, November 30, 1813 (to Moore); III, 161, November 12, 1813; and III, 205, 208, 225, 1813-1814 Journal.

To write so as to bring home to the heart, the heart must have been tried,--but, perhaps, ceased to be so. While you are under the influence of passions, you only feel, but cannot describe them,--any more than, when in action, you could turn round and tell the story to your next neighbour! When all is over,--all, all, and irrevocable,--trust to memory--she is then too faithful.²⁸

Here Byron acknowledges the tranquillity that must follow the state of emotional agitation, the period of digesting experience before committing it to poetry. Similarly, the poet as a man who has "lived and felt" suggests Wordsworth's man of heightened "sensibility" with the "disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present" and the ability to imagine feelings appropriate to events he may not have experienced.²⁹ Perhaps the major difference between the two poets apparent in Byron's statement is the emphasis on suffering experience against which the heart must endure and the suggestion that its memories are painful. More often than not, Byron viewed memory of past events as a threatening curse, described to Lady Blessington as "'the never-dying worm that feeds on the heart, and only calls up the past to make the present more insupportable'".³⁰

Both poets, however, place a similar faith in memory rather than notebooks when absorbing natural scenery and recognise the importance of allowing the

28. MLJ, III, 245, 1813-1814 Journal.

29. William Wordsworth, Preface, Lyrical Ballads, 1800, rev., 1802, in Romantic Criticism: 1800-1850, ed. R.A. Foakes (London: Edward Arnold, 1968), pp. 34-35, 43.

30. Blessington, Conversations, pp. 178-179.

memory to function selectively among the impressions of the external world. Aubrey de Vere recalls Wordsworth's criticism of a fellow poet who slavishly recorded nature:

"He took pains...he went out with his pencil and notebook, and jotted down whatever struck him most--a river rippling over the sands, a ruined tower on a rock above it, a promontory, and a mountain-ash waving its red berries. He went home, and wove the whole together into a poetical description".

And then Wordsworth proposed the proper approach to nature and the best use of memory:

"But Nature does not permit an inventory to be made of her charms! He should have left his pencil and notebook at home; fixed his eye, as he walked, with a reverent attention on all that surrounded him, and taken all into a heart that could understand and enjoy. Then, after several days had passed by, he should have interrogated his memory as to the scene. He would have discovered that while much of what he had admired was preserved to him, much was also wisely obliterated. That which remained--the picture surviving in his mind--would have presented the ideal and essential truth of the scene...by discarding much which, though in itself striking, was not characteristic".³¹

Lady Blessington recorded the way in which Byron responded to picturesque views discovered during their daily rides in Genoa. When a particular scene moved him, she noted that Byron gazed upon it with quiet intensity "as if to impress himself with its recollection", that he "rarely praised what so evidently pleased him", but absorbed the view "as if he was noting the principal features on the tablet of his memory".³² But in his own inimitable spontaneity, when he found that Rome surpassed any place he

31. Aubrey de Vere, "Recollections of Wordsworth", Essays: Chiefly on Poetry (London: Macmillan, 1887), II, 276-277.

32. Blessington, Conversations, p. 84.

had ever seen, even Greece, Byron explained to Murray how his memory worked:

I can't describe because my first impressions are always strong and confused--& my Memory selects & reduces them to order--like distance in the landscape--& blends them better--although they may be less distinct--there must be a sense or two more than we have as mortals--which I suppose the Devil has--(or t'other) for where there is much to be grasped we are always at a loss--and yet feel that we ought to have a higher and more extended comprehension.³³

Both poets suggest that the mind functions as an organic agent in collecting and arranging impressions in the memory; but Byron, overflowing with the wonders of Rome and without any trace of artifice, comes close to Coleridge's explanation of the workings of the secondary imagination, which "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealise and to unify". In the last half of his statement Byron struggles for terms to express the concept of a higher power at work that brings a new creation out of chaotic elements, and Byron's "t'other" is none other than Coleridge's "infinite I AM" whose "eternal act of creation" is repeated "in the finite mind".³⁴

Byron's first introduction to the rugged and wild Greek peninsula, described in the stanza quoted above, illustrates the process of his creative imagination that works from a foundation in fact of the actual world --no "airy" fictions for him. He makes the scene specific

33. MLJ, V, 221, May 9, 1817.

34. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, Chapter XIII.

with place names--"stern Albania's hills, / Dark Suli's rocks, and Pindus' inland peak". The scene, however, has already been coloured and ordered by the imagination of the viewer (in a note to the stanza Coleridge tells us that the mountain "is not visible from the sea-coast");³⁵ and it is given the further colouring of "mist", "many a dun and purple streak", and "clouds" which allows the particular scene to dissolve effortlessly into the general threatening terrain where the inner eye discovers the isolated mountaineer's dwelling and the challenging dangers of predatory creatures, savage men, and violent storms. In the interchange between inner and outer reality, Byron creates a personally satisfying world of heroic possibility where lone man pits himself against the forces of the unknown. "Harold" in the Levant stores up the factual details and impressions that make him the ancestor of the heroes of the verse tales. The Giaour, Conrad, Lara, all defy society and convention to return to these exotic settings to live their outlaw lives. Through them Byron escapes "habitual self", "the bosom of a hated thing", to find refuge in the reality of the imagination.

Apart from increasing Byron's understanding of the poet's imaginative faculties, the verse tales offer further evidence of Byron's poetic theory in development. Byron found through the verse tales that for him poetry was the best vehicle for expressing strong feeling. He confided to his journal that he had begun

35. PW, II, 126-127, note 3.

a comedy and burnt it because the scene ran into reality;
 --a novel, for the same reason. In rhyme I can keep
 more away from facts; though the thought always runs
 through, through...yes, yes, through.³⁶

Metre and rhyme become therefore integral to the expression of strong feeling, not the applied ornaments of the previous age of poetry. The demands of form give order to the chaos of emotions and provide distance between the poet and his feeling.

Ball has made the interesting observation that "the Eastern Tales are Byron's Lyrical Ballads", stories in which he, like Wordsworth and Coleridge, refined narrative skills and learned to handle autobiographical material objectively.³⁷ Even more elemental to poetic theory, however, Byron's tales resemble Lyrical Ballads in Wordsworth's explanation that the purpose of these poems is to trace "the primary laws of our nature" and "the essential passions of the heart".³⁸ Byron's characters are not drawn from "low and rustic life", but even in their lawless lives they demonstrate the passions common to ordinary men. To take The Corsair as an example, in the pirates' daily lives there is a simplicity that parallels the concerns of Wordsworth's common men. While it is true that

They game--carouse--converse--or whet the brand;
 Select the arms--to each his blade assign,
 And, careless, eye blood that dims its shine;

they also

36. MLJ, III, 209.

37. Ball, Central Self, pp. 104-105.

38. Wordsworth, Preface, Lyrical Ballads, p. 26.

Repair the boat, replace the helm or oar,
 While others straggling muse along the shore;
 For the wild bird the busy springes set,
 Or spread beneath the sun the dripping net:
 Gaze where some distant sail a speck supplies,
 With all the thirsting eye of Enterprise;
 Tell o'er the tales of many a night of toil,
 And marvel where they next shall seize a spoil.
 (I, ii)

They live in harmony with both the land and sea. Conrad for all his haughty ways emulates the simple rural peasant in his abstemious living, eating "Earth's coarsest bread, the garden's homeliest roots, / And scarce the summer luxury of fruits" (I, ii).

The pirates live in their way close to nature and take the rhythm of their lives from the sea, which they have made their "empire", and in their song celebrate their superiority over the "luxurious slave" of civilised life "Whose soul would sicken o'er the heaving wave" (I, i). Their language is efficiently direct as befits men of action who despite their outlaw freedom have submitted themselves willingly to strict obedience to Conrad:

"Steer to that shore!" they sail. "Do this!"--'tis done:--
 "Now form and follow me!"--the spoil is won. (I, ii)

The narrator explores inconclusively the mystery of Conrad's charismatic hold over the band of pirates (I, viii-xi) and excuses his villainy as the result of the lessons Conrad learned from society. If he is now the enemy of society, he is at least noble in that he acts out of the "honesty" of his emotions:

He knew himself a villain--but he deemed
 The rest no better than the thing he seemed;
 And scorned the best as hypocrites who hid
 Those deeds the bolder spirit plainly did.

He knew himself detested, but he knew
 The hearts that loathed him, crouched and
 dreaded too. (I, xi)

Conrad's single virtue was his love for Medora,
 "unchangeable--unchanged, /Felt but for one from whom
 he never ranged" (I, xii).

Against this background Byron develops a tale in which the ordinary passions common to most humans receive heightened treatment in the luxurious decadence of an eastern realm that owes its main details at least to Byron's tour of the Levant. Medora's tender love and devotion freely given to Conrad contrasts with Gulnare's relationship with the Pasha; she is "The Haram queen--but still the slave of Seyd" (II, v), a circumstance brought home to Gulnare when Conrad had rescued her from the general slaughter:

'Twas strange--that robber thus with gore bedewed,
 The Pacha wooed as if he deemed the slave
 Must seem delighted with the heart he gave;
 The Corsair vowed protection, soothed affright,
 As if his homage were a Woman's right.
 (II, vii)

Mercy shown the women of the Pasha's harem counterbalances the pirates' blood-thirsty attack upon Seyd, managed cunningly by Conrad disguised as a fugitive from the pirates' camp. The story deals with loyalty as well as deceit, not only the loyalty of Conrad's band to their chief, but Gulnare's shifting loyalty from Seyd whom she slays in order to rescue the captive Conrad. Feeling "Wronged--spurned--reviled", Gulnare demands vengeance, though Conrad shows that even pirates value honour as he refuses her offer to kill the sleeping Pasha with "the secret knife" (II, viii). When the deed

is nevertheless done, the effect is emotionally devastating to Conrad; and Byron investigates the range of Conrad's feelings from the horror of blood on a woman's hands, shed in deceit rather than by men in combat, to a deep sadness and loss of will before finally returning to his accustomed equanimity (III, x-xv). Seeing his men again and their wild exuberance at his safe return, Conrad "feels he yet can conquer and command" (III, xv). Two more stanzas are required, however, for Conrad to come to terms with his feelings about Gulnare. He knows that his men are "less scrupulous" than he and would not be disturbed to know they owed their survival to a woman. In the end, Conrad divided his dual capacity for love and hate and acknowledged that the "worst of crimes had left her Woman still!" (III, xvi) He could then feel "Hate for that deed--but grief for her distress", an appreciation for the sacrifice she made for him, "Her all on earth, and more than all in heaven" (III, xvii). The final cantos record Conrad's greater grief in discovering that Medora is dead. As a guilty thing he had nowhere to turn for comfort except inward to his bereft self, and Byron describes the range of feelings common to deep sorrow:

By those, that deepest feel, is ill exprest
 The indistinctness of the suffering breast;
 Where thousand thoughts begin to end in one,
 Which seeks from all the refuge found in none;
 No words suffice the secret soul to show,
 For Truth denies all eloquence to Woe.
 On Conrad's stricken soul Exhaustion prest,
 And Stupor almost lulled it into rest;
 So feeble now--his mother's softness crept
 To those wild eyes, which like an infant's wept:
 It was the very weakness of his brain,
 Which thus confessed without relieving pain.
 None saw his trickling tears--perchance, if seen,
 That useless flood of grief had never been:

Nor long they flowed--he dried them to depart,
 In helpless--hopeless--brokenness of heart:
 The Sun goes forth, but Conrad's day is dim:
 And the night cometh--ne'er to pass from him.
 There is no darkness like the cloud of mind,
 On Grief's vain eye--the blindest of the blind.
 (III, xxii)

Conrad's response to his bereavement is an accurate description of the bereaved's sorrow for the self, which plunges into the vortex of its own melancholy thoughts where, as if on a treadmill, there is no escape from the constantly recurring single thought of the loss.

While The Corsair offers the widest range of emotions for study, set as it is against a background of love and war, as it were, with a hero of more than usual sensitivity and an absorbing interest in examining his feelings, the other tales are also built around a variety of passions. Guilt and remorse dominate The Giaour; revenge and hopeless love, The Bride of Abydos; the dark and frustrated emotions of the disaffected are found in Lara. The circumstances of Byron's heroes are extraordinary and beyond the experience of most men, but their passions are elemental and their responses human. Because they are tales of gripping action, told with suspense that sustains the reader's interest, Byron could claim for these poems the same purpose that Wordsworth saw for Lyrical Ballads, the aim to give pleasure through stimulating feeling in the reader and to nourish his capacity to respond to affective experience. Like his earliest poems, Byron's verse tales are free of didactic spirit, palpably without designs upon us, and

written with a simplicity of theme and clarity of expression that he admired in other poets and cultivated in his own poetry. His disenchantment with the tales stems from the fact that they do not reflect reality except as they examine the truth of human emotions. The tales are basically self-indulgent in allowing Byron to escape his pressured existence and in adding to his popularity with the reading public. He generally distrusted the imagination that permitted escape from the facts of existence; and when he returned to the verse tale in The Island, he largely repudiated these lawless heroes and the dreams of escape.

The verse tales also look forward to the final poetics in Byron's refusal to be restricted to conventional themes and forms. The restless experimenting with metre, in The Bride, for example, and with point-of-view in The Giaour indicate that the search continues. In his letter dedicating The Corsair to Moore he surveys the hazards of various metres--"the fatal facility of the octosyllabic verse", "the rough & barren rock" of blank, to confess that he has settled for "perhaps the best adapted measure for our language--the good old & now neglected heroic couplet", after judging the Spenserian stanza, his favourite, "perhaps too slow and dignified for narrative".³⁹ Though the letter is written for public appreciation and therefore invites posturing, the tales as a whole bear out the attention Byron was consciously giving to an appropriate form for himself.

39. MLJ, IV, 13, January 2, 1814.

Additionally, the energetic and defiant heroes of these tales provide Byron with an attitude and identity ready to hand when he becomes the self-exiled outcast. Though his contentious spirit thrived on opposition, no adversity yet encountered had called forth from Byron the strength of spirit and defiant tough-mindedness that surges through the poetry of his first years in exile.

Byron had found exhilaration in the paper war generated by his "Lines to a Lady Weeping", inserted in the second edition of The Corsair. He relished the "clash of paragraphs" and "conflict of newspapers". Even the threat that his insult to the Prince Regent might be taken up in the House of Lords only moved him to stronger determination to stand by his right to use poetry to express his truth. He was quick to see the irony in the fact that the "Government Gazettes" could give his case equal space with what promised to be the end of Napoleon's reign, and he mused on the farce in which Parliament would divide its concern with his offensive poem and the terms of peace. From Byron at least there would be no effort to appease: "all the motions--censures--sayings--doings & ordinances of that august body shall never make me even endeavour to explain or soften a syllable". He dismissed the consequences of such defiance, perhaps "exclusion from society--and all sorts of disagreeables", with faith in his own durable spirit: "whatever I may & have or shall feel--I have that within me that bounds against opposition.--I have quick feelings--& not very good nerves--but somehow they have more than once served

me pretty well when I most wanted them--and may again--at any rate I shall try."⁴⁰

Two years later, Byron faced the severest test of feelings, nerves, and reboundable spirit of his life, eventually to justify what might otherwise have seemed in 1814 the empty boast of overweening pride. From this sublime phase of his personal and private woe came his richest lyric poetry and the culmination of an expressionistic poetics, to use Abrams' term. Although Byron's ultimate destiny is towards a theory of poetry more inclusive than his subjective dilemma at first allows, the poems of 1816 and 1817 were necessary stages on the way to the greater objectivity of his mature years. Between "Fare Thee Well", in which he took his leave of Lady Byron and England, "Seared in heart--and lone--and blighted", and Beppo, in which he catalogued the charms of Italy and England to conclude with a good-natured, satiric jab, "And so God save the Regent, Church, and King! / Which means that I like all and every thing" (xlvi), Byron had to discover what Pratt called "that poise of spirit which every thoughtful man must struggle after"⁴¹ before his final accepting attitude in Don Juan, the endorsement of "things as they are", was possible.

In his letters of the spring of 1816 Byron put a brave face on the effects of the separation and ensuing scandal that made his private life public. He told Moore

40. MLJ, IV, 53, February 11, 1814.

41. Willis W. Pratt, "Byron and Some Current Patterns of Thought", The Major English Romantic Poets: A Symposium in Reappraisal, ed. Clarence D. Thorpe, Carlos D. Baker, and Bennett Weaver (Carbondale: University of Illinois Press, 1957), p. 151.

that "agitation of any kind gives a rebound to my spirits and sets me up for a time".⁴² To allay Murray's fears that the din of criticism might somehow unsettle his prize author, he assures him that he is seasoned: "Were I to be beaten down by the world and it's inheritors-- I should have succumbed to many things--years ago".⁴³ And again to Moore, he admits that he is bothered not so much by the "privations of adversity" as by the "indignities" that beset his pride; "that same pride", however, he thought would "buckler" him through.⁴⁴ Even to Lady Byron he refused to display any weakness. He pressed for a reconciliation but, failing that, he was prepared to meet her head-on in whatever legal battle might follow. But he warned her not to think him "flippant or unfeeling", to understand that "in this as in many things--one must either laugh or cry--& I prefer the former. . . even if it should be Sardonicly".⁴⁵

Whether Byron's strength of spirit resulted from a reflex response to hurt and anger or from a philosophical depth not usually looked for in one who lived so much in the world, his letters before leaving England show him undaunted by his "domestic misfortunes". Implying a Romantic faith in new beginnings, he told Rogers that "'there is a world elsewhere'".⁴⁶ Only to Augusta did

42. MLJ, V, 45, March 8, 1816.

43. MLJ, V, 29, February 20, 1816.

44. MLJ, V, 45, March 8, 1816.

45. MLJ, V, 39, March 1, 1816.

46. MLJ, V, 25, February 8, 1816.

he admit the degree of effort he had to call up against his suffering. Writing to her from Switzerland, he found his spirits "unequal" and his pain physical: "--the Separation--has broken my heart--I feel as if an Elephant had trodden on it--I am convinced I shall never get over it--but I try". And he concludes on a note that mingles determined hope with continuing despair: "I have still a world before me--this--or the next".⁴⁷ With Augusta among all his correspondents in this affair Byron could be himself; but his was a self that tended to think melodramatically about his domestic tragedy. His reference to the "next" world is both an acknowledgement of the thoughts he had had of suicide and a weighing of the potential of his current world on the shore of Lake Lemán in the not unpleasant company of the Shelley trio and the inevitable possibility of moving on in his quest for a compatible abode.

To an even greater extent than the verse tales, the third canto of Childe Harold is the "lava of the imagination". Written as the narratives were to withdraw himself from himself, this canto translates the pain of the separation and exile into poetry as a means of relieving his distress. Unlike the verse tales, however, much of Childe Harold III strikes the reader as a totally private record of authentic suffering not consciously intended for an audience other than an infant daughter in some future time. In contrast to Childe Harold I and II,

47. MLJ, V, 91-92, September 8, 1816.

which Byron thought of as personal but which, especially in the satiric attacks on the Convention of Cintra and on personalities--Wellesley, Elgin, and others, suppressed when the poem was published,⁴⁸ has a public orientation, the third canto in the main presumes no audience. Despite the fact that Byron sent the fair copy directly to Murray in Shelley's hands and the original draft with Scrope Davies, the poem seems in its inception the work of the poet in isolation. Like Shelley's skylark the poet pours forth his "full heart / In profuse strains of unpremeditated art", unconcerned whether any one hears his instinctive response to overwhelming feeling. The immediate impulse which brings the poem into being is the poet's need to find relief for his overburdened spirit. The dramatic and rhetorical passages that seem to dominate the third canto reflect Byron's overcharged emotional state and his characteristic response to passionate thought.

When Byron reflected upon the completed canto, he was aware both that it was his best work to date and that the devastation of his personal life had ironically enriched his poetry. To Moore he recalled of this "fine indistinct piece of poetical desolation" that he was "half mad during the time of its composition, between metaphysics, mountains, lakes, love inextinguishable, thoughts unutterable, and the nightmare of my own

48. PW, II, in the notes that accompany the text of Childe Harold I and II, supplies the suppressed stanzas, which suggest in these at least Byron spoke in his consciously public voice. See also Dallas, Recollections, pp. 173-185, describing how the stanzas were omitted because unworthy of the poem or too personal in their content.

delinquencies".⁴⁹ Its success he told Augusta came from a "depth of thought in it throughout and a strength of repressed passion which you must feel before you find". Further, he expected its appeal to be limited to readers who had experienced similarly shattering upheavals, because it was "of a kind of metaphysics which every body will not understand". He did not expect it to "be popular & should not think well of it if it were".⁵⁰ Although the skylark's song is "unbodied joy", the distilled essence of the bird, Childe Harold III is "unbodied" woe which seeks distraction in the passing scenes or comfort in the poet's imagination or escape into nature. The poet is helpless to prevent the poem and has only to find the means of expressing his "indistinct . . . poetical desolation", the "thoughts unutterable".

The lines of Beddoes which Eliot adapted to explain the creative process of poetry of the "first voice" throw light on the poet and poem of Childe Harold III. Paraphrasing the opinion of the German poet Gottfried Benn on the process of lyric poetry, which Eliot thought would be better named "meditative", Eliot said that the poem begins with "nothing so definite as an emotion, in any ordinary sense", nor does it start from "an idea" as such, but is a

bodiless childful of life in the gloom
Crying with frog-voice, "What shall I be?"⁵¹

49. MLJ, V, 165, January 28, 1817.

50. MLJ, V, 159, January 12, 1817.

51. T.S. Eliot, "The Three Voices of Poetry", (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1954), pp.27-28.

Byron's "Fare Thee Well" and the note that he sent with a copy of the poem to Lady Byron prepare us for understanding something of the nature of the "bodiless childful of life in the gloom" that lies behind Childe Harold III and that must find words and form before it can "be" *the* poem. Byron's note explaining "Fare Thee Well" implies the bewildering mystery of the creative experience:

I send you the first verses that I ever attempted to write upon you, and perhaps the last that I may ever write at all. This at such a moment may look like affectation, but it is not so. The language of all nations nearest to a state of nature is said to be Poetry. I know not how this may be; but this I know.

The poem has surprised Byron as much as he anticipates that it will do the same to his wife. He is embarrassed that these are "the first verses" that their relationship has inspired and therefore pleads that the poem be received as a genuine expression. He claims that his poem shares the primal origins of language, which presumably arose among primitive man as a ritualised utterance in answer to the passionate need to communicate his feelings, a relief of the emotions through rhythmic sound. In creating the poem Byron has found himself stripped of the protective veneer of civilised man and is inseparable from and powerless to explain feeling that resorts to elemental expression.

He also acknowledges in the note that the inexplicable process is beyond reason:

You know that the lover, the lunatic, and the poet are "of imagination all compact." I am afraid you have hitherto seen me only as the two first, but I would fain hope there is nothing in the last to add to any grievances you may have against the former.⁵²

52. MLJ, V, 52. Marchand dates the note between March 20 and 25, 1816 and attributes it to a recollection, "recorded by Hobhouse".

Byron admits that the words of the poet come from a disordered mind not unlike that of the lover or the lunatic and that his deranged association of ideas is scarcely distinguishable from irrational or defective reasoning. This thought is amplified in lines from the epigraph to "Fare Thee Well", taken from Coleridge's Christabel, explaining the effects of a quarrel between "friends in youth":

And to be wroth with one we love,
Doth work like madness in the brain.

In the poem Byron treats the estrangement between himself and his wife as the cause of suffering both worse than and equal to the pain of bereavement:

Love may sink by slow decay,
But by sudden wrench, believe not
Hearts can thus be torn away:
Still thine own its life retaineth--
Still must mine, though bleeding, beat;
And the undying thought which paineth
Is--that we no more may meet.
These are words of deeper sorrow
Than the wail above the dead;
Both shall live--but every morrow
Wake us from a widowed bed.

Theirs is a living death in which the agony of the bereaved will be daily rehearsed. Words are inadequate to express the sorrow of such loss; yet, like poetry from fundamental feeling, the grief must find expression:

all words are idle--
Words from me are vainer still;
But the thoughts we cannot bridle
Force their way without the will.
Fare thee well! thus disunited--
Torn from every nearer tie--
Seared in heart--and lone--and blighted--
More than this I scarce can die.

Byron's note to Lady Byron shows that he had pondered briefly at least upon the surface of the process of poetic

composition and the nature of the poet. In Childe Harold III, in the course of working through his personal grief, Byron begins to arrive at an enlarged understanding of poets and the value of poetry and continues to add to his poetic theory in Manfred and Childe Harold IV.

What Eliot had to say about the poetic process regarding poetry of the "first voice", that is, "of the poet talking to himself--or to nobody",⁵³ is useful in understanding the process unfolded in Childe Harold III. Eliot agreed with Benn that such a poem had its origins in "an inert embryo or 'creative germ'" and in "the resources of words at the poet's command". Neither can the germ be identified nor the words known, however, until the poet can make "an arrangement of the right words in the right order". Once he has done this, "the 'thing' for which the words had to be found has disappeared, replaced by a poem". Eliot, on the other hand, found himself prepared to extend Benn's explanation. Eliot's own view of the poetic process of meditative poetry is particularly appropriate to our seeing the process of Childe Harold III:

In a poem which is neither didactic nor narrative, and not animated by any other social purpose, the poet may be concerned solely with expressing in verse--using all his resources of words, with their history, their connotations, their music--this obscure impulse. He does not know what he has to say until he has said it....He is oppressed by a burden which he must bring to birth in order to obtain relief. Or, to change the figure of speech, he is haunted by a demon, a demon against which he feels powerless, because in its first manifestation it has no face, no name, nothing; and the words, the poem he makes, are a kind of exorcism of this demon. In other words again, he is going to all that trouble, not in

53. Eliot, "Three Voices", p.6.

order to communicate with anyone, but to gain relief from acute discomfort; and when the words are finally arranged in the right way--or in what he comes to accept as the best arrangement he can find--he may experience a moment of exhaustion, of appeasement, of absolution, and of something very near annihilation, which is in itself indescribable.⁵⁴

Much of Eliot's thought in this portion of his lecture sounds like an echo of Byron in his comments on poetry. Both poets shared the view that the creation of a poem was comparable to giving birth to a child, to exorcising a haunting spirit, and to comforting the self in pain. Further, even though Eliot named only Rilke's *Duino Elegies* and Valery's *La Jeune Parque* as specific examples of poems in the first voice, he would no doubt agree that much of *Childe Harold III* ought to be so considered. In his closing remarks he told his audience that in order to increase their pleasure in reading poetry they should listen for the first voice of the poet in unexpected places:

If you complain that a poet is too rhetorical, and that he addresses you as if you were at a public meeting, try to listen for the moments when he is not speaking to you, but merely allowing himself to be overheard: he may be a Dryden, a Pope, or a Byron.⁵⁵

Through much of the third canto Byron is the poet "talking to himself" or "allowing himself to be overheard". We perhaps ought to say that Byron expects himself to be overheard. But that does not take away from the fact that in this canto Byron participates in the process of the creative imagination through which the poet himself learns "what he has to say" by finding the right words to

54. Eliot, "Three Voices", p.28.

55. Eliot, "Three Voices", p. 38.

give shape to his disordered and deranged thoughts. By giving utterance to chaotic "thoughts unutterable" the poet discovers truth, "true wisdom's world" that exists "within its own creation" (xlvi).

Byron's second pilgrimage like the first begins with no distinct destination in mind; but unlike the first, undertaken to find stimulus for a sated spirit devoid of feeling, the second begins more desperately with a shattered spirit in search of "a world elsewhere" that will afford relief to his overwrought feelings. The brief epigraph to Canto III proposes the context in which we must read the poem. The two sentences come from a letter to Frederick II of Prussia offering sympathetic advice to D'Alembert grieving over the death of a friend:

Afin que cette application vous forçât à penser à autre chose. Il n'y a en vérité de remède qui celui-la et la temps.⁵⁶

Byron for the purposes of his poem is treating his emotional turmoil as the grief of bereavement which he had already suggested in "Fare Thee Well". Like Conrad in the loss of Medora, he goes forth "In helpless—hopeless—brokenness of heart". He shares with Conrad that "indistinctness of the suffering breast" that tries to find relief in thinking on other things, but "thousand thoughts begin to end in one" and words are inadequate, "For Truth denies all eloquence to Woe".

In the undefinable state of emotional shock common to bereavement, however, there is the additional though typically Byronic complication that he is also the

56. PW, II, 209.

dead partner in the relationship. Having it both ways whenever possible, Byron describes his state of woe.

More than a year after the separation, from Venice he wrote to Scrope Davies that he would never live in England again, a decision he felt Davies would understand "when you recollect what I have encountered since my funeral with Miss Milbanke & in consequence of that interment".⁵⁷ This third canto is perhaps forever labelled "the pageant of the bleeding heart", but the display also represents the poet's search for control over his emotions. Pafford, in looking at the poems of 1816-1817 for insight into Byron's "crucial shift from a hasty and flashy verse-craft to poetry of inimitable distinction" sees the poems of these years as Byron's efforts to come to terms with "the warring claims of imagination and reason".⁵⁸ This is of course the problem as Byron ultimately understood it in Canto IV, but in Canto III his immediate problem is to try how far thought can master feelings or, as Gleckner prefers, "the warring claims of the heart and the mind".⁵⁹ To now he had judged that the life of sensations that provoked strong feelings was the staff and mainstay of poetic existence. In terms of Keats's "simile of human life" Byron is emerging from the "Chamber of Maiden-Thought", forced to proceed along one of its "dark passages" in order to discover "the

57. Scrope Davies Papers, Loan 70, British Library Manuscripts Collection, letter dated June 6, 1817.

58. Ward Pafford, "Byron and the Mind of Man: Childe Harold III-IV and Manfred", Studies in Romanticism, I (1961), 105.

59. Gleckner, Ruins of Paradise, p. 244.

ballance of good and evil" in the world.⁶⁰ In a flash of poetic insight Byron had admitted in "Epistle to Augusta":

I have been cunning in mine overthrow,
The careful pilot of my proper woe.
Mine were my faults, and mine be their reward.
(iii, iv)

The grand desideratum essential to Byron's final vision and the foundation of his last poetics is that he come to see and accept the non-poetic, literal truth of this statement of individual responsibility, not only for himself but as it applies to man in general. The poetry of his maturity rests on this truth--the acquiescent agreement that the world is less than perfect but that human beings acting responsibly can effect improvement. Through these poems of 1816-1817 Byron recreates a self that begins to accept the mixture of good and evil in himself and in mankind to come closer to the image of his juvenile ideal, "The man of firm and noble soul" who through "crashing chaos" of whatever kind could in the end stand and smile "Still dauntless 'midst the wreck of earth".

Byron begins this journey towards self-control and renewed self-esteem unconscious of aim or destination in Childe Harold III and without control over his direction nor concern where he goes:

Once more upon the waters! yet once more!
And the waves bound beneath me as a steed
That knows his rider. Welcome to that roar!
Swift be their guidance, whereso'er it lead! (ii)

60. John Keats, Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, May 3, 1818, in Romantic Criticism: 1800-1850, p.101.

He has submitted himself in effect to the ocean waves
as to a horse without bridle reins, one that he trusts
from familiarity, and is

as a weed
Flung from the rock, on Ocean's foam, to sail
Where'er the surge may sweep, the tempest's
breath prevail. (ii)

He is powerless to resist the lure of the imagination as
a means of escaping his sorrow. Like "the rushing wind /
Bears the cloud onwards", he resumes his earlier tale
though that ground appears destroyed of any fertility,
made a wasteland from the salty tears he has already
shed (iii). The effort to resume what may be only "a
dreary strain" is necessary, however;

So that it wean me from the weary dream
Of selfish grief or gladness--so it fling
Forgetfulness around me--it shall seem
To me, though to none else, a not ungrateful
theme. (iv)

The process of a poem of "the poet talking to
himself or to nobody" begins with the need to relieve
the suffering self through words not yet found. He
who can no longer be touched by distinct desires or
emotions--"Love or Sorrow, Fame, Ambition, Strife",

he can tell
Why Thought seeks refuge in lone caves, yet rife
With airy images, and shapes which dwell
Still unimpair'd, though old, in the Soul's haunted
cell. (v)

'Tis to create and in creating live
A being more intense, that we endow
With form our fancy, gaining as we give
The life we image, even as I do now--
What am I? Nothing; but not so art thou,
Soul of my thought! with whom I traverse earth,
Invisible but gazing, as I glow
Mixed with thy spirit, blended with thy birth
And feeling still with thee in my crushed feelings'
dearth. (vi)

Imagination allows a reciprocity of life between the thing created and the creator. In his own benumbed state, Byron accepts Harold as imagination given body and spirit, "Soul of my thought", which can restore to him feeling that is evidence of life. Byron justifies his retreat to the imagination, even though it is an escape from reality, because through it he can order the chaos of his thoughts and begin to reassert his will to endure:

Yet must I think less wildly:--I have thought
 Too long and darkly, till my brain became,
 In its own eddy boiling and o'erwrought,
 A whirling gulf of phantasy and flame. (vii)

This passage does not seem to suggest, as Pafford reads it, that Byron is already setting the claims of the imagination against those of reason.⁶¹ Byron seems instead to submit to the imagination for the distraction it can provide from the vicious circle of rational thought that has him trapped. Out of the "whirling gulf of phantasy and flame" mingled with his reasoning that has fixed blame for his woe on the fact that he never learned "to tame" his emotions so that the "springs of life were poisoned" (vii), Byron turns from the impossible confusion of his thought to accept the solace of an ordering imagination:

Something too much of this:--but now 'tis past,
 And the spell closes with its silent seal:
 Long absent HAROLD re-appears at last. (viii)

He greets Harold's coming with relief and the possibility of even greater relief in merging his identity with Harold's which in the intervening years has grown remarkably similar to the poet's current view of himself in his deliberate isolation from the common herd of men

61. Pafford, "Byron and the Mind of Man", p. 108.

and in his desire to alienate himself from that world to rediscover "companionship" in the natural world (ix-xv).

The efforts to think on other things and to distract the mind in turning the imagination to thoughts provoked by the new scenes prove of no avail. On the field of Waterloo the poet identifies his sorrowful fate with the meaning of the battle. The "grave of France" only reminds him of the death of his own life and hopes:

How in an hour the Power which gave annals
Its gifts, transferring fame as fleeting too! (xviii)

The defeat he suffered in London is the equal of the defeat that Napoleon met at Waterloo in that both must now face the truth that "Ambition's life and labours all were vain" (xvii). Self surfaces again in the imagined ball of the Duchess of Richmond that ironically had begun "merry as a marriage bell" (xxi) only to end in chaos and disaster, "Rider and horse,--friend, foe--in one red burial blent!" (xxviii) It is his own plight that underlies his eulogy of Major Howard. The broken hearts which will endure that tragedy reassure Byron that he will survive his broken heart:

The tree will wither long before it fall;
The hull drives on, though mast and sail be torn;
The roof-tree sinks, but moulders on the hall
In massy hoariness; the ruined wall
Stands when its wind-worn battlements are gone;
The bars survive the captives they enthrall;
The day drags through though storms keep out the sun;
And thus the heart will break, yet brokenly live on.
(xxxii)

He wants to believe that the individual learns to live with his pain, even to find life in his despair, "Vitality of poison--a quick root / Which feeds these deadly branches".

The tentative affirmation of "Life" that adapts "Itself to Sorrow's most detested fruit" (xxxiv) anticipates the stanzas of Canto IV in which Byron confirms the fact from the evidence of his survival. Here, the stanzas also indicate that Byron has at last come to terms with imagination as a means of relief and escape necessary to survival and is now able to celebrate the more constructive uses of the mind.

The Tannen tree in the final canto is the symbol of the mind that endures and gains vitality from the poison of its environment, growing from barren rock and gaining strength from the storms that would destroy it. Like the tree that makes life out of "bleak, gray granite", the "Mind", Byron has found, "may grow the same" (xx). He has come to the stoical realisation that "Existence may be borne" (xxi) and that

All suffering doth destroy, or is destroyed,
Even by the sufferer--and, in each event,
Ends. (xxii)

As one who has survived, however, he is not unaware of the tricks that the mind can play:

But ever and anon of griefs subdued
There comes a token like a Scorpion's sting,
Scarce seen, but with fresh bitterness imbued;
And slight withal may be the things which bring
Back on the heart the weight which it would fling
Aside for ever: it may be a sound--
A tone of music--summer's eve--or spring--
A flower--the wind--the Ocean--which shall wound,
Striking the electric chain wherewith we are darkly
bound;

And how and why we know not, nor can trace
Home to its cloud this lightning of the mind,
But feel the shock renewed, nor can efface
The blight and blackening which it leaves behind,
Which out of things familiar, undesigned,
When least we deem of such, calls up to view
The Spectres whom no exorcism can bind,--

The cold--the changed--perchance the dead, anew--
 The mourned--the loved--the lost--too many! yet
 how few! (xxiii, xxiv)

But no longer is he the slave of a mind in which all thoughts return to the one dominating thought. He understands and accepts that memory is a process which he cannot control, but he can call his thoughts back to serve his purpose. In the next stanza he demonstrates this: "But my soul wanders; I demand it back...."; and he assigns it the specific duties of standing and meditating upon ruins and tracking the course of "Fallen states and buried greatness"(xxv). The imagination must apply itself to discovering the truth to be learned from observing the present world, even in ruins.

Byron arrived at the degree of equanimity of Canto IV that contrasts with the tortured emotional state of Canto III by observing from Waterloo through Switzerland examples of the destructive potential in passion uncontrolled. He makes of Napoleon a primary instance of defeat through over-reaching aspiration (xxxvi-xlii), but that paradoxical "Conqueror and Captive of the Earth" is only one of a class of beings of men maddened to inflame and destroy themselves and others:

Conquerors and Kings,
 Founders of sects and systems, to whom add
 Sophists, Bards, Statemen, all unquiet things
 Which stir too strongly the soul's secret springs,
 And are themselves the fools to those they fool.
 (xliii)

The "chiefless castles" along the banks of the Rhine are reminders of the vanity of human wishes:

they stand, as stands a lofty mind,
 Worn, but unstooping to the baser crowd,
 All tenantless, save to the crannying Wind,
 Or holding dark communion with the Cloud. (xlvi)

The beauty and serenity of the Rhine valley are an interlude prompting the imagination (Harold) to recur to fond memories of lost love:

the heart must
Leap kindly back to kindness, though Disgust
Hath weaned it from all worldlings... (liii),

a trait surprising in "a mind so far imbued / With scorn
of man".

That the solitary Harold has retained his feelings of love is testimony of the powerful link between love and the imagination; and despite the limited opportunities for growth afforded his "nipped affections", in Harold love "glowed when all beside had ceased to glow" (liv).

Byron also collects evidence of minds not driven by selfish aspiration. He pauses at the memorial to Marceau to reflect on

Freedom's Champion, one of those
The few in number, who had not o'erstept
The charter to chastise which she bestows
On such as wield her weapons; he had kept
The whiteness of his soul. (lvii)

In the valley of the Swiss Rhine he discovers further examples of human achievements worthy of honour. The battlefield at Morat, like Marathon but unlike Waterloo, represents one of

true Glory's stainless victories,
Won by the unambitious heart and hand
Of a proud, brotherly, and civic band,
All unbought champions in no princely cause
Of vice-entailed Corruption. (lxiv)

Nearby at Avenches he pays his respects to a daughter's selfless sacrifice of her life in an effort to save her father's. In a note Byron says that names such as these

deserve to be remembered because to them we can "turn with a true and healthy tenderness, from the . . . confused mass of conquests and battles, with which the mind is roused for a time to a false and feverish sympathy".⁶²

These examples of pure and unsullied actions Byron sees as further reminders of his own potential for corruptibility and destruction. Like the earth-piercing Alps which reach towards Heaven, "yet leave vain man below" (lxii), such deeds are

The high, the mountain-majesty of Worth [which]
Should be--and shall, survivor of its woe,
And from its immortality, look forth
In the Sun's face, like yonder Alpine snow,
Imperishably pure beyond all things below. (lxvii)

Byron therefore concludes that certain minds ought to dwell apart from men.

All are not fit with them to stir and toil,
Nor is it discontent to keep the mind
Deep in its fountain, lest it overboil
In the hot throng, where we become the spoil
Of our infection, till, too late and long,
We may deplore and struggle with the coil,
In wretched interchange of wrong for wrong
Midst a contentious world, striving where none
are strong. (lxix)

Life in the world of men can lead "in a moment" to action which "may plunge our years / In fatal penitence" (lxx); and thus, Byron reasons, "Is it not better, then, to be alone", to join our lives to nature "Than join the crushing crowd, doomed to inflict or bear?" (lxxi) His imaginary flight into a union with nature, however grandly described, is in the end a failure. The one drawback to becoming one with nature is a reminder that he is "A link reluctant in a fleshly chain" (lxxii), and he asks whether ridding himself of the "clay-co/d bonds" to rise

62. PW, II, 299.

phoenix-like as pure mind will bring contentment:

shall I not

Feel all I see less dazzling but more warm?
 The bodiless thought? the Spirit of each thought?
 Of which, even now, I share at times the immortal
 lot? (lxxiv)

Are not the mountains, waves, and skies, a part
 Of me and of my Soul, as I of them?
 Is not the love of these deep in my heart
 With a pure passion? should I not contemn
 All objects, if compared with these? and stem
 A tide of suffering, rather than forego
 Such feelings for the hard and worldly phlegm
 Of those whose eyes are only turned below,
 Gazing upon the ground, with thoughts which dare
 not glow? (lxxv)

Byron is caught in the romantic's dilemma of the desire to escape the demands and limitations inherent in being mortal and the reluctance to sacrifice the pleasure and pain of being human. The fact that the experience of this imaginary excursion into the realms of an existence as pure thought is phrased as unanswered questions indicates Byron's lack of any firm conviction in the possibility of an identification with nature.

He calls himself back abruptly from this flight of fancy--"But this is not my theme; and I return / To that which is immediate"--to his cataloguing of men destroyed by uncontrolled passions. Rousseau is the example of "One, whose dust was once all fire", one who in his desire "to be glorious" followed "a foolish quest / The which to gain and keep, he sacrificed all rest" (lxxvi). Through his words Rousseau deceived and destroyed himself and others:

he...threw

Enchantment over Passion, and from Woe
 Wrung overwhelming eloquence...
 he knew

How to make Madness beautiful, and cast

O'er erring deeds and thoughts, a heavenly hue
 Of words, like sunbeams, dazzling as they past
 The eyes, which o'er them shed tears feelingly
 and fast. (lxxvii)

In other images Byron continues to pick out the corrupting and corruptive powers. In his pursuit of Ideal Beauty Rousseau was "as a tree / On fire by lightning", "Kindled he was and blasted" (lxxviii); and in the sphere of influence over men's minds that ended in the French Revolution and its consequences, he brought,

As from the Pythian's mystic cave of yore,
 Those oracles which set the world in flame. (lxxxix)

Voltaire and Gibbon also were "gigantic minds" blending good and evil. The first "was fire and fickleness", mercurial and Protean in his moods and talents; "Historian, bard, philosopher", he was most gifted in "ridicule" which, like a destructive wind,

Blew where it listed, laying all things prone,--
 Now to o'erthrow a fool, and now to shake a throne.
 (cvi)

Gibbon's gifts, the habit of "deep and slow, exhausting thought, / And hiving wisdom" year after year, are likewise perverted by his talent for irony, which he applied to religious belief,

that master spell
 Which stung his foes to wrath, which grew from fear,
 And doomed him to the zealot's ready Hell,
 Which answers to all doubts so eloquently well. (cvii)

Through his pleasure in the night storm on Lake Lemman, Byron escapes these grim lessons of the past and feels briefly the pantheistic spirit of nature. His is an experience and a feeling that cries out for expression, but he finds himself regrettably inadequate to the task. The materials for poetry are arrayed about him and stir in

him powerful response:

Sky-Mountains--River--Winds--Lake--Lightnings! ye!
 With night, and clouds, and thunder--and a Soul
 To make these felt and feeling, well may be
 Things that have made me watchful; the far roll
 Of your departing voices, is the knoll
 Of what in me is sleepless,--if I rest.
 But where of ye, O Tempests! is the goal?
 Are ye like those within the human breast?
 Or do ye find, at length, like eagles, some high
 nest? (xcvi)

Yet the experience remains unutterable:

Could I embody and unbosom now
 That which is most within me,--could I wreak
 My thoughts upon expression, and thus throw
 Soul--heart--mind--passions--feelings--strong or weak--
 All that I would have sought, and all I seek,
 Bear, know, feel--and yet breathe--into one word,
 And that one word were Lightning, I would speak;
 But as it is, I live and die unheard,
 With a most voiceless thought, sheathing itself
 as a sword. (xcvii)

The apprehension and praise of the heights of experience that leaves vain man below to lament his inadequacy generate in him the feeling that requires expression. Once words are found, "the 'thing' for which the words had to be found has disappeared, replaced by a poem". The moment of creation in which the imagination ordered inchoate feelings and perceptions into utterance has been an experience beyond the ordinary, as the next stanza signals. The storm and the stanzas have brought a feeling, in Eliot's words, "of something very near annihilation". The coming of day restores the self to the self and Byron notes quietly "we may resume / The march of our existence" (xcvii).

In bringing the canto to a close Byron measures the progress he has made towards recouping control over his emotions:

Thus far have I proceeded in a theme--
 Renewed with no kind auspices:--to feel
 We are not what we have been, and to deem
 We are not what we should be,--and to steel
 The heart against itself; and to conceal,
 With a proud caution, love, or hate, or aught,--
 Passion or feeling, purpose, grief, or zeal,
 Which is the tyrant Spirit of our thought,--
 Is a stern task of soul:--No matter,--it is
 taught. (cxi)

Since his early years Byron had believed that the poet must be made of durable stuff, able to survive adversity. In the course of Childe Harold III he has discovered this truth about himself, that thought can overcome feelings. As the passage indicates, however, the discovery has not been particularly liberating. Byron has at best achieved a static state between knowing "We are not what we have been" and "not what we should be". His expressed understanding of the uses to which he had put his imagination show further the limits of his comprehension at the end of Canto III:

And for these words thus woven into song,
 It may be that they are a harmless wile,--
 The colouring of the scenes which fleet along,
 Which I would seize, in passing, to beguile
 My breast, or that of others, for a while.
 (cxii)

Byron's basic mistrust of the imagination is revealed in his hope that his words "may be . . . a harmless wile" and in the apology for "colouring" the passing scenes with no more purpose than to provide temporary distraction for himself and others. The truth is, however, that where his imagination has been most extended, in the Waterloo and Napoleon sections, and in the Clarens and Rousseau stanzas, he has used the power of his mind to throw light upon aspects of events and happenings of the real world to strip away the false colouring which makes war glorious or

Rousseau the inspired benefactor of mankind. Though he phrases his thoughts in rhetorical eloquence, Byron speaks from a personal vision in order to lay bare for discriminating evaluation this much of the world as it is. Harold answers to one mode of the romantic imagination which creates an identity and ambience offering escape from the real world, but he may have been abandoned half way through Canto III because Byron could no longer submit himself to that device. In the passages named above and in much of Canto IV Byron continues to find monuments of the past that engage his imagination and add to his apprehension of truth. Pafford calls Byron's imagination "historical" instead of "creative" and notes that in the process it "must feed upon the actual, suggesting that his mind functioned most contentedly by the way of fairly simple association rather than in the complexly interacting way celebrated by Wordsworth and Coleridge".⁶³ "Historical" perhaps adequately describes the kind of imagination most evidently at work in these Childe Harold cantos. But the technique here anticipates the imagination at work in Don Juan, playing in that poem upon actual or imagined experience, information from books, opinion, historical or current events, for the pleasure of showing the "world exactly as it goes" and the purpose of encouraging a critical appraisal.

The feat of surviving the ordeal of his separation continued to be a source of pride with Byron during the rest of his years. When he learned of Romilly's suicide, he could only reflect bitterly on the event, unable to forget that Romilly had betrayed him in the separation proceedings.

63. Ward Pafford, "Byron and the Mind of Man", p.116.

Byron set his loss against Romilly's loss of his wife to exult in his own courage: "reflect or consider what my feelings must have been--when wife--and child--and Sister--and name--and fame--and Country were to be my sacrifice on his legal altar".⁶⁴ But in 1816-1817 it still remained for Byron to work himself beyond the impasse of his satisfaction that he had endured against odds. In the concluding stanzas he asserts again his scorn for human kind--"I stood / Among them, but not of them" (cxiii); but he does not close the possibility of a closer relationship:

I do believe,
 Though I have found them not, that there may be
 Words that are things,--hopes which will not deceive,
 And virtues which are merciful, nor weave
 Snares for the failing: I would also deem
 O'er others griefs that some sincerely grieve--
 That two, or one, are almost what they seem,--
 That Goodness is no name--and Happiness no dream.
(cxiv)

With more than idle optimism Byron leaves the way open to discover an acceptance of humanity, his own and that of his fellow men.

Manfred in its composition history and thought is closely bound with both the third and fourth cantos of Childe Harold. Byron began the "dramatic poem" soon after completing the third canto to explore more thoroughly and directly ideas raised in Childe Harold III. The germ of the play lies in Byron's description of Harold's temperament--

He would not yield dominion of his mind
 To Spirits against whom his own rebelled,
 Proud though in desolation--which could find
 A life within itself, to breathe without mankind.
(xii)

--and in the moving scenery of the Alps that delighted Byron in his autumn journey. Details of the setting in Manfred frequently come directly from the Alpine Journal which

64. MLJ, VI, 150, June 7, 1819.

Byron kept for Augusta. At the end of the journal Byron suffers from the mood apparent at the close of Childe Harold III. In summarising his feelings about the mountain journey, he tells Augusta that though he is "a lover of Nature--and an Admirer of Beauty" and had made the trip "disposed to be pleased", his mood of "bitterness" and memories of his "home desolation" detracted from the experience:

neither the music of the Shepherd--the crashing of the Avalanche--nor the torrent--the mountain--the Glacier--the Forest--nor the Cloud--have for one moment--lightened the weight upon my heart--nor enabled me to lose my own wretched identity in the majesty & the power and the Glory --around--above--& beneath me.⁶⁵

As in Childe Harold III, heightened awareness of natural beauty does not lead to any sense of absorption into that world, nor does it distract the mind centred in itself. In this mood Byron began his "very wild--metaphysical--and inexplicable" drama and apparently completed the first two acts before moving to Venice where he was not inclined to care about poetry for a time. He told Murray after several months in that city, "I have not done a stitch of poetry since I left Switzerland--& have not at present the 'estro' upon me". Further, he had no thoughts of "resuming" Childe Harold nor any plans "for beginning any other".⁶⁶ He did, however, write the last act of Manfred a few weeks later; and when he saw the drama in proofs in April, he judged the third act "d--d bad" and "on no account" to be published before he had tried to rewrite it, though he felt

65. MLJ, V, 104-105.

66. MLJ, V, 157, January 2, 1817; V, 170, February, 15, 1817.

"the impulse is gone".⁶⁷ The ordinary social life of Venice and the excesses of the Carnival season had sapped Byron's creative energies. Though he had told Moore that Venice had "always been (next to the East) the greenest island of my imagination" and "a poetical place", it did not move him to poetry.⁶⁸ He had obviously given some thought to his poetic career, however, with apparent dissatisfaction in what he had done most recently in Switzerland. With no plans for poetry ahead of him, Byron told Murray,

If I write--I think of trying prose--but I dread introducing living people or applications which might be made to living people--perhaps one day or other--I may attempt some work of fancy in prose--descriptive of Italian manners & of human passions...⁶⁹

Of Manfred he said, "It is too much in my old style....I certainly am a devil of a mannerist--& must leave off". At the same time he found that writing the play had served the same purpose he had claimed for the verse tales and that he was helpless to unburden his feelings in any other way: "...but what could I do? without exertion of some kind --I should have sunk under my imagination and reality".⁷⁰ Yet Manfred more accurately represents not an escape from the self but a deeper probing of his bereft and isolated state, a probing of the life devoid of feeling thrown back upon the life of the mind and thought.

67. MLJ, V, 211, April 14, 1817.

68. MLJ, V, 129-131, November 17, 1816.

69. MLJ, V, 157, January 2, 1817.=

70. MLJ, V, 185, March 9, 1817.

Manfred is passionless:

I have no dread,
And feel the curse to have no natural fear,
Nor fluttering throb that beats with hopes or wishes,
Of lurking love of something on the earth.
(I, i, 24-27)

He drives himself to his studies and his "slumbers . . . are not sleep, / But a continuance of enduring thought" (I, i, 3-4). Longing to die, he finds it is his "fatality to live" and to exist with a "barrenness of Spirit" and to be his "own Soul's sepulchre" (I, ii, 24-27). Manfred is paralysed in the conflict of body and mind that preoccupied Byron, notably in the 1813-1814 Journal, the Ravenna Diary, and in Detached Thoughts. The beauties of the "visible world" only remind him of his temporal sway:

How glorious in its action and itself,
But we, who name ourselves its sovereigns, we
Half dust, half deity, alike unfit
To sink or soar, with our mixed essence make
A conflict of its elements, and breathe
The breath of degradation and of pride,
Contending with low wants and lofty will,
Till our Mortality predominates,
And men are--what they name not to themselves,
And trust not to each other. (I, ii, 38-47)

In Manfred Byron gives body to the familiar pattern of the aspiring mind dragged back to earth by the chains of the flesh. He longs to die as escape from his miserable state, yet clings to life because the future is unknown. From the spirit of Astarte, whom he had wronged, he seeks the knowledge that in his remorse he suffers for them both and that he will be able to die:

For hitherto all hateful things conspire
To bind me to existence--in a life
Which makes me shrink from Immortality--
A future like the past. I cannot rest.
I know not what I ask, nor what I seek.
(II, iv, 127-130)

When Astarte will tell him no more than that he will die tomorrow, Manfred's problem then is to die nobly. At the end of Act II, he is at first "convulsed", but then, as the Spirits observe, "he mastereth himself, and makes / His torture tributary to his will" (157-160).

The original last act, which Byron found too bad to permit publishing the drama, fails thematically and dramatically. Manfred lowers himself to petty and demeaning displays of his power over the spirit world by having the Abbot carried off to the "extremest peak" of the Streckhorn.⁷¹ He does not appear in Scene iii, the final act of that draft, except to be carried from his burning tower by his watchful retainers before a crowd of "Servants, Vassals, and Peasantry . . . stupified with terror". Manfred's final line, "Old man! 'tis not so difficult to die", thus becomes pathetically melodramatic, if not ludicrous, in the context.

Byron rewrote the last act in Rome,⁷² so that Manfred as a record of the triumph of Byron's personal sense of self-esteem and individuality and his ability to accept the good and evil of the human condition is inextricably bound up with the experience of Italy and his pilgrimage from Venice to Rome, related in Childe Harold IV. Before his journey to Rome Byron had told Kinnaird that Manfred was the end of his career as a poet, that he thought of "giving up altogether--unless Rome

71. PW, IV, 121-130, passim, provides in the notes to Manfred the text of the original final act.

72. MLJ, V, 219, May 5, 1817.

should madden me into a fourth Canto".⁷³ Byron still accepts that affective experience in the external and real world is the immediate source of his poetic inspiration. His visit to Tasso's cell in Ferrara enroute to Rome so moved him that he wrote The Lament of Tasso virtually on the spot and posted it to Murray from Florence.⁷⁴ Clearly the plight of Tasso held enormous appeal for Byron, for in his imagination Byron saw that the abused Italian had resolved his adversity in much the same way that Byron saw himself handling his own misfortune through stubborn endurance and escape through writing poetry to a more agreeable world. Beyond serving to distract him from his suffering Byron saw Tasso's achievement in Jerusalem Delivered as poetry serving an heroic purpose:

I stoop not to despair;
For I have battled with mine agony,
And made me wings wherewith to overfly
The narrow circus of my dungeon wall,
And freed the Holy Sepulchre from thrall. (20-24)

Additionally, Byron speaks through Tasso to affirm that he has succeeded in his struggle to master his emotions and that he has faith that his poetry will live on to justify his poethood:

I once was quick in feeling--that is o'er;--
My scars are callous, or I should have dashed
My brains against these bars....
[My name] shall be immortal.
(208-210; 219)

In Italy Byron's appreciation of history and art deepened his comprehension of human nature and the human potential. Prior to his coming to Venice, he had not found particular enjoyment in architectural or artistic

73. MLJ, V, 196, March 31, 1817.

74. MLJ, V, 217, April 26, 1817.

evidences of man's greatness. At the outset of his exile he wrote to Augusta from Belgium his impressions of churches and paintings he had been forced to view while his carriage was repaired. "At Ghent we stared at pictures--& climbed up a steeple 450 steps in altitude At Antwerp we pictured again--churched--and steepled again. . . ." He gloats over his lack of appreciation for Reubens--"the most glaring--flaring--staring harlotry imposter that ever passed a trick upon the senses of mankind. . . .an assemblage of florid night-mares. . .his portraits seem clothed in pulpit cushions". With engaging ingenuousness, Byron dismisses Reubens, a "very great dauber", with "I suppose it must be Art--for--I'll swear--'tis not Nature".⁷⁵ But in Florence he returned from visiting two galleries "drunk with beauty" after seeing the sculpture and paintings and understanding "for the first time . . . what people mean by their cant & (what Mr. Braham calls) 'entusimusy' . . . for those two most artificial of the arts".⁷⁶

The experience of St. Peter's in Rome forcibly taught Byron the principles of the analytic and synthetic powers of the imagination, the "piecemeal" system of breaking the whole of an immensity into its parts which are in turn re-integrated into the total structure. Byron's discovery of that growth of spirit in a viewer that enables him to order the experience of an immense spectacle into a manageable whole foreshadows Coleridge's

75. MLJ, V, 73-75, May 1, 1816.

76. MLJ, V, 218, April 26, 1817.

explanation of the workings of the secondary imagination in dissolving and separating the whole into parts before re-creating. Whether or not Byron was conscious of the significance of the process to his own poetic career, it is the procedure whereby he is able to convert his comprehension of Italy, ruins, art, and natural beauty, into Canto IV and into the fabric of his view of reality. The system also works for him in the totality of Don Juan in which the vast world of human experience is re-created through "piecemeal" apprehension. Byron's description of the method he applied to St. Peter's is appropriate to his process in writing Don Juan and to our appreciation of his master work:

Thou seest not all--but piecemeal thou must break,
To separate contemplation, the great whole;
And as the Ocean many bays will make
That ask the eye--so here condense thy soul
To more immediate objects, and control
Thy thoughts until thy mind hath got by heart
Its eloquent proportions, and unroll
In mighty graduations, part by part,
The Glory which at once upon thee did not dart,

Not by its fault--but thine: Our outward sense
Is but of gradual grasp--and as it is
That what we have of feeling most intense
Outstrips our faint expression; even so this
Outshining and o'erwhelming edifice
Fools our fond gaze, and greatest of the great
Defies at first our Nature's littleness,
Till, growing with its growth, we thus dilate
Our Spirits to the size of that they contemplate.
(clvii, clviii)

Using Don Juan as the "textual evidence", McGann makes the distinction between Byron's imagination and that of the other Romantics to say that Byron's purpose was "to present fictive conditions in terms of which the human world would be more clearly revealed and, being revealed, would be more susceptible to human judgment" rather than to create

"self-generated and self-justifying worlds and orders". Thus, he finds, "Byron's 'imagination' is not creative (in the Romantic sense), it is analytic and critical (in the philosophical sense)".⁷⁷ It is perhaps more accurate to say, however, that while Byron does not regularly participate in the transcendent experience of his contemporaries, his imagination is also creative to the extent that his mind is engaged vitally in shaping his perceptions and discovering his truth. Byron lagged behind the other Romantics in the pursuit of Beauty, but at times it overtook him to reveal Truth of a high order. His experience in St. Peter's was one such occasion.

In Childe Harold IV Byron arrives at the basilica, having first visited the Coliseum in the moonlight where he had had a mystical experience. There he had felt the "dread Power / Nameless, yet thus omnipotent" that comes at midnight "ever where the dead walls rear / Their ivy mantles" and so pervades "the solemn scene" with

a sense so deep and clear
That we become a part of what has been,
And grow upon the spot--all-seeing but unseen.
(cxxxviii)

The ruin is an emblem of the degradation of man, the place where "man was slaughtered by his fellow man" for "the imperial pleasure" (cxxxix). Byron enters imaginatively into the experience of the dying gladiator who is a reminder of the human suffering endured here (cxl-cxli). Yet the moon transforms the wreck into a "magic circle" to remind Byron that the Coliseum has also been the scene of heroic action (clxv) and that it is a symbol of

77. McGann, Don Juan in Context, p. 161.

endurance for Rome and the world (clxv). Between the Coliseum and St. Peter's, Byron discovers examples of human excellence and goodness. The Pantheon, "spared and blest by Time", remains remarkably preserved in spite of years of pillage and natural disaster. While all about it decays and "Man plods / His way through thorns to ashes", the Pantheon, though a pagan temple, "spreads / A holiness appealing to all hearts" and is the "sanctuary and home / Of Art and Piety" (cxlvi, cxlvii). Likewise, his visit to the dungeon associated with the Caritas Romana suggests to Byron positive values. A daughter's noble act to save her father in which "sacred Nature triumphs . . . in this / Reverse of her decree" shows daring, generosity, and devotion--human potential for goodness. Even the castle of St. Angelo, an anachronism on the Roman landscape, helps Byron to an understanding of human foible and seeing it provokes "philosophic mirth" rather than scorn (clii).

But St. Peter's shows to Byron man's capacity for supreme achievement. Although this "greatest of the great / Defies at first our Nature's littleness", as we gaze and comprehend the vast magnificence, "we thus dilate / Our Spirits to the size of that they contemplate" (clviii). As overwhelming as the structure is when we view it,

there is more
 In such a survey than the sating gaze
 Of wonder pleased, or awe which would adore
 The worship of the place, or the mere praise
 Of Art and its great Masters, who could raise
 What former time, nor skill, nor thought could plan.

(clix)

Byron learns that the true significance of St. Peter's lies in the statement that it makes of man's creative genius:

The fountain of Sublimity displays
 Its depths, and thence may draw the mind of Man
 Its golden sands, and learn what great Conceptions can.
 (clix)

Byron's thought patterns in these St. Peter's stanzas reveal the transcendental nature of his experience.⁷⁸ The effect of meditating on the immensity of the basilica is to drive his thoughts away from the immediate scene. His memory or imagination searches for adequate metaphors among other, perhaps more common, immensities of his experience--hence, the Alps (clvi) and the ocean (clvii). Further, the awareness of his own littleness in the presence of immensity is temporary, for the result is an expansion of being and the discovery of hidden grandeur within the self, that inner depth in man which Byron represents in this case as having access to the depth of the "fountain of Sublimity" and from

78. Bernard Blackstone, Byron: A Survey, p.23, treats Byron's experience in St. Peter's as a kind of religious conversion with the Christian faith of the Petrine affirmation "felt in the basilica as a force which 'dilates' the mind 'to the size of that it contemplates'". In the notes, he offers a disclaimer of sorts, finding the "question of the assent [to religious conviction] or otherwise of the individual Byron . . . irrelevant, as is, in consequence, any ascription of sincerity or insincerity" (p.229, note 37).

The question can be resolved, however, without doing violence to Byron's principles by recognising that the sensation of the mind's expansion is a psychological phenomenon that occurs in the presence of immensity, whether of a natural order or of human achievement. Byron had already experienced in other instances the emotional response to grandeur that resulted in a similar pattern of expression; for example, the

footnote continued.....

which he may draw his grand inspirations.

The four stanzas which follow, describing two works of art Byron saw in the Vatican galleries, reinforce this concept of the godly source of creative man, but at the same time--and all importantly for Byron, affirm his humanness. Laöcoon is ennobled by the very act of his vain struggle, displaying a "Mortal's agony with an Immortal's patience" (clx). The perfection of the Apollo sculpture, blending the magnificence of a god with the highest imaginings of ideal beauty testifies to inspiration that on the one hand transcends mere human capability and on the other glorifies the mind of the artist:

But in his delicate form--a dream of Love,
Shaped by some solitary Nymph, whose breast
Longed for a deathless lover from above,
And maddened in that vision--are exprest
All that ideal Beauty ever blessed
The mind with in its most unearthly mood,
When each conception was a heavenly Guest--
A ray of Immortality--and stood,
Starlike, around, until they gathered to a God!
(clxii)

In the creation of so glorious a work of art, Byron considers man's debt to Prometheus for heavenly fire is

Footnote 78 continued.....

immensity of the Alps sends him searching for images to make their vastness comprehensible: they are "Palaces of Nature" that have "throned Eternity in icy halls"; the Alps also remind him of his littleness, but not without the compensation of growth of spirit:

All that expands the spirit, yet appals,
Gather round these summits, as to show
How Earth may pierce to Heaven, yet leave
vain man below (CHP III, lxii).

In St. Peter's he apparently first submitted the occurrence to an almost clinical analysis.

cancelled, for the statue, "if made / By human hands,
is not of human thought" (clxiii). Thus, in St. Peter's
in Rome, Byron has articulated the true glory of the
human condition, the godlike potential of man
inseparable from the rewards of being human, a discovery
that had begun to impinge on his consciousness in
Switzerland but does not receive full expression until
his Italian tour.

"The Prisoner of Chillon", "Prometheus", and
Manfred, all written during the summer in Switzerland,
when viewed from the Roman achievement, are stages in
Byron's search for a means of accepting the limitations
inherent in being human, fulfilled finally in Rome. Here,
toward the end of Childe Harold IV he frees himself of
the melancholy Harold. Harold "fades into Destruction's
mass" (clxiv) where other concerns of mortality are also
consigned (clxv), leaving Byron "prying into the abyss"
to confront his essential self. For the moment it is
enough to know that although we have been a part of
existence, "never more, / Oh, happier thought! can we
be made the same". Like the prisoner of Chillon, through
long habit Byron had grown accustomed to his dungeon of
dark and gloomy thoughts, but through his pilgrimage he
discovered his individuality, his totality, and, unlike
the prisoner, regains his freedom with a liberating sigh:

It is enough in sooth that once we bore
These fardels of the heart--the heart whose sweat
was gore.(clxvi)

Byron can now embrace with conviction the beliefs he
expressed in the closing lines of "Prometheus". Looking

into the abyss, he reaffirms the heroic nature of man, described a year earlier:

Man is in part divine,
A troubled stream from a pure source;
And Man in portions can foresee
His own funereal destiny;
His wretchedness, and his resistance,
And his sad unallied existence:
To which his Spirit may oppose
Itself--an equal to all woes--
And a firm will, and a deep sense,
Which even in torture can descry
Its own centered recompense,
Triumphant where it does defy
And making Death a Victory. (47-59)

The revision of the third act of Manfred illustrates the Byron/Manfred discovery of this "centered recompense". While the phrase lacks imagistic value, it is rich in its psychological and philosophical connotations that suggest totality and self-sufficiency. All aspects of existence come together around the core that is the individual self to sustain the being and atone for the actions of the self. In the final scene of the revision of Act III, Manfred watches the moon as he awaits his death and recalls that on such a moonlit night he had "stood within the Coliseum's wall, / 'Midst the chief relics of almighty Rome" (III,iv,10-11). On that occasion the moonlight had transformed and restored the "ruinous perfection" of "the gladiators' bloody Circus". It had

cast a wide and tender light,
Which softened down the hoar austerity
Of rugged desolation, and filled up
As 'twere anew, the gaps of centuries;
Leaving that beautiful which still was so,
And making that which was not--till the place
Became religion, and the heart ran o'er
With silent worship of the Great of old,--
The dead, but sceptred, Sovereigns, who still rule
Our spirits from their urns. (III,iv,32-41)

In this experience Manfred finds assurance in the continuity of existence and Byron gained an image to communicate his new sense of the integrity and wholeness of all of life. As an integrated being Manfred can refuse to yield either to the Abbot who offers salvation or the Spirits come to collect his soul, claiming the right "to die as I have lived--alone" (III, iv, 90). In assuming sole responsibility for his past and present actions, Manfred describes his own "concentered recompense":

What I have done is done; I bear within
 A torture which could nothing gain from time:
 The Mind which is Immortal makes itself
 Requital for its good or evil thoughts,--
 Is its own origin of ill and end--
 And in its own place and time; its innate sense,
 When stripped of this mortality, derives
 No colour from the fleeting things without,
 But is absorbed in sufferance or in joy,
 Born from the knowledge of its own desert,
(III, iv, 127-36)

The passage ends in a spirit of defiant individualism with Manfred claiming to be his "own destroyer" and his "own hereafter" (III, iv, 139-140). Manfred in the revision is no longer the self-pitying martyr of the earlier version; his belief that "'tis not so difficult to die" closes the play on a note preserving the daring and courage which characterise the Manfred of the first two acts.

In the final version the images of roundness take on a symbolic quality not present in the earlier version. The broken Coliseum, made whole again by the moonlight and the workings of the imagination, invests the other round images of the final act with significance.

As the Coliseum encircles the whole of life, the good and evil, as well as past and present time, so the sun, to which Manfred bids a long farewell in Scene ii, becomes emblematic of the whole of a man's life, seen to "rise / And shine, and set in glory" (III, ii, 23-24). Equally, the tower, previously an image of the isolation of individualism, now represents the concentricity of Manfred.

With the completion of the last canto of Childe Harold, Byron's own pilgrimage had come to a satisfactory end. Appropriately he exorcises Harold, image of his divided self, and concludes the work with the acknowledgement that "it is fit / The spell should break of this protracted dream" (clxxxv). A sense of the unreality of existence has dominated much of the final canto, beginning with the stanzas on Venice, from his boyhood "a fairy city of the heart" (xviii). Against the landscape of Italy's faded glory, now lying in ruins, Byron wanders as one in reverie, finding on every hand places he had known from books now repeopled through his imagination. Venice particularly stimulates thoughts on the process and power of the imagination. He realises that even though the actual stones of Venice may be obliterated by Time, creations of the imagination endure: "Shylock and the Moor, / And Pierre cannot be swept or worn away" (iv). Life created in the mind is not only more enduring than ordinary life, but the imagination builds a pleasurable place where the tedium of the real world can be avoided. Early in Canto IV Byron makes

this thematic link with the previous canto:

The Beings of the Mind are not of clay:
 Essentially immortal, they create
 And multiply in us a brighter ray
 And more beloved existence: that which *Fate*
 ← Prohibits to dull life in this our state
 Of mortal bondage, by these Spirits supplied,
 First exiles, then replaces what we hate;
 Watering the heart whose early flowers have died,
 And with a fresher growth replenishing the void.
 (v)

But in Canto IV he is more critical and distrustful of the powers of the imagination that deceive and prohibit truth. The imagination renews growth in a barren heart and provides "refuge" from a miserable existence, yet it prevents our facing real things and diminishes our ability to distinguish between fact and fancy (vi). In these early stanzas Byron sets the conflict between imagination and reason, "for waking Reason / Deems such phantasies unsound" (vii). Like Manfred facing death with

a calm upon me--
 Inexplicable stillness! which till now
 Did not belong to what I knew of life (III,i,6-8),

Byron finds his poise restored--"to the mind,/Which is itself, no changes bring surprise" (viii). He has assumed responsibility for the consequences of his actions in that spirit of resolution which brings independence:

I seek no sympathies, nor need--
 The thorns which I have reaped are of the tree
 I planted,--they have torn me,--and I bleed:
 I should have known what fruit would spring from
 such a seed. (x)

Although he experiences momentary lapses when the seductive powers of the imagination tempt him to escape, he resists succumbing to the lure. By the tomb of Cecilia Metella Byron describes the process and purpose of the imagination:

Yet, could I seat me by this ivied stone
 Till I had bodied forth the heated mind,
 Forms from the floating wreck which Ruin
 leaves behind;

And from the planks, far shattered o'er the rocks,
 Built me a little bark of hope, once more
 To battle with the Ocean and the shocks
 Of the loud breakers, and the ceaseless roar
 Which rushes on the solitary shore
 Where all lies foundered that was ever dear:
 But could I gather from the wave-worn store
 Enough for my rude boat,--where should I steer?
 There woos no home, nor hope, nor life, save what
 is here. (civ, cv)

In the last line reason counters imagination, and the rationale and subject matter of Don Juan are eloquently implied in that simple, final sentence.

Byron also deploras the tendency of the imagination to idealise. The mind creates out of "its own desiring phantasy" to produce forms which further corrupt "the unquenched soul--parched--wearied--wrung--and riven" (cxxi). In Byron's view this is the source of the power of art to corrupt:

Nor Worth nor Beauty dwells from out the the mind's
 Ideal shape of such; yet still it binds--
 The fatal spell, and still it draws us on,
 Reaping the whirlwind from the oft-sown winds.(cxxiii)

He would reassert the "right of thought", that "faculty divine" which, though "chained and tortured--cabined, cribbed, confined, / And bred in darkness", is the way to "Truth". Here, Byron says, is "our last and only place / Of refuge" (cxxvii).

The years between 1816 and 1818 stand as the watershed of Byron's poetic development. They encompass a period of major adjustment in his personal life, accompanied by a maturing of his thought and increased depth of feeling. His brief acquaintance with Shelley in

Switzerland no doubt contributed a share to his growth, as is widely claimed by Shelley scholars; but, in the main, time and Byron's own introspective nature, added to his indomitable will, must be awarded most of the credit for his survival and success. Appropriately, the period closes with Byron's discovery of the comic potential of the ottava stanza and the completion of Beppo. It was a fortuitous conjunction of events when Kinnaird brought with him to Venice a copy of Frere's Whistlecraft at the time when Byron had regained his emotional balance and had found delight in his Italian way of life.⁷⁹ Byron's search for a stanza form agreeable to his mobile mind was ended. One of his last letters of 1817, to Kinnaird now back in England, is an index of his newly acquired self-sufficiency, emotional independence, and restored high spirits:

If you see Augusta give my love to her and tell her --that I do not write because I really and truly do not understand one single word of her letters --to answer them is out of the question--I don't say it out of ill nature--but whatever be the subject--there is so much paraphrase--parenthesis--initials--dashes--hints--& what Lord Ogilby calls "Mr. Sterling's damned crinkim crankum" that--Sunburn me! if I know what the meaning or no meaning is--and am obliged to study Armenian as a relief.⁸⁰

This is the voice of the confident Byron that reverberates through the poetry of his mature phase.

79. Hobhouse records in his diary for 21 September 1817, "Went out in gondola with Lord Kinnaird and Lord Byron to the gardens. Lord Kinnaird read to me a new poem of Frere's, excellent and quizzical--no better since the days of Swift". John C. Hobhouse, Recollections of a Long Life, II, 80.

80. MLJ, V, 273-274, November 19, 1817.

CHAPTER VTHE POET AND THE WINDS OF PUBLIC OPINION, 1818-1820

The serious attitude towards poetry as vocation which Byron began to show in his first two years of exile deepened in 1818, 1819, and 1820. His literary production was not steady and in reading his letters we are aware of long periods during which he wrote little. Yet during these years he wrote a remarkable number of poems. In addition to the first five cantos of Don Juan, he wrote Mazeppa and The Prophecy of Dante, translated the first canto of Pulci's Morgante Maggiore, completed Marino Faliero, wrote his Memoirs, and began putting down his thoughts on Pope, first formally expressed in his reply to a review of Don Juan which had appeared in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, August 1819. Byron wrote despite the various distractions that beset him--the irritations of his still unsettled financial affairs back in England, recurrent bouts of poor health as the excesses of his lifestyle inevitably caught up with him, the conduct of various and sundry love affairs that culminated in the very time-consuming attachment to the Countess Guiccioli, and his subsequent involvement in Italian politics as a result of his associations with the Countess's father and brother. One other feature of these years that might have discouraged any ordinary writer was the criticism which Don Juan brought against Byron, not only from the reading public

but, more distressingly from Murray, spokesman for the "back-room Synod", and from those close friends from whom he had expected support.

Increasingly, however, his letters hold statements of firm opinions about poets and poetry. Although he had left England under a cloud that would forever darken any hope of another wild success such as had greeted The Corsair, his former popularity and the approval of the final cantos of Childe Harold and of Beppo endowed Byron with the role of elder statesman in the world of poetry. Murray quite naturally encouraged Byron's comments on literary matters. Supplying Byron with the day's publications--volumes of poetry, novels, and travel accounts, he was anxious to hear the opinions and observations of his own most profitable author. Moreover, Byron's increasing confidence, now in a curious way intensified by the distance between him and the English literary scene, seems to have encouraged his pontification. We must also suspect that when Don Juan had provoked so much unexpected criticism human perversity which Byron possessed in good measure forced him into pronouncements by way of retaliation. Thus, his letters and works of these years are a mine of remarks that reveal his poetics. Appropriately, this three-year period begins with the publication of Beppo, forerunner of his mature and unique style, and closes with the completion of Canto V of Don Juan. In retrospect, the writing of the fifth canto, undertaken in spite of advice against continuing the poem and with no particular prospects of profit,

ought to be viewed as Byron's commitment to the life of a poet. In refusing to give in to adverse opinion and in his insistence that Don Juan was good and would one day be so judged by posterity, Byron essentially liberated himself from the whims of a reading audience and the qualms of fastidious friends. By this act he indicated his intention to carry on as a poet, often in a spirit of moral indignation, to be sure; but this same vengeful mood gave back to Byron the compelling, authoritative voice, and the determination to speak truth for its own sake.

During the first half of 1818 Byron produced no new work. Both Beppo and the fourth canto of Childe Harold had been published (in February and April, respectively) and Byron waited anxiously in Venice for news of how these pieces were received. Since the style of Beppo was a radical departure from the kind of poetry he had formerly given his readers, he was more than a little concerned to have a report on this poem. Insecure as he frequently was in judging his own work, when he had sent Beppo to Murray Byron asked that the poem be printed "alone--without name", owing to its "politics & ferocity". With his usual obsession for correctness, Byron also asked Murray to "get a Scholar to see that the Italian phrases are correctly published" and, mindful of the irritating type-setting errors which customarily marred his first editions, he urged greater care in reading proofs: "your printing by the way always makes me ill with it's eternal blunders, which are incessant".¹

1. MLJ, VI, 7-9, January 19, 23, 27, 1818.

Returning proofs to Murray Byron cries out against "a word left out which spoils an entire line--& drives me crazy".² Obviously unaware that Beppo had already been published the last of February, Byron wrote in early March to Hobhouse about the proofs. His letter reveals his growing irritation with Murray's indolent and lackadaisical ways, a trait to cause more serious trouble as these years pass:

Beppo was full of some gross omissions of words-- which I hope will not go before the public--as it spoils both sense & rhyme--though any body (if in his damned hurry he allowed any one to look at the proofs) might see where they occur what words ought then & there to come in.--Whether the error be of the M.S. or the printer--I know not--but they worry me cursedly with their nonsense at this distance--if other people are as sick of reading my late works as I have been--my Conscience may release M[urray] from his compact.³

Byron's insistence on seeing his works printed as free of errors as possible in a vague way relates to his passion for truth and to his sense of artistic integrity. Careful attention to details in his poetry in order to preserve historical accuracy or the truth of experience could go for naught in the hands of a careless printer. Beyond this Murray seems to have been unusually casual in seeing that the work was set up accurately by his printer. Byron's frequent outbursts throughout the time of his association with Murray as his publisher reflect more than imperious disdain for a mere book-seller. Byron was genuinely impatient with inefficiency

2. MLJ, VI, 15, February 25, 1818.

3. MLJ, VI, 19, March 3, 1818.

in others, and he also knew Murray or Gifford might make slight changes in his manuscripts. In 1818 Murray was especially a source of frustration, both because of his finicky objections to Byron's barely disguised attack on William Sotheby in Beppo and because of his "horrid stillness" on the public response to the poem.⁴ Because Byron thought of Beppo as an "experiment" to be followed, if successful, by "a volume in a year or two" drawn from his familiarity with the Italian way of life and because both "the verse & the passions" he had "still in tolerable vigour", he needed to know how the poem fared in England. Clearly, Byron had not yet thought of Beppo as a fore-runner of Don Juan, but in a moment of good self-criticism he was pleased that the poem showed the public "that I can write cheerfully & repel the charge of monotony & mannerism".⁵

When Murray wanted to drop the Sotheby/Botherby stanzas in future printing, Byron reaffirmed his right to satirise if provocation warranted. He reminded Murray that Sotheby had insulted him in Rome with an anonymous letter and therefore was fair game: "a man may print anonymously--but not write letters so--it is contrary to all the courtesies of life & literature".⁶ In all fairness to Byron, at the same time he recognised Murray's right to give in to outside pressures and discontinue printing

4. MLJ, VI, 46, June 1, 1818.

5. MLJ, VI, 24-5, March 25, 1818.

6. MLJ, VI, 24, March 25, 1818.

the work, but he refused to allow Beppo to be published in a "garbled or mutilated state". So adamant was Byron that he would not "alter or suppress a syllable for any man's pleasure but my own",⁷ that Murray in his reply seems properly humbled. When he at last reported on the success of Beppo, which had sold "six times [as many copies as Whistlecraft] in a sixth of the time", Murray added that "as to my having ventured upon any alterations or omissions, I should as soon have scooped one of my eyes out".

Murray's long over-due report of the good reception of Beppo and, in the same letter, of Childe Harold IV, was not written until mid-June. But clearly Murray did not entirely approve of this new direction. While he heaps praise upon Byron, the undertone of the letter is unmistakably one of disapproval. His attempts to manoeuvre his star author into what he considers a more profitable vein are shamelessly without subtlety. Murray flatters Byron by observing that Frere is at last convinced that Byron is the author of Beppo having had "no conception that you possessed the protean talent of Shakespeare, thus to assume at will so different a character". With little trace of finesse, however, he hastens on to offer Byron a challenge:

I am glad to find you are disposed to pursue this strain, which has occasioned so much delight.ⁱ Do you never think of prose?--though like Lord Hervey, I suspect your thoughts fall so naturally into rhyme that you are obliged to think twice to put them into prose. Yet the specimen of prose, in the dedication to Hobhouse [of Childe Harold IV], is so

7. MLJ, VI, 35, April 23, 1818.

much admired and talked of, that I should much like to surprise the world with a more complete sample,--to be given at first anonymously.

Murray promises to send "at once" the anticipated reviews of the new Childe Harold canto and continues to flatter Byron regarding its general reception. It "has been quoted ten times over", he tells Byron, "in the different scraps which diversity of taste has selected, in the monthly, weekly, and daily journals of the metropolis and country--so that some have selected each part as the best; and, in conclusion, the public will be as eager to receive anything from your pen as ever".⁸

In his next letter Murray is still apologetic for his past negligence and still attempting to nudge Byron towards prose, something closer to Childe Harold than Beppo. Thinking ahead to his November campaign, Murray tries to treat the topic lightly:

May I hope you will favour me with some work of prose. ... Have you not another lively tale like 'Beppo'? or will you not give me some prose in three volumes? --all the adventures that you have undergone, seen, heard of, or imagined, with your reflection on life and manners.⁹

Byron replied that he had "some things in project or preparation...two stories--one serious & one ludicrous (a la Beppo) not yet finished". He also seemed amenable to the idea of a shift to prose and told Murray of his embryonic plans to write his memoirs to be prefixed to the full edition of his works which Murray was planning.¹⁰

8. Samuel Smiles, A Publisher and His Friends: Memoir and Correspondence of the Late John Murray (London: John Murray, 1891), I, 393-394, June 16, 1818.

9. Smiles, I, 396, July 7, 1818.

10. MLJ, VI, 58-59. See also Smiles, I, 394.

In the midst of the fretting over Beppo and Murray's pressing for prose, Byron wrote one of his periodic self-study reports, defining rather precisely how he felt about continuing the life of a poet. His attitude is tentative as he senses the delicate balance between inspiration and public approval. Byron was well aware that his efforts of the past six months had at best been spasmodic and desultory as he awaited news of the fate of his last pieces. Moved by this bit of self-knowledge, Byron makes an honest effort to evaluate his situation as a poet:

I have several things begun--verse and prose--but none in much forwardness.--I have written some six or seven sheets of a life--which I mean to continue--& send you when finished--it may perhaps serve for your projected editions.--If you would tell me exactly--(for I know nothing and have no correspondents except on business) --the state of the reception of our late publications & the feeling upon them--without consulting any delicacies--(I am too seasoned to require them) I should know how and in what manner to proceed.--I should not like to give them too much which may probably have been the case already--but as I tell you I know nothing.--

Rarely, in his letters do we find Byron in this self-pitying, Childe Haroldish mood. Nor does his claim to be immune from criticism ring with conviction. While his intention is to confront his situation head on, his thoughts only turn back on the self-defeating fact that he has not heard whether the public has approved his poetry and therefore cannot write more. As the passage continues, Byron briefly moves outside this vicious circular thinking that paralyzes him only to have his thoughts recoil to his dependency on reader approval:

I once wrote from the fullness of my mind--and the love of fame (not as an end but as a means to obtain that influence over men's minds--which is power in itself & in it's consequences) and now from habit-- & from avarice--so that the effect may be as different as the inspiration; I have the same facility and indeed necessity of composition--to avoid idleness-- (though idleness in a hot country is a pleasure--) but a much greater indifference to what is to become of it--after it has served my immediate purpose.

Byron breaks off his soul-searching with "However I should on no account like to--".¹¹ What is left unsaid is perhaps as important as what has been said. In this bit of unpretentious stocktaking, Byron questions the validity of his present motives for writing. Whereas the desire for fame and the sway that goes with such personal authority had served him in the past, he now wonders whether he can continue to write poetry to satisfy crass motives. He faces also the uncertainty common among maturing Romantic poets who discover a diminishing response to the external world. Byron marks the shifted sources of inspiration: strong passion, "the fullness of my mind", is now opposed to "habit" and "avarice". He asks the quite reasonable question whether out of mundane thoughts he will be able to write poetry that appeals. Although he feels his skills have not diminished and he still looks on poetry as diversion, the reality from which he needs distracting is no longer the nightmare of his own dark thoughts but indolence, a life of no special purpose. Moreover, Byron is aware of his increasing indifference to what happens to his work once it has served the purpose of giving structure to his time. Byron's syntax places the "necessity of composition" in a place of greater

11. MLJ, VI, 61, July 17, 1818.

importance than the pleasure of "idleness in a hot country", which implies that he was using poetry as a means of self-discipline. Yet Byron is shrewd enough to know that merely writing from habit and to escape boredom is ultimately unsatisfactory.

Considering the passage as a whole, we see Byron moving toward an acceptable justification for writing, even though for the time being he is tied to the thought he left dangling at the close of his letter. The end of the sentence, however, can be easily supplied. In spite of his claims to "greater indifference", he would 'bn no account like to" discourage his reading audience. If fame no longer mattered to him (and that he had achieved), Byron still believed that poets without readers made little point, especially in the light of his new view of poetry as money. His letters to Murray, and to Hobhouse and Kinnaid who frequently acted as his agent, emphasise Byron's increasing bloodimindedness, especially when Murray's reluctance to publish Don Juan grew noticeable. Although Byron had not yet come to the stamina of a Shelley who could rationalise that his poetry was important because it would matter to future generations, we see Byron laying the foundation for that time when he no longer cares at all what popular taste demands.

In terms of Byron's poetic theory, the passage belongs in the context of the closer critical examination of the poetic style of the day, announced in the fall of 1817 when he offered Murray a summary of his thoughts on

"poetry in general". Byron had only recently received Moore's long-awaited Lallah Rookh, a poem he had encouraged Moore to publish since the days of their first acquaintance in London. It is evident in his letter to Murray that Byron is disappointed in the poem and he evades giving the critical pronouncements that Murray waits to hear. He has read the poem, he tells Murray, and knows that he "don't like the prose at all-- at all", but he will delay comments on the poetry until he has "mastered it". Lallah Rookh, however, seems unquestionably to have led him to reflections upon the current state of poetry, for in his next sentence Byron outlines the thinking that must have led him to the Beppo experiment and ultimately to the style of Don Juan. The "he" in the first sentence refers to Moore, although Moore is also named in the catalogue of poets:

With regard to poetry in general I am convinced the more I think of it--that he and all of us--Scott--Southey--Wordsworth--Moore--Campbell--I--are all in the wrong-- one as much as another--that we are upon a wrong revolutionary poetical system--or systems--not worth a damn in itself--& from which none but Rogers and Crabbe are free --and that the present & next generations will finally be of this opinion.--I am the more confirmed in this--by having lately gone over some of our Classics--particularly Pope--whom I tried in this way--I took Moore's poems & my own & some others--& went over them side by side with Pope's--and I was really astonished (I ought not to have been so) and mortified--at the ineffable distance in point of sense--harmony--effect--and even Imagination Passion-- & Invention--between the little Queen Anne's Man--& us of the lower Empire--depend upon it [it] is all Horace then, and Claudian now among us--and if I had to begin again-- I would model myself accordingly.¹²

Although it is beyond the scope of this study to discuss the implications in Byron's statement applied to Victorian and twentieth-century poetry, the road that Byron looked

12. MLJ, V, 265, September 15, 1817.

along held the excesses of the worst of Victorian poetry, owed directly to the misunderstanding and misapplication of Romantic principles, which provoked in earnest during the early years of the present century the debate opposing Classicism and Romanticism.

What Crabbe and Rogers most obviously hold in common to exempt them from the conglomeration of poets on the wrong track is their kinship with Pope. Byron admired Rogers for his polished wit and clarity of expression. Some years earlier when he had re-read The Pleasures of Memory, he told Moore, "His elegance is really wonderful--there is no such thing as a vulgar line in his book".¹³ Crabbe, on the other hand, doubtless appealed to Byron for his cynical and sardonic voice, and his efforts to treat the rural folk of his experience without the sentimentality and bathos that at times tripped up Wordsworth. Byron called Crabbe's subject "coarse and impracticable", but he no doubt approved of Crabbe's common-sense and realistic approach to the study of mankind. In his closing thought on the matter, Byron ranks Crabbe above Rogers, "the Grandfather of living Poetry...retired upon half-pay".¹⁴ The "wrong ... poetical system" upon which he found himself and the other poets of the day shares the common ground of poetry of the imagination, written to appeal to the popular taste for sensation and feeling, whether a vicarious fulfillment of the longing to escape offered in the languid and exotic East of Lallah Rookh or the sympathy and admiration aroused

13. MLJ, III, 107, September 5, 1813.

14. MLJ, V, 266, September 15, 1817.

for Wordsworth's imperturbable characters who drew their strength from nature. ^{To Byron's credit he warned of the pitfalls ahead.} The route for poetry lay towards the dangers of expressing emotion for its own sake and towards the poet consuming himself in feeding on his own inner self. But above all, it moved away from broad experience in the real world.

The passage occurs in Byron's poetic development between the time that he had completed the first draft of Childe Harold IV and immediately before he was introduced to Frere's Whistlecraft. In exorcising Harold in Canto IV Byron had, as we have seen, bid farewell to his "child of imagination" who blocked the way towards the real world:

His wanderings done--his visions ebbing fast,
And he himself as nothing:--if he was
Aught but a phantasy, and could be classed
With forms that live and suffer. (clxiv)

Harold is consigned to "Destruction's mass", which must be equated with the deluding powers of the imagination, "Through which all things grow phantoms" (clxv). Harold and the imagination have served their purpose and Byron is grateful for their service but not reluctant to part:

It is enough in sooth that once we bore
These fardels of the heart--the heart whose
sweat was gore. (clxvi)

Byron was therefore ready for discovering the comic potentials of the ottava rima stanza and not unprepared "to begin again" when the model closer to his thinking on the virtues of Pope presented itself.¹⁵ Neither Beppo nor Don Juan appears to owe much to Pope other than belonging to the general mode of satire. But Pope's willingness to

15. See McGann, Don Juan, pp.51-56, for an account of the study Byron put into Italian models and to Pope in connection with Beppo and Don Juan.

speaking out on whatever displeased him and his appeal to reason rather than emotion gave Byron a basis for his social satires. Byron greatly enlarged the world he surveyed and with the abrupt change in the direction of his poetry showed, in Bostetter's opinion, the succeeding generations of Victorians how poetry could serve a useful purpose. "But the way was never followed."¹⁶

Don Juan became the battleground where Byron met Murray and his cohorts to shape his final poetic principles. The poem generated a contest between two obdurate forces, with Murray and his advisors coming to represent for Byron the tastes of the readership at large. As Murray vacillated and dallied over publication, Byron became more determined to see the poem published. Placed as he was on the defensive, yet not unaware of the disadvantages of being out of touch with public taste, Byron was compelled to examine his position as dispassionately as possible and to articulate a dogma which would preserve his integrity as an author. Enlarging upon those principles which we have already noted in his earlier letters and works, all attached in some way to truth (i.e. truth to self, truth to fact, truth to convictions), Byron constructed a philosophy whereby he might continue as a poet to his own satisfaction and by which we must reckon him seriously engaged in the business of poetry.

Just as he had considered Beppo an experiment to try the public taste, so he thought of the first canto of Don Juan as a more advanced experiment. In this case, however, the difference lies in the matter and not the

16. Bostetter, Romantic Ventriloquists, p. 302.

manner. With Beppo Byron tested reaction to a style totally unlike anything he had produced before and response to his basically unflattering views on English society. He had not expected his spirited treatment of domestic immorality to offend his English readers because he so clearly made the point that Beppo was a story of Italian ways. But he could not be certain his kite would fly among readers addicted to his melancholy mood. Except for the lines on Botherby, that "Small 'Triton of the Minnows,' the sublime of Mediocrity" (LXXXVIII), the substance of the poem could not be expected to offend. Byron as narrator of the poem reveals that he has settled into the pleasures of Venice with her agreeable climate, melodic language, and beautiful women, without having forgotten England--"with all thy faults I love thee still" (XLI - XLIX). He quite obviously ranks himself among those poets, "Men of the World, who know the World like Men", as he takes a jab at the "author that's all author--fellows / In foolscap uniforms turned up with ink", those "shreds of paper", the "unquenched snuffings of the midnight taper" (LXXV - LXXVI). In his bid for acceptance in this new guise, Byron confesses that he has "a little turn for Satire", but he has also discovered that growing older "Inclines us more to laugh than scold" (LXXIX).

With Don Juan, however, Byron's anxiety stemmed from the material itself. As soon as he had finished the first canto, and before Murray and the others had ever seen it or pronounced against it, Byron wrote Moore that

he feared the poem was "too free for these very modest days" and that he "would try the experiment anonymously" with the idea of discontinuing it "if it don't take".¹⁷ There can be little question that even before Murray's Synod disapproved Byron knew that the poem, "meant to be a little quietly facetious upon every thing", would provoke a controversy. He refers to the sample stanza sent to Moore while the poem was still in composition as "a brick of my Babel". To Hobhouse also he anticipated Murray's disapproval. When he had entrusted his "Oeuvre of Poeshie" to Lord Lauderdale for delivery to Murray-- the manuscripts of the first canto of Don Juan, Mazeppa, and the "Ode on Venice", he wrote Hobhouse that Don Juan was "as free as La Fontaine--& bitter in politics" and predicted that "the damned Cant and Toryism of the day may make Murray pause". He reassured Hobhouse, however, that the poem was free only in the sense that good literature must be free, that there were "no improper words nor phrases--merely some situations which were taken from life". He urged his friend to see the poem published at a suitable price, if not by Murray, by "any Bookseller who bids best".¹⁸

Even though he expected Murray's objections, he was little prepared for the squeamishness of his friends toward his latest bantling. Finally and reluctantly, out of regard for their judgment, Byron agreed that Don Juan should not be printed, except for fifty copies for private circulation.¹⁹ The last straw apparently was the

17. MLJ, VI, 67-68, September 19, 1818.

18. MLJ, VI, 76-7, November 11, 1818.

19. MLJ, VI, 95, January 25, 1819.

decision of Scrope Davies to take sides with the enemy. On the day following his resigning thoughts of publishing Don Juan for the public, he told Davies of his disappointment in his capitulation:

Yesterday I received through Hobhouse the decision of your Areopagus or Apollophagus--or Phobopagus;--and by the same post I growled back my reluctant acquiescence (for the present) of which I have repented ever since--and it is now twenty & four hours.--What I meant to call was a Jury--(not of Matrons) and not a Coroner's Inquest.--That Hobhouse the politician & Candidate should pause--I marvel not...that Frere the poet and Symponicist [sic] of the Coteries should doubt was natural--but that you a man of the world and a wit... should give into the atrocious cant of the day surprises me.²⁰

When objections were first raised, Byron had written a letter addressed jointly to Kinnaird and Hobhouse, allowing the stanzas to Castlereagh to be omitted from the dedication and the Bob-Bob of the concluding stanza about Southey, because of the anticipated offensiveness of that double entendre. Beyond those changes, Byron had insisted that the poem be published as written: "Don Juan shall be an entire horse or none". Countering the charges of indecency, Byron listed various writers more indecent than he, including Anstey, of the New Bath Guide, Fielding, Smollet, Chaucer, Prior, Voltaire, and Ariosto, and asserted his willingness to take his chance with the poetry:

I will not give way to all the Cant of Christendom--I have been cloyed with applause & sickened with abuse; --at present--I care for little but the Copy --I have imbibed a great love for money--let me have it--if Murray loses this time--he won't the next.... But in no case will I submit to have the poem mutilated.²¹

20. Scrope Davies Papers, Loan 70, British Library Manuscripts Collection. Letter dated January 26, 1819.

21. MLJ, VI, 91, January 19, 1819.

Continued hints from Murray and those presumed friends that the poem would offend public taste irked Byron and made him determined to publish Don Juan after all, anonymously if necessary. Although Southey, with his tales of the Byron-Shelley "League of Incest" in Switzerland, had provoked the "simple, savage verse" of the dedication, Byron at the actual time of publication relented, declining to "be shabby--& attack Southey under Cloud of night".²² He had, however, staged a valiant struggle to prevent his poem being "curtailed and watered". Confused by praise, on the one hand, from members of the select circle among whom Murray had circulated the manuscript and by unending advice, on the other hand, against publication, Byron railed against making "Canticles of my Cantos". For the "cursed puritanical committee", who called the poem immoral, Byron had only contempt, maintaining that Don Juan was "the most moral of poems".²³ Although even Byron's vision did not yet extend to the full appreciation of Don Juan's ultimate moral vision, Byron was insisting that poetry which reflects the world as it is is moral poetry.

Murray's delays in printing the fifty private copies no doubt figured in Byron's decision to publish the poem as a forthright attack on cant. By April he had sent Murray the second canto with the request that the two be published together. Giving Murray permission to publish anonymously or not, Byron offered to provide a preface absolving Murray from any responsibility for the

22. MLJ, VI, 127, May 15, 1819.

23. MLJ, VI, 93, 105, 99, January 19, February 22, April 6, 1819.

poem. To the further efforts from Albemarle Street to divert Byron into a more acceptable strain, Byron asserted his right to write out of his own consciousness and conscience. At their request that he apply himself to a "great work" to be given the public some "seven or eight years" hence, Byron scoffed, "God send us all well this day three months--let alone years" and cited Childe Harold as a work of merit, adding "you have so many 'divine' poems, is it nothing to have written a Human one?" If it was length they wanted, he threatened fifty cantos of Don Juan. Convinced that the best approach was to offer the poem to the public to judge, Byron issued his manifesto to Murray and his committee:

As to the Estimation of the English which you talk of, let them calculate what it is worth--before they insult me with their insolent condescension.--I have not written for their pleasure;--if they are pleased --it is that they chose to be so,--I have never flattered their opinions--nor their pride--nor will I. Neither will I make "Ladies Books"...I have written from the fullness of my mind, from passion--from impulse--from many motives--but not for their "sweet voices".--I know the precise worth of popular applause --for few Scribblers have had more of it--and if I chose to swerve into their paths--I could retain it or resume it--or increase it--but I neither love ye nor fear ye--and though I buy with ye--and sell with ye--and talk with ye--I will neither eat with ye--drink with ye--nor pray with ye.--They made me without my search a species of popular Idol--they--without reason or judgement beyond the caprice of their Good pleasure--threw down the Image from it's pedestal--and it was not broken with the fall--and they would it seems replace it--but they shall not.²⁴

Relying on his knowledge of the English reading audience, outdated though it was, Byron spoke in the voice of the outcast Shylock to insist on his independence from public pressure. He would participate in the ordinary communion

24. MLJ, VI, 105-6, April 6, 1819.

among men but he would not allow an invasion of his private and essential concerns. Only two weeks before the first two cantos of Don Juan were to appear, Byron again found it necessary to bolster Murray's timid spirits. Refusing to remove the offensive attack on Romilly, Byron told Murray, ". . . think you of the sale--and leave me to pluck the Porcupines who may point their quills at you".²⁵

Byron reasserted his headstrong determination again when Murray, who after the publication of Don Juan had retreated to Wimbledon to escape the anticipated barrage, wrote to tell him that the deed was done. Byron promised to defend himself with "the spirit of a bulldog when pinched--or a bull when pinned", boasting to be made of "a happy compound of the united energies of those amiable animals" such as would provide "some good tossing and goring in the course of the controversy". Although understanding Murray's predicament, Byron nevertheless reasserted his refusal to bow to public opinion, apparently considering the popular verse tales of first importance in his own need:

Come what may--I never will flatter the Million's canting in any shape--circumstances may or may not have placed me at times in a situation to lead the public opinion--but the public opinion--never led nor shall lead me.²⁶

Murray's timidity no doubt made Byron bold; but his reply to Hobhouse's letter announcing the publication of Don Juan is quiet and dramatic understatement, yet eloquently reveals Byron's pride in having maintained his integrity:

25. MLJ, VI, 167, June 29, 1819.

26. MLJ, VI, 192, August 1, 1819.

"I have had my own way--in spite of everybody and am satisfied".²⁷ When he comments a few days later on Margharita Cogni's pitiable display of insecurity at a Carnival Ball, noting that "where there is no independence --there can be no real self-respect", Byron states a truth that applies equally to his concept of an author as to the daily sad reminders of the inevitable collapse of Venice.²⁸

Since Murray and Hobhouse both wrote to announce Don Juan's appearance too soon after it was published to be able to gauge public reaction, Byron's only clue to public response to the poem had come from extracts or reviews printed in Galignani's Messenger and these he found not "so fierce" as Murray had predicted. Unable to understand Murray's continued reluctance to accept Don Juan as it was, once more Byron promised "a preface that shall exculpate you and Hobhouse &c completely", but he insisted impatiently on having his own way with the poem:

You are right--Gifford is right--Hobhouse is right--
you are all right--and I am wrong--but do pray let me
have that pleasure.--Cut me up root and branch--
quarter me in the Quarterly...make--if you will--
a spectacle to men and angels--but don't ask me to
alter for I can't--I am obstinate and lazy--and there's
the truth.²⁹

And he took time to answer the objection to the "quick succession of fun and gravity" in Don Juan with examples from ordinary life, the constant antithesis of pleasure and pain in everyday experience.

As Stead has observed, a poet must discover his style alone without consultation with opinion. When he

27. MLJ, VI, 200, August 4, 1819.

28. MLJ, VI, 205, August 9, 1819.

29. MLJ, VI, 205, August 9, 1819.

has set the manner of expressing his particular truth, "an audience can be encouraged to understand it, though never to demand modification".³⁰

When Murray again suggested alterations, propped by Gifford's lament that Don Juan represented "so much beauty so wantonly and perversely disfigured" and a "store of shame and sorrow", Byron made no effort to hide his disgust.³¹ Almost with weariness he explains to Murray his need to be free to write as he pleases. To Murray's question on his plan for "Donny Johnny", Byron replies, "I have no plan--I had no plan--but I had or have materials". He points out, however, that the poem can not thrive in an atmosphere of constant quibbling and threatens that "the poet [will] turn serious again". Further, he concedes that he is willing to abide by the decision of the reading public and, should the public take to the poem, he must continue it in his way. Puzzled by the reproving stance of his intimates, Byron reminds Murray that "the Soul of such writing is it's licence", and his only intention "to giggle and make giggle".³² We should not, however, accept his remark at its face value and read it as a contradiction to his earlier claim that Don Juan was a serious, moral poem. While the phrasing might be expected to soothe Murray, the heart of the meaning expresses the high purpose of comedy to change man through encouraging him to laugh at himself.

30. Stead, New Poetic, p. 14.

31. Smiles, I, 404.

32. MLJ, VI, 207-8, August 12, 1819.

Byron's mood still vacillates between his avowed independence from his reading audience and a practical awareness of an unshakable dependence on public approval. Any news of Don Juan's reception came slowly, and Byron's anxiety about its fate crops up in almost every letter he wrote to his circle of friends during the late summer of 1819. In a letter to Kinnaird primarily concerned with details of some financial difficulties, Byron interjects a despondent note on Don Juan. Because neither of two letters from Murray, one "timid" and the other "in better spirits", had indicated how Don Juan fared, Byron confessed to Kinnaird, "I know where I am--but know not whither I am going--and hardly where I have been", an admission as much in reference to his uncertainty over the poem as to his disturbed state resulting from a temporary hitch in his affair with the Countess Guiccioli.³³ To Hobhouse, a day later, he takes the more positive view that he "never wrote better" and only wishes his readers might display "better taste".³⁴

Byron's agitation, created by his unsettled future as a poet and the difficult adjustment to his "Cisisbean existence", increased during the autumn of 1819, producing "ill health & worse nerves". In a characteristic response to pressure, Byron began Canto III of Don Juan; and Moore, when he visited him in Venice in early October, records a decided improvement in mood. He found Byron "in high spirits and full of his usual

33. MLJ, VI, 210, August 19, 1819.

34. MLJ, VI, 212, August 20, 1819.

frolicsome gaiety", eager to talk about Don Juan, and already well into the third canto.³⁵ By the end of the month Byron had completed more than one hundred stanzas of the new canto that was to become the third and fourth, but admitted that his "astro" was weakened by the reported outcry in England against the first two cantos.³⁶ Despite his bold claims to independence from audience opinion, this canto, which continues the Juan-Blaidée love story introduced in Canto II, is closer than the rest of Don Juan to the old verse tales of his days of fame. Byron makes much of descriptive details of the tropical setting and the conflict between Lambro and the lovers in a manner after his old heart. But agitation is also apparent as Byron has distinct difficulty with tone in a number of places. He seems torn between yielding to popularity and upholding his principles. There is no explanation, nor excuse, for Murray's failure to tell Byron how well Don Juan actually had sold, and we are left to wonder what effect this news might have had both on the quality of the third and fourth cantos and on Byron's mood over the months that followed. Not until the fall of 1821, and then only by chance from a travelling Englishman, did Byron learn that the "sale of the two first Juans had been excessive".³⁷

Knowing Murray's concern for profit as well as reputation, Byron might have interpreted his request for additional cantos of Don Juan as an indication that the

35. Thomas Moore, Memoirs, Journal, and Correspondence, ed. Lord John Russell (London: Longman, 1855), III, 24-25.

36. MLJ, VI, 232, 234, 235.

37. L.B.C., II, 198. See also MLJ, VI, 253, note 3.

first had not failed. Apparently, however, he did not; nor did he ever change his opinion that the portion of the poem written in anxiety was inferior. When Byron obliged Murray's request for two more cantos of Don Juan, he did so by dividing the excessively long third into two, admitting it was "not written 'con amore'"; and the best that he could ever say about it was that it was "very decent--but dull--damned dull".³⁸ Nonetheless, in the spring of 1820 as Murray prepared the new cantos for publication, Byron held to his practice of refusing to alter. He reminded Murray that he had warned him earlier that he "wrote on with no good will. . . not frightened but hurt--by the outcry", and told Murray he could take or leave the new cantos; he would do no altering: "I can neither recast--nor replace. . . . I can't cobble; I must 'either make a spoon or spoil a horn'".³⁹

Cantos III and IV, furbished out of what Byron had originally thought of as a single canto, may be dull, but they are particularly useful for the several rather long passages relating to his poetics. These cantos echo and amplify views already expressed in his letters, prompted by the general assault on the published cantos of Don Juan, and represent Byron's decision to appeal directly to his audience. Perhaps nowhere in his poetry does he say so much related to poetic theory as in these cantos written under the barrage of public criticism. The canto originally contained a substantial number of digressive

38. MLJ, VI, 256, December 10, 1819; VII, 34-35, February 7, 1820.

39. MLJ, VI, 82-83, April 23, 1820.

stanzas expressing his views on poets and poetry and twenty of the thirty-three stanzas which he added in order to make the single canto into two merely amplify his thoughts about poets and poetry already incorporated into the third canto.⁴⁰

The longest digression of the Canto III deals with several topics involving poetic principles and begins with Byron's description of the trimmer-poet, the resident bard called upon to entertain Juan and Haidée (lxxviii-lxxxvi). Byron gives an extended definition of the poet who lacks integrity, a slave to popularity, brought to these straits after experiencing public neglect for "seeming independent in his lays". The portrait is a curious blend of details which indicate Southey as the model, yet potentially applicable in several ways to Byron himself. In altering the line "Their poet a sad Southey" to "sad trimmer", Byron universalised the description; and it can be read as a warning to Murray and to readers in general who would force poets to tailor their verse for popular appeal, "being paid to satirise or flatter". Both direct and indirect references indicate unmistakably that Southey is the object of Byron's scorn: his shift in politics, "anti-jacobin at last . . . preferring pudding to no praise"; his sycophantic lying "with such a fervour of intention-- / There was no doubt he earned his laureate pension"; and one who "always changed as true as any needle; / His Pole Star being one which rather ranges".

40. Steffan, Making of a Masterpiece, I, 63, gives a chart of the additions to Canto III as it became III and IV.

On the other hand, certain details seem more appropriate to Byron with a view to his fears of what he might become if forced to yield to the pressures of his publisher and to readers' tastes. It is Byron who, until he fell into disfavour before leaving England in 1816, was the "favourite of full many a mess" and who had enjoyed the "glorious meed of popular applause". Byron also, not Southey, is the much travelled poet "lifted into high society", who might presume that the "free thoughts" he had acquired in his journeys would be acceptable "in a lonely isle, among friends", and among whom he might feel secure enough to sing again "as he sung in his warm youth". As an antidote to the dissembling of Childe Harold Byron had thought to make his peace with Truth by giving up that posturing to return to the satiric voice which in his earlier days had pleased an audience. The portrait continues with the poet disgustingly facile enough to please on any occasion and reminds us of Byron's scornful boast to Murray that he could "retain . . . or resume . . . or increase" the readers' approval if he "chose to swerve into their paths".

If we accept the trimmer-poet stanzas as Byron's vision of his own future to be expected to result from a weakening of principles, then the lyrical stanzas "The Isle of Greece" which follow are not as incongruous an offering as they have been judged to be. The song laments the loss of an ideal world which nurtured both the manly arts of war and the contemplative

life of a poet. The singer urges the enslaved Greeks to rise up against their oppressors to restore that lost climate agreeable to the nurture of poets. The poet in the song is apologetic for his verse but finds that good poets cannot thrive in unheroic times and would withdraw to "Sunium's marble steep. . . / There, swanlike, [to] sing and die".

Following the song, Byron continues the digression from his narrative to reflect on and to contrast past and present poets (lxxxvii-xcvi) and adds *four new* stanzas (xcvii-c). He praises the feeling of the poet in the preceding lyric because "feeling, in a poet, is the source of others' feeling". But this brief allusion to the poet's ability to effect change Byron quickly undercuts with the reminder that "they are such liars / And take all colours--like the hands of dyers". In the stanzas following Byron continues his dialectical examination of poetry, showing ambivalence toward the power of the printed word:

But words are things, and a small drop of ink,
Falling like dew, upon a thought, produces
That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think.

Moreover, recorded words endure, and from the obscurity of time's decay that reduces "Frail man" to dust, posterity "May turn his name up, as a rare deposit".

Next, Byron muses on the paradox of fame:

'T is something, nothing, words, illusion, wind--
Depending more upon the historian's style
Than on the name a person leaves behind.

Moving this idea into a lighter vein, Byron notes how glory is diminished by the biographer's scramble after

"entertaining facts" and his insistence on truth: Milton, "An independent being in his day-- / Learned, pious, temperate in love and wine", is cut down to human size by the biographer's report that he was "whipped at college--a harsh sire--odd spouse". This is the same sort of truth which has spiced the recorded lives of soldiers and poets through the ages--Shakespeare and Bacon, Titus and Caesar, Burns and Cromwell, and his own, we must infer. Turning to his contemporaries, Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, Byron highlights their antithetical natures, moralists and convicts, whose "loyal treason, renegado rigour / Are good manure for their bare biography". Wordsworth comes in for more specific treatment for his "drowsy, frowzy poem, called the 'Excursion', / Writ in a manner which is my aversion". His objections, as usual, centre on the fact that the poet has built a barrier between himself and his reader; he is dull and unintelligible, suffering from a condition which Byron likens to Joanna Southcote's false pregnancy: "the new births of both their stale Virginities / Have proved but Dropsies, taken for Divinities".

Calling himself back from these "addresses from the throne" to his narrative, Byron merely takes a short breath before digressing further in the added stanzas that explore Wordsworth's trying tediousness. With disgust he sums up the low state to which poetry has fallen in an apostrophe to the spirits of the Augustan luminaries:

"Pedlars", and "Boats", and "Waggon!" Oh, ye shades
 Of Pope and Dryden, are we come to this?
 That trash of such sort not alone evades
 Contempt, but from the bathos' vast abyss
 Floats scumlike uppermost, and these Jack Cades
 Of sense and song above your graves may hiss--
 The "little boatman" and his Peter Bell
 Can sneer at him who drew 'Achitophel'!

In the final stanza of Canto III, added to close the canto, Byron apologises for his own tediousness, a trait he finds "too epic". He shares with the reader his joke of padding one canto in order to divide it into two and is pleased to think even critics will be deceived: they will take their cue from Aristotle's dictum that extra bulk makes the epic more grand (cxi).

The seven stanzas added at the beginning of the fourth canto are a digression on some of the difficulties that beset writers. Maintaining the intimate mood established at the end of Canto III, Byron confesses to his readers, "Nothing so difficult as a beginning / In poesy, unless perhaps the end". He contrasts the young poet's overconfidence which causes his Pegasus "to soar too far" with the humility of the mature poet, who has learned from past experience to "ponder deeply on each past emotion" (i-ii). In the five stanzas which follow, Byron offers a brief but thoughtful analysis of his own writing career in what seems to be, like Wordsworth's Preface to Lyrical Ballads, a conscious effort to gain the reader's understanding for the very different kind of poetry he now writes. He admits that in growing older he finds that his imagination

droops her pinion,
 And the sad truth which hovers o'er my desk
 Turns what was once romantic to burlesque. (iii)

Byron enlarges upon the reasons for his new comic vein (with, incidentally, enough of the old Childe Harold flavour to appeal to those followers) and denies any intention to corrupt, only to amuse the reader:

And if I laugh at any mortal thing,
 'T is that I may not weep; and if I weep,
 'T is that our nature cannot always bring
 Itself to apathy, for we must steep
 Our hearts first in the depths of Lethe's spring,
 Ere what we least wish to behold will sleep....

Some have accused me of a strange design
 Against the creed and morals of the land,
 And trace it in this poem every line:
 I don't pretend that I quite understand
 My own meaning when I would be very fine;
 But the fact is that I have nothing planned,
 Unless it were to be a moment merry--
 A novel word in my vocabulary (iv-v).

Patiently, he explains the tradition back of his new verse form, strange to his English audience, attributing it to Pulci, the Italian Renaissance poet, "who sang when Chivalry was more quixotic". Byron explains that since "True Knights, chaste Dames, huge Giants, Kings despotic" are all, except the last named, obsolete subjects he has chosen "a modern subject as more meet". Declining to judge how well he has succeeded in his new venture, Byron rests his case by pointing out that while certain readers have unfairly read into the poem "what they wished to see", he remains tolerant: "This is a liberal age and thoughts are free" (vi, vii).

Towards the end of the canto Byron again takes up the topic of reader response to the first two cantos of Don Juan. Because these first cantos have been criticised for having "too much truth", he promises to forego a description of Juan's resisting temptation while

chained to the beautiful and provocative female member of the opera troupe. With a good-natured swipe at Murray's hesitancy, Byron confides that

the publisher declares, in sooth,
Through needles' eyes it easier for the camel is
To pass, than those two cantos into families. (xcvii)

In the same spirit he twits the hypocrisy of those readers who accept the "purer page / Of Smollett, Prior, Ariosto, Fielding" and admits there was a time when he would have waged "poetic war", when "all this cant / Would have provoked remarks--which now it shan't" (xcviii).

In the revision he expanded this idea into eight more stanzas, xcix-cvi. Although the desire for fame is still a spur to the creative life, Byron says that he has put away his childish love of a squabble and is now indifferent to judgments against his poetry:

Whether my verse's fame be doomed to cease
While the right hand which wrote it still is able,
Or of some centuries to take a lease,
The grass upon my grave will grow as long,
And sigh to midnight winds, but not to song.
(xcix)

Byron well knows that he lives in a world in which nothing endures "save change", where "great names are nothing more than nominal / And love of Glory's but an airy lust" (c). There are daily reminders, seen in his riding about Ravenna, of the transience of fame in the neglected and desecrated memorial to a warrior and the still revered tomb of Dante, but Byron knows

The time must come, when both alike decayed,
Will sink where lie the songs and wars of earth (civ).

In spite of eventual oblivion, however, Byron affirms the the life of poetry; not only will man's passionate feelings

continue to find relief in poetic expression, but poetry will outlive the transitory fame of the poet to inspire the human mind. In the stanza he also touches on the creative process itself. Like Wordsworth's "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" or his own earlier imagistic explanation to Miss Milbanke, the lava of a volcano, the process is an inevitable and instinctive response to strong feeling. The process is also natural and organic, like a wave which in its breaking is changed into new forms - spray, foam and wavelet:

Yet there still will be bards: though Fame is smoke,
 Its fumes are frankincense to human thought;
 And the unquiet feelings, which first woke
 Song in the world, will seek what then they sought;
 As on the beach the waves at last are broke,
 Thus to their verge the passions brought
 Dash into poetry, which is but Passion,
 Or, at least, were so ere it grew out of fashion. (cvi).

Later in the same year Byron reaffirmed that passions are the stuff of poetry in letters to both Murray and Moore. Taking Murray to task for allowing his "parlour boarders", the "Quartering Reviewers", to deride Gally Knight for "moody passions", Byron asked Murray, "are not the passions the food and fuel of poesy?"⁴¹ Similarly, to Moore he explained his theory: "I verily believe that nor you, nor any man of poetical temperament, can avoid a strong passion of some kind. It is the poetry of life. What should I have known or written, had I been a quiet, mercantile politician, or a lord in waiting? A man must travel, and turmoil, or there is no existence".⁴²

In Canto IV Byron also defined the poet,

41. MLJ, VII, 132, July 17, 1820.

42. MLJ, VII, 170, August 31, 1820.

anticipating some of the ideas expressed to Moore. The stanza follows immediately the stanza quoted above describing how heightened passions "dash into poetry", and Byron's intention is to make the point that censorship by readers thwarts the poet; but in arriving at this statement, he tells us much about his conception of a poet:

If in the course of such a life as was
 At once adventurous and contemplative,
 Men who partake all passions as they pass,
 Acquire the deep and bitter power to give
 Their images again as in a glass,
 And in such colours as they seem to live;
 You may do right forbidding them to show 'em,
 But spoil (I think) a very pretty poem. (cvii)

Byron's view of the poet is mainly conventional, the man of strong feeling who finds an outlet for his thwarted desires or disappointments in poetic expression. Therefore, the poet is a man engaged in a life "at once adventurous and contemplative", one who does not shrink from participation in any of life's experiences. Byron's poet is energetically involved, no "quiet, mercantile politician, nor a lord in waiting", but one who "must travel, and turmoil, or there is no existence". Byron makes no allowance for vicarious experience which may be translated into poetry. In addition, the poet is one who through the course of his life has developed, or perhaps discovered, the ability to communicate feelings and events as faithfully as reflections in a mirror. This is, of course, the neo-classical approach, which places importance on well-defined images, not the shadowy forms of the romantic. Again, Byron takes the traditional view that the process involves power beyond the ordinary,

a gift "deep and bitter", mysterious in its origins and painful to the bearer. Acknowledging the old fears regarding poets that date back at least to Plato's time, Byron sympathises with readers who would restrain their works, but warns that the result may be inferior poetry. In the Preface to Julian and Maddalo Shelley made these observations on the character of the Count, presumably a fair comment on the interplay between Byron's "passionate intensity" and his strength of mind: "His passions and powers are incomparably greater than those of other men, and instead of the latter having been employed in curbing the former, they have mutually lent each other strength."

In the next five stanzas, Byron addresses the Bluestockings, a particular group of poem-spoilers for Byron at the moment. During the fall of 1819 while writing the new Don Juan cantos, Byron had fumed at them in a letter to Hoppner. Commenting on the poor sales of the first cantos, Byron attacks the "bad taste of the times", a phenomenon beyond his understanding. He tells Hoppner also of a further mystifying occurrence: "There has been an eleventh commandment to the women not to read it -- and what is still more extraordinary they seem not to have broken it".⁴³ In the Don Juan stanzas, cviii to cxii, his tone to these "benign Ceruleans of the second sex" is a forced flippancy for it is censorship such as theirs which thwarts poets. Claiming to have "no dislike to learn'd natures / For sometimes such a world of virtues cover", he recalls with spite "one woman of that purple school / The loveliest, chastest, best--but quite a fool".

43. MLJ, VI, 237, October 29, 1819.

These Don Juan stanzas are no more than a token acknowledgement of his annoyance at being rejected by this group of former devotees, but he offers no bargaining or compromise; instead, he dismisses them with a scarcely veiled insult, based on his description of an instrument recently invented to measure "'the intensity of blue': 'Oh, Lady Daphne! let me measure you'". Whether or not Daphne represents a particular Bluestocking of Byron's acquaintance is not known. More than likely Byron refers to the legendary Daphne who was turned into a tree to escape Apollo's love. Such an allusion would apply in Byron's opinion to the Bluestockings as a whole who were often viewed as unnatural of their kind. The intensity of the insult shows how bitterly Byron resented being deserted by this group of supposedly intelligent women readers.

This censoring by the Blues was only one element of the general disapproval of readers in an England now alien to Byron. Having travelled widely in his lifetime and finding a new sense of freedom in the more expansive atmosphere of the continent, Byron seems to have had no appreciation of the narrow insularity of the English reading audience that had failed to keep pace with him. It pleased him to report to Murray that the Paris edition of Don Juan "is read in Switzerland by Clergymen and ladies with considerable approbation".⁴⁴ He had later reported to Murray when an Italian lady, presumably the Countess, had complimented him on Don Juan but with some "due drawbacks". These objections he had dismissed

44. MLJ, VI, 238, November 8, 1819.

as resulting from the truth found in the poem: "the truth is that it is too true - and the women hate every thing which strips off the tinsel of Sentiment--& they are right--or it would rob them of their weapons."⁴⁵

The remaining cantos of Don Juan stand as evidence that Byron did not relinquish his principle of recording truth as he saw it. The poem, as it continues, certainly makes no concessions to the sentiments of women, nor to any other group of readers. From a Turkish harem to an English country house Byron proceeds to poke fun at the pomposity and pretentiousness of human beings. Boyd traces the origins of Don Juan to Byron's conscious rejection of "the romantic search for ideal beauty and ideal love" to embrace the more rational world of the Augustans. Further, she sees the first two cantos of the poem as evidence of Byron's decision "to reform the literary taste of the time in favour of Pope".⁴⁶ Whether or not Byron began Don Juan with so deliberate an aim in mind, Canto I surely began in opposition to the "wrong ... poetical system" in which most poets of the day found themselves; and certainly in Cantos III and IV, he makes a somewhat sustained effort to educate the reader to accept his new style of writing. It seems likely that he labelled these cantos "decent--but dull" because the digressions bordered too heavily on the didactic, too much "system" for his tastes.

Byron's appreciation for Pope was a lifelong

45. MLJ, VII, 202, October 12, 1820.

46. Elizabeth Boyd, Byron's Don Juan (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1945), pp. 9-18 passim.

affair, but the first indication that he planned a campaign to restore Pope's reputation appears in a letter to Murray, in April 1818. Writing to introduce the "principal publisher & bookseller" of Venice to his counterpart in London, Byron mentions that he is sending with Signor Missiaglia a packet of assorted manuscript letters, found in Italy, which Murray might find suitable for a small volume. Among the letters were several written by Lord Hervey and Lady Mary Wortley Montague. The last lines of Byron's letter indicate that he had begun to think seriously of taking up Pope's cause. He tells Murray that should he decide to print the letters,

I thought of a preface--defending Ld. Hervey against Pope's attack--but Pope quoad Pope the poet against the world--in the unjustifiable attempts at depreciation begun by Warton--& carried on to & at this day by the new School of Critics & Scribblers who think themselves poets because they do not write like Pope. I have no patience with such cursed humbug--& bad taste....47

While there is no evidence that anything came of this project, Byron did eventually take up the Pope question, first formally in his reply to Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, written in March 1820 in answer to a review of Don Juan in the August 1819 issue. Although Byron finally decided against publishing the piece, the portion of the reply devoted to Pope provides the nucleus for his later letters in defence of Pope. Informally, in letters to friends and acquaintances Byron began to encourage Pope's reinstatement as the chief of English poets. He was not pleased with Hodgson's poem The Friends, published in 1818, but to Murray he praised

Hodgson for defending Pope

against the bastard Pelicans of the poetical winter day--
who add insult to their Parricide--by sucking the blood
of the parent of English real poetry--poetry without a
fault--and then spurning the bosom which feeds them.⁴⁸

The particular portion of Hodgson's book which must have caught Byron's attention is a note in which Hodgson deplores "those notable discoveries in criticism" of the past two or three decades "which have taught our recent versifiers to undervalue this energetic, melodious, and moral poet".⁴⁹ Hodgson's adjectives are better suited to describe a romantic than a neo-classical poet, though Pope was admired in his age for the musical quality of his verse. Even "energetic" is somewhat startling when applied to Pope. But the three adjectives would appeal to Byron both in application to Pope and to his own poetry as well.

When he wrote the reply to Blackwood's, Byron had quite obviously not submitted his appreciation of Pope to detailed scrutiny nor given serious thought to a defence of Pope. What he will do for Pope is a recurrent theme in his letters, but the idea of challenge has greater appeal than getting down to the task. More than a year passed before Byron wrote to Hodgson and then only at Augusta's urging. When he finally wrote, he told Hodgson of his intention to "take up the Cudgels" against the Scoundrels of Scribblers...trying to run down Pope" and called it "the common concern of all men of common sense, imagination, and a musical ear". He lays the blame for the depreciation of Pope on "Southey and

48. MLJ, VI, 134, May 18, 1819.

49. Francis Hodgson, The Friends (London: John Murray, 1818), p. 181, note 12.

Turdsworth and such renegado rascals with their systems".⁵⁰ Byron's contempt for systems of poetry, reflecting his own scorn for rules, remains unreconciled with his admiration for Pope, a subscriber to the rules of Neo-classical poetry. We must assume that Coleridge is also included among the renegades, since Byron read Coleridge's Biographia Literaria at the same time that he read Frere's Whistlecraft.⁵¹ He does not mention Coleridge's comments on Pope, but when he writes to Hobhouse telling him that in reply to Blackwood's he has "taken up the Pope question (in prose) with a high hand", he reminds Hobhouse of their summer of 1817:

You know how often under the Mira elms, and by the Adriatic on the Lido--we have discussed that question and lamented the villainous Cant which at present would decry him.⁵²

The analysis of contemporary poets placed alongside Pope, reported to Murray in September 1817, occurred at the time that Byron was reading Coleridge's work and may have been suggested to him by a similar experiment that Coleridge conducted in his lectures. Speaking of the debased state of the language of poetry, fallen into mechanical expressions and meaningless poetic clichés, Coleridge explains in a note that while in "original composition" Pope's ordering and selecting of words is "almost faultless", in his translation he relies heavily on "pseudo-poetic diction". Coleridge says that he demonstrated this to his audience by an analysis "sentence by sentence, almost word for word", using a popular passage from Pope's

50. MLJ, VII, 252, December 23, 1820.

51. MLJ, V, 267, October 12, 1817.

52. MLJ, VII, 63, March 29, 1820.

translation of The Iliad, and that he carried out the exercise "much in the same way as has been done in an excellent article on Chalmer's British Poets in the Quarterly Review".⁵³

Byron's defence of Pope in his reply to Blackwood's is on the whole disappointing. By the time he came to try his hand Byron had dissipated his original passion for defending Pope. Though the piece shows flashes of good judgment, it is too much the rejoinder to the reviewer's unfair attack on Byron's personal life under the guise of reviewing Don Juan so that the total impact of Byron's defence is weakened. Stating that the present decline of English poetry results from "that absurd and systematic depreciation of Pope", Byron insists on drawing battle lines with the followers of Pope on one side, Crabbe, Rogers, Gifford, Campbell, and himself, and the new Lake School group on the other--the good guys versus the bad. We have Crabbe, "the first of living poets", and Gifford, "the last of the wholesome satirists", maintaining Popean standards while Wordsworth, "peddling his lyrical ballads and brooding a preface", undermines them. Such extremes of black and white were doomed to fail in convincing others to take up the cause of "the Christianity of English poetry, the poetry of Pope".⁵⁴ In this last high claim Byron was no doubt sincere in his belief that a return to poetry of Pope's style would be the salvation of present poetry, but he leaves the qualities of Pope's poetry which he admires ill-defined.

53. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, p.22, note 1.

54. PLJ, IV, 484-486, Appendix IX.

Achievement in the Pope project was never so great as Byron's original enthusiasm seemed to herald. In sending off to Murray this first prose defence, Byron sounds full of fight and hopes to find like-minded compatriots; "but", he tells Murray, "if not, I'll battle it alone--convinced that it is in the best cause of English literature".⁵⁵ Nearly a year passed before he publicly took up the cause of Pope again in the Bowles letters. Then, because he had specific charges against which he could contend, Byron acquitted himself somewhat better than he was able to do with the scattered shots of his first formal defence.

Meanwhile, we find in his letters increasing indications that he would isolate himself even further from the contemporary English scene. He instructs Murray to send "no more modern poesy . . . neither Mrs. Hewoman's --nor any female or male Tadpole of Poet Turdsworth's-- nor any of his ragamuffins".⁵⁶ When Murray defended Hemans, Byron retorted, "You are taken in by that false stilted trashy style which is a mixture of all the styles of the day--which are all bombastic (I don't except my own-- no one has done more through negligence to corrupt the language) but it is neither English nor poetry".⁵⁷ Gifford's praise of the language of Marino Faliero, "English sterling genuine English", had quite naturally pleased Byron, but had done nothing to dispel his fears that the language of poetry was a part of the larger problem of present-day

55. MLJ, VII, 61, March 29, 1820.

56. MLJ, VII, 158, August 12, 1820.

57. MLJ, VII, 182, September 28, 1820.

poetry, a natural consequence of imitation. He saw poetry weakened by language "soft and pamby":

...what with the Cockneys and the Lakers--and the followers of Scott and Moore and Byron--you are in the very uttermost decline and degradation of Literature. --I can't think of it without all the remorse of a murderer--I wish that Johnson were alive again to crush them.⁵⁸

Earlier, in a letter to Moore, he had objected to Leigh Hunt's abuse of the language: "He believes his trash of vulgar phrases tortured into compound barbarianisms to be old English".⁵⁹ Since Keats in his early work imitates Hunt, it is not surprising that Byron objected also to his "p-iss a bed poetry". When Murray continued to send volumes of contemporary poetry against Byron's orders, he reiterated his request: "Pray send me no more poetry but what is rare and decidedly good.-- -- There is such a trash of Keats and the like upon my tables--that I am ashamed to look at them". Keats remained his primary target of the moment, for Byron found "there is no bearing the drivelling idiotism of the Mankin".⁶⁰ Specific remarks on the language of poetry are rare in Byron's comments on poetry. Those observations which he does make, however, ranging from Wordsworth's unintelligibility to Keats's affectations, indicate Byron's preference for diction that is unpretentious and direct. When Eliot criticises Byron for his failure to add anything to the language of poetry, he is perhaps less than fair in applying twentieth-century

58. MLJ, VII, 175, September 11, 1820.

59. MLJ, VI, 46, June 1, 1818.

60. MLJ, VII, 200-2, October 12, 1820.

standards that expect poetry to express a distillation and concentration of experience through the well-chosen word or image.⁶¹ Byron's purpose, especially in his mature style, was to describe the world of chaos, indecision, paradoxes, multiple and conflicting experience, and uncertainties - a world that can be infinitely talked about from many points of view but never with any positive assurance that we have got it right. Byron's expansive, even rambling style is appropriate to his world-view. No one has matched the conversational charm of Byron's best poetry nor come so close to achieving poetry in the language ordinarily spoken by men.

While Byron waited for Murray to publish Cantos III and IV of Don Juan, he turned to other kinds of literary activity, perhaps hoping to demonstrate the variety of his talents and to discredit his detractors. In the spring he had completed the Prophecy of Dante, which he called "the best thing I ever wrote if it be not unintelligible"⁶² and had translated the first canto of Pulci's Morgante Maggiore. This latter apparently appealed to Byron as a means of familiarising his English readers with the ottava rima stanza while at the same time educating them to greater sophistication. Byron makes the point in the preface that there is no agreement on whether or not Pulci was intentionally satirising religion in the poem. He takes the view that the Italian meant to "ridicule the monastic life", but finds this no

61. T.S. Eliot, "Byron", in English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism, second edition, ed. M.H. Abrams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp.268-269.

62. MLJ, VII, 59, March 23, 1820.

cause to "accuse him of irreligion". Byron no doubt hoped his readers would take the point that he himself should not be judged immoral because of Don Juan and be encouraged to be as broad-minded as Pulci's readers had been.

The Prophecy of Dante is a subjective treatment of the poet in exile, wronged by his countrymen, but one who will be avenged by Time and whose name

May form a monument not all obscure,
 Though such was not my Ambition's end or aim,
 To add to the vain-glorious list of those
 Who dabble in the pettiness of fame,
 And make men's fickle breath the wind that blows
 Their sail and deem it glory to be classed
 With conquerors and Virtue's other foes,
 In bloody chronicles of ages past. (I, 50-58)

Even though denied the privilege of serving the cause of freedom in his native land, the poet is comforted in the knowledge that he will be remembered when the others are forgotten:

I am not of this people, nor this age,
 And yet my harpings will unfold a tale
 Which shall preserve these times when not a page
 Of their perturbed annals could attract
 An eye to gaze upon their civil rage,
 Did not my verse embalm full many an act
 Worthless as they who wrought it.... (I, 143-149)

Byron concludes this canto with the thought that although the poet in isolation sorrows, he retains his integrity, "They made an Exile--not a Slave of me" (I, 178). In the third canto, Byron returns to this theme of the necessity for the poet's independence. Like the trimmer-poet of Don Juan III,

the Bard too near the throne
 Quails from his inspiration, bound to please,--
 How servile is the task to please alone!
 To smooth the verse to suit his Sovereign's ease
 And royal leisure, nor too much prolong

Aught save his eulogy, and find, and seize,
Or force, or forge fit argument of Song! (III, 85-91)

Such a poet "sings, as the Athenian spoke, with pebbles /
In's mouth, lest Truth should stammer through his strain"
(III, 96-7).

In the final canto Byron defines poetry as a transcendent gift held by creators in arts other than literature, by painters, sculptors, and architects, for example. They are men "who never penned / Their inspiration", men who "felt, loved, and died, but would not lend / Their thoughts to meaner beings" (IV, 1-4). In the lines following, Byron claims the high purpose of poetry to benefit man, but sees the poet unappreciated for his sacrifice:

For what is Poesy but to create,
From overfeeling, Good or Ill, and aim
At an external life beyond our fate,
And be the new Prometheus of new men,
Bestowing fire from Heaven, and then, too late,
Finding the pleasure given repaid with pain,
And vultures to the heart of the bestower,
Who, having lavished his high gift in vain,
Lies chained to his lone rock by the seashore?
(IV, 11-19)

In the preface Byron had called this poem "a metrical experiment" because he was pioneering in trying Dante's terza rima; it is obvious, however, that the subject itself appealed as gaining sympathy for himself as a poet. The poem marks an end to Byron's self-conscious pleading with an audience for understanding the problems of a poet. Hereafter, when he discusses style with the reader, as in Don Juan, Byron displays a confidence of direction and a determination to write on whether the reader reads or not.

The opening stanzas of Canto V are a case in point. He begins with a free association of ideas about the harm of amatory verse (i) and seems to be capitulating to the public outcry against the immorality of Don Juan:

I therefore do denounce all amorous writing,
 Except in such a way as not to attract;
 Plain - simple - short, and by no means inviting,
 But with a moral to each error tacked,
 Formed rather for instructing than delighting,
 And with all passions in their turn attacked;
 Now, if my Pegasus should not be shod ill,
 This poem will become a moral model (ii).

The stanzas beyond this, however, follow Juan through the intimacies of his experiences as a slave in the Sultan's harem. Byron resumed Don Juan without encouragement from Murray or friends, in a manner which suggests both defiance and decision. The canto moves with an energy not found in the previous ones. Confident in his style and no longer concerned to wheedle Murray or readers, Byron moves enthusiastically through Canto V. Byron seems to mean to go on with poetry, whether approved of or not, the kind of poetry which satisfied him. His increasing spirit of independence from whatever restraints might block his way is summed up in the *dare* he throws out to the still hesitant Murray. Writing to tell him that he had written and was copying out a fifth canto of Don Juan, Byron leaves Murray with a challenge: "I want to know what the devil you mean to do?"⁶³

63. MLJ, VII, 250, December 14, 1820.

CHAPTER VI

THE POET AND HIS TRUTH, THE CRISES OF 1821

Byron's last years see his poetic theory brought to a remarkably full development. By the time he had set aside his poetic career in 1823, apparently without regret, to engage the remaining year of his life in an heroic action that he had never stopped desiring, Byron had worked through the ordinary problems that beset the poet, as well as the extraordinary problems that were in many ways a Byronic peculiarity. The problems centre of course in what McGann has noted were the "divided aims" that caused the failure of his early works: "He did not want to be a poet, or at least he thought he shouldn't be one; yet he did too, on both counts."¹ In the beginning of what we can identify as his final phase Byron refined and restated the problem. By now he was a poet, however reluctant and tentative that commitment was, but he wanted to be a poet who continued to enjoy the appreciation that he had known through the fame of Childe Harold and the verse tales and he wanted an outlet for his moral vision. Byron was not as yet prepared, as Anne Barton has observed, to rely on "'the Avenger, Time' to vindicate literary works".² Experience had taught him, as he had explained in "Childish Recollections", that posterity is an unreliable

1. McGann, Don Juan, p. 22.

2. Anne Barton, "'A Light to Lesson Ages': Byron's Political Plays", Byron: A Symposium, p. 138.

repository for whatever illusions the present may have of recall from the past to a life in the future. In the last years of his life Byron therefore had to resolve the question of the ultimate value of the poet and poetry.

The way to the final vision, however, is turbulent. The few years left to poetry are times of feverish inactivity as well as activity. The course appears indirect, even haphazard and undirected, as Byron throws his creative energies into a variety of genres-- prose in Detached Thoughts and in literary criticism in his defence of Pope; drama historical, "gay metaphysical", Gothic, and surrealist; narrative romance; and several kinds of satire represented between the extremes of The Blues or The Age of Bronze and the unparalleled Vision of Judgment. But when we follow the seemingly erratic route of Byron's Pegasus, at the end of the journey the pattern asserts itself. As in Childe Harold, these last years are a pilgrimage of self-discovery and reorientation, but undertaken by a personality convinced of the validity of his view of reality and desperately determined to discover the means of expressing it. Byron's final stance is a rich understanding of what it means to be a poet and of the worth of poetry.

The immediately obvious character of Byron's last phase is his growing isolation from the world's currents, in part deliberately cultivated and in part imposed by the conditions of his daily life. Finding himself at odds with publisher, friends, and public, Byron met the reversal with, characteristically, a further

withdrawal into himself to examine and defend, finally and simply to himself, his type of poetry and his purpose as a poet. When he had boldly fired off the fifth canto of Don Juan and asked Murray what he meant to do now, Byron inevitably turned the question on himself and we see him floundering about for an answer in the Ravenna Journal that he began immediately after. Further, Byron's arrangement with the Countess Guiccioli which was little different from marriage tended to isolate him from a social world. From the beginning of his exile he had avoided English society whenever possible and, once away from Venice, he no longer often bothered with Italian society. The reclusive life suited his temperament that required time for reflection and writing, but eventually the demands of life with Teresa frustrated his ambition. Humour and pathos both figure in his account to Murray of the trials he endured while writing Marino Faliero:

I never wrote nor copied an entire Scene of that play --without being obliged to break off--to break a commandment;--to obey a woman's, and to forget God's.--Remember the drain of this upon a Man's heart and brain--to say nothing of his immortal Soul.--Fact I assure you--the Lady always apologized for the interruption--but you know the answer a man must make when and while he can.--It happened to be the only hour I had in the four and twenty for composition or reading and I was obliged to divide even it...3

To a degree, Byron was able to remedy his trapped existence with separate living quarters for the Gambas and Teresa when they moved to Pisa and then Genoa. The Pisan interlude, before Shelley's death and the invasion of the

3. MLJ, VII, 195, October 8, 1820.

Hunts, encouraged rather than thwarted the quiet life. The community of friends who had followed the Shelleys to Pisa in many ways fostered Byron's poetic energies. Byron particularly enjoyed and exploited the opportunity to gather about him the male elements of the group. The attention he gained from Shelley, Williams, Medwin, Trelawny, and later Taaffe, replaced for a few months the approval he missed from England. While they held him in sufficient awe to respect his privacy, they were a handily-available, intelligent, and literary-minded audience. Before achieving this degree of independence from domesticity, however, Byron went through a period of restless introspection and self-study more searching than at any time since his days in Switzerland immediately after his separation and its cataclysmic upheaval to his concept of self.

During 1821 Byron began three journals if we include the brief "Dictionary" begun in May. The extracts which Moore preserved from the diary Byron kept during the first two months of 1821, now usually called the Ravenna Journal, and Detached Thoughts, written between mid-October 1821 and mid-May 1822, allow us to mark Byron's progress towards his last orientation. Detached Thoughts, the more studiously contemplative of the two, as one reading of the title claims, is an attempt to record assorted thoughts in a state of detachment from self. Both, however, are marked by much looking back and some attempts at peering beyond. Aside from nostalgic recollections of former days in England, a particularly prominent feature of Detached

Thoughts--memories of school days and anecdotes ~~of~~ friends and events of his heyday in London society, Byron tries several philosophic questions aimed at justifying his existence. He asks who and what am I, but in larger terms he asks what poets and poetry are worth, whether a lifetime spent at "scribbling" can be reconciled with the facts of the real world.

In the subjective entries of the Ravenna Journal we discover how profoundly Byron was disturbed by his conflicting desires--the need to be recognised for achievement and a sense of futility at trying to satisfy that need through poetry. The dispirited tone that marks much of the diary is set in the first pages with Byron's meditation on "fame" that grows out of his having read an account of a grocer who wrapped a gypsy-murderess's bacon purchase in pages from Richardson's Pamela. From the incident he draws the cynical conclusion that

After all, it is but passing from one counter to another, from the bookseller's to the other tradesman's--grocer or pastry-cook. For my part, I have met with most poetry upon trunks; so that I am apt to consider the trunk-maker as the sexton of authorship.⁴

Byron reaches the nadir of his despair with the approach of his thirty-third birthday. Ever sensitive to anniversaries as occasions requiring an inventory, Byron writes near midnight on the eve of his birthday of "a heaviness of heart at having lived so long, and to so little purpose", finding irredeemably that his regret is not "so much for what I have done, as for what I might

4. MLJ, VIII, 12.

have done".⁵ He closes the day's account with four cheerless lines of verse:

Through life's road so dim and dirty,
I have dragg'd to three-and-thirty.
What have these years left to me?
Nothing--except thirty-three.

For his birthdate itself Byron constructs an even more despairing entry, a bleak tombstone-shaped epitaph for the dead year now buried without hope of resurrection and "Leaving a successor / Inconsolable / for the very loss which / occasioned its / Existence".⁶

The mood and the thought look backward to all the expressions of determination to achieve heard in his most intimate confessions throughout his career. They also look forward to his final birthday poem marking his thirty-sixth year and often considered his crowning lyric. In the last poem, however, affirmation and decision displace despair, self-pitying introspection yields to ancestral example, the poet gives way to the soldier. On the simplest level, the poem stands as a denouement that looks backward to commitments Byron had made as a youth and to the questionings of his adulthood as if to rediscover the pure source of his life's troubled stream. The poems of Byron's final years, as we shall see, repeatedly turn to his earlier themes to affirm his childhood vision. The foundation of his final resolute position lies in one of his earliest poems, "On Leaving Newstead Abbey". On this occasion the fifteen-year old boy took leave of the spirits of his

5. MLJ, VIII, 31-32.

6. MLJ, VIII, 32.

ancestors who dwelt in the Abbey and in the memory of their young descendant even though they had died and were buried and forgotten in places far from home. In leaving the Abbey Byron acknowledges their continuing example to him and pledges his life to upholding the family name. The sentiments of the final stanzas of this poem underlie Byron's thinking in his last birthday poem:

Shades of heroes, farewell! your descendant departing
From the seat of his ancestors, bids you adieu!
Abroad, or at home, your remembrance imparting
New courage, he'll think upon glory and you.

Though a tear dim his eye at this sad separation,
'Tis nature, not fear, that excites his regret;
Far distant he goes, with the same emulation,
The fame of his fathers he ne'er can forget.

That fame and that memory still will he cherish;
He vows that he ne'er will disgrace your renown;
Like you will he live, or like you will he perish;
When decay'd, may he mingle his dust with your own!

The irregular anapests are oddly appropriate to the boyish intensity and determination to model his life on the example of their service to England, recorded in her histories, and strikingly effective when the verse can break free from history, names, and conventional thought: "How you fought! How you died! still her annals can tell!" or in the last two lines of the closing stanza, cited above. Sentimentality is submerged in the authenticity of feeling. The poem records Byron's setting forth in search of a means of bringing additional honour to an already illustrious family name; the pain of parting is not allowed to overshadow the exuberant pleasure he finds in beginning the quest for glory. Not long after, he renewed his

vows in a letter to his mother:

...the way to riches to Greatness lies before me, I can, I will cut myself a path through the world or perish in the attempt. others have begun life with nothing and ended Greatly. And shall I who have a competent if not a large fortune, remain idle? No, I will carve myself the passage to Grandeur, but never with Dishonour. These Madam are my intentions.... 7

The journey from Newstead Abbey to Missolonghi was beset with detours and, in Byron's view, frequent wrong-turnings toward poetry as the way to fame. Though he never lost sight of the desired end, Hamlet-like indecisions separated him from the final fulfillment of his mission. In the 1813-1814 Journal Byron had raised metaphysical questions for which he finds answers in the Detached Thoughts of 1821 and which bear a direct relation to his final poem. On the 27th of November, 1813, he wrote,

My restlessness tells me that I have something within that "passeth show". It is for Him, who made it, to prolong that spark of celestial fire which illuminates, yet burns, this frail tenement; but I see no such horror in a "dreamless sleep", and I have no conception of any existence which duration would not render tiresome. How else "fell the angels", even according to your creed? They were immortal, heavenly, and happy, as their apostate Abdiel is now by his treachery. Time must decide; and eternity won't be the less agreeable or more horrible because one did not expect it. In the mean time, I am grateful for some good, and tolerably patient under certain evils--grace à Dieu et mon bon temperament.⁸

A few weeks later, musing at midnight on the inevitable end of rich and poor, he speculates:

7. MLJ, I, 49, May 1-10, 1804.

8. MLJ, III, 225.

Is there any thing beyond?--who knows? He that can't tell. Who tells that there is? He who don't know. And when shall he know? perhaps, when he don't expect, and, generally when he don't wish it. In this last respect, however, all are not alike; it depends a good deal upon education, --something upon nerves and habits--but most upon digestion.⁹

"On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year" rests on this dialogue between flesh and spirit, begun in the 1813-1814 Journal and taken up again in the Detached Thoughts of 1821. To his realisation that he can conceive of no "existence which duration would not render tiresome", Byron responds that "what is most to be desired is an easy passage out of it". To the more burning question of what is to follow, he answers,

Of the Immortality of the Soul, it appears to me that there can be little doubt, if we attend for a moment to the action of Mind. It is in perpetual activityIt acts also very independent of body: in dreams for instance incoherently and madly, I grant you; but still it is Mind, and much more Mind than when we are awake. Now, that this should not act separately, as well as jointly, who can pronounce? The Stoics, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, call the present state "a Soul which drags a 'Carcass'": a heavy chain, to be sure; but all chains, being material, may be shaken off.¹⁰

What remains for Byron is to free the spirit from the body and exhort it to victory. Thus, the poem stands in relation to the accumulation of Byron's recorded, and unrecorded, thoughts and works as the sculptor's creation, released into new life from the mass of compressed lives in the block of marble.

9. MLJ, III, 244.

10. PLJ, V, 456, 457-458.

'T is time this heart should be unmoved,
 Since others it hath ceased to move:
 Yet though I cannot be beloved,
 Still let me love!

My days are in the yellow leaf;
 The flowers and fruits of Love are gone;
 The worm, the canker, and the grief
 Are mine alone!

The fire that on my bosom preys
 Is lone as some Volcanic isle;
 No torch is kindled at its blaze--
 A funeral pile.

The hope, the fear, the jealous care,
 The exalted portion of the pain
 And power of love, I cannot share,
 But wear the chain.

But 't is not thus--and 't is not here--
 Such thoughts should shake my soul, nor now
 Where Glory decks the hero's bier,
 Or binds his brow.

The Sword, the Banner, and the Field,
 Glory and Greece, around me see!
 The Spartan, borne upon his shield,
 Was not more free.

Awake! (not Greece--she is awake!)
 Awake, my spirit! Think through whom
 Thy life-blood tracks its parent lake,
 And then strike home!

Tread those reviving passions down,
 Unworthy manhood!--unto thee
 Indifferent should the smile or frown
 Of Beauty be.

If thou regret'st thy youth, why live?
 The land of honourable death
 Is here!--up to the Field, and give
 Away thy breath!

Seek out--less often sought than found--
 A soldier's grave, for thee the best;
 Then look around, and choose thy ground,
 And take thy Rest.

His renunciation of the physical and senuous
 was made with the analytical common sense Byron generally
 showed, his ability to look at both sides of a situation.

Man is born passionate of body, but with an innate though secret tendency to the love of Good in his Mainspring of Mind. But God help us all! It is at present a sad jar of atoms.¹¹

If the life reflecting the pleasures of the body no longer pleased himself or others, he need no longer "wear the chain" which bound his spirit to his carcass. Convinced that the mind lives on in a universe where "Matter is eternal" and reasoning that the mind should "act upon the Universe . . . as portions of it act upon and with the congregated dust called Mankind",¹² Byron urges his newly released spirit to awaken and seek the glory pledged years before to the dust of his ancestors. Byron embraces the prospect with the same buoyancy that characterised his leaving England to find a "world elsewhere":

I sometimes think that Man may be the relic of some higher material being, wrecked in a former world, and degenerated in the hardships and struggle through Chaos into Conformity....But even then this higher pre-Adamite supposititious Creation must have had an Origin and a Creator; for a Creator is a more natural imagination than a fortuitous concourse of atoms. All things remount to a fountain, though they may flow to an Ocean.¹³

Thus, the thought of death held no fear for him. He could go to meet it energetically and generously and heroically-- "up to the Field, and give / Away thy breath!" Like Manfred, Byron in this final poem sees himself as master of himself to the end. The spirit "tracks its parent lake" in order to "strike home".

The fear of not being master and controller of his destiny haunted Byron in the last years of his life.

11. PLJ, V, 457.

12. PLJ, V, 458.

13. PLJ, V, 459.

The Ravenna Journal shows Byron restless and despondent, with an abnormally clinical interest in his moodiness. Well into January he even looked back to the previous year and reckoned it to have been unsatisfactory on balance: "The year 1820 was not a fortunate one for the individual me...." He toted up the losses--a law suit and an investment scheme, to which he added the unexpected responsibility which the Countess Guiccioli's separation had forced on him. Attempting to restore good humour, he listed "other petty vexations"--

overturns in carriages--the murder of people before one's door, and dying in one's beds--the cramp in swimming--colics--indigestions and bilious attacks, &c. &c. &c.¹⁴

To the list he might have added several more annoyances. His understanding of England and the English had deteriorated to a perplexity with the outcry against Don Juan; his old friend Hobhouse had taken unwarranted offence over the playfully mocking ballad he had sent to Murray, honouring "Hobby O's" stay in Newgate; and the trial of Queen *Caroline*, which Byron considered an unnecessarily degrading business, had preoccupied his thoughts. Even with his poetry the year stood as a reminder of frustrated days. Except for a canto of Don Juan, divided and patched to make two, and Marino Faliero, Byron had spent the little time he devoted to poetry to finishing up work begun earlier--the translation from Pulci and The Prophecy of Dante. His involvement with the Carbonari to aid the Romagnulese in their revolt against the Austrians must have seemed to him an oasis in this otherwise sterile year. Though he had no

14. MLJ, VIII, 34.

sanguine hopes that the uprising would succeed, he was quite excited to be involved in the action for freedom. This one bright spot, however, was also marred when the plans for an autumn insurrection had to be aborted.

It was with this disappointment fresh upon him that Byron had begun the fifth canto of Don Juan, perhaps to sublimate this further reversal of his expectations, but more likely with a determination to resume control of his drifting existence. Certainly, he plunges into the narrative with a vigour noticeably absent from the third and fourth cantos. Without slowing the pace, through the dialogue of Juan and Johnson, Byron concocts at length a philosophy for sagging spirits.

Leaving aside the first four stanzas, which he added in the revision, we see Byron at his story-telling best as he picks up the narrative thread. Moving from a panoramic view of the scene where "The wind swept down the Euxine, and the wave/Broke foaming o'er the blue Symplegades", he sets the time as "a raw day of Autumn's bleak beginning, /When nights are equal but not so the days", and then focuses on "A crowd of shivering slaves of every nation", who stand in the market-place apprehensively awaiting their fates (v, vi, vii). Juan, handsome and somewhat splendidly dressed, stands out from the crowd, and, next to him, a man more mature, one "stout and hale", who had "an English look" and an air of "sang froid, that greater/Could scarce be shown by a mere spectator"(xi). Fortunate for the juvenile Juan now "weighed down by a doom which had/O'erthrown even men" (xii) and fortunate

for Byron to find so handy a mouthpiece to speak the truisms intended to bolster the courage of untried youth and to console his own jaded experience. Johnson reassures Byron as well as Juan that fortune is indeed best contemplated in the image of the wheel:

Fortune has played you here a pretty freak,
But that's her way with all men, till they're tried;
But never mind--she'll turn, perhaps, next week;
She has served me also much the same as you,
Except that I have found it nothing new. (xiv)

The stranger has learned, and would pass on to Juan, the lesson of acceptance and patience to wait without chafing for the inevitable turn of the wheel:

But droop not: Fortune at your time of life,
Although a female moderately fickle,
Will hardly leave you (as she's not your wife)
For any length of days in such a pickle.
To strive, too, with our fate were such a strife
As if the corn-sheaf could oppose the sickle:
Men are the sport of circumstances, when
The circumstances seem the sport of men. (xvii)

The older man in his fatalistic philosophy, Juan learns, is not merely callous but pragmatic and self-serving. Juan has lost Haidée, but his new friend has loved and lost three women; yet he can still "take things coolly" (xxi). His solution is to look undespairingly for whatever good can be found in apparent evil. Summarising his understanding of the ages of man, Johnson instructs Juan in what he must expect:

All, when Life is new,
Commence with feelings warm, and prospects high;
But Time strips our illusions of their hue,
And one by one in turn, some grand mistake
Casts off its bright skin yearly like the snake.

'T is true, it gets another bright and fresh,
Or fresher, brighter; but the year gone through,
This skin must go the way, too, of all flesh,
Or sometimes only wear a week or two;--

Love's the first net which spreads its deadly mesh;
 Ambition, Avarice, Vengeance, Glory, glue
 The glittering lime-twigs of our latter days,
 While still we flutter on for pence or praise.
 (xxi-xxii)

When Juan wonders how anyone can take comfort in such a
 snared-bird existence, his mentor suggests what must
 have struck even Juan as small compensation:

...you will allow
 By setting things in their right point of view,
 Knowledge, at least, is gained; for instance, now,
 We know what slavery is, and our disasters
 May teach us better to behave when masters. (xxiii)

Nor could he have taken great comfort in Johnson's final
 bit of shared wisdom that slavery, their "present state",
 is "all men's lot":

Most men are slaves, none more so than the great,
 To their own whims and passions, and what not.
 Society itself, which should create
 Kindness, destroys what little we had got:
 To feel for none is the true social art
 Of the world's Stoics --men without a heart. (xxv)

Such a philosophy of heartlessness which the experienced man
 offered was temporarily necessary to Juan's survival,
 jerking him from that gloom and self-pity which threatened
 to destroy his natural ebullience. At the same time it is
 a turning point for Juan. Johnson's cynicism forces him
 to examine his life totally gone out of his control and
 to begin to assert his attitudes. His memory of Haidée
 supports him in his decision to resist, at least temporarily,
 Gulbeyaz's demands for love (V,cxxv, cxxvi, cxxvii).
 Although under pressure of the Sultana's tears "Juan's
 virtue ebbed" (V,cxiii), the momentary resistance to
 victimisation marks a change in Juan. Later, he gives in
 to the Empress Catherine initially out of vanity (IX,lxviii),
 but, in time, "In Royalty's vast arms he sighed for beauty"

(X, xxxvii) and was released from that affair. Once at Norman Abbey where he is prey to three distinctive types of women, Juan's feelings are most stirred by the Haidée-like Aurora Raby "who looked as if she sat by Eden's door" (XV, xlvi). Johnson's advice to Juan reflects the same stoic-like endurance and indifference to pain which Byron practised during the latter months of 1820. Having determined to continue Don Juan in spite of public opinion and Murray's shuffling, he completed the canto, copied it out, and posted it to Kinnaird the end of December.

Meanwhile, Byron also spent some time "setting things in their right point of view" for himself. As the annual snake of Time was about to cast off the "grand mistake" of 1820, he wrote a Christmas Day letter to Moore, brimming with optimistic plans, yet another of his several schemes designed to get the two of them working jointly at their writing. Although he calls it a "hint" which Moore should make into a "plan", Byron explains an already rather elaborate conception of the project. He proposes that they each return from their separate exiles to London in the spring and set up a literary weekly:

There must always be in it a piece of poesy from one or other of us two, leaving room, however, for such dilettanti rhymers as may be deemed worthy of appearing in the same column: but this must be a sine qua non; and also as much prose as we can compass. We will...give the age some new lights upon policy, poesy, biography, criticism, morality, theology, and all other ism, ality, and ology whatsoever.¹⁵

15. MLJ , VII, 254.

Admittedly, at the core Byron was concerned about Moore's debts from the Bermuda affair and no doubt saw the venture as a way of resolving his friend's financial crisis. Beyond this, however, the thought of returning to England to work with Moore in upgrading the taste of the reading public appealed to him on its own merit. Apart from the pleasure in "composing, supposing, inspecting, and supping together", Byron felt the project, weighted in favour of serious matters, would prove writing to be a respectable, that is to say, an acceptable way of life to one who preferred action. The choice of titles Byron proposed suggests the revolutionary spirit which Byron hoped to infuse into the weekly--the "Tenda Rossa", "Gli", or "I Carbonari", "or any other name full of 'pastime and prodigality', which you may prefer".¹⁶

In spite of the seeming resolve implied in resuming Don Juan and his exuberant promise to Moore that he would "begin to lay in a small literary capital of composition" in anticipation of a favourable answer to his proposal, Byron could not shake his despondent mood as 1821 began. Moore had answered Byron's letter both promptly and positively. He told Byron that by coincidence he and Lord John Russell had been concocting a similar scheme for a literary periodical and had hoped to interest Byron in their plan. Moore, in recommending Russell as a "useful and active ally", contrasted his own attitude toward writing--basically a chore except "for the imagining, the shadowing out of the future work", which he found "a delicious fool's paradise", with Russell's unbelievable

16. MLJ , VII, 255.

"pleasure in writing".¹⁷

Byron's response tells us something of his view of the creative act at this stage. He agreed with Moore that the writing process itself was an agony which, at the same time, was like a physical function that must be yielded to:

I feel exactly as you do about our "art", but it comes over me in a kind of rage every now and then, like ****, and then, if I don't write to empty my mind, I go mad. As to that regular uninterpreted¹⁸ love of writing which you describe in your friend, I do not understand it. I feel it as a torture, which I must get rid of, but never as a pleasure. On the contrary, I think composition a great pain.¹⁹

In his explanation of his inspiration for poetry Byron reverts to an earlier stage in his development, characteristic of all periods of extreme stress in his life. While he does not return in his description to the earliest passive stage of poetry as lava overflowing from the volcano, he does return under pressure to the subsequent state in which "convulsions end with me in rhyme", a process carried out through a conscious and active effort, if we assume that in times of emotional upheaval Byron turned to poetry either as exorcism or as a deliberate ordering of reality. Later, under the strain of Allegra's death, he told Murray that the "event has driven me into some attempts at Composition, to hold off reality",²⁰ again calling poetry an anodyne for physical discomfort,

17. PLJ, V, 214-15, note 2.

18. This appears to be an error. PLJ, V, 215, gives uninterrupted, which accords with regular and with the general sense of the passage.

19. MLJ, VIII, 55, January 2, 1821.

20. PLJ, VI, 62, May 16, 1822.

but in practice seeking the reality afforded by the life of the imagination.

Under the ordinary circumstances, however, in his last years Byron prefers to think of the poetic process as stemming from habit primarily, but benefiting from aroused feelings. When Moore had expressed surprise that Byron could write The Vision of Judgment while in a depressed mood, Byron answered impatiently and not without surprise at so naive a statement from a fellow poet: "A man's poetry is a distinct faculty, or soul, and has no more to do with the every-day individual than the Inspiration with the Pythoness when removed from her tripod."²¹ From Shelley also he expected an understanding that writing poetry required the impulse of some mysterious spirit which fires imagination. In response to his appreciation of the "poetical parts" of the first two cantos of Don Juan and his flattering insistence that Byron now begin his great work, as he was "at the age when those eternal poets . . . have ever begun their supreme poems",²² Byron replied that both the "inclination" and the "power" were diminishing. He attributes the loss to the fact that as he grows older, "the indifference--not to life, for we love it by instinct--but to the stimuli of life, increases".²³ To non-poets Kinnaird and John Hunt, however, Byron stressed habit as the motivation for his poetry. Writing to Kinnaird in 1822, who had advised Byron to give up

21. PLJ, V, 479, November 16, 1821.

22. LBC, II, 169.

23. MLJ, VIII, 104, April 26, 1821.

publishing since no satisfactory publisher could be found, he vows to continue writing and publishing "till I have run my vein dry. . . .because it is an occupation of mind, like play, or any other stimulus".²⁴ Again, in the following spring, in a letter to John Hunt, commenting on the problems with The Liberal, which Byron thought might be solved if he withdrew his open support of the venture, Byron promises to give "mature consideration" before quitting his contributions, but he hastens to explain that the failure of his recent works with the English reader has not lessened his desire to write:

...writing and composition are habits of my mind, with which Success and Publication are objects of remoter reference--not causes but effects, like those of any other pursuit. I have had enough both of praise and abuse to deprive them of their novelty, but I continue to compose for the same reason that I ride, or read, or bathe, or travel--it is a habit.²⁵

There is a self-protective facet in Byron's reluctance to name the process more than habit. Byron preferred to maintain the pose that he wrote only for his own amusement and to entertain those who might be interested. When the Italian uprising replanned for the spring of 1821 had also collapsed, he accepted Moore's sympathy but claimed no loss of "feelings of indignation against tyranny triumphant". He changes the subject to a more cheerful topic:

And now let us be literary;--a sad falling off, but it is always a consolation. If "Othello's occupation be gone", let us take to the next best; and, if we cannot contribute to make mankind more free and wise, we may amuse ourselves and those who like it.²⁶

24. PLJ, VI, 24, February 25, 1822.

25. PLJ, VI, 173, May 17, 1823.

26. MLJ, VIII, 104-105, April 28, 1821.

The passage acknowledges the dual concerns of literature to instruct and delight, but Byron does not confide in Moore the emphasis he is beginning to place on the moral value of literature. Indeed, to admit it even to himself would imply a "falling off" in one who so strongly favoured openly and privately a life of action. Yet the works of his last years tend increasingly toward moral and ethical considerations in a way that cannot be claimed for the satires of his early career. We must conclude therefore that, apart from his disappointment in Italian politics, Byron's gloom and frustration in the first months of 1821 originates out of the upheaval to his spirit in coming to terms with this new direction. We cannot entirely agree with Iris Origo that when Byron, in the Ravenna Journal, had deplored his lack of achievement in his thirty three years that "it was not of literary achievement that he was thinking".²⁷ Both aspects of his life must have been in his thoughts. The Ravenna Journal is the painful record of a crisis and stands in one sense as a palinode to much that had made up Byron's life before now and to attitudes which he had stoutly and publicly defended.

Composition remained a great pain to the end of his life, but not writing was perhaps more agonising to him. The young Count Gamba recalls that Byron "often felt the want of some other occupation than that of writing; and frequently said, that the public must be tired of his compositions, and that he was certainly more so".²⁸ On the

27. Iris Origo, The Last Attachment (London: Johnathan Cape & John Murray, 1949), p. 18.

28. Peter Gamba, A Narrative of Lord Byron's Last Journey to Greece (London: John Murray, 1825), p. 3.

other hand, he talked frequently while in Greece of plans for continuing Don Juan. And when in December 1823 he resumed the journal he kept sporadically in Greece, he wonders why he had neglected the journal and, in fact, why he now takes it up again. Had Byron pursued his analytical mood, he would have doubtless concluded that the pleasure he took from writing outweighed the pain:

I know not why I resume it even now, except that, standing at the window of my apartment in this beautiful village, the calm though cool serenity of a beautiful and transparent Moonlight, showing the Islands, the Mountains, the Sea, with a distant outline of the Morea traced between the double Azure of the waves and skies, has quieted me enough to be able to write, which (however difficult it may seem for one who has written so much publicly to refrain) is, and always has been, to me a task and a painful one. I could summon testimonies, were it necessary; but my hand-writing is sufficient. It is that of one who thinks much, rapidly, perhaps deeply, but rarely with pleasure.²⁹

The Ravenna Journal gives us several glimpses of the pain of not writing. He began Sardanapalus in the middle of January, but at the end of the month he noted in his journal that for several days he had "not written any thing except a few answers to letters".³⁰ The condition absorbs his attention for the next few weeks. He attributes his inability to "settle down to the desk for the higher kinds of composition" to his anticipation of the Italian revolt. To Byron this was preferable to believing that he suffered from sheer laziness, as he recalled that Rochefoucault had said that "'laziness often masters them all'--speaking of the passions". Byron returns to the topic in a midnight

29. PLJ, VI, 249.

30. MLJ, VIII, 41.

entry recording his opinion that Grimm is "an excellent critic and literary historian" and he is pleased to apply to himself Grimm's observation that a creative person must have "une ame qui se tourmente, un esprit violent":

How far this may be true, I know not; but if it were, I should be a poet "per excellenza"; for I have always had "une ame", which not only tormented itself but every body else in contact with it; and an "esprit violent", which has almost left me without any "esprit" at all. As to defining what a poet should be, it is not worth while, for what are they worth? what have they done?³¹

Denying any worth to poets does not, however, put his mind at rest. Two days later he again speculates on his growing indolence and "a disrelish more powerful than indifference".³² Then, after a week's interlude during which he wrote his first letter on the Pope-Bowles question, he returned to recording his inactivity:

". . . . have written nothing since the completion of the letter on the Pope controversy"; "Within these few days I have read but not written"; "Almost ditto with yesterday--rode, &c.--visited--wrote nothing--read Roman History"; "Came home--my head aches--plenty of news, but too tiresome to set down. I have neither read nor written, nor thought, but led a purely animal life all day. I mean to try to write a page or two before I go to bed." The last entry of the journal follows his realisation that not writing and thinking is giving in to an animal existence. The mood shows a recovering of equanimity as he notes that he composed another stanza for the fifth canto of Don Juan,

31. MLJ, VIII, 41.

32. MLJ, VIII, 42.

and on the previous day had written two notes on the "'Bowles-Pope' controversy and sent them off to Murray".³³

While Byron continues to profess indifference to being a poet, he demonstrates that he is driven to continuing as a poet; but there is always the proviso that he will join in some actual struggle for freedom should the opportunity occur. He accepts the fact that he must write out of long habit and, until he leaves for Greece, dramas, Don Juan cantos, and other poems flow from his pen in an uninterrupted stream. This tacit agreement between his conflicting ambitions, however, does not eliminate the tension. His writing may become an instrument for improving humankind, but he never relinquishes his dream of the soldier's life.

In taking up the quarrel with Bowles whether nature is more poetical than art, Byron produces his first sustained prose piece of literary theory. On the whole, it is an improvement over his earlier, but as yet unpublished, emotional outburst in defence of Pope, written the previous year. Although decidedly more objective in handling the question on this occasion, Byron still makes critical points which frequently show their origins in his strong identification with Pope's personal problems-- his physical disfigurement and his waspish contentions with critics and readers. When his major points are sifted out, the letters in a very real way are Byron's defence of himself and the seeds that will grow into his final understanding of how to make his

33. MLJ , VIII, 49-50.

mode uniquely his own. Early in the argument Byron wins the edge over Bowles by pointing out his shortcomings as editor of Pope's works. He finds intolerable Bowles's obvious prejudice against Pope as a person which results in a one-sided biographical sketch. Byron finds the allusions to Pope's disorderly private life uncalled for and unfounded, since the information is based on supposition and second-hand report and, in the final analysis, is irrelevant to any appreciation of Pope's work. He argues rationally, and from his own bitter experience, that judgment of a man's work ought not to be biased by considerations of his personal life. Byron takes Bowles's treatment of Pope as evidence of that "'primum mobile' of England . . . cant; cant political, cant poetical, cant religious, cant moral", a position arbitrary as well as hypocritical.³⁴

Byron also attacks Bowles for his arrogance in pointing out to Campbell, who had defended Pope in his Specimens of British Poets, his violation of the "invariable principles of poetry". He asks, "What is there of human, be it poetry, philosophy, wit, wisdom, science, power, glory, mind, matter, life, or death, which is invariable?" (V, 543) Having stated his own characteristic position against rigidity and system, Byron claims to leave further defence to Campbell's capable hands in order to take up a different aesthetic question; yet his reaction to the idea of "invariable principles" in poetry understandably colours his discussion.

What interested Byron most in Bowles's letter

34. PLJ, V, 540-542. In the discussion of the Pope-Bowles letters, subsequent references are given in parentheses in the text.

was the notion that good poetry owes its appeal more to images of the sublime or beautiful in nature than those drawn from art, and he concentrates the main thrust of his attack on this point. It is Byron's opportunity to assert in prose as he commonly does in poetry his belief in the spirit of man, developing his argument to demonstrate that the appeal of nature derives from evidences of man that it contains, that natural scenes are not in themselves poetical, but rely for their poetical qualities upon man-made artifacts placed there and from the shaping spirit in the mind of the artist which transforms nature into art (V,543-547). As he had done in The Prophecy of Dante, Byron expands the definition of the poet to include creative genius in the arts other than poetry and finds that in all instances art is an improvement upon nature. To Bowles's claim that the pyramids would lose their appeal if moved from the deserts of Egypt to Lincoln's Inn Fields, Byron answers that the deserts without the pyramids would be nothing. For Byron the "celebrated spots of earth" derive their poetical qualities from the record they bear of man's achievement and historical associations attached to them. The natural scenery of Greece is made more poetical because of the ruined columns and temples which testify to man's spirit; the canals of Venice would be as ordinary as Paddington Canal except for the history associated with them; and Mont Blanc, though an inspiring work of nature, is no more poetical than the great works of man, which are "direct manifestations of the mind, and presuppose poetry

in their very conception" (V, 547-548).

Byron singles out sculpture, landscape painting, and portrait painting from which to draw conclusions about the creative process, applicable to the poet. He believes the work of the sculptor to be inherently superior to nature because it is an idealising of the subject, achieved by the selection of features from various models in order to "heighten nature into heroic beauty" (V, 547-548). While Byron is not here displaying original thinking but suggests the familiar view of the creative process as a selection of parts to be integrated into a whole greater than the sum of the parts, it is again testimony to the mind of man, capable of envisioning and seeking after the Ideal. Byron brings Canova into his discussion as an example of the sculptor who "takes a limb from one, a hand from another, a feature from a third" in order to create an original work (V, 550). In an unpublished lyric of 1816 written after he had first seen Canova's bust of Helen at the home of the Countess Albrizzi in Venice, Byron described the process not as imitative but as an out-flowing of feeling from within the artist:

In this beloved marble view,
 Above the works and thoughts of Man,
 What Nature could but would not do,
 And Beauty and Canova can!
 Beyond Imagination's power,
 Beyond the Bard's defeated art,
 With Immortality her dower,
 Behold the Helen of the heart.

In creating the sculpture, the artist has not merely copied a copy of the idea of beauty, but in his conception has participated in the ideal. His work is no Platonic

reflection of the real; but he has surpassed nature and the limits of words to produce from his response to experience a view of Helen, which speaks in turn to the deepest feelings of the viewer. The statue has the immortality of poetic truth, because the artist has participated in divine conception.

Byron finds similarly that the landscape painter and the portrait painter improve upon nature. Their principles require an altering of nature through selecting a point of view, the degree and angle of light, and those details to receive emphasis. Among these artists Byron includes the poet almost as an after-thought: "Nature, exactly, simply, barely, Nature, will make no great artist of any kind, and least of all a poet--the most artificial, perhaps, of all artists in his very essence" (V, 549-550). Yet Byron is including the poet among artists who transform the truth of nature into a higher truth through a selection of the diverse natural and non-natural elements of experience. The method requires the active involvement of the mind of the artist-poet in ordering the materials of his experience in such a way that they add up to his individual conception of reality or truth.

Byron turns for an example to Falconer's Shipwreck to show how the poet succeeds when he uses his materials honestly, but mars his poem when he ventures beyond the truth of his experience. The "infinite superiority" of Falconer's poem over factual accounts of shipwrecks, Byron finds, is due to "the application of

the terms of his art; in a poet-sailor's description of the sailor's fate". It is Falconer's experience as a sailor, together with his poetic ability, which give what he calls "strength" and "reality" to the poem. On the other hand, the poem is weakened by Falconer's digression on ancient Greece, because he has violated the terms of his art (V, 551). Byron had no high regard for invention since in his view it is necessarily fiction; and, as he points out a few pages later, "an Irish peasant with a little whisky in his head will imagine and invent more than would furnish forth a modern poem" (V, 554).

Although Byron shifted the meaning of "art" in his discussion of the Shipwreck, he returns to art as a man-made construction as he sums up this portion of his answer to Bowles. In an image unfailingly clear and cutting, and one which must have amused Byron to think of, he reduces to the ridiculous the argument that nature is more poetical than art. To Bowles's insistence that the poetic qualities of a ship depend on the wind which puffs its sails, Byron asks, "Why is a ship under sail more poetical than a hog in a high wind? The hog is all nature, the ship is all art" (V, 552). Embedded in this contrast is Byron's belief that the ship, at first a conception in the imagination of the architect, now stands as art itself and evidence of the truth of imagination.

In general, Byron's defence of Pope proceeds along lines which he has already indicated elsewhere in his letters and poems. The one surprise perhaps is the

emphasis he places on ethical poetry, claiming it to be "the highest of all poetry, because it does that in verse, which the greatest of men have wished to do in prose" (V, 559). Byron challenges Bowles's depreciation of Pope's satires because they belonged to a low order of poetry and asks whether "didactic poetry. . .whose object is to make men better and wiser, is not the very first order of poetry" (V, 554).

In taking this view Byron dismisses Aristotle's ranking of the genres which had so preoccupied poets and critics of the neo-classical age; he demands instead that the poet be "ranked according to his execution, and not according to his branch of the art" (V, 553)--"the poet who executes best is the highest whatever his department, and will ever be rated so in the world's esteem" (V, 554). Byron elaborates the point noting that if the five great Italian poets were ranked according to Bowles's "invariable principles", Dante and Ariosto would be unclassifiable and fall beneath inferior poets because their greatest poems belong to no recognised genus. The sensible Italians, however, classify poets according to "the power of their performance, and not according to its rank in a gradus". Principles of poetry, Byron adds, "never were or ever will be settled"; they are "nothing more than the predilections of a particular age". He closes the note abruptly, and, we can imagine, with some disgust, with the observation, unadorned and prophetic, that "Schlegel and Madame de Stael have endeavoured also to reduce poetry to two systems, classical and romantic.

The effect is only beginning" (V, 553-554).

Unquestionably, in these several pages against "invariable principles", Byron is also consciously defending Don Juan and his own choice of a structure and a stanza form which permitted him to combine and to explore a variety of genres without regard for rules. He had given his opinion on rules succinctly in the first canto: "Every Poet his own Aristotle" (I, cciv). Byron had of course earlier liberated himself from bothersome rules of poetry when he had surrendered himself in Beppo to the Italian octave. But it was not the discovery of ottava rima which freed Byron so that he could write his masterpieces in that stanza. He had already used that form in his "Epistle to Augusta", written in Switzerland in 1816, and a more wooden performance would be difficult to find. Byron's liberation was the realisation that within a single poem he might express, as in his letters, a variety of antithetical moods without regard for a tone arbitrarily dictated by genre or custom; that he could move his thought along according to a pattern of associated ideas, or according to no perceptible pattern at all, but reflecting throughout the natural workings of the mind absorbed in the totality of human experience.

Any stanza from "Epistle to Augusta" matched against a stanza chosen at random from Beppo, Don Juan or The Vision of Judgment shows how much Byron gained from ignoring rules. In the Augusta poem he merely plays with what Coleridge calls the "counters" of Fancy, "fixities and definites".³⁵ Byron's helpless and hopeless love for

35. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, p. 167

Augusta frames the poem; from beginning to end, he maintains, even cultivates, the sombre mood by displaying his sense of inherited and inevitable doom alongside his determined will to assume responsibility for his fate and to make the best of the alien world of his exile - all a reworking of the ground he has covered in the third canto of Childe Harold. Byron's process is unimaginative; it is, again in Coleridge's words, "no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from time and space", a selecting of "materials ready made from the law of association".³⁶

The "Epistle to Augusta" is like a series of boxes to hold gloomy thoughts, constructed by laboriously nailing together words into five-foot planks. Although any stanza might serve, stanza 7 illustrates how Byron trades off honesty and principle for the sake of preserving the required mood of gloom:

I feel almost at times as I have felt
 In happy childhood; trees, and flowers, and brooks,
 Which do remember me of where I dwelt,
 Ere my young mind was sacrificed to books,
 Come as of yore upon me, and can melt
 My heart with recognition of their looks;
 And even at moments I could think I see
 Some living thing to love--but none like thee.

The idea that aspects of the Swiss scene make a bridge to his memory of similar features of his home landscape and inspire expansive feelings of love for "some living thing" is worthy of imaginative treatment. In fact, in The Island, Byron digresses from his narrative of the nature children, Neuha and Torquil, to recall how his "Childhood's sympathy" with the Scottish highlands had allowed him to love other peaks he saw as he travelled the world: "The

36. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, p. 167.

infant rapture still survives the boy/And Loch-na-gar with Ida looked o'er Troy" (II, xii, 290-291). In these lines, Byron transcends the self-conscious "I" to give life to "infant rapture" as the perceiving self; and, in turn, the sight which delighted the infant and became memory gains life and is merged with Mount Ida to stand above Troy. In the Augusta poem, however, Byron settles for sentimentality with "happy childhood" to feed his self-pity and with the "young mind . . . sacrificed to books", an idea that actually violates Byron's belief about books. How much better also the specific Loch-na-gar that looks with Ida than the "trees, and flowers, and brooks", deprived of real visual appeal as they "Come as of yore upon me". The sombre mood is preserved with awkward poeticisms--"do remember me", "ere", "as of yore", and a slavish march of iambs, resulting in a clumsy line like "My heart with recognition of their looks". Syllable-counting also accounts for fuzzy meaning in a line like "And even at moments I could think I see".

Yet Byron's prose letters to Augusta, written at the same time, are a mixture of moods; sadness gives way to genuine pleasure in his new surroundings. He is "going to Chamouni (to leave my card with Mont Blanc)"; he plans "to buy some pretty granite & spar playthings" that he wishes Augusta to divide with Ada and her own children. With this reminder of his separation and his broken heart, he tells Augusta "I feel as if an Elephant had trodden on it". Even in misery he can find a metaphor that carries both the weight of his suffering and the

message that his sense of humour survives. He can see his pain in a ludicrous but imaginative image. For a moment he gives into self-pity:

I breathe lead.-- --While the storm lasted & you were all pressing & comforting me with condemnation in Piccadilly--it was bad enough--& violent enough--but it is worse now.--I have neither strength nor spirits--nor inclination to carry me through anything which will clear my brain or lighten my heart.--I mean to cross the Alps at the end of this month--and go--God knows where--by Dalmatia--up to the Arnauts again--if nothing better can be done;-- I have still a world before me--this--or the next.³⁷

But Byron abruptly puts aside this mood as quickly as he took it up. The next few sentences may have been written with some spite as repayment for all the "comforting. . . condemnation in Piccadilly". He reassures Augusta that the stories she must have heard of all the mistresses he has had since coming to Switzerland are only rumour, that there has been only one. In a tone on the surface matter-of-factly explanatory, he teases her with some degree of malice:

. . . I could not exactly play the Stoic with a woman--who had scrambled eight-hundred miles to unphilosophize me--besides I had been regaled of late with so many "two courses and a desert" (Alas!) of aversion that I was fain to take a little love (if pressed particularly) by way of novelty.³⁸

By the time he wrote Beppo the following year, Byron had learned from Frere's Whistlecraft that the Italian octave, known already to him through Berni, Casti, Pulci, and Ariosto, was capable of expressing many

37. MLJ, V, 91-92, September 8, 1816. See also other letters to Augusta with similar mercurial moods: V, 88-89; 92-94; 95-96. The Alpine Journal also reflects a variety of moods, only descending to the despair of the trap of his "wretched identity" in the final entry, V, 105.

38. MLJ, V, 92; September 8, 1816.

moods. Beppo succeeds because Byron throws away traditional and classical rules for poetry to follow the freedom of the Italian Renaissance poets. He treats his English reading audience as one of his correspondents eager to hear how life goes with him in Italy and submits himself, his story, his impressions and opinions, to the rhythm of the stanza form as facile and nimble as his mind. The stanza takes control of both the writer and the material so that the poem seems to write itself:

To turn--and to return;--the Devil take it!
 This story slips for ever through my fingers,
 Because, just as the stanza likes to make it,
 It needs must be--and so it rather lingers;
 This form of verse began, I can't well break it,
 But we keep time and tune like public singers;
 But if I once get through my present measure,
 I'll take another when I'm next at leisure. (lxiii)

As the poem moves easily and naturally from descriptions of Carnival in Venice, Italian attitudes to marriage, digressions on art, Turkish women, mediocre but relentless authors, the satisfactions he finds with his life in Italy, woven in and out of the narrative thread, his moods range as naturally to reveal emotions from the light-hearted to the serious. Just as he ends many of his letters with the announcement that he has come to the end of his paper and an apology that he has probably written on too long anyway, so Byron closes Beppo:

My pen is at the bottom of a page,
 Which being finished, here the story ends:
 'T is to be wished it had been sooner done;
 But stories somehow lengthen when begun. (xcix)

Although Byron took other measures from time to time in his last years, notably the blank verse of the dramas; the heroic couplets of The Age of Bronze and

The Island; the jingling anapestic rhythm of The Irish Avatar and The Blues, oddly turned to serve bitter satire; he returned for his most permanent expressions to the Italian octave which gave him the mobility to speak as his true self, entire and integrated, and without regard for rules. The discovery of this outlet for the variety of his moods is perhaps one reason Byron writes fewer letters in his last years and why they are for the most part "uncharacteristic". Many of the letters of his last years are chores to discharge business arrangements, unenthusiastically written and concealing the total man behind the letter. Don Juan, on the other hand, becomes the means for the full display of his mind. In explaining his digressive, wide-ranging technique in Don Juan, he unconsciously explains the style of his best and most typical letters:

But what's this to the purpose? you will say.
 Gent. reader, nothing; a mere speculation,
 For which my sole excuse is--'t is my way;
 Sometimes with and sometimes without occasion.
 I write what's uppermost without delay;
 This narrative is not meant for narration,
 But a mere airy and fantastic basis,
 To build up common things with common places.
 (XIV, vii)

Byron closed the first letter on the Pope question with strong praise for the poet as an agent for truth and the betterment of the social order:

If the essence of poetry must be a lie, throw it to the dogs, or banish it from your republic, as Plato would have done. He who can reconcile poetry with truth and wisdom, is the only true 'poet' in its real sense, 'the maker', 'the creator',--why must this mean the 'liar', the 'feigner', the 'tale-teller'? A man may make and create better things than these.
 (V, 556-560)

Here again in defending Pope we feel that Byron is hammering

out his own poetics. In order to justify his time spent writing poetry, Byron needed to emphasise the importance of poetry as a moral force, nor had he as yet found himself able to defend Don Juan convincingly against the charge that it was an immoral poem. While holding to the intuitive truth that the poem was moral, he had continued to refer only to its amusing qualities.¹

In defending Pope against Bowles's charge of licentiousness in the second letter, Byron sharpens his thinking on the question of what he means when he says that Don Juan is a "moral" poem. Byron points out that those elements of Pope's Eloise which Bowles found licentious belong not to Pope's invention but to fact and therefore can not be considered objectionable: "All that it had of gross, he has softened;--all that it had of indelicate, he has purified--all that it had of passionate, he has beautified--all that it had of holy, he has hallowed" (V, 581-582). Objecting to the false modesty of the day which decries Pope yet tolerates Anacreon and Sappho, still taught in the schools, Byron finds greater harm in "a single French prose novel, in a Moravian hymn, or in a German comedy, than in all the actual poetry that was ever penned or poured forth, since the rhapsodies of Orpheus". Continuing in the same vein, but less sweeping in his generalising and therefore close to a defensible position, Byron claims that the unrestrained and introspective prose of Rousseau and Madame de Stael are potentially more dangerous than poetry:

They are so, because they sap the principles, by reasoning upon the passions; whereas poetry is in itself passion, and does not systematize. It assails, but does not argue; it may be wrong, but it does not assume pretensions to Optimism.
(V, 582)

Put another way, Byron's argument rests on the belief that prose, that is, the novel, as fiction corrupts because it is an artifice of seeming truth. Prose by its very nature seduces the mind since the usual province of prose is factual material, and therefore credible. Fiction by pretending to present a prose account of reality by its very form inherits credibility. The reader is tricked into accepting fiction as fact. Poetry, on the other hand, speaks directly and openly to the emotions and expresses a truth beyond the reach of prose because it is a truthful record of feeling.

Finally, in an addendum, Byron touches on another favourite theme, his conviction that travel and the experience of various locales and cultures are essential to a poet. He directs his attention particularly to the imitators of the Lake poets, who have only experienced city life. The "aquatic gentlemen of Windermere" may "whine about Nature because they live in Cumberland", but they have travelled in the broad world as well ~~while~~ their followers know nothing of the world beyond London. Of this Cockney School Byron finds the vulgarisms in expression their greatest offence and recalls that when he had pointed out some of these to Leigh Hunt in the manuscript of Rimini, he was completely nonplussed by Hunt's answer "that he wrote them upon principle". What Byron means by vulgarisms are the glibly contrived images and

self-consciously poetical phrases which characterise the poetry of the Cockney School. Such poetry, in Byron's opinion, lacks the concreteness and strength which comes from writing out of experience and honest emotion. "When they have really seen life--when they have felt it--when they have travelled beyond the far distant boundaries of the wilds of Middlesex--when they have overpassed the Alps of Highgate", then, Byron says, they may be permitted to pass judgment on Pope (V, 587-590). Until they have been engaged in life, however, and have knowledge of what they write about, the language of their poetry will lack the ring of authenticity which comes from experience.

In the final analysis, in his defence of Pope Byron is ahead of his time both in his appreciation of Pope and in the standards he requires of criticism. Throughout the two letters he argues in favour of giving due credit to Pope for the range and variety of his verse from Windsor Forest to the spiteful portrait of Sporus and for the technical skill shown in his works, which is summed up in The Rape of the Lock. Byron's admiration clearly finds its basis in the strength and courage of Pope's expression. At no time does he defend Pope for following neo-classical rules for composition; instead, he praises Pope's total effect, achieved through wit and facility of language, without sacrificing honest emotion. It is the indomitable spirit of the man that speaks through the poetry to Byron, a fellow warrior against the pettiness of mankind.

He takes Bowles to task both as editor-biographer

and as critic for a lack of objectivity and rational thinking. Bowles in his attack on Gilchrist had revealed his narrow understanding of criticism by ignoring the points which Gilchrist had raised in defence of Pope to attack Gilchrist as a grocer turned critic. Byron concludes that discussions of literary works ought not to become occasions for slanderous word-wars between reviewers (V, 567-570). He also argues for judging a literary work in its context. The objections which Bowles had raised to Pope's indecent and profane language, Byron points out, are invalid because "the occasional occurrence . . . was less the tone of Pope than the tone of the time" (V, 574). Byron sees the root of the current depreciation of Pope in the pretensions and false modesty of the age--"this immaculate period, this moral millenium of expurgated editions in books, manners, and royal trials of divorce. . . .this crying-out elegance of the day" (V, 575). Byron believed that critical evaluation must rise above the temporary bias of a particular time to judge a writer's work on its intrinsic merit.

Similarly, Byron felt that an editor of a writer's work had an obligation to present his subject with as sympathetic an understanding as possible and certainly without any trace of personal rancour. In his view, if an editor was unable to treat his subject objectively, any erring ought to be on the side of his subject. While an overly-enthusiastic editor may weary his leader, he can be forgiven,

But a detracting editor is a parricide. He sins against the nature of his office, and connection-- he murders the life to come of his victim. If his author is not worthy to be remembered, do not edite at all: if he be, edite honestly, and even flatteringly. The reader will forgive the weakness in favour of mortality, and correct your adulation with a smile. (V, 586)

Thus, Byron takes a stand against faddish and temporal treatment of literature; and while we today would argue that successive ages have the right to re-evaluate and reinterpret literature of previous generations, we would agree with Byron that such consideration must be based on informed and rational judgment, using critical principles which allow for a detached and thoughtful appraisal. Pope, as the "patrimony of Posterity", ought to be handed down to succeeding generations with all the honesty that could be brought to bear on his life and works.

Byron's defence of Pope was in part motivated by the fact that Pope was unable to defend himself. But in large part it grew out of his hatred for Bowles's irresponsible treatment of Pope. As often as he regretted having published English Bards and refused to allow the satire to be reprinted, he never regretted his lines on Bowles and only wished they had been more stinging. Bowles's treatment of Pope, in Byron's view, amounted to unsportsmanlike behaviour and he longed to punish the editor as he knew Pope would have done:

Oh! hadst thou lived in that congenial time,
To rave with Dennis, and with Ralph to rhyme;
Throng'd with the rest around his living head,
Not raised thy hoof against the lion dead;
A meet reward had crown'd thy glorious gains
And link'd thee to the Dunciad for thy pains.
(379-384)

Byron, who never forgot the agony of the unjust

attack of the Edinburgh Review on his Hours of Idleness, for the rest of his life argued for fair play in criticism. This pain was no doubt in his mind when he upbraided Bowles for denying that he felt any "sensitivity to criticism": Byron reveals his Romantic bias as he asks, "Is Mr. B. a poet, or is he not? If he be, he must, from his very essence, be sensitive to criticism" (V, 563). For Byron, as with the other Romantic poets, heightened feelings are a part of the poet by definition. Ultimately Byron told Murray not to publish his second letter against Bowles because it was "too brutal. . . after his urbanity"; but at the same time he gave permission to attach "any passages not personal to Bowles" to any reprints of the first letter.³⁹ When the letter was nevertheless set up in proof for Byron's corrections, he resigned the final decision to Murray and Gifford whether to publish it. Meanwhile, the death of Keats compelled him to withdraw all comments he had included in the letter about him and Byron ordered Murray to "omit the whole of the observations against the Suburban School--they are meant against Keats and I cannot war with the dead--particularly those already killed by Criticism".⁴⁰

Byron seems to have been genuinely moved and bewildered by the death of Keats, evidenced in the several letters in which he referred to the tragedy. He took quite

39. MLJ, VIII, 111; May 10, 1821.

40. MLJ, VIII, 166. August 4, 1821.

literally, as Shelley no doubt intended, the explanation that Keats had died as a result of a hemorrhage sustained two and a half years earlier when the Quarterly Review had attacked Endymion. In a letter to Shelley he expresses surprise that criticism could be "so killing", and recalls that his reaction to the Edinburgh Review had been "rage, and resistance, and redress", adding his common-sensical opinion that "in this world of bustle and broil, and especially in the career of writing, a man should calculate upon his powers of resistance before he goes into the arena".⁴¹ To Moore also he confided that such "yielding sensitiveness" was beyond his understanding and that his own reaction to unmerited criticism continued to be "an immense rage for eight-and-forty hours", followed by a return to normal.⁴²

In large part, the basis of Byron's hostility to Keats lay in his belittling of Pope and his followers in "Sleep and Poetry", but when the unfortunate incident of his death was raised again a few weeks later with Shelley's Adonais, Byron again directed Murray to eliminate all references to Keats in his letters to Bowles.⁴³ His Cock-Robinish quatrains included in the letter must be taken as his private, capsule-critique of Shelley's elegy and Byron's disapproval of the self-conscious sentimentality which mars the tribute to Keats. Taking a realistic and an objective approach, he tells Murray that he has recently

41. MLJ, VIII, 103; April 26, 1821.

42. MLJ, VIII, 117; May 14, 1821.

43. MLJ, VIII, 172; August 7, 1821.

re-read the "homicide review" and finds it "hardly so bitter as to kill". Byron quotes from the piece to show that while it is "harsh and certainly contemptuous" it is not altogether unbalanced and negative: "The Reviewer allows him 'a degree of talent which deserves to be put in the right way' 'rays of fancy' 'gleams of Genius' and 'powers of language'. . . . & professes fairly to review only one book of his poem."⁴⁴

Byron also took on the role of champion of the defenceless living and, from Pisa, made even more explicit his belief that harsh criticism, deserved or not, was unnecessarily destructive, especially to budding authors. When John Taaffe, briefly a member of the Pisan coterie, had sought Byron's help in getting his study of Dante published, a work he was prepared to subsidise for the joy of seeing his name in print, Byron conspired with Moore to spare Taaffe the humiliation that his translation of Dante would inevitably call forth. Byron believed Taaffe's commentary on Dante to be "excellent" but, he told Moore, "his verse is such as it hath pleased God to endue him withal". Describing Taaffe's determination to print the "traduction" along with the notes with personal funds, "though the Reviewers will make him suffer more tortures than there are in his original", Byron put his scheme squarely to Moore:

Now, what shall we do for him? . . . He will never rest till he is published and abused--and I see nothing left but to gratify him, so as to have him abused as little as possible; for I think it would kill him. You must write, then, to Jeffrey to beg him not to review him, and I will do the same to

44. MLJ, VIII, 173; August 7, 1821.

Gifford, through Murray. Perhaps they might notice the Comment without touching the text. But I doubt the dogs--the text is too tempting.⁴⁵

Byron took pride in having insulated himself against criticism, or in having developed a system for dealing with any agitation that resulted from what he considered unjust and adverse criticism, but he achieved the state at no little expense of spirit. He betrays his continuing sensitivity to critics' attacks by the very effort he applies to rationalising their reviews and, during these last years, his repeated threats to Murray to spin out another satire to surpass English Bards. He told Medwin that he was "satisfied" with Jeffrey's critique against Marino Faliero because it was "fairly stated". Jeffrey had supported his opinions with numerous quotations from the play, unlike many critics who only elaborate upon the flaws of a work without offering evidence to demonstrate the weaknesses. Such criticism Byron judges to be irresponsible, considering the numbers of readers who rely on "these trimestrials, and swear by the ipse dixit of these autocrats" to guide their reading. In essence, "these Acteon hunters of literature", Byron believed, were powerful tastemakers, "fond of raising up and throwing down idols".⁴⁶

When he was unable to establish an attitude of indifference to criticism, he did at least analyse his objections along a line of sound principles. His response to the news that August Wilhelm Schlegel was "making a

45. PLJ , V, 476-477; November 16, 1821.

46. Medwin's Conversations, pp. 121-122.

fierce book" against him was suppressed indignation. He asks Murray "what can I have done to the literary Col-
 captain of late Madame?--I who am neither of his country nor
 his horde?" Then while insisting that Schlegel's plan did
 not however appal him, Byron unintentionally reveals his
 apprehension: "There is a distinction between native
 Criticism--because it belongs to the Nation to judge and
 pronounce on natives,--but what have I to do with Germany
 or Germans neither my subjects nor my language having
 anything in common with that Country?"⁴⁷ Byron's dis-
 approval rises not so much from a narrow insularity,
 unbecoming in a man of his wide experience, but from his
 fear of being unfairly treated. He had known Schlegel
 briefly in Switzerland through Madame de Stael and had
 formed an instant dislike for the German's egotistical
 manner, a dislike which was reciprocated, and an attitude
 not likely to allow impartial treatment. Earlier in the
 year Byron had been reading brother Friedrich Schlegel's
History of Literature, and he had no high opinion of him
 either. His estimate of Schlegel's critical abilities,
 recorded in the Ravenna Journal, derives from principles
 Byron had long applied to poetry. He found Schlegel self-
 indulgent: "He is like Hazlitt, in English, who talks
pimples--a red and white corruption rising up (in little
 imitation of mountains upon maps), but containing nothing,
 and discharging nothing, except their own humours." Worse
 than this, Schlegel was frequently unintelligible: ". . .
 he always seems upon the verge of meaning; and lo, he goes

47. MLJ, VIII, 166-167, August 4, 1821.

down like sunset, or melts like a rainbow, leaving a rather rich confusion,--to which, however, the above comparisons do too much honour." Schlegel's worst offence in Byron's view, however, was that he was pretentiously opinionated: "he speaks of things all over the world with a kind of authority a philosopher would disdain, and a man of common sense, feeling, and knowledge of his own ignorance, would be ashamed of".⁴⁸ As far as Byron was concerned, neither of the Schlegels was to be trusted and especially not the one he knew on personal acquaintance, who now threatened him, and who had a habit of arbitrarily disparaging writers. Byron, giving an example to Moore, remembered that Schlegel vindictively vowed to punish the French by proving that "Moliere is no poet".⁴⁹ In a second letter to Murray on the matter, Byron threatened to take revenge himself against Schlegel for what he anticipated would be an unprincipled attack by "a man who sits down to an elaborate attempt to defame a foreigner of his acquaintance--without provocation--& without legitimate object".⁵⁰

Soon after, as he prepared to join Teresa and the Gambas in Pisa, Byron must have realised how much energy, time, and thought he was dissipating and how much agitation he was inflicting on himself with his concern about critical opinions, his own and others, as well. Initially, he had been pleased with his first dash into literary criticism in the letters on Bowles, but in time he came to see the wisdom of the opinion Gifford gave to

48. MLJ, VIII, 38 and note 2.

49. MLJ, VIII, 164-165; August 2, 1821.

50. MLJ, VIII, 173; August 7, 1821.

Murray: "I hope . . . that Lord B. will not continue to squander himself thus. When will he resume his majestic march, and shake the earth again?"⁵¹ The Bowles letters had, however, served to overcome the writer's block which Byron was suffering. Through them also he formalised his growing conviction of the moral nature of the poet and his high calling as an ethical voice. The plays, following in quick succession after the second Bowles letter, anticipate Byron's declaration of "war with words" promised in Don Juan (IX, xxiv).

Conscious of the debilitating and fragmenting effect of outside comment on his work, Byron wrote dispassionately but firmly to Murray, drawing up the six articles that were to govern their relationship in the future. Under these new rules, Byron permitted Murray to write of the "health, wealth, and welfare" of himself and his friends; to continue to send the usual dental and medical supplies; and to forward the works of a select list of authors--Scott, Crabbe, Moore, Campbell, Rogers, Gifford, Joanna Baillie, Washington Irving, James Hogg, and John Wilson, "or any especial single work of fancy which is thought to be of considerable merit", and travel books "provided that they are neither in Greece Spain Asia Minor Albania nor Italy". He expressly forbade anything containing opinions on his own work--"me (quoad me)", or any works by modern authors other than the exceptions already named. Additionally, he would have "no periodical works whatsoever--no Edinburgh--Quarterly--Monthly--nor any

51. Smiles, I, 420.

Review--Magazine--Newspaper English or foreign of any description"; and he would have "no opinions good--bad--or indifferent--of yourself or your friends or others--concerning any work or works of mine--past--present--or to come". Finally, he cut himself off from any of the inevitable business negotiations, ordering Murray to handle all that through Kinnaird or Hobhouse.⁵²

In explaining these commandments, Byron made it clear that he had analysed his writing habits and the moods affecting his creative energies and had concluded sensibly that he must free himself from the disturbances and distractions of outside forces. He acknowledged that Murray had sent the constant supply of books and periodicals with good intentions, but the books he found "a quantity of trash" that "neither amused nor instructed". The critical opinions of his work, however, both those in publications and those Murray reported from conversations, had had devastating effects, he felt, because if favourable, they "increase Egotism"; if unfavourable, they irritate--"they soil the current of my Mind". Byron therefore proposed these drastic measures

to keep my mind free and unbiased--by all paltry and personal irritabilities of praise or censure,--and to let my Genius take it's natural direction,--while my feelings are like the dead--who know nothing and feel nothing of all or aught that is said or done in their regard .⁵³

Byron had arrived at his decision after looking back at the productivity of the time spent in Greece and Switzerland where he was isolated both from "praise or censure" to

52. MLJ, VIII, 219-220, September 24, 1821.

53. MLJ , VIII, 220-221.

make the sweepingly uncritical judgment "& how I wrote there!"⁵⁴ In Greece he had written the cantos of Childe Harold which were to make him famous and the Hints from Horace which he always thought would add to his fame; in Switzerland, those pieces on which the average twentieth-century reader still is asked to judge his fame when the usual anthology of English poetry is the record--the third canto of Childe Harold, Manfred, the Chillon poems, "Darkness", and "Prometheus".

This determination to recapture the isolation of those days can be seen as further evidence of Byron's commitment to poetry and another attempt to understand the nature of the creative process. In the letter to Murray he makes a very forthright effort to readjust the lines of tension between himself and the public and between himself and his poetry. Not long after Byron had left Switzerland, while still caught up in the novelty of Venice, he had answered Murray's request for a poem with a simple explanation of the poetic process: "As for poesy-- mine is the dream of my sleeping Passions--when they are awake--I cannot speak their language--only in their Somnambulism.--& Just now they are dormant",⁵⁵ an understanding basically similar to the one he now expresses to Murray. Neither of these comments on how the poet works perhaps adds so much to our comprehension of the process as Wordsworth's observation that the poet works from "emotion recollected in tranquillity". In common with Wordsworth,

54. MLJ, VIII, 221.

55. MLJ, V, 157, January 2, 1817.

however, Byron recognises that creating poetry is an activity requiring isolation, an act of the solitary spirit. Implicit in Byron's statements also is the understanding, as Stead puts it, that the poet is "a man with a store of creative energy, which in part he commits, and in part commits him, to a function which must be in one way or another a social function".⁵⁶ To the process Byron brings his "sleeping Passions" which become poetry during a state of suspended animation, as it were, a state of repose in which there is nonetheless a subconscious involvement, the reason he must make the distinction between dormancy and somnambulism. The later statement also acknowledges the complex balance between the poet's commitment and his sense of being committed by a force outside his control. He must let his "Genius take it's [sic] natural direction" while his conscious being remains "like the dead--who know nothing and feel nothing".

At the time Byron wrote the letter to Murray setting out the terms that would gain a greater degree of isolation for him, an unexpected serenity had come his way when the Gambas and Teresa had gone ahead of him to Pisa, taking with them the domestic cares and interruptions which had plagued him since his move to Ravenna. This sudden tranquillity at home no doubt highlighted the niggling criticism that came from abroad. Later, he told Lady Blessington on two different occasions that the poet ought to live in solitude and, as he confided, in his own

56. Stead, pp. 14-15.

case it had become "absolutely necessary" because the demands of maintaining personal relationships on a level that would not offend close ties was debilitating to the imagination.⁵⁷ On another occasion, he proposed facetious reasons why the poet ought to live apart from ordinary men but they are no more than a conscious effort to cover the embarrassed truth of his conviction that the poet possesses some divine and mysterious gift that is diminished and trivialised if he is seen "eating, drinking, and sleeping, like the most ordinary mortal" when he "Prometheus-like, has stolen fire from heaven to animate the children of clay". Solitude therefore is necessary, Byron argues, to protect the image of the poet and his consequent authority which is destroyed when we "see him in the throes of poetic labour, blotting, tearing, re-writing the lines that we suppose have poured forth with Homeric inspiration".⁵⁸

Byron's request to Murray for solitude, however, needs to be seen for reasons immediately significant to the progress of his poetic theory, coming as the culmination of nearly a year of introspection. The demand that Murray spare him all opinion, good or bad, of his work indicates that Byron has come to at least a tacit understanding that his poetic style and vision must be free to develop apart from outside pressures. He must be left alone to discover and perfect the technique which will express his truth and his reality. Seen in terms of the kite-flying metaphor, Byron turns his attention more directly to the relationship

57. Blessington, Conversations, pp. 49-50.

58. Blessington, Conversations, p. 111.

between himself and his kite; he must concentrate undisturbed on "the throes of poetic labour", the "blotting, tearing, and re-writing" that is the proper preoccupation of the poet as he shapes the material out of which rises the poetic vision. In his final understanding of the poetic process, Byron comes close to Eliot's view that "the creation of a work of art is like some other forms of creation, a painful and unpleasant business; it is a sacrifice of the man to his work, it is a kind of death".⁵⁹ This statement unintentionally serves as a gloss to the poet's "impersonality", the cause of much misunderstanding and objections when Eliot had explained the term in "Tradition and the Individual Talent", but his view can be seen to coincide with Byron's. When Byron explains to Murray that in the creative act his "feelings are like the dead", we cannot avoid hearing Eliot's similar thought:

Poetry is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from those things.⁶⁰

In insulating himself from opinion, published or private, Byron was striving to quell his own personality that rose in pride if the opinions praised or in rage and bitterness if they blamed. Put another way, Byron sought a state of balance held in a "personality" outside himself, to borrow again from Eliot, "a 'personality'. . . which is only a medium . . . in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways".⁶¹ In Byron's greatest

59. T.S. Eliot, Letter of June 25, 1920, The Athenaeum, p. 842.

60. T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 43.

61. Eliot, "Tradition", p. 42.

achievements, The Vision of Judgment and the last Don Juan cantos, and in the little-valued return to the verse tale, The Island, it is this achieved "personality" that is the material of the poetry so that the poetic self and the poetry are indivisible.

The comparative isolation which Byron gained for his last years resulted in an uncommon productivity that had begun with the five dramas and The Vision of Judgment in 1821. During the final year and a half before Byron turned his attention to his plans to go to Greece, he wrote The Deformed Transformed, The Age of Bronze, The Island, and the last eleven cantos of Don Juan. He wrote on with little real expectation of "fame or profit", having broken with Murray and therefore forced to rely on John Hunt for a publisher. As he admits in Don Juan, however, writing had become a habit:

And yet I can't help scribbling once a week,
Tiring old readers, nor discovering new.
In Youth I wrote because my mind was full,
And now because I feel it growing dull. (XIV, x)

Anticipating the logical question "why then publish?", Byron replies that the activity serves to "make some hour less dreary" and that

It occupies me to turn back regards
On what I've seen or pondered, sad or cheery;
And what I write I cast upon the stream,
To swim or sink--I have had at least my dream.
(XIV, xi)

It is typical of Byron's final phase that he treats any claim to moral intentions lightly. He asserts repeatedly in Don Juan that his purpose is moral, but in the context the reader does not feel threatened. Byron's "Muses do not care a pinch of rosin" for what the world would call

"success" or failure; "'T is a 'great moral lesson' they are reading" (XII, lv) and that, in Byron's final view, is sufficient reason for writing poetry.

In treating his ethical purpose dispassionately, Byron avoided that flaw in Shelley's work which Keats termed the "palpable design" that offends the reader. Byron also had recognised the trait in Shelley, who, he told Medwin, "has more poetry in him than any man living; and if he were not so mystical, and would not write Utopias and set himself up as a Reformer" would achieve the recognition he deserved.⁶² Byron's Muse, on the other hand, "by no means deals in fiction: / She gathers a repertory of facts . . . and mostly sings of human things and acts" (XIV, xiii). Poetry that enlightens, however, is Byron's goal as well as Shelley's and other of the Romantics, a truth that Byron often off-handedly admits as, for instance, he prepares the reader for "the following sermon" on the world Juan had discovered in English society, "This paradise of Pleasure and Ennui" (XIV, xv, xvii).

The works of Byron's last years bear witness in subject matter and form to the emphasis he placed upon the ethical purpose of his poetry. His dramas, "studiously Greek",⁶³ as he called them, shared the high purpose of drama in the classical age of Greece and of serious drama in general since that time, despite the fact that he did not intend them to be acted before an audience. As

62. Medwin, Conversations, p. 235.

63. MLJ, VIII, 186, August 23, 1821. See also MLJ, VIII, 223, September 27, 1821, Byron's explanation to Kinnaird: "I want to simplify your drama--to render it fit for the higher passions--& make it more Doric and austere".

Barton has reminded us, no one of his time was more conscious of the degree to which the English stage had degenerated and of the need for "radical reforms".⁶⁴

Byron explained to Medwin his reasons for not writing for the stage in terms that summarise the state of the theatre and the problems of a dramatist in his day:

When I first entered upon theatrical affairs [as a member of the Drury Lane sub-committee], I had some idea of writing for the house myself, but soon became a convert to Pope's opinion on that subject. Who would condescend to the drudgery of the stage, and enslave himself to the humours, the caprices, the taste or tastelessness, of the age? Besides, one must write for particular actors, have them continually in one's eye, sacrifice character to the personating of it, cringe to some favourite of the public, neither give him too many nor too few lines to spout, think how he would mouth such and such, look such and such a passion, strut such and such a scene. Who, I say, would submit to all this?⁶⁵

Byron took satisfaction in the fact that Marino Faliero was unsuited to the stage, holding "no surprises, no starts, nor trapdoors, nor opportunities 'for tossing their heads and kicking their heels'--and no love--the grand ingredient of a modern play".⁶⁶ Even when he was asked "to alter 'the Doge'" for the illustrious Kean whom Byron admired to excess, he refused, saying that "the Stage is not my object--and even interferes with it".⁶⁷

Byron's object was "to introduce into our language . . . the mental theatre of the reader";⁶⁸ and

64. Barton, "Light", p. 140.

65. Medwin, Conversations, p. 93.

66. MLJ, VIII, 23, January 12, 1821.

67. MLJ, VIII, 210, September 14, 1821.

68. MLJ, VIII, 210, September 14, 1821.

at the time that he was defending his new style of drama against the objections of Gifford and Murray, Byron was so convinced of the rightness of his direction that he was willing to trust the plays to the vindication of some future, unspecified time: "I have a notion that if understood they will in time find favour (though not on the stage) with the reader".⁶⁹ In the Preface to Marino Faliero Byron spoke candidly of the fear that prevented his offering any play for the current stage, a hesitancy derived from his familiarity with the theatre and the pain of disapproval:

The sneering reader, and the loud critic, and the tart review, are scattered and distant calamities; but the trampling of an intelligent or of an ignorant audience on a production which, be it good or bad, has been a mental labour to the writer, is a palpable and immediate grievance, heightened by a man's doubt of their competence to judge, and his certainty of his own imprudence in electing them his judge.

Marino Faliero was, in Byron's opinion and as he explained to Murray, "more like a play of Alfieri's" than anything on the English stage; and he had earlier referred to the Italian's works as "political dialogues".⁷⁰ What Byron hoped from the historical-political plays and the metaphysical plays was to create a "mental theatre" in which he, like Alfieri, might raise moral questions that would force the reader to examine protected convictions and assumptions for his own good and the good of society as a whole.

The plays are important to Byron's evolving poetics because they are excursions into the complexities

69. MLJ, VIII, 218, September 20, 1821.

70. MLJ, VII, 182, September 28, 1820; MLJ, VII, 150, August 7, 1820.

of existence on a scale he had not yet undertaken. All reflect the baffling, bewildering conditions of ordinary life that may require decisions which go against a man's basic principles or the perversity of reality which allows principled action to result in disaster, or, again, those conditions which force decisions and action with uncertainty shrouding the outcome. In the plays Byron examines in some detail the vast grey area between the black and white of right and wrong, good and evil, the knowable and unknowable, the region where most human activity occurs perforce. Although the history plays are set in a remote time and place, the concerns were relevant to Byron's time as they are to our own. Neither the trappings of the Venetian Republic nor the luxuries of the Assyrian court obscure the fact that Byron uncovers conflicts and issues common to humans of all time. Through these plays, Byron shows his deepened understanding that the truth of history exists only when it is eternally rediscovered in present moments and appreciated for the insights it offers to current conditions. In the imaginative recreation of an historical event, the poetic mind lights up the past at the same time that it illuminates the present.

Marino Faliero is the most complex of the history plays, made so by the several emotions at war in the breast of the old Doge and the issues that the play raises regarding the nature of anarchic rebellion. Faliero's grievance against the state is not simply that the Council fails to punish Steno as his offence seems to merit, thus

adding to the Doge's humiliation. Faliero's quarrel involves the deeper disappointment that goes back to his discovery, when he had assumed the ducal throne, that the power had been stripped from the office, in his opinion an insultingly inadequate reward for his years of military service to the state. When his nephew had proposed the revenge of a personal vendetta against Steno, the Doge's mind was already forming a more encompassing revenge:

a life so vile as his
Were nothing at this hour; in th' olden time
Some sacrifices asked a single victim,
Great expiations had a hecatomb. (I, ii, 228-231)

Faliero seizes upon the newest injustice of the Council against him as an excuse for bringing about its destruction and begins to plot alone a strategy that will turn his wounded pride into a bloody vengeance. While in this mood the Doge and Israel Bertuccio, one of the plebian organisers of conspiracy against the state, are brought together in a scene of mutual exploitation for personal ends (I, ii). The Doge needs the strength of the plebians and the support of the Doge would enhance the cause of the conspirators. The play is a masterful exploration of how political alliances are made among disaffected elements of a society when the rhetoric of personal and private wrong masquerades as public good.⁷¹ In private, the Doge's thoughts have been towards the way to turn his ducal cap into a "diadem" (I, ii, 267), and Israel feeds these hopes with the suggestion that after Faliero has

71. It is beyond the scope of this study to develop this interpretation here, but I have appended my reading of Marino Faliero that looks at the play in terms of the manipulative power of words. See Appendix I, pp. 502-535.

led the rebellion he will be "Sovereign hereafter" (I,ii, 497). Before the body of conspirators when the Doge must convince them of his worthiness to join them, he shares a vision of "a fair free commonwealth", modified from total surrender to egalitarian principles, however, in that he does not foresee "rash equality but equal rights" (III, ii, 169-170). In the end, when the weight of his deed is upon him, the Doge, once more alone, thinks to turn the wicked means to a noble end: "I will resign a crown, and make the State / Renew its freedom" (IV, ii, 159-160). But within the context the sentiment has more of the expedient to a tortured conscience than an enlightened concept of political order.

The play raises but does not answer questions that grow out of anarchic revolution, put most graphically in Faliero's agonising conflict between his desire for revenge and his loyalty to his friends and in Bertram's bond divided between the plebian cause and the demands of his friendship with Lioni. The problems presented by revolution are in the end matters of individual conscience and Byron's message is, as Barton has observed, that in such a situation men "must be prepared to trample on their human instincts and emotional ties, to falsify their own natures and mythologise those of their victims".⁷²

Marino Faliero is important in Byron's mature understanding of the reality of rebellion, especially in terms of the responsibilities which it imposes on individuals. The failure of the play to present a positive

72. Barton, "Light", p. 151.

attitude towards revolution has led Johnson to conclude that Byron is "an eighteenth-century Whig where England is concerned, a nineteenth-century liberal on the continent".⁷³ The judgment is fair as far as it goes, but in his last years Byron had come not only to see that the issues of revolution were not always black and white but that human beings in times of political crisis were often inflamed to commit acts against reason and good judgment. Marino Faliero is not offered as a definitive answer to the question of revolution but is an Alfierian "political dialogue", a debate, that reveals the complexities of civil struggle. Byron remained throughout his life a champion of the oppressed and a supporter of the rebel against tyranny, but in Marino Faliero he acknowledges that rebellion is not always a clear-cut case of good versus evil, that the decision to overthrow order must be seen in terms of the complex motives of individual rebels and of the cost to individual conscience. That he could support unequivocally the Italian or the Greek revolution indicates that the tyrannical domination of a foreign power does not impose the same claims on conscience that sheer anarchy does.

Although Byron had researched and brooded upon the materials for Marino Faliero for nearly four years, he began to write the play at last at a time when he was being assaulted by letters from Hobhouse filled with the rhetoric of politics that seemed to Byron like news from

73. E.D.H. Johnson, "A Political Interpretation of Marino Faliero", Modern Language Quarterly, III (1942), 425.

an alien world. He had frequently twitted Hobhouse for his alliance with the reformers Hunt and Cobbett in his stand as a reform candidate for a seat in Parliament and judged that his friend had "waxed somewhat rash at least in politics".⁷⁴ When Hobhouse had accepted the last straw, his reply to Byron can have come as no small surprise either in the impassioned language used or in information that showed just how strange were the bed-fellows of politics. Hobhouse told him that it was Byron's old Whig friends, "the preachers of the mobocracy to come", in league with Hunt who had defeated him in the first election:

...if you want to find a true blackguard, chimney-sweep--seeking politician, a truly mean mob-hunting master of the dirty art, commend yourself to a Whig, but do not expect to find him among the Reformers. It was all very well for such pitiful patriots in petticoats as the Duchess of Devonshire and Lady Crewe to kiss butchers to get votes for Charley Fox, but those days are gone by, and I am convinced that the proudest of all politicians and the most uncondescending is the man of principle, the real radical reformer.⁷⁵

In his answer to Hobhouse, Byron laid the foundation for his more discriminating attitude towards revolution, finding himself able to "understand and enter into the feelings of Mirabeau and La Fayette--but I have no sympathy with Robespierre--and Marat". The sentence that follows throws light on Byron's handling of the Doge in Marino Faliero, which Byron had begun to write a few days

74. MLJ, VII, 50, March 3, 1820.

75. Unpublished proofs of letters of Hobhouse to Byron, dated March 31, 1820, in British Library.

76. MLJ, VII, 80, April 22, 1820.

before, who found the Council made new laws in his trial: "I do not think the man who would overthrow all laws-- should have the benefit of any." And as he continues the letter, Byron's position becomes one that clearly favours only a leader of rebellion whose motives are of the purest. Byron also seizes upon the word "radical" from Hobhouse's letter to note that it is "a new word since my time--it was not in the political vocabulary in 1816--when I left England--and I don't know what it means--is it uprooting?"⁷⁷ Byron ends the letter still filled with "thorough contempt and abhorrence--of all I have seen, heard, or heard of the persons calling themselves reformers, radicals, and such other names", but reaffirming that he is "no enemy to liberty". He predicts that "there is some chance of it in Italy", an event in which he hopes to participate, if not actively, certainly as "a well wishing spectator of a push against those rascally Austrians who have desolated Lombardy, and threaten the rest of the bel paese".⁷⁸ Byron makes a firm distinction between anarchy and the

77. According to the OED, the word radical used as an adjective had indeed entered the political vocabulary since Byron had left England. It cites the earliest use in this sense in Shelley's Oedipus, (I, 12), "Kings and laurelled Emperors, Radical butchers", published in 1820. The earliest evidence of radical used as a noun with political implications is found in the Spirit of the Public Journals (1802): "The sagacious only could have seen that he should have become a r - c - l". But no other instance is cited before Walter Scott defines the word in a letter, dated October 16, 1819: "Radical is a word in very bad odour here, being used to denote a set of blackguards...."

78. MLJ, VII, 81-82, April 22, 1820.

overthrow of tyranny in the form of a foreign power and would doubtless have echoed the sympathies of John Stuart Mill when he called the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832 an "unspeakable blessing" that provided for the accomplishing of reform "through other means than anarchy and civil war".⁷⁹

Byron had followed with interest the political situation in England, worsening markedly since mid-1819, and at first had quite a different attitude towards civil strife. He wrote to Kinnaird that he thought of coming to England the following spring and, treating revolution as a lark, he asked,

Do you think there will be a row? civil war or any thing in that line?--because as how--why then I should make one amongst you--I am a little tired of this effeminate way of life--and should like "to wink and hold out mine iron" as Corporal Nym says "thats the humour on't".

Congratulating Kinnaird on his successful stand for Westminster from one of the rotten boroughs, Byron develops an image of political change that treats the problem of reform as if it were no more than an impersonal chemical procedure: "you are the prepared Charcoal and anti-putrescent or (more politely) antiseptic sweetener of this maggoty joint of the Borough dead body corporate".⁸⁰ By the following spring when the news of the Cato Street

79. From a part of a letter from Mill to an unidentified correspondent, quoted in "The Poet's Politics", in a collection of essays by Geoffrey H. Hartman, Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays 1958-1970 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 247. Hartman identifies the letter only as written by Mill "after the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832" and addressed "to the same correspondent" to whom he had written six months earlier (p. 247).

80. MLJ, VI, 210-211, August 19, 1819.

conspiracy had reached him, reform took on a personal and gruesome aspect. His thoughts on the incident reflect the ideas which he brings to larger life in Marino Faliero; and it should be noted that at some time within the next ten days, Byron had begun the play:

What a desperate set of fools these Utican Conspirators seem to have been.--As if in London after the disarming acts, or indeed at any time a secret could have been kept among thirty or forty.--And if they had killed poor Harrowby--in whose house I have been five hundred times --at dinner and parties--his wife is one of "the Exquisites"--and t'other fellows--what end would it have answered?⁸¹

When civil strife is seen to involve friends, Byron says "I for one will declare off". He can accept that "revolutions are not to be made with rose-water", that blood "must be shed", but he cannot accept that "it should be clotted".⁸² Marino Faliero does not reconcile the problems of internecine struggle, but it does dramatise the fact that anarchy may be made of a mixture of pure and impure motives and it does present certain important facts for individual assessment and informed judgment.

The two other historical plays look more closely at individuals in turbulent political situations caught between principles which could only be seen as good in some other context, but in the particular event are destructive. In The Two Foscari Byron examines the harsh

81. MLJ, VII, 62, March 29, 1820; see MLJ, VII, 74, April 9, 1820, for earliest reference that Byron had begun Marino Faliero.

82. MLJ, VII, 63.

dilemma created when another Doge of Venice finds his duty to the state in conflict with his love for his son. The issue is further complicated by the hereditary hatred that a fellow patrician, Loredano, holds for the Doge. The consequence of the Doge's decision to uphold scrupulously the "honour, the decrees, / The health, the pride, and welfare of the State" (II, i, 257-258) is the sacrifice of his son's life and his own. Sardanapalus also demonstrates the folly that frequently befalls intended good. While the Assyrian king viewed his rule as an enlightened beneficence, he had not reckoned with his unenlightened subjects. The neglect of the conventional duties of the ruler manifested in conquest and the pursuit of glory transforms what Sardanapalus had deemed good into mob tyranny for his people who could not appreciate life devoted to the enjoyment of living. His insight towards the end of the play measures not only his own dilemma but that of many humans who find themselves out of accord with their times:

I am the very slave of Circumstance
And Impulse--borne away with every breath!
Misplaced upon the throne--misplaced in life.
I know not what I could have been, but feel
I am not what I should be.... (IV, i, 330-334)

In living an idea whose time had not yet come, Sardanapalus corrupted his people and brought destruction upon himself. But in sweeping all the riches and treasures of his empire into his funeral pyre, the wayward king sought to outwit Time which would inevitably "Sweep empire after empire, like the first / Of empires, into nothing" (V, i, 444-445). Thus in the paradox of winning future life

by losing present, he regards his death in the flames of the remnants of his kingdom as

a light
To lesson ages, rebel nations, and
Voluptuous princes. (V, i, 440-442)

Much of the Byronic hero who rebels against accepted order surfaces in this history play and a good case can be made for seeing aspects of the play shaped in Byron's imagination by elements of his own life--his relationship with Theresa as a model for the love between Sardanapalus and Myrrha, Lady Byron cast as Zarina, and Byron's mood of indolence and self-indulgence when he had begun the play early in 1821 recreated in the softly sensitive and rebellious king.⁸³ The fusion of his own life into poetry and history heightens our conception of Byron's poetic theory. Shortly after beginning Sardanapalus Byron noted in his Ravenna Journal plans for four tragedies - "Sardanapalus, already begun", Cain, Francesca of Rimini, and Tiberius. He follows this entry with the abrupt thought "What is Poetry? - the feeling of a Former world and Future".⁸⁴ This brief memorandum on poetry richly sums up Byron's comprehension of his creative imagination. Like the other history plays, but more pointedly, Sardanapalus shows Byron reanimating figures from the past to tease from them a meaning for the present, transforming the dead

83. McGann, Fiery Dust, pp. 228-230 and 242-244, relates the play to this context.

84. MLJ, VIII, 36-37.

dust of the ages into art that gives life and at the same time remaking his own life into the formality of art.

The process continues in Cain and to some extent in Heaven and Earth, though the latter perhaps suffers from Byron's having ended it rather arbitrarily at a point in the "suspension of the action" instead of completing the choral mystery according to his total conception, fearful that the play would prove "a fruitless experiment".⁸⁵ Both plays allow Byron to explore further the experience of individual will, in this case, in conflict with absolute authority and to discover the limits of human understanding. Cain and Lucifer, archetypal figures of the Romantic rebellion, raise metaphysical questions that bedevil all attempts towards resolution in purely intellectual terms. When Lucifer has shown Cain that "the human sum / Of knowledge, [is] to know mortal nature's nothingness" (II, ii, 421-422), his advice to Cain is to rely on the "One good gift" from the tree of knowledge, "Your reason":

let it not be overpowered
By tyrannous threats to force you into faith
'Gainst all external sense and inward feeling:
Think and endure,--and form an inner world
In your own bosom--where the outward fails;
So shall you nearer be the spiritual
Nature, and war triumphant with your own.
(II, ii, 459-466)

Lucifer asserts the lesson of the defiant Titan, which Byron had earlier expressed in "Prometheus", the discovery of "concentered recompense, / Triumphant where it dares

85. PLJ, V, 474, November 14, 1821.

defy" (57-58). This is the lesson learned by Manfred who withdraws from the world into his tower and torment, closing out spirits and the Abbot to die in isolation. The way of Lucifer and Manfred, however, is not Cain's way. He feels pain to know the limits of human knowledge but is able to go beyond the narrowness of self. Thorslev has noted that Cain's "capacity to love" elevates him to an order of hero higher than Lucifer and Manfred, that he "sees more than Manfred--in the value of his love for Adah, for his son, and for all posterity".⁸⁶ To carry the idea further, Cain bears more of suffering humanity than either Lucifer or Manfred, a capacity for suffering that only partly owes its existence to his capacity to love his wife, child, and future inheritors.

In his journey through space Cain had seen the wonders of creation that taught him his "littleness" (III, i, 68), but he had also experienced an expansion of his spirit that enabled him to express love and praise for beauty discovered amid the uncertainties of existence:

Oh God! Oh Gods! or whatsoe'er you are!
 How beautiful ye are! how beautiful
 Your works, or accidents, or whatsoe'er
 They may be! (II, i, 110-113)

Cain's spontaneous blessing of the obviously beautiful in creation is a reversal of the Ancient Mariner's blessing of the water snakes, but the act equally prepares the way for redemption. Both sinful beings apprehend transforming truth. Cain's conception of the good of creation calls

86. Peter L. Thorslev, Jr., The Byronic Hero, Types and Prototypes (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), p. 183.

into sharper focus his discontent with the apparent evil of man's lot. As he explains to Lucifer, it is not a question of how beautiful the world "was"--for Cain it still "is!"

It is not with the earth, though I must till it,
I feel at war--but that I may not profit
By what it bears of beautiful, untoiling,
Nor gratify my thousand swelling thoughts
With knowledge, nor allay my thousand fears
Of Death and Life. (II, ii, 124-130)

Thus, back on earth where he confronts Abel, he kills him, as Byron said, "in a fit of dissatisfaction . . .with the politics of Paradise"⁸⁷ and "in the rage and fury against the inadequacy of his state to his conceptions". The act "discharges itself rather against Life, and the Author of Life, than the mere living".⁸⁸ But the impulsive deed and Cain's consequent feelings are in themselves both the evidence and the means of an enlightened perception of the nature of man that opens the way towards growth.

Cooke has observed that "Cain does not promise the realisation of a new world" and that "it is odd that Cain's will, breeding murder in its egocentric violence, when corrected proves barren of fruit; the enlightened Cain has no viable future".⁸⁹ Such a view, however, ignores the import of Cain's final stance that implies fruit if not a new world. Against the seeming nothingness of self discovered through his voyage with Lucifer (II, ii, 420), when he has brought Death to life in the

87. MLJ, VIII, 216, September 19, 1821.

88. PLJ, V, 470, November 3, 1821.

89. Michael G. Cooke, The Blind Man Traces the Circle: On Patterns and Philosophy in Byron's Poetry (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 79, 89.

human world Cain can say "I am awake at last--a dreary dream had maddened me" (III, i, 378-379). Not only has Cain earned a more poignant appreciation of the life he had detested, but he is awakened to his capacity for suffering. He feels the penitential sufferings of remorse for his guilty deed commingled with a sense of sacrificial suffering. Cain would, if possible, "With my own death redeem him from the dust" (III, i, 511). Though Cain is denied a Christ-like fulfillment through a redemptive act that would expiate guilt and give back life to Abel, he trusts in the yet untaught Christian precepts of brotherly love and forgiving one's enemies. In seeking forgiveness from Abel's spirit and in meditating upon what he has lost in losing a brother, Cain begins a study of his suffering that at once elevates him above the natural and merely human order of beings. In the end he accepts, god-like, what he cannot change:

That which I am, I am; I did not seek
For life, nor did I make myself (III, i, 509-510).

Adah's similar acceptance of the situation reinforces Cain's and demonstrates that Cain's suffering has also awakened to a greater realisation the bond possible between humans. In a speech moving in its simplicity, Adah takes leave of the dead brother who met "A dreary, and an early doom", mourning but not weeping, and turns to the sorrow of the living: "Now, Cain! I will divide thy burden with thee" (III, i, 545-551). In contrast to Adam's example of will-less resignation and submissive obedience to God, Cain elects to make his way into exile "Eastward from Eden" because that is the way

"most desolate" (III, i, 552-553). The isolation of his exile is no retreat into the "inner world" of his bosom, as Lucifer counselled, but an act of attracting further pain to himself in choosing the harshest waste of earth in which to bring his suffering to flower.

Byron turns again in Heaven and Earth to a lyrical statement of man's compassion for human misery and suffering that contrasts with a seeming lack of compassion in God. Japhet views God's decision to destroy the world by flood, saving only Noah and his family, as unnecessarily arbitrary and vindictive and his own survival in the face of the destruction of other mortals causes him pain: "Can rage and justice dwell in the same path?" (I, iii, 762) For him death becomes a more desirable "doom" than to live and "behold the universal tomb, / Which I / Am thus condemned to weep above in vain" (I, iii, 925-929). We can only suppose that had Byron written the next part which he had in mind, he would have turned Japhet's passive sorrow towards the creative suffering that Cain experiences.

These plays of 1821 that followed Marino Faliero testify to the widening and deepening of Byron's thought in his final years. The discipline of writing drama, even mental theatre, required a precision of thought and expression that the discursive Childe Harold or Don Juan had not. The mode also forced an objectifying of himself and of his material, accomplished through standing back sufficiently from his own experiences and feelings to see them in a perspective that allowed

their fusion into the characters of the plays. Byron's insistence on following the classical unities against the dictates of popular taste must be seen, in part, as evidence of that disregard for an audience that is necessary to any artist in working out his view of reality. The ordeal of the dramas gave Byron an increased apprehension of the human condition and the perplexities of existence, and the accumulated truth of his knowledge ironically confirmed that uncertainty attends all human endeavour. But it also gave him the theme that he explores so successfully in the last cantos of Don Juan. The plays offer no solutions to the provocative questions they raise about political, social, and moral order, but they do affirm that these are questions that sensible man must be willing to consider without despairing over the lack of firm answers. Though Byron was no philosopher, he achieved a philosophical acceptance of finite man in a world devoid of certainty.

CHAPTER VII

THE POINT OF BALANCE: "I WRITE THE WORD,
NOR CARE IF THE WORLD READ."

Among the work of Byron's mature years The Island was long regarded as a relapse, a momentary return to the verse tale romance that had crowned the success of Childe Harold I and II with almost riotous popular accord. Even the renewed interest in Byron as a poet that has absorbed scholars in recent years has directed little study towards The Island. Overshadowed by Don Juan or obscured by the bulk of the total work, the poem is easily dismissed, as Rutherford has done, as "a belated verse tale with a most unskilled mixture of romance and humour".¹ Some have given more attention to the poem to conclude that it is escape from reality, and sometimes ^{it is} seen as escape with meaning. Joseph calls it "a symbolic adventure" in which Byron "for once, allows himself to surrender to the charms of a utopia",² and Gleckner sees it as "the poet's last desperate articulation of hope for man".³ Lengthier readings have reached conclusions that similarly distort or do violence to Byron's view of reality at this point in his development. McGann rightly observes the interrelation of themes in The Island and the last cantos of Don Juan, but he then reads these last works as Byron's

1. Rutherford, Byron, p. 138.

2. Joseph, Byron, p. 63.

3. Gleckner, Ruins, p. 350.

affirmation that paradise is an attainable reality, "not that paradise is exclusively true but that it is really true, in despite of all entropic forces". Without qualifying what is meant by paradise such a statement cannot hold; and after discussing the poem, McGann arrives at the equally unsatisfactory conclusion that The Island "lays out an unequivocal programme for the possession of the earthly paradise".⁴ Blackstone, in summing up, finds that The Island records Byron's temporary, stop-gap submission to partially understood "'daimonic images'", "of preferring mergence to interpretation" until Greece offered him the saving "way of action".⁵ Fleck's reading comes closest to what seems to be Byron's intention in the poem both in seeing that the poem is a departure from what we might expect from Byron but that at the same time the poem remains "unmistakably romantic and unmistakably Byronic".⁶ The degree to which the poem is "unmistakably romantic" needs to be called into question but when we fully appreciate the poem as an expression of Byron's final orientation of his poetic self and the product of his poetic theory in its last phase The Island reveals itself as "unmistakably Byronic".

This final and complete long poem appears on the surface to be an exception to the otherwise discursively dialectical and rhetorical body of his mature

4. McGann, Fiery Dust, pp. 188, 198.

5. Blackstone, Survey, p. 265.

6. P.D. Fleck, "Romance in Byron's The Island", Byron: A Symposium, ed. John D. Jump (London: The Macmillan Press, 1975), p. 164.

poetry. When we look at The Island, however, within the context of the time of its composition and in the terms of his evolving poetics embodying the ever more complex philosophy of his mature years, we discover that the poem is more significant in Byron's poetic development than has been previously noticed. Byron himself is partly to blame for the fact that the poem went so long overlooked with the announcement that he was "merely trying to write a poem a little above the usual run of periodical poesy".⁷ But in Byron's case we frequently need to take such disclaimers to mean the opposite of what he has said, for when we read the poem in its context and with regard for his poetic insights and skills, The Island provides a compendium of Byron the poet who at last is a mirror-reflection of Byron the man. From the initial stage of his early years in which the creative act was no more than a spontaneous outpouring of the emotions of a sensitive but largely passive individual through the intermediate phase in which the poetic personality actively cultivated feelings to make the materials of poetry, Byron has arrived in his last years at the pinnacle of his poetic power. The materials of his poetry are the moral personality itself; feeling and knowing are translated into images so that the poet's brooding apprehension of reality finds its objective correlative in the figures and events of The Island. Though the poem may seem the distorted reflection of the final Byron orientation, failing to catch the image

7. PLJ, VI, 164, January 25, 1823.

of the Don Juan persona, we do in fact glimpse the likeness of the narrator of Don Juan in an intimate and sober mood of self-analysis. The subtle variations of style that Byron achieved within the limits of the heroic couplet reflect in their way the varied voices and perspective stances of the Don Juan narrator. The comic mood is largely suppressed, breaking out only briefly in Byron's ironic conception of Ben Bunting, but the subject and purpose of the poem preclude a light-hearted approach. The persona of The Island is Peckham's "tough-minded man" who ultimately must "engage with reality simply because it is there and because there is nothing else".⁸

Byron's imaginary sojourn in the South-Sea Island earthly paradise reflects his final concept of his purpose as a poet. He must discover and recount the value of the real world. The Island then is not Byron's escape into or surrender to a utopian dream. Rather, it is a last farewell to romantic longings that man's lot might be otherwise and the acceptance of his responsibility to redeem the world as it is. As Peckham has observed in describing the sense of Christ-like mission to be found in Romantic poets,

The flower of value must be plucked not on the sunny mountaintop, but in the very abyss. The worship of sorrow is divine. The world must be redeemed in its absurdity and ugliness, as well as its order and beauty.⁹

The Island reveals Byron adjusting the balance of his final orientation and sharing his insights as a corrective

8. Peckham, "Reconsiderations", p.8. See Chapter I, p.12, above.

9. Peckham, "Reconsiderations", p.6.

for the world's dreams of escape to paradise. Looking backward to the effusive poems of the juvenile years and the melancholy posturing of young manhood of the Childe Harold years and forward to the last cantos of Don Juan, the poem makes objective through Torquil, Christian, and Bligh, Byron's progress from youth to maturity. The mature Byron emerges, however, in the moral personality of the narrator who envelops and reconciles these vestiges of earlier poetic identities.

No problem arises in seeing either Torquil or Christian as former Byronic selves. The kinship with Torquil is made explicit in the description of the "fair-haired offspring of the Hebrides" (II,x) and in the narrator's digression on the life-long, enduring influence of scenes from childhood, treasured in the memory, later magically to endow subsequent similar scenes: "The infant rapture still survived the boy, / And Loch-na-gar with Ida looked o'er Troy" (II,xii). The identification with Christian, model of former Byronic heroes, likewise needs no explanation. Christian is a being of "a higher order" than other men; he is moody, "Like an extinct volcano" and "Silent, and sad, and savage,--with the trace / Of passion reeking from his clouded face" (III, vi). As with his other Byronic heroes, Byron uses "passion" here in the pure sense of the word, the sense of passivity and suffering.

No problem need arise in accepting Bligh as a facet of the mature Byron when we take the ship's captain as Byron found him in Bligh's Narrative of the Bounty

mutiny, uncluttered as his image later became when the popular, romanticised interpretation set the mutineers heroically against a cruel and inhumane commander.¹⁰ Byron stuck closely to his source and to his usually good instincts about human nature, aided further in this case by personal knowledge of the necessity for shipboard discipline. In The Island therefore Byron represents Bligh and the Bounty as emblems of order and just authority, overcome temporarily by impulse and youthful rebellion, passionate feeling overthrows reason.¹¹ Even some of the mutineers give evidence of

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10. Bernard Blackstone, The Lost Travellers: A Romantic Theme with Variations (London: Longmans, 1962), p.187, note 2, observes that had Byron "known the full story, there would have been some shift in his perspective, for he hated cruelty". Time, however, has long since exonerated Bligh from responsibility in provoking the mutiny. George Mackaness (The Life of Vice-Admiral Bligh, 1931, rev. 1951) made use of newly discovered journals kept by Bligh's seamen to restore Bligh's reputation finally and definitively. Recent studies have reopened the case with some attempting to make a case for Christian and the mutineers and others defending Bligh. Even those who would like to justify the mutiny, however, conclude that the evidence lies in Bligh's favour: he was a just, albeit stern leader and the cause of the mutiny was the overwhelming desire among certain members of the crew to return to Tahiti and to the attachments which they had formed during the five months they had spent in a tropical paradise. See Richard Hough, Captain Bligh and Mr. Christian: Men of the Bounty, 1974; Kenneth Allen, Biography of That Bounty Bastard, 1976; Richard Humble, Captain Bligh, 1976; and especially Gavin Kennedy, Bligh, 1978, a thorough study which makes use of additional newly-discovered materials.
11. McGann, Fiery Dust, p.188, takes the view that the ship "represents that ordinary law and disorder which produce the conflicted world of the Byronic hero, and it does not pass out of existence at the end of the tale: it merely goes somewhere else". To see the ship as symbolic of "disorder" signals the basic disagreement between my reading and McGann's. I believe that when the whole poem is taken into account in the light of Byron's mature views my reading will be justified.

regard for their leader and show regret for the severity of the action that they must take against him. The very fact that Bligh was not put to death as customarily happened in mutinies should be seen as a sign of respect for him as a leader: "Some lurking remnant of their former awe / Restrained them longer than their broken law" (I, iv). Byron also notes, following Bligh's Narrative, that one of the "less obdurate" mutineers "told, in signs, repentant sympathy" and held a shaddock to the rope-bound Bligh's "parched lips" (I, viii). And Christian himself wavered in his resolve as he ordered his mentor into the waiting longboat, revealing his agony only to Bligh--

Yet then, even then, his feelings ceased not all:
 In that last moment could a word recall
 Remorse for the black deed as yet half done,
 And what he hid from many showed to one. (I, viii)

To Bligh's disappointment at being betrayed by the one whom he had trusted and for whose future he had held high hopes, Christian could only answer "'Tis that! 't is that! I am in hell! in hell!" (I, viii). The sketch of Bligh is admittedly slight, but he embodies Byron's adolescent ideal, the Horatian "man of firm and noble soul". He is that human emotional strength and endurance which can triumph over adversity, an ability that Byron could admire in himself. Neither Bligh nor Byron possessed the advantage against storms at sea enjoyed by "the tender nautilus" whose "port is in the deep", but both had weathered storms to triumph "o'er the armadas of Mankind" (I, vii).

Had Byron written The Island in an earlier period in his life, he perhaps would have interpreted Bligh as a tyrannical figure and glorified the case for the mutineers. Presumably the initial response to a first casual reading of The Island is the same among all of Byron's knowledgeable readers. We wonder why the poet of freedom wasted what seems an ideal opportunity to strike another blow at tyranny, why he treated Bligh sympathetically while Christian, who might have been the model for his earlier Byronic rebels against authority, comes to a defiant but nonetheless ignoble end. The answer to this simple question of Byron's handling character and plot in The Island is inseparable from our understanding of his mature poetics. Not only must we appreciate his insistence on discovering lessons for the present in actual historical events, but we must keep in mind his mature understanding of his function and image as a poet, as well as personal truth, his view of reality that is the material of his poetry.

As we have seen in the political plays, Byron had arrived at a more discriminating position regarding rebellion, a differentiation between acceptable and unacceptable forms of resistance to oppression. He could approve of rebellion against foreign oppression, the Italians rising up against Austrian dominations and the Greeks against the Turks. But he feared anarchic revolt that inflamed the passions of the masses and he opposed mob rule, whether the Whig mobocracy which Hobhouse had identified, the potential mobocracy to grow out of the

radical reformers' zeal, or the mob rule of the Bounty mutineers. His political plays reflect his fear of anarchy and the breaking of established order. The conspirators, joined by the demagogical Faliero, cannot succeed against the state; Sardanapalus, the self-indulgent and neglectful king, dooms himself and his kingdom to destruction by the mob; the old Foscari and the order of Venice are undermined by the hatred of Loredano. When he vows in Don Juan to "war, at least in words" against the enemies of "Thought", he states again his fear of mobs and asserts the primacy of individual rights and responsibilities. Disclaiming any partiality for people as a whole--"Without me, there are demagogues enough", Byron wishes rather "men to be free / As much from mobs as kings--from you as me" (IX, xxiv, xxv). Freedom of that variety is attained only through individual self-control, self-knowledge, and reason curbing passion. In the introduction to The Island, Coleridge claimed that

it may be taken for granted that if [Byron] had known that the sympathy, if not the esteem, of the public had been transferred from Bligh to Christian, that in the opinion of grave and competent writers, the guilt of the mutiny had been almost condoned by the violence and the brutality of the commanding officer, he would have sided with the oppressed rather than the oppressor.

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But this opinion fails to take into account Byron's purpose in the poem and to comprehend Byron's last identity.

Against the background of mutiny against official, political order, The Island explores further mutiny against the order of tradition, Christian teaching, and individual

moral precepts. Further, as we will see, Byron was quite aware of popular sympathy for Christian and the mutineers and of the powerful lure of the islands in his own life.

To read the poem as Byron's affirmation that paradise is an attainable reality, or that it reveals Byron romantically choosing the idealised existence of Neuha and Torquil until Greece offered him the "way of action", is to ignore much of what Byron says in the poem. A large part of understanding The Island lies in understanding the character of the narrator, as well as the implications of the allusions throughout the poem to the literary and moral heritage of the Western world. The narrator is, of course, inseparable from Byron himself if from no other evidence than the digression on mountains he has loved (II, xii). He must also be seen in the light of what he owes to the epic tradition, to the ballad tradition of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, and especially to the narrator of Christabel, all fused to create a persona as important as the narrator of Don Juan in revealing the meaning of the poem. In The Island, Byron's narrator stands outside the poem and is omniscient, as is the narrator of the epic or the ballad, but he is not impersonal and he does make moral judgments. All-knowing, he is also wise and tolerant, lenient as an indulgent father in allowing Torquil to enjoy his idyllic love, knowing sadly that perfection cannot last. As Coleridge had adapted the impersonal tradition of the ballad to give intensity to his ballad-

like tales through the obvious involvement of the narrator in the tale he tells--concluding the Ancient Mariner, by telling us of the ultimate effect of the Mariner's tale on the Wedding Guest and the ominous sense of fear communicated by the all-seeing narrator of Christabel, so Byron grafts a sensate and discerning narrator onto what Blackstone calls his "little epic of insubordination".¹³ The Don Juan narrator-author openly takes the reader into his confidence, behind-the-scenes, as it were, to see the process at work, to watch the creative mind considering, selecting, rejecting, wool-gathering, and ordering the available materials into the story. The narrative is not as important as the technique, the general fate of narrative in the hands of the Romantic poets. In The Island, however, the narrator is no less confiding, only less assertive and less dogmatic than he is in Don Juan. He shares directly and indirectly his view of the inevitable consequences of the upheaval of order. Because Byron told the story of Torquil and Neuha so tenderly and lovingly and because the idea of escape back to paradise is so intrinsically appealing, readers understandably miss the corrective balance of the narrative voice.

The narrator of The Island constantly reminds us of the importance of order indirectly through allusions and directly through narrative technique, theme and structure, and the language of the poem. Adapting the distinctive style of Coleridge's narrator in Christabel

13. Blackstone, Survey, p.263.

in which the preternatural invades and disrupts the order of the manor-house, in The Island, Byron immediately plunges us into a scene filled with foreboding. With the opening words we remember the evil genius of Geraldine who destroyed the innocence of Christabel and befuddled her father's reason and we therefore anticipate danger to the ship. The hour is not midnight, as in Christabel, when man's spirit is believed to be at its lowest ebb but the hour before dawn when man's physical nature is at its most vulnerable point. The story begins near the moment of crisis with the omniscient narrator warning us that before the sun can rise, "a deed is to be done" (I, i). Telling us that the captain sleeps peacefully in his quarters, the narrator then asks and answers a question which establishes in the first few lines the conflicting issues raised in the poem:

And why should not his slumber be secure?
 Alas, his deck was trod by unwilling feet,
 And wilder hands would hold the vessel's sheet;
 Young hearts, which languished for some sunny isle,
 Where summer years and summer women smile. (I, ii)

The initial conflict is between the "establishment" and impetuous youth, complicated further by a narrator whose sympathies are divided. It is "young hearts" too long away from home who threaten the captain's dreams of "Old England" and stability, of "toils rewarded" and the intangible glory to be derived from his voyage successfully completed. The young yearn instead to return to the transitory and sensual "summer years and summer women". "Half-civilised", they prefer the certainty of "the cave / Of some soft savage" and a life of ease in a

land where "promiscuous Plenty" provides for their needs --"the equal land without a lord". Theirs is the longing "which ages have not yet subdued / In man--to have no master save his mood" (I, ii).

The watchful narrator projects his concern and tries to rouse the captain to the danger: "Awake bold Bligh! The foe is at the gate! / Awake! awake!" But his efforts fail--"Alas! It is too late!" (I, iii) The mutineers, driven by their memories of the delights of Toobonai, only recently left, take over the ship in order to return; but the narrator knows that the victory is "dearly earned" (I, ii). While the mutinous crew may escape the discipline of the ship, they will not escape their sense of guilt.

Blackstone has identified the conflict of the mutiny as passion set against conscience, a personification that sets Christian against Bligh and "dramatises a crisis in Byron's own inner life".¹⁴ This reading, however, narrows the scope of the poem and fails to take into account that in the language of the poem, Christian and his followers are, in the abstract, both passion and guilty conscience. Guilt registers "in the scarce believing eyes / Of those who fear the Chief they sacrifice" (I, iii); it motivates Christian to order a boat for Bligh and the loyal members of the crew to avoid direct responsibility for their deaths (I, v). Christian's conscience also prompts his confession that

14. Blackstone, Lost Travellers, pp. 187, 188.

he is in hell (I, vii), but Blackstone thinks "we can discount" that as "all too dramatic", an instance of Byron's following his source for an inexplicable purpose.¹⁵ Christian's understanding that the ground gained in the mutiny could be lost through a surge of conscience in his followers lies behind his order for drinks all around "Lest Passion should return to Reason's shoals" (I, vi); and the narrator's observation generalises on the relation between passion and conscience: "For ne'er can Man his conscience all assuage, / Unless he drain the wine of Passion--Rage" (I, iii).

At issue then is the question of order and the consequences of violating order, whether it be the established social and political order represented by the ship and its discipline seen as a microcosm, or the order of the individual self. The results in either case are chaotic disorder. Byron disapproves of the mutiny in explicit language from the moment the narrator discovers the mutineer standing beside the sleeping leader's cot whose presence "proclaims the reign of rage and fear" (I, iii).¹⁶ Christian and his followers are an unruly mob, delirious "In the first dawning of the drunken hour, / The Saturnalia of unhop'd for power" (I, v), who in their lawlessness convert the ship, the once "proud vessel" into a "moral wreck" (I, vii).

15. Blackstone, Lost Travellers, p. 187.

16. My reading is again the opposite of Blackstone's who finds that Byron "is far from passing judgment on the mutiny. He neither condemns nor approves of Christian and his mates", Lost Travellers, p. 187.

Additionally, the parallels to Coleridge's Rime of the Ancient Mariner remind us that that poem explores the consequences of violating natural order, while Byron examines man's integrity as tested by social and moral order. Guilt and retribution is a theme common to both poems, but in The Island it is the sinned-against who wrestle with the vastness of an indifferent sea and survive to tell their tale. Byron only hints in broad strokes at the suffering of Bligh and his men who endure a long sea-journey in an inadequate boat with meagre supplies: they endure "constant peril" with "scant relief", "days of danger", "nights of pain", and "sapping famine", which reduces them in the end to skeletons. He does, however, like Coleridge, develop in detail

The incessant fever of that arid thirst
Which welcomes, as a well, the clouds that burst
Above their naked bones, and feels delight
In the cold drenching of the stormy night,
And from the outspread canvass gladly wrings
A drop to moisten Life's all-gasping springs.
(I, ix)

But in the Ancient Mariner thirst is a passive condition --"every tongue, through utter drought, / Was withered at the root"; "Each throat / Was parched and glazed each eye" and in Byron's description the thirst becomes a living thing. It "welcomes" the rainclouds, "feels delight" in the rain, and "gladly wrings" moisture from the sail spread to collect it. Man's physical need asserts itself as a positive force. As if in dialectical disagreement with Coleridge, Byron treats the life-preserving rain in The Island as a chance natural occurrence, not as a beneficent reward for penitence.

When Bligh and his sailors reach England and their ordeal is over, they are

The ghastly Spectres which were doomed at last
To tell as true a tale of dangers past,
As ever the dark annals of the deep
Disclosed for man to dread or woman weep. (I, ix)

Their stories set in motion the wheels of official and uncompromising retribution; but just as Byron had put no supernatural interpretation on the saving rain, so no power above the ordinary world metes out the punishment. Man-made socio-political order, having been violated, moves dispassionately and impartially to see justice done to the victims: "Roused discipline aloud proclaims their cause, / And injured Navies urge their broken laws" (I, x).

Against this background of activity to reassert authority Byron leaves the survivors to their fates, "not unknown" and not "unredressed", as he knew from the historical facts of the case, and turns for the final lines of Canto I to the fate of the mutineers. The narrator has clearly left a large part of his heart with Christian and his band while he followed Bligh safely to port. He has already identified them as a "savage foe escaped, to seek again / More hospitable shelter from the main" (I, ix), but takes up their story with pleasure as he turns to search for them "Wide o'er the wave--away! away! away!" He enters vicariously into the delight of the mutineers when again their "eyes shall hail the welcome bay; / Once more the happy shores without a law / Receive the outlaws whom they lately saw" (I, x). The narrator can genuinely admire the daring decision of the men to hazard all on a return to their island paradise, but he

is also experienced enough to know that their act will give pleasure tainted with pain. Earlier, in musing on the irony of the mutineers' celebratory drink, which called to his mind Burke's phrase "Brandy for heroes!" and the essential incongruity of these "rudest sea-boys" raising cheers to Tahiti, "gentle" and "genial" island, the narrator had wondered what possibility of success attended these untamed men who "now prepared with other's woes / To earn mild Virtue's vain desire, repose?" He acknowledged the commonality of desire in all men to find an ideal existence free from labour and the variety of factors of existence which urge us to seek this paradise, but he is also aware of inner restraints which mitigate against surrender to dreams of paradise:

Yet still there whispers the small voice within,
 Heard through Gain's silence, and o'er Glory's din:
 Whatever creed be taught, or land be trod,
 Man's conscience is the Oracle of God. (I, vi)

Byron brings up the matter of the nagging conscience again in the final stanza of Canto I as he imagines the mutineers being accepted back into their natural paradise "where, save their conscience, none accuse". The narrator cannot end the stanza without a final word of regret at the apparent lack of sensitivity in the mutineers. Alluding to the story of Jason and the Argonauts, he reminds us that as they sailed from home they "still looked back"; not so, the mutineers:

These spurn their country with their rebel bark,
 And fly her as the raven fled the Ark;
 And yet they seek to nestle with the dove,
 And tame their fiery spirits down to Love. (I, x)

The images of folly emphasise the improbability of success

in their venture by stressing the primacy of order here as throughout the poem. The narrator knows that no matter how appealing the lotus-eating existence may be, man once enlightened cannot give in to its lure, cannot "escape from Duty's path". Since Adam's expulsion from the first Garden of Eden, he and his children after him have been doomed to earn their bread by the sweat of their brows; to give in to a land where bread grows on trees is to court destruction. The narrator is in sympathy with the all-too-human longings for the simplified and effortless life, but he recognises in its attainment a breaking of moral order.

McGann has called attention to the various passages suggesting a death-and-resurrection theme in the last three cantos.¹⁷ Blackstone, in his latest reading, interprets much the same imagery in the Freudian return-to-the-womb pattern which presupposes rebirth.¹⁸ Their conclusions differ, however, with McGann interpreting death and resurrection, achieved by yielding to Eros, as metaphors "describing a way of living in the natural, human world without being subject to its mastery;"¹⁹ and Blackstone, admitting that "womb poem is also doom poem", sees Byron nonetheless giving in to the lotus-eaters' paradise, saving his "last word" for some later time, but for the present "preferring mergence to inter-

17. McGann, Fiery Dust, pp.194-195, 197-198, especially.

18. Blackstone, Survey, p. 264.

19. McGann, Fiery Dust, p. 198.

pretation."²⁰ Both of these readings seem unsatisfactory in that supporting passages are selected and discussed out of context and some phrases within the text or surrounding lines which would seem contradictory are passed over. The problem returns to the narrative voice. We have grown accustomed to the expatiating tones of the speaker in Beppo and Don Juan. Joseph, in fact, comments that in The Island Byron's "narrative slips easily into comment and personal digression, though without imposing the deliberate double-vision of Beppo and Don Juan . . ." ²¹ While it is true that the narrator does not sermonise on his views, he nevertheless makes them known; caught up as he is in the wish to believe in the return to paradise himself he employs his double vision with lament. The narrator's stance is that of a true moral philosopher who exposes both sides of the issue but does not prescribe the course which others should follow, leaving moral decisions to be made on an individual basis.

Through the narrator's perception, for example, we see that Toobonai is not the earthly paradise which the mutineers envision. The song of the islanders, which memorialises their dead, reveals that the island is not a place for dying into life, as McGann would have it, but a place of living death. The islanders lead, if not a parasitic existence in taking their pleasures from the graves of the dead, at least a realistic life that is never unmindful of death:

20. Blackstone, Survey, pp. 264-265.

21. Joseph, Byron, p. 62.

Yes--from the sepulchre we'll gather flowers,
 Then feast like spirits in their promised bowers,
 Then plunge and revel in the rolling surf,
 Then lay our limbs along the tender turf,
 And, wet and shining from the sportive toil,
 Anoint our bodies with the fragrant oil,
 And plait our garlands gathered from the grave
 And wear the wreaths that sprung from out the brave.
 (II, ii)

Though the natives clearly enjoy the pleasures of being alive, even in their sport they rehearse the preparations of the body for the grave and accept the inevitable without despair. Byron remained conscientiously close to his source in this song that admits the limitations of the island paradise. The portion of Mariner's account which introduces the native song also explains its significance. Mariner relates a tale from the folklore of the island that tells of "a band of young chiefs, heads of a conspiracy" who sought to escape their opponents by hiding in a high, rocky refuge, but in time all were slaughtered.²² During his stay on the island, Mariner witnessed the natives holding one of their periodic commemorations of the event which culminated in the song that Byron made use of. One passage is particularly interesting, not only for the light it throws upon the origin and the meaning of the song as Byron used it in The Island but also as an aid to understanding Byron's point of view in the poem. According to Mariner,

22. William Mariner, An Account of the Natives of the Tonga Islands, in the South Pacific Ocean, with an original Grammar and Vocabulary of their language, ed. John Martin, M.D. (London: John Murray, 1817), I, 303. For the sake of convenience, I attribute the information and the interpretive observations to Mariner though I am aware that Dr. Martin may be responsible for certain editorial comments.

when he lived among the Tonga Islanders, it was their custom to climb to that rocky height "to enjoy the sublime beauty of the surrounding scenery, or to reflect on the fate of those rebellious men, who, so long ago, departed from the scene of public tumult, by dying in an unsuccessful attempt to change the order of things".²³

As Mariner continues, he reports "the moral reflections of the natives" as they prepare themselves for the dancing and singing that will shortly take place in this burying ground. They begin with a meditation on the vanity of human aspirations, which, though Byron omitted it, is a theme running through The Island:

Where are these men who once held up their heads in defiance of their chiefs? where now is the proud boast of superiority? their bodies lie here mingled with the dust, and their names are almost forgotten! ...in Bolotoo they are all gods, and we see with a clear understanding the folly of fighting.²⁴

In the song that follows Byron preserved faithfully the words as Mariner had recorded them so that the natives are caught in an interlude between their apprehension of "the folly of fighting" and the knowledge that tomorrow they may lose their lives in battle with the Fiji Islanders: "Let us enjoy the present time, for tomorrow or perhaps the next day we may die".²⁵ The unsigned review of Mariner's Tonga Islands in the Quarterly, now attributed to Southey, points up a basic difference between

23. Mariner, Tonga Islands, I, 304.

24. Mariner, Tonga Islands, I, 304.

25. Mariner, Tonga Islands, I, 307-308.

Byron and his Romantic brethren.²⁶ Southey was charmed enough by the song to quote it almost entirely, but he went to some effort to remove allusions to death. That he consciously romanticised the song becomes apparent in his claim that he quotes the song "with no other variation from Dr. Martin's idiomatic version than what the English idiom requires...."²⁷ Among his "improvements" then, Southey changes "burying place" to "precipice" in the line "We will gather flowers near the burying place at Matawato" and he changes Mariner's phrase "plait in wreathes the flowers gathered at Matawato" to "plait the chi plucked at Matawato", chi being the Tonga Islanders word for flowers that Southey found in the vocabulary at the end of the second volume, scarcely a service to "the English idiom" but a concealment that the natives' activity was a memorial to their dead.²⁸ Byron's changes, on the other hand, preserve the meaning of the song, changing words only for the sake of the requirements of his poetic meter, "burying place", for example, becomes "sepulchre". Both he and the islanders face the reality of life. The natives appreciate the transitory nature of their paradise and in their song value and prolong the moment stolen from their simple responsibilities. Their song alludes to the toils and the "public tumult" to which they must return: "The Mooa woos us back", and the sound of

26. "Accounts of the Tonga Islands", Quarterly Review, XVII (April 1817), 1-39. See Hill Shine and Helen Chadwick Shine, The Quarterly Review under Gifford: Identification of Contributors, 1809-1824 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1949), p. 55, for the evidence used to establish Southey as the reviewer.

27. Quarterly Review, XVII, 33.

28. Quarterly Review, XVII, 34.

the women pounding bark to make tappa-cloth reminds them that they only momentarily escape their tasks and the public ceremony on "the Marly's green" for those who will be going into battle. The constant threat of death has taught them to make the most of the time they have:

...feast tonight! tomorrow we depart.
Strike up the dance! the Cava bowl fill high!
Drain every drop!--tomorrow we may die. (II, ii)

The narrator acknowledges that the islanders enjoy an imperfect and flawed paradise but, despite their carpe diem existence, one superior to that offered in the Old World:

True, they had vices--such are Nature's growth--
But only the barbarian's--we have both;
The sordor of civilisation, mixed
With all the savage which Man's fall has fixed.
(II, iv)

The primary flaw of the New World, however, is its innocence, epitomised in Neuha, "infant of an infant world" (II, vi). She possesses an unblemished naiveté, possible only in one who is spared "Experience, that chill touchstone, whose / Sad proof reduces all things from their hues" (II, vii). Neuha is the perfect mate for Torquil. She is heedless of whatever ills she has known because "what she knew was soon--too soon--forgot" (II, viii). He also applies this Blakean appreciation for experience to Torquil, the other island child. Although of an Old World northern island, he retains the innocence of untried youth. Having from infancy looked on the sea as home, he is the victim of a mindless existence:

the sport of wave and air;
 A careless thing, who placed his choice in chance,
 Nursed by the legends of his land's romance.
 (II, viii)

Legends fall into the same category as the song of the islanders, and, as we learned in the narrator's long digression, when they "reach the awakened heart", inspire the hearer to great deeds (II, v). While Torquil possessed heroic qualities--optimism, bravery, "a soaring spirit", which under other circumstances might have challenged him to fulfil his potential, the narrator cannot ignore the actuality to which his drifting existence has led the Hebrides child: "what was he here? / A blooming boy, a truant mutineer" (IX, ix). The double meaning of "blooming" underlines Byron's moral judgment.

In a reversal of the roles which brought about the first fall from Paradise, Torquil teaches Neuha "Passion's desolating joy" and an epic simile forewarns of the end which awaits the naive as a result of this "too powerful" experience, "most" so

O'er those who know not how it may be lost;
 O'er those who, burning in their new-born fire,
 Like martyrs revel in their funeral pyre,
 With such devotion to their ecstasy,
 That Life knows no such rapture as to die:
 And die they do.... (II, vi)

McGann interprets this passage to mean that "Nothing human dies in this fire, and a fullness is gained when the desire for life, ending at last, becomes wholly translated into the desire for love".²⁹ On the contrary, the poem seems to say that everything human dies when the naive sacrifice life for love. Neither the fact that the lovers

29. McGann, Fiery Dust, p. 194.

"die" in the sexual sense in "that burst of Nature" nor the fact that earthly love leads us up the ladder to the concept of "better life above" overshadows the other meaning of "die they do": lost innocence is merely the first step toward lost paradise. In the stanza that follows, Byron acknowledges Neuha as the very essence of innocent, unselfish love, as yet untouched by harsh reality, but he wonders at her fate when the inevitable cataclysmic event occurs. The most optimistic view which he can take is that she will survive as the "Spirit" of all-giving love (II, vii).

The narrator's corrective, balancing view pervades also the escape-from-reality motif, which runs through The Island. He understands why the mutineers had succumbed to the temptations of the island. To them Toobonai was as fabulous as the island of the Phaeacians was to Homer, who digressed at length as Odysseus made his way to the palace of King Alcinous, to point out the agricultural marvels of Scheria--trees which bear bud, blossom, and fruit in every stage of ripening. The mutineers South Sea paradise offered "The Cava feast, the Yam, and Cocoa's root, / Which bears at once the cup, and milk, and fruit" and, better yet,

The Bread-tree which, without the ploughshare, yields
The unreaped harvests of unfurrowed fields,
And bakes its unadulterated loaves
Without a furnace in unpurchased groves. (II, xi)

The positively desirable, expressed in negatives, remains negative, after all; nothing comes of nothing. The narrator knows that western man cannot obliterate upbringing and conscience to enjoy for long this "more happy,

if less wise" state although he reports that the idyllic island "Did more than Europe's discipline had done, / And civilised Civilisation's son!" (II, xi)

In reading The Island, which opposes Old and New World islands, we cannot fail to recall that epic tale of islands, The Odyssey, which sets up a contrapuntal theme against Byron's poem as it contrasts islands and cultures and celebrates Odysseus's choosing in the end the reality of rocky Ithaca instead of a life of ease. No conflict tortured Odysseus when Alcinous offered him a home in his kingdom with the beautiful Nausicaa for his wife. Life in the utopian society among the highly skilled and civilised Phaeacians would not test either his brains or brawn. He preferred the challenge of his own island and a wife of his own choosing. Nor had Calypso's offer of immortal life tempted him to remain with her on Ogygia. For Odysseus, an eternity on that far and mysterious island would have been a living death; he would not sacrifice the prospect of eventual death which adds the zest to life.

In the narrator's eyes self-indulgent seeking after the life of ease leads to empty desolation. When most of the mutineers had been "crushed, dispersed, or ta'en", the few who managed to escape the avenging ship sent from England knew that their cause was lost: "Their sea-green isle, their guilt-won Paradise, / No more could shield their Virtue or their Vice" (III, ii). Yet they determined to resist capture; and when the last resisters, except Torquil, were slain and the guilt-torn Christian

they never paused o'er time,
 Unbroken by the clock's funereal chime,
 Which deals with daily pittance of our span,
 And points and mocks with iron laugh at man.
 (II, xv)

The narrator sees their lack of concern for past and future as an ambiguous blessing, however: "The present, like a tyrant, holds them fast" (II, xv). When Torquil plunges after Neuha to discover the cave, this event had been ominously foreshadowed earlier in the sun setting in the sea "As dives a hero headlong to his grave" (II, xv), and again, when his eyes question Neuha whether the rock that conceals the entrance to the cave is "a place of safety, or a grave" (IV, iii). The cave itself is a thing which might have been created out of the destruction of former worlds and holds "a little tinge of phantasy" in its Gothic-like construction (IV, vii). The narrator devotes an entire stanza to listing a series of unanswered questions which attempt to unravel the mystery of Torquil's disappearance, seen as no ordinary human feat. Has Torquil, "Following the Nereid", somehow reversed the natural world; "Wrung life and pity from the softening wave;" or become a part of the legendary, supernatural world of Mermen and Mermaids; or had he simply perished as would be expected of ordinary mortals? (IV, v)

When the lovers at last emerge from their cave to rejoin the islanders, no ship was seen on the horizon, "all was Hope and Home" (IV, xv). But the narrator has already established that "Hope's last gleam in Man's extremity" is "White as a sail on a dusky sea" of a

departing ship and as it gradually fades from view, "The heart still follows from the loneliest shore" (IV, i). He has little expectation that Torquil will find contentment on the island. Torquil's sense of duty had called him earlier to aid Christian and the other mutineers; and though he had promised Neuha "I am thine whatever intervenes", Ben Bunting's cynical "'that will do for the Marines'" is spoken out of the wisdom of past experience (II, xxii). As Torquil settles down "To Peace and Pleasure, perilously earned", the jubilant natives rechristen the cave, site of an island fairy tale romance, "Neuha's cave" and celebrate the return of the lovers with a night of feasting, "succeeded by such happy days / As only the infant world displays" (IV, xv). In the phrase "infant world" the narrator sums up the price which Torquil pays for his idyll. Not only do infants lack wisdom, but they also grow up. In allying his fate with Neuha's, Torquil must accept her future. Her life has been uneventful and unruffled; whatever minor disturbances have come her way have left no mark,

as light winds pass
 O'er lakes to ruffle, not destroy, their glass
 Whose depths unsearched, and fountains from the hill,
 Restore their surface in itself so still,
 Until the Earthquake tear the Naiad's cave,
 Root up the spring, and trample on the wave,
 And crush the living waters to a mass,
 The amphibious desert of the dank morass! (II, vii)

"And must their fate be hers?" Byron's answer is that all creation alters radically - in the slow movement of time, worlds fall; in human beings, the process is merely speedier. Byron leaves the final fate of the fallen

human being, the hope of triumph over disaster and the ascent to "Spirit o'er all", to the conditional "if just" (II, vii). Experience tells us that the idea of innocent, giving, all-absorbing love does survive in man's reveries.

Byron cannot disapprove of Torquil's desire to remain on his island of perfect love. The inspired descriptive passages of the serenity of island life and of the ecstatic escape from reality reveal Byron's sympathetic understanding. Torquil, not taken from Bligh's Narrative, is Byron's pure invention, truly the child of his imagination, allowed to survive in life transmuted to fairy tale. But he is also a recreation of Byron's youthful self, and we are reminded of the juvenile "To Romance" in which Byron had put away childish things:

At length, in spells no longer bound,
 I break the fetters of my youth.
 No more I tread thy mystic round,
 But leave thy realms for those of Truth.

And yet 't is hard to quit the dreams
 Which haunt the unsuspecting soul,
 Where every nymph a goddess seems,
 Whose eyes through rays immortal roll;
 While Fancy holds her boundless reign,
 And all assume a varied hue;
 When Virgins seem no longer vain,
 And even Woman's smiles are true.

He indulges Torquil in an interlude of happiness and himself in the pleasure of the memory of the golden days of youth, but he never forgets his rueful knowledge that dreams are insubstantial.

In The Island Byron relives the wonder and exuberance of the child and revives the innocent

optimism of the world new and fabulous to the child. But in destroying Christian, he destroys the rebellious and moody self which constantly pursued and mocked both child and man, yet nonetheless informed them both. The Island, on one level, demonstrates how Byron had come to terms with his own nature and with Romantic longings. The poem, however, is not unqualified indulgence in an escape into a dream. When we set aside what we expect Byron to say and read The Island in the context of the works which surround it and in the light of Byron's mature philosophy, the poem urges that there is no retreat from reality.

We now know from Steffan's study of the Don Juan manuscripts that The Island was not written simultaneously with Cantos XIII and XIV as generally presumed, but rather bursts in upon the English Cantos. Midway through Canto XII Byron had announced enthusiastically a drastic change in plans for his satire, claiming that the "first twelve books are merely flourishes, / Preludios" and that he now meant "to canter through a hundred" cantos (liv, lv); yet when he had completed the twelfth canto on December 7, 1822, he laid the work aside until February 12, 1823.³⁰ In the brief interim Byron turned his poetic energies immediately and, we must conclude, spiritedly to the

30. Lord Byron: Don Juan, edd. T.G. Steffan, E. Steffan, and W.W. Pratt, Penguin English Poets, 1973, reprinted with revisions, 1977, pp. 707, 715. References to the dating of the Don Juan cantos are to this edition which incorporates the most recent information on that subject.

quite different Age of Bronze and The Island.³¹ At the same time he seems to have returned to The Deformed Transformed as he sends Mary Shelley in late January "a few scenes more of the drama before begun, for her transcriptive leisure".³² Because Byron originally thought of the satire and the verse tale as material for an upcoming issue of The Liberal, critics have found it easy to dismiss them as pieces he wrote hastily to fulfil his commitment to the Hunts. The nature of these works, however, suggests that they are more important in his orientation as a poet than would appear at a casual glance and enhances their significance in the development of Byron's poetic theory.

When Byron had resumed Don Juan in mid-1822 after a sixteen-month interval, he had fairly raced through six cantos, completing Canto XI on the seventeenth of October, bringing Juan to England toward the end of Canto X. As we can see, however, the further Juan progresses into England the more diffuse the poem becomes. Byron's imaginary return to England seems to have generated emotional conflicts that diminished the effectiveness of his satire. Indeed, Canto XII, which cost Byron almost as much time in the spinning as the whole of the three previous cantos, itself seems like an irruption into the total poem.³³ Here, Byron very nearly loses the narrative thread altogether as he founders among digression after

31. Coleridge, PW, V, 537, 581, indicates that The Age of Bronze was begun in December, 1822, and completed January 10, 1823; and The Island was completed February 14, 1823.

32. PLJ, VI, 165, January 25, 1823.

33. Steffan, Lord Byron, pp. 675, 684, 692, 707.

digression. What Kroeber has observed in the case of The Vision of Judgment must be applied to Don Juan as well: the success of the poem depends upon "strong feelings strongly controlled".³⁴

Byron's thoughts of publishing The Age of Bronze and The Island in The Liberal indicate astute design rather than mere attention to an obligation. Murray's merciless "review" of the first issue ^{of} The Liberal no doubt added measurably to Byron's turbulent spirits with the usual counter-effect of boosting his determination not to be dictated to. While Murray had disapproved of Byron's involvement in a periodical scheme with Leigh Hunt from the beginning, his attack on Byron after the first issue of The Liberal had appeared is more than animosity towards the Hunts: it is a sign of a dangerous submission to sentimental public taste and a greatly narrowed freedom of intellect. In his letter, Murray comments on both The Liberal and the three new cantos of Don Juan, which Kinnaird had sent him, presumably VI, VII and VIII, although Kinnaird by that time had Canto IX, as well. Of The Liberal Murray says,

...never since I have been a publisher did I ever observe such a universal outcry as this work has occasioned and it is deemed to be no less dull than wickedly intended....You see the result of being forced into contact wi[t]h wretches who take for granted that every one must be as infamous as themselves--Really Lord Byron--it is dreadful to think of yr. association with such outcasts from Society.

His view of the Don Juan cantos is equally passionate and,

34. Karl Kroeber, Romantic Narrative Art (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), p. 135.

if Murray's opinion is an unclouded window on the world of readers' taste, equally enlightening:

I declare to you they were so outrageously shocking that I would not publish them if you were to give me your Estate--Title and Genius--For Heaven's sake revise them--they are equal in talent to any thing you have written--it is therefore well worth while to extract what would shock the feeling of every man in the country and do your name everlasting injury--My company used to be courted for the pleasure of talking about you--it is totally the reverse now --and by a re-action even your former works are considerably deteriorated in sale. It is impossible for you to have a more purely attached friend than I am--My name is connected with your Fame and I beseech you to take care of it even for your sister's sake--for we are in constant alarm but she should be deprived of her situation about Court--Do let us have your good humour again and put Juan in the tone of Beppo.³⁵

The Liberal, then, must have seemed to Byron the most likely outlet for an attack on such bigotry and self-righteous complacency. The periodical had at least attracted enough readers to raise an "outcry" and was his most accessible means for publishing short pieces such as The Age of Bronze and The Island. Although he carried on with Canto XII with the weight of Murray's letter upon him, he clearly was not in control of his material. In the pieces written between that and the last Juan cantos, Byron took stock of himself and of the state of men's affairs in the world. When he finally resumed Don Juan in the English Cantos, he had arrived at a new stance and stability, an equanimity persuasive in its honest amusement with the variety that life offers, the good and the bad. In the meantime Byron had found

35. L.A. Marchand, Byron: A Biography (London: John Murray, 1957), III, 1039-40, unpublished MSS. letter, John Murray, October 29, 1822.

that genteel mode of address which Tristram Shandy so much admired in his father, "that soft and irresistible piano of voice, which the nature of the argumentum ad hominem absolutely requires".

While Bostetter speaks the truth when he says that in Cantos XI and XII Byron seems to be "marking time", to interpret this as a sign that Byron had "temporarily run out of inspiration" is again perhaps too easy a solution.³⁶ When we look at these early English Cantos together with the poems Byron wrote before resuming Don Juan we see Byron undergoing the periodic reorientation process which Peckham has described as necessary to the Romantic poet if he is to fulfil his high calling to redeem the world. The realisation that value is not to be derived from the discovery of order and meaning in the world of external nature but from the self projected on the world requires of the poet a repeated dislodging of a particular orientation to keep himself adequate to his task of redemption. Thus, according to Peckham and contrary to previous views about Romantic poets, it is not "emotional disturbance for its own sake" which the Romantic poet values but "as a means to break down an orientation which, as a human being, he is tempted to preserve but as a Romantic being, he knows by definition is inadequate".³⁷ Byron's poetry of the last months of 1822 and the beginning of 1823 when

36. Bostetter, The Romantic Ventriloquists, p.242.

37. Peckham, "Reconsiderations", p. 6.

he had finished The Island is a record of his acquiring a new orientation.

Byron's daily life during this time held enough disruption in itself to account for what would seem to be a loss of poetic power. Shelley's death had forced upon him a degree of responsibility for Shelley's family, not to mention the obligations he had to assume for Leigh Hunt and his family, newly arrived in Pisa. Added to these burdens, the uneasy state of Italian politics required him to move the revolutionary Gambas and the Guiccioli once more, this time to Genoa; and the final break with Murray at the end of 1822 led to his arrangement with John Hunt as his publisher and a deeper involvement in The Liberal at a time when he had begun to regret his alliance with the Hunts in this project. Such a combination of events no doubt contributed to the difficulties Byron found in settling into a routine in Genoa favourable to his work and could account for the uneven quality of Cantos XI and XII. Yet the problems apparent in these cantos suggest that they grow out of Byron's material and are intrinsically related to a loss of control of the narrative voice. In fact, it is perhaps fair to say that the narrator almost assumes the role of a character in the poem. We no longer feel that he is outside the story, but sense that he has entered the narrative as a presence, that he is Juan's companion full of strong opinions and unmanageable feelings about the country in which Juan now finds himself. In a word, Byron had lost the detachment that kept him free from

abrasive sentiment in the previous cantos.

When he had left England in 1809 on his first venture from home, from Falmouth Byron had boasted to Hodgson "I leave England without regret, I shall return to it without pleasure.-- --I am like Adam, the first convict sentenced to transportation, but I have no Eve, and have eaten no apple but what was sour as a crab and thus ends my first Chapter".³⁸ Significantly, Byron returns to the transportation metaphor in Canto X just before his imagination sets him down once more on English soil. What we know of the events behind his first departure from England scarcely warranted Byron's image of that pleasure jaunt as an expulsion from Eden more brutal than Adam's who had at least had the comfort of Eve's company to share his misery and the consolation of having enjoyed tasty if forbidden fruit to account for and alleviate his predictable suffering, but he might have been justified in this attitude when he had taken leave of England in 1816 and in his vow to find no pleasure on his return. As Juan begins his English experience towards the end of Canto X, however, Byron's spiritual return in what was ironically to be the beginning of his last "Chapter" brought him extremes of pleasure as well as pain. Quite obviously caught off guard by the emotional effects of arousing dormant memories, Byron finally brought Don Juan temporarily to rest at the end of Canto XII until he had regained a more dispassionate perspective.

38. MLJ, I, 211, June 25, 1809.

Byron shares the young traveller's pleasure in the stormy channel crossing: "seasoned" Juan "with a flowing sail / Went bounding for the Island of the free", like all tourists, eager to "catch the first glimpse of the cliffs" (X, lxiv). Nor was he disappointed:

At length they rose, like a white wall along
 The blue sea's border; and Don Juan felt--
 What even young strangers feel a little strong
 At the first sight of Albion's chalky belt--
 A kind of pride that he should be among
 Those haughty shopkeepers who sternly dealt
 Their goods and edicts out from pole to pole,
 And made the very billows pay them toll. (X, lxv)

Against Juan's simplistic understanding and as a corrective to his own immediate pleasure, the narrator views the scene as a sad reminder of England's failure to live up to her ideals. Without regard for Don Juan's eighteenth century time-frame, Byron's attention here, and elsewhere in the English Cantos, is on contemporary England. English theory of rights and individual freedom contrasts sharply with current practice in England, and the nation has also gained the reputation of an oppressor of other nations with the continuation of the imperious Navigation Acts and protective tariffs which prosper her commercial interests at the expense of other countries.

In the next stanza Byron makes an effort to assess his mixed emotions:

I've no great cause to love that spot on earth,
 Which holds what might have been the noblest nation;
 For though I owe it little but my birth,
 I feel a mixed regret and veneration
 For its decaying fame and former worth.
 Seven years (the usual term for transportation)
 Of absence lay one's own resentments level,
 When a man's country's going to the devil. (X, lxvi)

His attitude is an acceptable union of concern and regret.

The degree of magnanimity he gains, however, by conquering his personal grievances is soon lost in the unmitigated hatred voiced in the two stanzas which follow. Byron had begun the canto with praise for Newton who had changed the world through his scientific discoveries and his own wish "to do as much by Poesy" (X, i-iii). The years of absence had indeed given him an advantageous perspective on the ills of English political and social life, and he hoped to bring his poetical talents to bear on redressing those wrongs. But when he shares with his country the unflattering image she projects to the world, his rancorous description seems more designed to touch the hearts of his growing European and American audience than his own countrymen:

Alas! could she but fully, truly, know
 How her great name is now throughout abhorred;
 How eager all the Earth is for the blow
 Which shall lay bare her bosom to the sword;
 How all the nations deem her their worst foe
 That worse than worst of foes, the once adored
 False friend, who held out Freedom to Mankind,
 And now would chain them--to the very mind!--

Would she be proud, or boast herself the free,
 Who is but first of slaves? The nations are
 In prison, --but the gaoler, what is he?
 No less a victim to the bolt and bar.
 Is the poor privilege to turn the key
 Upon the captive, Freedom? He's as far
 From the enjoyment of the earth and air
 Who watches o'er the chain, as they who wear.
 (X, lxvii-lxviii)

The satire is only slightly softened as Byron turns to Juan's discovery of "dear Dover" and the "long, long bills" prepared for the naive visitor (X, lxix). He recovers his good humour as the little entourage posts in high spirits through Kent towards London:

On with the horses! Off to Canterbury!
 Tramp, tramp o'er pebble, and splash, splash through
 puddle;
 Hurrah! how swiftly speeds the post so merry!
 (X, lxxi)

And again,

On! on! through meadows, managed like a garden,
 A paradise of hops and high production.
 (X, lxxvi)

Although the quietly ordered green fields of Kent do not match a European landscape of "more sublime construction, / Which mixes up vines--olives--precipes-- / Glaciers--volcanos--oranges and ices", the scene drives Byron's thoughts forward to anticipate the end result of the hops fields and to a sentimental mood: "and when I think upon a pot of beer-- / But I won't weep!--and so drive on, postillions!" (X, lxxvii)

These wide swings of mood continue through to the end of the canto. He undercuts Juan's awe at his first glimpse of London from Shooter's Hill with his own conviction that the city symbolises "the mother, / Who butchered half the earth, and bullied t'other" (X, lxxxix). But he regains his balance as he describes the reality of London against Juan's romanticising of "each wreath of smoke . . . as the magic vapour / Of some alchymic furnace" (X, lxxxiii). Byron recreates smokey, bustling London with deep delight, lovingly accepting her as she is:

A mighty mass of brick, and smoke, and shipping,
 Dirty and dusky, but as wide as eye
 Could reach, with here and there a sail just skipping
 In sight, then lost amidst the forestry
 Of masts; a wilderness of steeples peeping
 On tiptoe through their sea-coal canopy;
 A huge, dun Cupola, like a foolscap crown
 On a fool's head--there is London Town! (X, lxxxii)

Dissolving the paradox of Wordsworth's London "All bright and glittering in the smokeless air" of early morning who in her quiet mood emulates the splendour of "valley, rock, or hill", Byron appreciates the evidence of her man-centred activities. Byron's London does not disguise herself in imitation of Nature's open and tranquil fields but has subdued and absorbed Nature into her human activity. Nature serves man with the "forestry / Of masts" jostling against "a wilderness of steeples". Commerce and industry tower over the church so that St. Paul's presides over all wearing a dunce cap.

Byron closes the canto with fair warning that he pauses "as doth a crew / Before they give their broadside". He promises his countrymen "truths you will not take as true, / Because they are so", and remonstrates with Mrs. Fry who would reform female prisoners:

To mend the People's an absurdity,
A jargon, a mere philanthropic din,
Unless you make their betters better....
(X, lxxxiv, lxxv)

They must be told that "though it may be, perhaps, too late . . . To set up vain pretence of being great, / 'T is not so to be good", and he promises to return like Roland to sound the warning of their approaching doom (X, lxxxvii).

In Cantos XI and XII as Byron journeys further into London and the familiar haunts and scenes of his days of glory in the heart of London society, the narrative proceeds by fits and starts, but almost disappears entirely in Canto XII. Reliving through Juan's introduction into London society his own earlier days in that "great world",

Byron cannot resist, as the memories crowd in upon him, the temptation to digress on the Blues, on the poets of his day, on women's wiles and schemes; on truth and reality, honesty and hypocrisy, permanence and change. And while even he recognised that the appeal of Don Juan for himself and his readers lay in the discursive and rambling nature of the poem, he could not afford to lose the story line on which he hung his digressions. His memory was proving to be a horse bewitched, his Pegasus out of control:

Oh! ye ambrosial moments! always upper
 In mind, a sort of sentimental bogle,
 Which sits forever upon Memory's crupper,
 The ghost of vanished pleasures once in vogue!
 (XI, lxxii)

The former scenes and events which reappear so vividly in Byron's mind's eye in their odd mixture of nostalgia and recrimination not only threaten the narrative movement of the poem but his effectiveness as a moral poet. He is in the grave danger of becoming a narrow moraliser.

His problem then is two-fold, but with the parts interdependent on each other. He must make memory work for him instead of against him by submitting it to the selecting and editing powers of the imagination; and he must find the grace as well as the voice to accept the world as it is. The first is an act of will and understanding which leads directly to the solution to the second, the combining, in Coleridge's words, of "judgement ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement".³⁹ In

39. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, p. 174.

Detached Thoughts Byron had reflected on the vagaries of memory and considered inconclusively and distrustfully what part imagination played in the process:

It is singular how soon we lose the impression of what ceases to be constantly before us. A year impairs, a lustre obliterates. There is little distinct left without an effort of memory: then indeed the lights are rekindled for a moment; but who can be sure that Imagination is not the torch-bearer? Let any man try at the end of ten years to bring before him the features, or the mind, or the sayings, or the habits, of his best friend, or his greatest man (I mean his favourite--his Buonaparte, his this, that or 'tother), and he will be surprized at the extreme confusion of his ideas. I speak confidently on this point, having always past [sic] for one who had a good, aye, an excellent memory.⁴⁰

Byron acknowledges the elusiveness of memory as well as the burden of his "aye, excellent memory". But he does not touch on the creative and therefore productive use of memory, except by implication, its capacity to connect the past with the present and the future. This, however, is the use he makes of memory in these cantos.

Out of his memory he creates a fantasy world ("What is Poetry?--The feeling of a Former world and Future"), but memory tyrannises him so that he loses direction. Open as ever in sharing his perplexities, with the reader, in both cantos Byron wrestles candidly with his problem. In the first stanzas of Canto XI, while he makes fun of philosophy in general and Bishop Berkley's in particular, Byron is also concerned with the problem of memory, the origin of ideas, and the disparity between the world as we see it and the world as we would have it. He would gladly accept Berkley's

40. PLJ, V, 433-434.

refutation of Locke and believe that there is no matter, only spirit (i). He would be all too willing to accept as true Berkley's proposition that the world is only our idea if somehow he could account for the reality of his own experience which tells him that the body is more than idea and, in a case of indigestion, holds supremacy over spirit (ii-iii). In his Ravenna Journal it had amused Byron to record the details of a bout with indigestion during which he observed

the complete inertion, inaction, and destruction of my chief mental faculties. I tried to rouse them, and yet could not--and this is Soul!!! I should believe that it was married to the body, if they did not sympathise so much with each other.... But as it is, they seem to draw together like post-horses.⁴¹

Philosophy is inadequate to explain what experience and consciousness present as "confusion . . . and this unriddled wonder, / The World, which at the worst's a glorious blunder" (iii,iv). Byron therefore falls back on the responsibility of the self to give value to the world as it exists: "If I agree that what is, is; -- then this I call / Being quite perspicuous and extremely fair" (v). In this assertion he contrasts Pope's Neoclassical dictum that "Whatever is, is right" and the charge to discover the laws and therefore the values of the universe with the Romantic mandate to accept a chaotic world and to redeem it by projecting values upon it as it is. Byron demonstrates how easily the human being is enabled to accept a given body of beliefs with his facetious illustration of how a sequence of physical

41. MLJ, VIII, 51.

illnesses proved to him "the Divinity", "the Virgin's mystical virginity", the "Origin of Evil", and "the whole Trinity"; or to find value in intrinsically beautiful or moving spots of the world--Attica seen from the Acropolis, "picturesque Constantinople", Timbuctoo, and so on (vi, vii). But London, unlike the wide world, does not so easily reveal her charms. Byron nevertheless is convinced that when the visitor comes to know her he will find such charms as make her lovable in spite of superficial ugliness and says, confident of an affirmative answer, "ask of him what he thinks of it a year hence!"

This is wisdom Byron very much needed to remind himself of in these first English Cantos. Bostetter has judged that through "Don Juan", Byron had found a way out of the impasse in which his contemporaries were trapped. He had achieved a point of view and method capable of encompassing the complex world in which they lived."⁴² While this is true of Don Juan as a whole, in Cantos XI and XII Byron had temporarily lost his way as he subsided into his memories of the past. The fact that the narrative becomes static is a symptom of the general lack of forward movement in these cantos. The ubi sunt stanzas, followed by the cataloguing of all the changes he has seen in seven years time (XI, lxxvi-lxxxv), are perhaps extreme examples of the "sentimental bogle" that rode on "Memory's crupper", but they indicate that Byron is foundering in a welter of unsorted recollections.

42. Bostetter, p. 302.

If his memories are to work effectively for him, are to become more than a retreat to the past, he must impose on them a meaning, explore them for significance, and blend them with invention. The undisguised portrait of Lady Melbourne in *Lady Pinchbeck* in Canto XII, for example, sticking too close as it does to Byron's undigested memories of his dear friend, in the long run fails to do service to her or credit to Byron. As a character in *Don Juan* she is probably least memorable in the reader's mind among his many excellent portraits of women because he drew her so directly from his memories. He had not first generalised her as a type before particularising her in *Lady Pinchbeck* as he was able to do in the characters of the enigmatic Lady Adeline or the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke, "her gracious, graceful, graceless Grace" (XVI, xlviiii), in the last cantos.

The opening of Canto XII indicates that Byron was aware that he had lost both perspective and voice:

Of all the barbarous middle ages, that
 Which is most barbarous is the middle age
 Of man! it is--I really scarce know what;
 But when we hover between fool and sage,
 And don't know justly what we would be at--
 A period something like a printed page,
 Black letter upon foolscap, while our hair
 Grows grizzled, and we are not what we were;--

Too old for Youth--too young, at thirty five,
 To herd with boys, or hoard with good threescore,--
 I wonder whether people should be left alive;
 But since they are, that epoch is a bore:
 Love lingers still, although 't were late to wive:
 And as for other love, the illusion's o'er;
 And Money, that most pure imagination,
 Gleams only through the dawn of its creation. (i, ii)

We cannot fail to notice the ironic contradiction between the Middle Ages with its comprehensive, systematised

philosophy which made possible a resignation to reward (or punishment) in the next world and Byron as the middle-aged individual in the modern world who expects his pleasure in this world. Along with the sense of stagnation expressed in the image of his life as completed "like a printed page" and his concern with sex and money, both high on the list of interests of mature and decaying cultures as well as men, we feel the beginnings of a new Byronic orientation. Ultimately, in the dialectic of self-consciousness when he is unable to find the fulfilment of his hopes and desires in the world as he finds it, Byron refuses to accept defeat and sets about accommodating himself to the world. He recognises that he cannot "hover between fool and sage" but must assume the role of one or the other, for either speaks truth.

The long digression on the power of money follows, and whether we believe he speaks with the voice of the wise fool or the foolish sage, his outrageous defence of the pursuit of money rings with the truth of experience and conviction. The stanzas echo the sentiments he was expressing in his letters not long before to a shocked and disbelieving Kinnaird as he urged his friend to bargain hard with Murray for his manuscripts, though more as retribution for Murray's delays and censures than out of his professed love of money. In Canto XII, however, Byron translates his material into a humourous satire on greed which his readers could accept as a portrait of himself yet could not fail to apply to their own materialistic attitudes. He disguises his scorn for the acquisitive

aristocratic class and Malthusian economics by turning vice into a virtue and allowing himself to be the recipient of ridicule.

Having acquired the proper blend of wrath and partiality⁴³ towards his detached self as the target, Byron tried to resume his narrative, but immediately admits his problem:

What with a small diversity of climate,
Of hot or cold, mercurial or sedate,
I could send forth my mandate like a Primate
Upon the rest of Europe's social state;
But thou art the most difficult to rhyme at,
Great Britain, which the Muse may penetrate.
All countries have their "Lions", but in thee
There is but one superb menagerie. (XII, xxiv)

Less than a quarter of the stanzas of this canto relate to the narrative, and most of these are concerned with getting Leila under the wing of Lady Pinchbeck and thus neatly disposed of at least for the time. Byron falls back into his memories of the days of his high life in English society. Absorbed in re-creating the battle of the sexes, Byron suddenly finds himself inspired to extend his poem to a hundred cantos and instantly sets out an organising principle which he unfortunately loses sight of in a further tumbling out of memories; "Don Juan saw that Microcosm on stilts, / Yclept the Great World" (XII, lvi). Consideration in detail of the matchmaking hobby of women aristocrats gives way to the praise of the charms of foreign women when compared with English women with too much partiality towards foreign women and too much wrath against the English, "like

43. See Don Juan, XII, xix and Byron's note, PW, VI, note 2, in which he mentions "wrath, and partiality" as "virtues in a writer, because they make him write in earnest".

virtuous mermaids, whose / Beginnings are fair faces,
 ends mere fishes" (lxxiii). Byron ends the canto
 lamely as he had ended Canto XI, repeating his promise
 to tell what happened to Juan in England, and declaring
 again that the British are an immoral people. In Canto
 XII, however, his hostility seems to have diminished, a
 positive sign of Byron's increasing objectivity. In
 Canto XI he had stated brazenly "You are not a moral
 people, and you know it, / Without the aid of too sincere
 a poet" and claimed not to care that the work would
 inevitably come under attack: "So much the better!--
 I may stand alone, / But would not change my free thoughts
 for a throne" (lxxxvii, xc), but in closing Canto XII he
 softened his tone and projected further cantos which would
 have something in common with the popular sentimental
 novels of the day. As he forecasts the story of Juan's
 "temptation" to include "what, and where, with whom, and
 when, and why", he reminds the reader that his "object is
 Morality" and suggests that he will improve their morals
 by playing on their tender emotions:

I don't know whether
 I'll leave a single reader's eyelid dry,
 But harrow up his feelings till they wither,
 And hew out a huge monument of pathos,
 As Philip's son proposed to do with Athos.
 (lxxxv-lxxxvi)

He once again asserts his artistic aloofness from reader's
 opinions, but instead of defiant independence as the mode
 Byron acknowledges the need for inviolate detachment: "a
 real spirit / Should neither court neglect, nor dread to
 bear it" (lxxxviii).

Though this moment of insight would seem to

offer an ideal resting place for this canto, Byron later added the two concluding stanzas.⁴⁴ Apparently in reading over what he had written he was struck by the inferiority of this canto to his previous work with the exception of the stanzas on the power of money. Stanza lxxxviii is a subtle apology for offering less than his best and contains the impulsive thought that he might expand his thoughts on money:

And if my thunderbolt not always rattles,
Remember, reader! you have had before,
The worst of tempests and the best of battles,
That e'er were brewed from elements or gore.
Besides the most sublime of--Heaven knows what else;
An usurer could scarce expect much more--
But my best canto--save one on astronomy--
Will turn upon "Political Economy".

He leaves the reader with a teacher-to-pupil injunction to prepare himself for this lesson: "Meantime, read all the National-Debt sinkers, / And tell me what you think of our great thinkers" (lxxxix). Byron's loss of direction is emphasised in this appeal to his past successes and his casting about for a focus ("astronomy" because it rhymes with "economy", of course). We cannot find, however, that he suffers from a lack of interest and inspiration, but from too much interest. Passages unexpectedly strident and bitter in tone alternate occasionally with inappropriate sentimentality. The narrator at other times confuses his voice with Juan's, especially in Canto X, as he thrusts his presence into the poem, or he forgets for long periods that Juan travels with him, in a manner not unlike the relationship that evolved between the

44. Steffan, Making of a Masterpiece, p. 393.

narrator and Childe Harold before Byron abandoned the pretence of a distinction between the two. Byron, in these Don Juan cantos, writes not out of "the dream of [his] sleeping Passions" but wide awake to and overwhelmed by his memories. The London scene has too much the quality of the present, of memory unmediated through a dispassionate consciousness where it might become alert to the artistic possibilities that must be realised by imposing design on memories.

In part, Byron's loss of direction in Don Juan reflects his general dissatisfaction with his life. He viewed the move to Genoa as a disagreeable necessity, and it was apparently no secret in Pisa that he considered Genoa only a stop-over on the way to a more adventurous world. According to the spy Torelli, whose account Marchand has quoted, Byron had "expressed his intention of not remaining in Genoa, but of going on to Athens in order to make himself adored by the Greeks...."⁴⁵ More real to Byron at this point, however, than the serious prospect of supporting the Greeks in their bid for independence was the thought of emigrating to America. A few days before leaving Pisa he wrote Kinnaird a letter "full of questions and calculations" regarding his financial affairs, with the following explanation for his interest:

The reason why I am so anxious to settle my affairs, and learn what I may have to trust to, is that I have long had a notion of emigration from your worn-out Europe; but am undecided as to where, South America, the United States, or even Van Diemen's Island, of which I hear much, as a good place to settle in.⁴⁶

45. Marchand, Biography, III, 1036.

46. LBC, II, 231, September 24, 1822.

The inheritance Byron had received from the death of Lady Milbanke earlier in the year had made financially feasible both settling his debts in England and indulging the thoughts he had had on various occasions of emigrating to the New World. Thus, it was with this long-range plan in mind that Byron had begun to show increased interest in building up his supply of capital during 1822, before his goal changed during the spring of 1823 to aiding the Greek rebellion. Soon after he had learned of Lady Milbanke's death, he confessed to Kinnaird his growing understanding of the power of money, which was to become a theme in his other letters to Kinnaird during the next year as well as the inspiration for the best stanzas of the twelfth canto of Don Juan:

They say "Knowledge is power." I used to think so; but they meant "money" who said so, and when Socrates declared "that all he knew was that he knew nothing," he merely intended to declare that he had not a drachma in the Athenian world.⁴⁷

A few days later he wrote Kinnaird again, telling him that "the noble feeling of cupidity grows upon us with our years" and of his determination "to have all the monies I can, whether by my own funds, or succession, or lawsuit, or wife, or MSS. or any lawful means whatsoever".⁴⁸ In what must have seemed to Kinnaird a matter of pure greed, Byron explained "my avarice-- or cupidity--is not selfish --for my table don't cost four shillings a day--and except horses and helping all kinds of patriots--(I have long since given up costly harlotry) I have no violent

47. LBC, II, 214, February 19, 1822.

48. LBC, II, 217, February 22, 1822.

expenses--but I want to get a sum together to go amongst the Greeks or Americans--and do some good. . . ."49 Once Byron was in Genoa he began even more earnestly to accumulate capital both by economies in house-keeping expenses and by selling off possessions, though it seems unlikely that he was as yet clever enough to write the promised canto on "Political Economy" since he asked Kinnaird to send him "a good Cocker, or the best simplifier of arithmetic" as an aid to settling his household accounts.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, he told Kinnaird, "I am reducing my establishment, have sent away for sale two more horses, and am about to dispose of a superfluous carriage or two, and various other useless books, and furniture; such as snuffboxes, trinkets, &c. &c".⁵¹ Early in 1823 he could say with pride and certainly no slight amusement that his "surplus revenue of 1822", earlier reported to Kinnaird,⁵² "almost equals the ditto of the United States of America (vide President's report to Congress)", and he urged his banker to invest any idle funds to his credit since "'every little makes a mickle'". Later, in the same letter, he once more assures Kinnaird that by "this recent and furious fit of accumulation and retrenchment" he hopes "to leave something to my relations more than a mere name; and, besides that, to be able to do good to others to a greater extent". He returns also to the theme of the opening stanzas of Don Juan XII as he thinks of his approaching thirty-fifth birthday and the beginning of the "most barbarous" of the ages of man:

49. C.L. Cline, Byron, Shelley and Their Pisan Circle (London: John Murray, 1952), p 190, September 12, 1822.

50. LBC, II, 239, December 19, 1822.

51. LBC, II, 240, December 23, 1822.

52. LBC, II, 246, December 30, 1822.

I always looked to about thirty as the barrier of any real or fierce delight in the passions, and determined to work them out in the younger ore and better veins of the mine, and I flatter myself (perhaps) that I have pretty well done so, and now the dross is coming and I loves lucre. For we must love something....At any rate, then, I have a passion the more, and thus a feeling.⁵³

If he has outworn love as a driving passion, Byron will substitute a passion for money, knowing that for him, both as a man and a poet, strong feeling is necessary. In cultivating and humouring his passion for money he seems also to have learned something important about himself. The economies which he had adopted, particularly after arriving in Genoa, slight though they were in terms of his total household budget, revealed to Byron a strength of will, of self-control, greater than he had previously realised. The austerity of daily regime in the interests of hoarding money for a "good cause" which these letters suggest is only one instance among other indications of a newly-evolving sense of worth and of purpose in his personal and his poetic self. The Ravenna Journal and Detached Thoughts, along with the introductory English Cantos of Don Juan and the poems written in the interlude before the final Don Juan cantos, enable Byron to transform and objectify his view of himself and to re-evaluate the significance of his work and, indeed, of his life.

When the first, real opportunity to involve himself in a "good cause" presented itself in the form of the Carbonari support of Italian independence, Byron responded romantically in his Ravenna Journal:

53. PLJ, VI, 163-164, January 18, 1823.

I shall not fall back; though I don't think them in force or heart sufficient to make much of it. But, onward!--it is now the time to act, and what signifies self, if a single spark of that which would be worthy of the past can be bequeathed unquenchedly to the future? It is not one man, nor a million, but the spirit of liberty which must be spread. The waves which dash upon the shore are, one by one, broken, but yet the ocean conquers, nevertheless. It overwhelms the Armada, it wears the rocks, and, if the Neptunians are to be believed, it has not only destroyed, but made a world. In like manner, whatever the sacrifice of individuals, the great cause will gather strength, sweep down what is rugged, and fertilize (for sea-weed is manure) what is cultivable. And so, the mere selfish calculation ought never to be made on such occasions; and, at present, it shall not be computed by me. I was never a good arithmetician of chance, and shall not commence now.⁵⁴

Nearly two years later, and in spite of the failure of the Italian cause, Byron has not lost faith in the ability of the world to change attitudes nor in the power of a single individual to become an instrument for change. In commenting to Murray on the Quarterly reviewer who could "almost" prefer his stance in Cain as "a moral and argumentative atheist, than the professed and systematic poet of seduction, adultery, and incest" of Don Juan, Byron reveals his growing detachment as he explains why he judges the review to be "anything but unkind or unfair":

As I take the good in good part, I must not, nor will not, quarrel with the bad: what the Writer says of Don Juan is harsh, but it is inevitable. He must follow, or at least not directly oppose, the opinion of a prevailing, and yet not very firmly seated, party: a review may and will direct or "turn awry" the Currents of opinion, but it must not directly oppose them. Don Juan will be known by and bye, for what it is intended,--a Satire on abuses of the present states of Society, and not an eulogy of vice: it may be now and then voluptuous: I can't help that. Ariosto is worse; Smollet...ten times worse; and Fielding no better. No Girl will ever be seduced by reading

D.J:--no, no; she will go to Little's poems and Rousseau's romans for that, or even to the immaculate De Stael: they will encourage her, and not the Don, who laughs at that, and--and--most other things. But never mind--Ca ira!⁵⁵

In this realistic assessment Byron is continuing the process of distancing himself from his work and from opinions about it, signalled earlier in his letter to Murray forbidding his sending any more reviews or private opinions. Both readers and critics express the mood of the times, but times change, Byron can say philosophically. His willingness to wait for recognition in the course of time, by implication to allow a future age to discover the value of his work, reveals a belief not only in the continuity of human nature but in the continuity of history as well. The "abuses of the present states of Society" will find their counterparts in future times.

As Byron's intentions for Don Juan evolved, becoming more specifically purposeful, so his need to find the best way of looking at his material. In the beginning he had defended the poem as "a playful satire" with no more intention than "to giggle and make giggle"; and when he had written the fifth canto in spite of the adverse opinions of friend and foe, his purpose was still somewhat vaguely defined: "to take [Don Juan] the tour of Europe to show the different ridicules of the society in each of those countries".⁵⁶ If in the next year and a half his purpose had hardened into the vision of Don Juan as a "Satire on abuses of the present states

55. PLJ, VI, 155-156, December 25, 1822, and note 2, p.155.

56. MLJ, VI, 208, August 12, 1819; MLJ, VIII, 78, February. 16, 1821

of Society", when Byron reached the English Cantos, he became more acutely aware of the need to find the orientation, to use Peckham's term, most effective to accomplish that purpose--to rise above mere ridicule and denunciation in order to redeem the world.

In The Deformed Transformed Byron dramatises his efforts to accept himself as he is, his strengths and his weaknesses, and in so doing to accept the world with its good and evil. According to Peckham,

Since it is this world which must be redeemed, the first task of the Romantic is to face fully the horror, the brutality, and the evil which before had been either thought away or dismissed or regarded as either temporary or ultimately unreal.⁵⁷

With Arnold transformed into the handsome form of the heroic Achilles and the mysterious Stranger, calling himself Caesar and wearing Arnold's deformed body, Byron descends into the abyss of his personal horror as well as the abyss of Christian history during the sack of Rome. Here he explores the human impulses which express themselves in violence and bloodshed, in a perversion of power towards selfish ends, and in the gentler regard for beauty and love. He also discovers that history is the ceaseless pattern of these dual impulses of individual man. In its cyclical rhythm it both shapes and is shaped by individuals who are themselves as often the helpless victims of the events of time, as they are the victimised.

Byron's extreme sensitiveness to his lameness

57. Peckham, "Reconsiderations", p. 6.

is well supported by his drive to excel in physical activities in which he could compete--swimming, boxing, riding, by the testimony of close acquaintances, and by the rare reference in his letters. In The Deformed Transformed, however, for the first time Byron publicly confronts the problem of his lameness under the self-protective guise of Pickersgill's novel about Arnaud, the unloved hunchback, in The Three Brothers.⁵⁸ The novel and Goethe's Faust, plus the historical sack of Rome, provide the "fact" which Byron always liked as a basis for his poetry and, in this case, they allow him a sense of security wherein he can freely explore the fact of his own experience--his resentments and dark thoughts, his dreams of physical perfection, his rationalisings and common-sense arguings against his preoccupation with his defect. Blackstone has noted that in the play Byron "works out the sources of his 'poisoned springs'", and that "even though [he] is approaching the nuclear nerve of his own trauma, the hero becomes less heroic, less 'Byronic', more complex, weaker, questioning, bewildered".⁵⁹ The fact is that it is because he comes to grips with his elemental self that he becomes more human. He gains understanding of himself as an individual

58. Moore (Life, p.13) suggests also that the drama has its origin in Byron's painful memory of his mother's reference to him as a "lame brat!" Mary Shelley wrote on the fly-leaf of her copy of the play that "No action of Lord Byron's--scarce a line he has written--but was influenced by his personal defect". Byron wrote to Moore, trying to explain his fondness for Henry Fox and concluded that the feeling was due "perhaps, in part...[to] his lameness....he appears a halting angel, who has tripped against a star; whilst I am Le Diable Boiteux...." PLJ, VI, 178-179, April 2, 1823.

59. Blackstone, Survey, p. 253.

and of human nature in general. Self-centredness moves toward selflessness. In the play Byron faces the image of his lame self in Arnold the hunchback and of his rejecting mother in Bertha who, when subsequent "beautiful and lusty" sons were born, denied all motherly feeling for the first-born Arnold; and in the fragment of the unfinished third part of the drama we see the indications of self-acceptance which make possible Byron's moral poise in the works which come after The Deformed Transformed, including the final cantos of Don Juan. When the mysterious Stranger offers Arnold the shape of his choosing, the hunchback has eyes only for physical beauty and rejects the phantoms of Caesar, who is bald; Socrates, who is short and ugly; even the handsome Alcibiades, Antony, and Demetrius of Macedonia. Determined in his power of choice to choose perfect beauty, in the end he chooses the form of the beautiful and heroic Achilles. This choice, however, is not an opting for Achilles' "physical prowess", as Blackstone says.⁶⁰ Arnold rejects the Stranger's offer of the Greek's strength proudly and firmly, claiming to have acquired that through his defect:

I ask not
 For Valour, since Deformity is daring.
 It is its essence to o'ertake mankind
 By heart and soul, and make itself the equal--
 Aye, the superior of the rest. There is
 A spur in its halt movements, to become
 All that the others cannot, in such things
 As still are free to both, to compensate
 For stepdame Nature's avarice at first.
 They woo with fearless deeds the smiles of fortune,
 And oft, like Timour the lame Tartar, win them.
 (I, i, 313-323)

60. Blackstone, Survey, p. 259.

It is the outward appearance, the physical beauty of Achilles, that guides Arnold's choice, a predictable selection, according to the Stranger:

You have done well. The greatest
Deformity should only barter with
The extremest beauty--if the proverb's true
Of mortals, that Extremes meet. (I, i, 285-288)

The lesson which the Stranger is to teach Arnold is the true relationship between external and internal man, that body and spirit are inseparable, each dependent upon the other and must be attuned to each other. The dialogue between the Stranger and Arnold frequently takes the form of what we can imagine as the dialogue of Byron's divided self, with the Stranger taking the part of reason and good sense and Arnold that of emotional self-pity. At their first meeting, when Arnold invites the tall black man who has appeared from the fountain to speak, whether "spirit or man", the Stranger asks bluntly, "As man is both, why not / Say both in one?" (I, i, 83-85) To Arnold's quibbling reply that he looks like a man but may be a devil, the Stranger suggests that labels in themselves are not important: "So many men are that / Which is so called or thought, that you may add me / To which you please, without much wrong to either" (I, i, 87-89). To demonstrate that appearance is no reliable measure for judging an individual, he invites Arnold to compare their different aspects and say which looks most like the common notion of the devil (I, i, 99-102). When Arnold admits that he would accept the misshapen body of Socrates if he could have his "perfection of all mental beauty / And personification of all virtue", the Stranger observes that

he could find those qualities "Easier in such a form-- or in your own". Arnold's answer is the germ of the play: "No. I was not born for philosophy, / Though I have that about me which has need on 't" (I, i, 222-229). Unphilosophically, he risks his soul in exchange for a handsome body which he reasons will assure him the love that has been denied.

With some understanding of popular psychology, however, Arnold tells the Stranger that he could have accepted his misfortune, resigned himself to a life without a fulfilling love if his mother had given him the ordinary love due an offspring. He might then have had sufficient determination and heart to become a worthwhile person, but because of his deprivation he is obsessed with the idea of love, of being "belovéd" (I, i, 328-362). Arnold is rapturous as he gazes on Achilles' phantom, "As if I were his soul, whose form shall soon / Envelope mine", and is impatient to make the exchange. Once again the Stranger calls attention to the falsity of appearance, comparing Arnold to "a youthful beauty / Before her glass. You both see what is not, / But dream it is what must be" (I, i, 283-291). His initial pleasure in his new and pleasing shape is therefore marred when the Stranger assumes Arnold's cast-off shape. He calls Arnold "ungrateful" and "ungracious" to abandon "the hump, and lump, and clod of ugliness, / Which late you wore, or were", reminding him that "Whatsoe'er it be, / It hath sustained your soul full many a day". He tells Arnold that in his new form it will be his fate to "see /

Yourself for ever by you, as your shadow". Even beauty's shadow is ugly. Stressing again the interdependence of body and spirit, the Stranger summons fire to resurrect Arnold's lifeless form, presumably in the knowledge that Arnold will in time decide to return to his former body:

One little marshy spark of flame--
 And he again shall seem the same;
 But I his Spirit's place shall hold!
 (I, i, 421-481)

The last line is ambiguous: the Stranger will possess the place vacated by Arnold's spirit or he will merely keep it secure for Arnold's return. In the light of the second part of the play and of Byron's memorandum on the fragment of Part III, the latter seems the stronger meaning. In his notes Byron jotted down a plot-outline for proceeding with the play: "Mem. Jealous--Arnold of Caesar. Olimpia at first not liking Caesar--then? Arnold jealous of himself under his former figure, owing to the power of intellect, etc., etc., etc." Doubtless Byron intended to show Arnold eventually desiring to return to his original body, a rather obvious sign of enlightened self-acceptance and an acceptance of the world as well. His pilgrimage to Rome and his experiences there with the hated form beside him allow Arnold to objectify his attitude to himself and prepare for a willingness to return to his own shape.

Rome as the main scene of the action of the play serves richly to illuminate the progress of Byron's understanding. Arnold's decision to try his new identity in Rome is for Byron a return to the place of his own earlier self-discovery in Childe Harold IV; the con-

trasts in the two experiences emphasise the complexity of Byron's mature vision. Arnold and Caesar arrive outside the walls of Rome at the time of the sack of Rome in the early sixteenth century; but in Byron's surrealist handling of time, contemporary time mingles with the past. To see the "workings" of the world where it is "thickest", Arnold might have seen "War / And Woman in activity" in the nineteenth century as Caesar offered him "Spain--Italy--the new Atlantic world"; time present is time past (I, i, 494-498). Arnold's pain, caused by his mother's rejection of him expands for deeper meaning into the image of Rome, the mourning mother, now the battle-ground where "Christians war against Christ's shrine"; and yet again, when reaching further back to Rome's beginnings and the internecine struggle between her legendary sons Romulus and Remus. Mother-child conflicts participate in history and myth and lose their personal sting. Rome, "Niobe of nations", "mother of dead empires", and refuge for "orphans of the heart", is herself repeatedly the victim of rivalry between her sons.

Embattled Rome is also the occasion for a more complex understanding of history. In Childe Harold IV Byron had traced the downward course of history in a series of abstractions:

First Freedom, and then Glory--when that fails,
Wealth--Vice--Corruption,--Barbarism last:--
And History, with all her volumes vast,
Hath but one page.... (xcviii)

In the play, he selects an event from history to show that historical moments are enacted by individuals with the

Succumbing to the flattery of the Bourbon and the mystique of the hero, Arnold leads the assault on Rome after the Bourbon is slain at the walls. He gives in to the temptation to become Rome's conqueror, a prospect that the Stranger, now calling himself Caesar, had first laid before him outside Rome's walls. Caught up in the pursuit of glory, Arnold rallies the Bourbon's forces and leads them on towards their prize. When Caesar discovers Arnold within the city, leading a party of besiegers, "Hand in hand with the mild twins--Gore and Glory", he reminds Arnold that he is but a mortal man. Man is, however, both body and spirit; he has given Arnold

A form of beauty, and an
Exemption from some maladies of body,
But not of mind, which is not mine to give.
(I, iii, 17-19)

When the action moves into St. Peter's Byron returns to the place where, in Childe Harold IV, he had discovered that

Majesty--
Power--Glory--Strength--and Beauty all are aisled
In this eternal Ark of worship undefiled. (cliv)

The lesson which the Church in its grandeur and immensity had taught him then was an appreciation for the mind of man that could conceive so magnificent a structure (clix). Now, in The Deformed Transformed, St. Peter's is the scene of all man's lowest impulses--murder, greed, lust; defilement and desecration. When Arnold first saw St. Peter's in the distance and before the siege, because he trusts only the "dubious notice of [his] eyes and ears", he saw the Church topped by Christ's cross as fact and emblem of refuge, won by Christ's blood "made a badge

of glory and / Of joy (as once of torture unto him)". Caesar, however, who sees beyond the limited perception of man whose senses "deceive [him] sweetly, / And that is better than the bitter truth", sees within the Church both holy shrines and instruments of destruction, and "men who are to kindle them to death / Of other men" (I, ii, 15-18; 37-49). As the groups of soldiers come and go in the Church, they image Rome's history: "the Caesars / But yielded to the Alarics, the Alarics / Unto the pontiffs" (I, ii, 277-279):

so flows the wave on wave
Of what these creatures call Eternity,
Deeming themselves the breakers of the Ocean,
While they are but its bubbles, ignorant
That foam is their foundation. (I, iii, 53-57)

During the course of the play Arnold takes on various identities--the despairing hunchback, the warrior revelling in his masculinity, the bewildered lover, the redeeming Christ. In St. Peter's Arnold appears on cue in answer to Olimpia's prayer:

Great God! through thy redeeming Son,
And thy Son's Mother, now receive me as
I would approach thee, worthy her, and him, and thee!
(II, iii, 69-71)

In Christ-like fury he drives her attackers from her, but in one of the many inversions of images that enrich the meaning of the play, Olimpia herself becomes a Christ-figure. The language echoes the New Testament as Arnold sends his rapacious followers, now penitent, to quarters he had prepared for them and Olimpia remarks, aside, "In my father's / House!" From the high altar on which she stands ready to dash herself down to her death, she prays for God's forgiveness for Arnold below. He has made her

"father's house / A den of thieves" and defiled the temple. In a further profusion of meaning, Caesar appears to answer Arnold's despairing cry when Olimpia has hurled herself on the pavement below the altar: "Eternal God! I feel thee now! Help! Help! She's gone". Although he claims "The resurrection is beyond me", he prepares a mixture of holy water and blood and Olimpia is revived.

Olimpia, the "Essence of all Beauty", embodies both divine, spiritual love and human, physical love. Arnold regrets that he is unworthy of her perfection,

Alas! that the first beat of the only heart
I ever wished to beat with mine should vibrate
To an assassin's pulse (II, iii, 152-154),

and the cynical Caesar finds himself "almost enamoured of her, as / Of old the Angels of her earliest sex", but he has given up that sort of thing:

't is rarely worth the trouble
Of gaining, or--what is more difficult--
Getting rid of your prize again; for there's
The rub! at least to mortals. (II, iii, 183-186)

Each is thinking of her only as a human love object at this point, but in the fragmentary third part Caesar leads Arnold toward an appreciation of the divine aspects of love. Because Arnold had saved Olimpia's life, he had expected her to love him as he loved her. Picking up the Christ motif again, Caesar comments on the gulf between Arnold's expectations and realisations:

Blessings on your Creed!
What a good Christian you were found to be!
And what cold Sceptic hath appalled your faith,
And transubstantiated to crumbs again
The body of your Credence? (III, i, 43-47)

Whereas Olimpia is "calm, and meek, and silent", her love "coldly dutiful, and proudly patient", Arnold, according to Caesar, expects Olimpia to love him out of obligation:

...you would be loved--what you call love--
Self-loved--loved for yourself--for neither health,
 Nor wealth, nor youth, nor power, nor rank, nor beauty--
 For these you may be stripped of--but beloved
 As an abstraction--for--you know not what!
 These are the wishes of a moderate lover--
 And so you love. (III, i, 60-66)

The fragment breaks off before the question is resolved, but Byron is working toward an understanding of the complexities of love. Perfect love is self-forgetting and undemanding; it does not seek to make over the beloved in its image, but loves the object for itself. Selfless and detached, it seeks neither to possess nor be possessed. The movement of the play and fragment suggests that Byron would have arrived at such a reconciliation. Certainly the memorandum for developing the plot implies this direction.

Canto IV of Childe Harold, as we have seen, marks the culmination of one stage of Byron's poetic vision. Having travelled through scenes which were reminders of man's base desires, he escapes his loathing for his fellow man in the evidences of art that speak of man's sublime and god-like conceptions, the message of St. Peter's to him, reinforced by art works housed in the Vatican. This pseudo-reconciliation, however, is the most that can be expected from his "piecemeal" method of apprehending the vast grandeur of the Church: "thou seest not all--but piecemeal thou must break, / To separate contemplation, the great whole" (clvii). The "more"

which he discovered "In such a survey than the sating gaze / Of wonder pleased, or awe which would adore / The worship of the place, or the mere praise / Of Art and its great Masters" (clix), was the sometime transcendent nature of man. Such a view was vital to Byron at the time, burdened as he was by his own sense of worthlessness and the evidence of the worthlessness of mankind which his pilgrimage across Europe had proved to him. The piecemeal approach fails, however, finally unless there is an overriding theory or frame of reference which insures a consideration of all parts of the whole and allows for their reintegration into the whole. An encompassing vision of St. Peter's would have told Byron then, as The Deformed Transformed reveals later, that the Church holds within its magnificent walls scenes of violence and bloodshed, as well as the essence of beauty.

The history of Rome metaphorically is the history of man, written in blood. In the play Byron explores the multiple meanings of blood, symbol of vengeance and redemption, death and life. The cross atop St. Peter's dominates the landscape of Rome and testifies to the actual cross of Christ "which his blood made a badge of glory and / Of joy (as once a torture unto him)" (I, ii, 41-42). Christ's blood sacrifice, commemorated by the crucifix inside St. Peter's, becomes Olimpia's salvation, the weapon she uses to save herself from the pursuing soldier whom she slays with the gold altar cross (II, iii). Arnold wishes that the blood dropping from his wounded hand would turn to snakes to wreak revenge on his

kin who despise him (I, i, 37-38). He seals his pact with the Stranger in his blood mixed with water from the fountain (I, i, 155-156), and Olimpia is resurrected by blood mixed with holy water. The Coliseum is emblematic of the nature of man which looks to bloodshed for pastime when "no human foe [is left] unconquered" (I, ii, 49-62). The chorus of peasants and Caesar, introducing the fragmentary third part of the drama, oppose in a strophe and antistrophe frame the pleasures of spring and love in a world at peace and the lament of the idle warrior. When the peasants posit hunting as a substitute for war, the Stranger answers that such is the "shadow of Glory! / Dim image of war!" Caesar had answered Arnold's longing to be "at peace--in peace" by observing that such was impossible:

From the star
 To the winding worm, all life is motion; and
 In life commotion is the extremest point
 Of life. The planet wheels till it becomes
 A comet, and destroying as it sweeps
 The stars, goes out. The poor worm winds its way,
 Living upon the death of other things,
 But still, like them, must live and die, the subject
 Of something which has made it live and die.
 (I, ii, 21-30)

In the last song in the fragment Caesar acknowledges that peace is an illusion and men, those bubbles on the Ocean of Eternity, move inevitably towards death and destruction:

When the merry bells are ringing,
 And the peasant girls are singing,
 And the early flowers are flinging
 Their odours in the air;
 And the honey bee is clinging
 To the buds; and the birds are winging
 Their way pair by pair:
 Then the earth looks free from trouble

deformity and beauty, but the union also brings together the extremes of physical perfection with Arnold's own defiantly daring spirit, born out of his deformity but held in check by it. Part II reveals the consequences of this fatal combination. Arnold's new and beautiful body gives him a sense of wild release that goes unrestrained by his soaring spirit. Though peace is his heart's desire, he participates in the sack of Rome and the carnage of St. Peter's, to find himself tainted with the blood of his fellow man. Ideally, extremes must be tempered with some balancing influence, as in the case of Socrates whose "perfection of all mental beauty / And personification of all Virtue" resided in and redeemed his physical ugliness. Part III, though a fragment, moves toward the idea that love is outside the realm of choice or will. Disappointed in Olimpia's lack of response, Arnold learns from the Stranger that he wrongly is equating love with gratitude. But perfect love, like grace, is not earned; it is bestowed upon the individual without regard for his deserving.

After The Deformed Transformed Byron turned again to formal satire in, as he described it, his "early English Bards style".⁶¹ The Age of Bronze owes as much, however, to Juvenal and Johnson, especially his Vanity of Human Wishes, as it does to Horace and Pope. Although we are perhaps not prepared to say with Coleridge that in this poem "Byron has wedded 'a striking passage of history' to striking and imperishable verse",⁶² the poem surpasses

61. PJL, VI, 161, January 10, 1823.

62. PW, V, 540, Introduction to The Age of Bronze.

English Bards in conception and execution. Treating the poem as a kind of poetic Annual Register for the not-so-wonderful year of 1822, Byron gains a mask of impersonality and the commanding presence of a wise and judicious observer of current events. The farcical Congress of Verona of 1822 is the focus of Byron's remarks, but that subject allows him to survey Napoleon's career which, begun with promise, had ended in degradation in 1821, and was directly responsible for the formation of the Triple Alliance. Byron speaks out of a sense of moral duty in the tradition of the poet-orator whose heightened sensitivity and embracing perception require him to record the decline he sees. His voice is dispassionate but not disinterested as he shares his view of the deplorable state to which Europe has sunk and laments the evidence of wasted opportunities for greatness, the great or potentially great made small. The promise of Napoleon dwindled to the pathetic prisoner "daily squabbling o'er disputed rations" (iii, 58). The Congress of Verona, convened to approve France's military intervention in the revolution in Spain, by its repression of liberty mocks its namesake the American Continental Congress, "that hallowed name / Which freed the Atlantic" (viii, 378-379). Britain's "uncountry gentlemen", war-profiteers and "first to make a malady of peace", continue to act in their own self-interests, blocking reform and exploiting the poor through high rents and high prices on grain (xiv, 569, 571). Unlike the usual satire, however, Byron sounds a positive note of hope in the opening lines which must be

heard as encouragement underneath his catalogue of ills:

The "good old times"--all times when old are good--
 Are gone; the present might be if they would;
 Great things have been, and are, and greater still
 Want little of mere mortals but their will. (i, 1-4)

Right values and individuals with the will to act beyond their own self-interests can bring about a return to better times. For Byron, Napoleon is a prime example of the narrow gap between good and evil times:

A single step into the right had made
 This man the Washington of worlds betrayed.
 (v, 233-234)

Betrayed Europe, however, is not without hope. Just as a "dashing sea of eloquence . . . flowed all free" between those towering orators of Britain's last great age, Pitt and Fox, the "Athos and Ida" of their time, so the tide of the Atlantic returns to the shores of Europe (ii, 13-16). Flowing between the Andes and Athos, the new-world ocean renews "old aspirations" and Byron takes heart from the stirrings towards freedom in Spain, Italy and Greece. Throughout the poem Byron focuses attention on individuals as shapers of history. He looks at the specific rulers of the "unholy" alliance and holds them as well as their associates responsible for the unfortunate page in history. From the greedy war profiteers to manipulating powers behind Europe's thrones to Napoleon's undignified widow, all are "mere mortals" who could nonetheless through an exercise of will make history otherwise than it has been; they are individuals who could abandon self-seeking to respond positively to the wave of freedom washing Europe's shores.

Byron presumably began The Island on the same day he sent The Age of Bronze to Mary Shelley for copying out. Taken in the context of his burdensome vision of the world's political affairs and his own restlessness, his decision to leave Italy and his indecision as to whether he would go to South America, the United States, or Van Diemen's Land, as he told Kinnaird, The Island needs to be read as the final stage of Byron's coming to terms with himself and with the ugliness and beauty of human nature. The poem represents Byron's acceptance of himself and of his commitment to the belief, expressed in the Ravenna Journal, that "a single spark of that which would be worthy of the past can be bequeathed unquenchedly to the future". As Byron became more isolated from social groups during the last months in Pisa and in Genoa paradoxically he became more conscious of the importance of social order and of individual, moral responsibility to work toward improved social conditions. The Island then is a "still point" occurring between what is past and what is to come. Here, Byron combines his love for historical fact and the truth of human experience with his tough-minded insistence on facing reality and crystallises his views on time and timelessness, memory and imagination, and his antithetical vision of the human condition. In its subject matter, characters, and motifs, the poem gathers up the threads of his earlier poetry to be woven into the fabric of his mature insights. The Island, in turn, complements and illuminates the few remaining stanzas of Don Juan that were to come.

As a product of Byron's last year of poetry-writing, The Island is not without regrettable flaws. We find ourselves wishing he had mended his habit of writing hastily and often carelessly in this last long and complete poem of his maturity; that he had not, for example, broken the mood of romance with the intrusion of Ben Bunting's smelly pipe and the long digression on tobacco. On the other hand, the interruption attests to the freedom from conventional theories about poetry which Byron practised and is artistically effective in reasserting the real world into the tranquillity of the young lovers' dreamy world. Since The Island reflects the major concerns which make up Byron's aesthetic principles, it is perhaps the perfect poem within the corpus for seeing his poetic theory in practice.

Unfortunately we know little of a factual nature about the composition of this poem. Clinton, the earliest of Byron's biographers, tells of the poet's delight with "Mariner's Account of the Tonga Islands" and says that Byron "announced his intention of introducing into some of his works the new and poetical feelings which his fancy had conjured up in connection with a country rich in all productions of nature, and uncorrupted by the vices of civilization".⁶³ Clinton, however, does not reveal any source for his information, and what he says of the inception of the poem he might have inferred from the inherent appeal of the subject of the poem and from Byron's own acknowledgement of his debt to Mariner's work and to

63. George S. Clinton, Memoirs of the Life and Writing of Lord Byron (London: James Robins and Co., 1825), p. 656.

Bligh's Narrative found in the Advertisement to the poem. Yet Clinton renders Byron's search for an appropriate form with all the drama of a close observer. He notes that Byron had felt "for some time at a loss" for a means of using the appealing descriptions of these South Sea islands until "At length, in the history of the mutiny[he] found the materials which, in his hands, were soon wrought into the shape that he required".⁶⁴

Coleridge, in his introduction to the poem, also speculates on the poem's origin. He accepts Clinton's opinion as a credible reconstruction of the background of the poem, but finds disturbing that "Byron accepts without qualification or reserve, the guilt of the mutineers and the innocence and worth of Bligh". He tries to account for what he sees as a view uncharacteristic of Byron by assuming that he was unaware of Christian's fate and that he was influenced by the naval tradition of the Byron family to uphold the "necessity of discipline on board ship".⁶⁵

Coleridge concludes therefore that out of ignorance Byron went against the strong public sympathy for Christian in siding with the oppressor rather than the oppressed.

Opinion since Coleridge's edition of the poems has continued to accept the belief that Byron wrote The Island without knowledge of the aftermath of the mutiny nor of the heroic proportions which Christian and the mutineers had assumed in the popular mind. But when we make a realistic assessment of what Byron probably knew

64. Clinton, p. 656.

65. PW, V, 582.

both about the details of the Bounty affair and public sentiment regarding the Pitcairn Islanders, then the assumption that he was unaware of either lacks validity. Add to such evidence Byron's increasing concern with the ethical function of poetry, his low regard for the public thirst for sentimentality, and his sense of the poet's responsibility to speak truth, and The Island becomes a conscientious check on run-away popular imagination, an attempt to restore sanity by a return to the facts. As we shall see, the truth of the mutiny and of the public's romanticising of that truth was readily available to Byron; thus, his poem going against the public grain must be seen as conscious design.

Strong circumstantial evidence indicates that even before leaving England in 1816 Byron knew the degree to which Christian's story had captured the popular imagination. On the day that Byron left London for the last time, bound for Dover and then the continent, a new production called Pitcairn's Island had already played for a week to sold-out houses at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane and seems to have ended after a second successful week only because Kean returned from an extended Easter holiday.⁶⁶ The playbills of the production suggest something of the appeal that Christian's story held for the theatre audiences. When the

new romantick, operatic, Ballet Spectacle, with Embellishments, (Founded on the recent Discovery of a numerous Colony, formed by, and descended from, the Mutineers of the Bounty, Frigate) called PITCAIRN'S ISLAND...

66. Drury Lane Playbills, 1814-1816, I, 155ff., in British Library.

was first announced on the April 15 playbill, top billing was given to the characters of a British Naval Commander, a Boatswain, and a Lieutenant, with "descendants" of the mutineers mentioned afterwards. The character of Christian was not mentioned at all. Playbills after opening night on April 17, however, give the character of Christian pride of place and continue to carry his name in top position with the added notice that Pitcairn's Island, "having been honoured with unanimous applause throughout, and announced for repetition with universal Acclamations, will be repeated until further notice".⁶⁷ The same playbills name even Christian's son "Ocee (Thursday October Christian)" and two grand-daughters ahead of the British naval personnel. Still a member of the Drury Lane Committee, it is unlikely that Byron could have been unaware of this hit.

The impetus for the production may well have been the long account in the July 1815 issue of the Quarterly Review, detailing for the first time publicly the blissful life of the descendants of the Bounty mutineers, recently discovered on Pitcairn Island in the Pacific. This particular issue of the Quarterly was not published until late November or early December 1815.⁶⁸ Thus, the interval between the appearance of the story and the Theatre Royal production in mid-April seems an appropriate length of time in which to mount a "Ballet

67. Further evidence of the success of the production lies in the fact that sheet music of the songs of Pitcairns Island was marketed in 1816. The six songs in the Music Collection of the British Library are attributed to M[ontague] Corri and bear the notation "as performed with unbounded applause at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane".

68. "Porter's Cruise in the Pacific Ocean", Quarterly
Footnote 68 continued.....

Spectacle" of some size. Whether or not Byron saw a production of Pitcairn's Island before leaving London on April 23 is a moot question. His letters yield no evidence of activity in the Drury Lane theatre during this hectic spring, being almost entirely taken up with his domestic difficulties in the first months of 1816 and then with his arrangements for going abroad. There is other evidence, however, that he continued to be in and around the theatre. We know, for instance, that one of Lady Byron's grievances in the separation proceedings was Byron's affair with a Drury Lane actress, now identified as Susan Boyce.⁶⁹ Her letter to Byron, dated April 3, 1816, is a bold rebuke for his having ignored her in the theatre on the previous evening, a practice which apparently was becoming a regular occurrence:

It is very evident from the rudeness of your answer and manner to me last night when I asked how you were, and indeed from the whole of your behaviour lately, that my attention to you is very offensive....I have waited frequently, which was the case last night, to say how do you do, but in future I shall spare myself the mortification....Good God, what could Dibdin think?⁷⁰

The letter suggests that Byron came fairly regularly to the theatre during this period and would therefore have been aware of the Pitcairn's Island production in preparation for the April 17 opening. It is tempting to think that he had seen a rehearsal at least or that Dibdin

Footnote 68 continued.... Review, (XIII (July 1815), 352-383.

See also The Annual Register for 1815, pp.514-520, and The Times, December 12, 1815. For information on the Quarterly Review publication delay, see Shine and Shine, Quarterly Review Contributors, p. 47.

69. George Paston and Peter Quennell, "To Lord Byron": Feminine Profiles based upon unpublished letters, 1807-1824 (London: John Murray, 1939), p. 178.

70. Paston and Quennell, "To Lord Byron", p. 186.

had consulted him on the "embellishments" of the script.⁷¹ Byron's letter to Dibdin, uncertainly dated July 1815, conceivably refers to Pitcairn's Island and perhaps ought to be dated later:

Is not part of the dialogue in the new piece a little too double, if not too broad, now and then? for instance, the word "ravish" occurs in the way of questioning, as well as remark, some half dozen times in the course of one scene, thereby meaning, not raptures but rape. With regard to the probable effect of the piece, you are the best judge; it seems to me better and worse than many others of the same kind.⁷²

In the spring of 1816 Byron had also begun his liaison with Claire Clairmont, a possible reason for neglecting Susan Boyce. In this relationship there is further circumstantial evidence that he was aware of the exotic South Sea Island dramatic production under preparation at the Drury Lane theatre. According to one of Shelley's biographers, Byron was accustomed to entertaining Claire in his private rooms in the theatre during April, where they discussed the Shelley menage, first established in their 1814 sojourn in France and Switzerland.⁷³ Byron and Claire seem to have shared a private joke regarding that Godwinesque triangular arrangement, expressed in

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71. Dibdin of course was Joint Manager of the theatre at this time but not necessarily involved in all productions. The playbill for the opening night performance, however, in the collection cited above, bears the manuscript addition in the margin "By T. Dibdin". Presumably either Dibdin himself or someone closely associated with the theatre originally owned this collection of playbills from Drury Lane because many of them carry a record of the night's box-office receipts, apparently written in the same hand.
72. MLJ, IV, 304-305, undated, but assigned to July 1815 with a question mark.
73. Richard Holmes, Shelley, the Pursuit (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1974), p. 317.

terms of the theme of Pitcairn's Island and descriptive of the Shelley household. When Byron had made it clear to Claire that he would neither permit her to travel with him to Switzerland nor approve of her following him alone, Claire resourcefully manoeuvred the Shelley entourage towards Geneva. From their Paris stop-over she wrote Byron that since he had told her "not to come without protection the 'whole tribe of Otaheite philosophers' is come".⁷⁴ Claire's quotation marks suggest that "Otaheite philosophers" was a Byron coinage, reflecting his amused opinion of Shelley's utopian community of female disciples in an allusion to the Dibdin production which they could not have failed to notice.

Moreover, as a regular reader of the Quarterly, Byron doubtless read the account which seems to have sparked the Drury Lane production or at least heard it discussed in Murray's rooms, since the information on the Pitcairn Islanders was drawn from several reports received by the Admiralty Office over a period of several years. The unsigned article in question is ostensibly a review of A Cruize in the Pacific Ocean, a book written by an American naval officer. The reviewer, however, now identified as John Barrow,⁷⁵ Secretary of the Admiralty, finds the American's account so questionable

74. Paston and Quennell, "To Lord Byron", pp. 209-211. See also Holmes, Shelley, p. 322, which identifies Claire's phrase "Otaheite philosophers" as "a laughing reference to the sunny pleasure-loving islanders of Tahiti", but does not connect it with the obscure production of Pitcairn's Island that had closed at the Theatre Royal only days before Claire's letter.

75. Shine and Shine, Quarterly Review Contributors, p.50.

in its facts and so dull in the telling that he feels no apology is necessary in giving short shrift to that work in order to bring the reader the more interesting account of the Bounty descendants, adding, he notes, to information given in an earlier number.⁷⁶ Barrow's handling of the Pitcairn Island report reflects his own divided feelings on the affair and provides a prime example of the hypocritical cant of the day. As Secretary of the Admiralty, he approves of the fact that justice has triumphed over insubordination, but as a man infected with the romantic belief in noble savages, he is poetic in his praise of the little community of descendants of the mutineers. Barrow seems more than a little pleased with the evidence, supported by the facts received in the Admiralty Office, that sin is ultimately punished:

We give this little narrative all the more readily, on account of the awful example it holds forth of the certain punishment which awaits the guilty, and which not time, nor distance, nor concealment in unfrequented corners of the world, can avert.⁷⁷

Barrow's prophecy of doom grows out of the already-known fate of those mutineers who had eventually deserted

76. Quarterly Review, XIII, 374. The earlier number to which Barrow refers is III (February 1810), 21-34. In another unsigned review, also identified as Barrow's (Shine and Shine, Quarterly Review Contributors, p.12), entitled "Dentrecasteaux--Voyage à la Recherche de la Pérouse", Barrow is happy to report an example of "how seldom criminals escape divine vengeance" in relating that Sir Sidney Smith has received news that Christian had met his death on Pitcairn's Island in an uprising among the natives he had brought from Tahiti. Another version of his death, closer to Byron's poem, is also given, which states that Christian "became insane...and threw himself off the rocks into the sea", pp.23-24.

77. Quarterly Review, XVII, 374.

Christian and were captured by the British ship Pandora, sent out to Tahiti when Bligh had returned and reported the mutiny. Barrow summarises that story--of the sixteen captured, four had drowned in the wreck of the Pandora; ten had stood trial in the Admiralty Court, with six sentenced to death and four acquitted--and seems satisfied that justice was done.⁷⁸ The fate of Christian and his opinion on that Barrow delays while he turns to the fuller reports that describe the perfections of the Pitcairn Island settlement, the prosperous and happy community of English-speaking, dusky savages, ruled over by the venerable and patriarchal Alexander Smith, sole survivor of the mutiny. When he takes up Christian's fate, he treats the facts to his own sanctimonious, moralistic interpretation, once again pleased that the wages of sin is death:

This ill-fated young man [Fletcher Christian], it seems was never happy after the rash and inconsiderate step he had taken; he became sullen and morose, and practised the very same kind of conduct towards his companions in guilt which they so loudly complained about in their late commander. Disappointed in his expectations at Otaheite... this deluded youth committed himself and his remaining confederates to the mere chance of being cast upon some desert island....He soon however disgusted both his countrymen and the Otaheitan, by his oppressive and tyrannical conduct.... [Christian was finally shot by a jealous "Otaheitan" husband]. Thus terminated the miserable existence of this deluded young man, who was neither deficient in talent nor energy, nor in connexions and who might have risen in the service, and become an ornament to his profession.⁷⁹

78. Quarterly Review, XVII, 374-375.

79. Quarterly Review, XVII, 382.

We see in Barrow's version of Christian's temperament much that Byron repeats in The Island, especially his forbidding moroseness, and if he remembered this description eight years later when he wrote the poem, Byron may have been consciously restoring some necessary balance to Christian's portrait. Against Barrow's strong condemnation of the leader of the mutiny, we can also hear Byron's warning to those who set themselves up as pious judges:

'Tis ours to bear, not judge the dead; and they
 Who doom to Hell, themselves are on the way,
 Unless these bullies of eternal pains
 Are pardoned their bad hearts for their worse brains.
 (Island, IV, xii)

What truly charms Barrow in the reports of the little colony is the testimony of the physical beauty of these half-savage natives and of their moral and religious fervour. A victim of his own rhetoric, Barrow ends his account with an exordium to the evangelical spirit of the day, urging that a "zealous and intelligent" missionary be despatched, along with "that root of plenty . . . the potato; bibles, and prayer books" to Pitcairn where "there are better materials to work upon than missionaries have yet been so fortunate as to meet with. . . ." Barrow's closing thought reveals the depth of his enchantment with his vision of this earthly paradise:

O happy people! happy in your sequestered state!...
 May no civilized barbarian lay waste your peaceful
 abodes; no heary proficient in swinish sensuality
 rob you of that innocence and simplicity which it is
 peculiarly your present lot to enjoy!⁸⁰

80. Quarterly Review, XVII, 383.

Barrow's appreciation for the idyllic life brought to light on Pitcairn Island is symptomatic of the general fever of the times that longed to believe in the innocence and goodness of natural man who lived apart from the corruption of civilisation. Cook's voyages in the South Pacific in the last quarter of the previous century had precipitated a sizeable body of voyage literature, descriptive of the islands and island life in the South Seas. When Napoleon's decrees had cut off trade with Europe in 1806, leaving England stalwartly alone, as Wordsworth had celebrated her in the sonnet that Byron admired in the 1807 edition of his poems, she was forced to develop Asian markets for her goods that took her ships along routes among these Pacific islands. Accounts from these voyages were joined with reports from sealing and whaling ships which also traded for replenishment of their supplies with South Sea islanders. Many recorded encounters with unfriendly natives with unwholesome practices, such as cannibalism, but many who found islands as yet undiscovered by old world traders told of an apparently carefree life on warm and sunny islands of indescribable beauty, enjoyed by people of great physical grace who, having no need to supplement nature's bounty, spent their days weaving flower garlands and bathing in warm seas.⁸¹ Understandably, the authors consistently fell back upon words like "paradise"

81. Two compendious studies detail much that was known about the Pacific Islands at this time: Captain James Burney, A Chronological History of the Voyages and Discoveries in the South Sea or Pacific Ocean, London, 1813-1817, 5 vols.; and Amasa Delano, Narrative of the Voyages and Travels, in the Northern

footnote continued.....

or "Garden of Eden" to communicate the wonders they had seen. Delano, Captain of an American whaler and close friend of Folger, the American Naval Officer who first reported discovering Christian's colony on Pitcairn Island, uses language that is typical of the spirit of the times:

It is painful to look forward to the time, when the interesting family of Pitcairn shall lose their present innocence and loveliness, by the frequent visits, which they must be expected to receive from ships, that will hereafter be attracted to their retreat by the fame of their beauty, the affection of their hearts, and the softness of their climate ...Paradise might well be brought to Captain Folger's imagination when he was walking through the villages of these uncorrupted children of nature, when he was receiving the full tide of their affection and sympathy, when he looked round on their graceful forms and artless manners, and when he contemplated the felicity which innocence and purity bestow. To leave such a spot...might, without much effort, be considered as a second banishment from Eden.⁸²

Delano, prompted by the "officious and unnecessary bitterness" which Barrow had displayed in the 1815 Quarterly Review regarding Christian and the mutineers,⁸³ interrupted his description of his voyages to devote two chapters to the Bligh mutiny. As a corrective to the "unworthy spirit" of Barrow's one-sided view, Delano brings together in one chapter (V) all the evidence known at that time both about the background of the mutiny and the fate of the mutineers, derived from various reports on

Footnote 81 continued..... and Southern Hemispheres... with a Voyage of Survey and Discovery in the Pacific Ocean, Boston, 1817.

82. Delano, Voyages and Travels, pp. 150-151.

83. Delano, Voyages and Travels, pp. 145-146; PLJ, VI, 72-73, May 26, 1822.

the Pitcairn Island settlement from other ships who visited the island after Folger's 1808 discovery. He also prints long extracts from Bligh's Narrative and the "substance" of Captain Edwards' manuscript account of capturing the mutineers who had not left Tahiti with Christian, a document that had survived the wreck of the Pandora and that Delano had found and copied while on the island of Timor. The second chapter (VI), entitled "Reflections", presents an attitude towards the mutiny remarkably similar to Byron's position in The Island. Nor is it unreasonable to suppose that Byron read Delano's work. By the time he was honoured on board the American ship in the harbour at Leghorn, Delano's volume was regularly carried by American ships. Apart from its entertaining tales of adventures during twenty years at sea, Delano's book offered copious information about the flora and fauna of the places he had visited, his impressions of the natives, and details regarding safe harbours and emergency supply points to be found along the as-yet-uncharted areas of the South American and Australian coastlines, as well as the Pacific islands.⁸⁴

84. Herman Melville, for example, presumably read Delano's work while on a whaler and found the material for "Benito Cerino", a story little altered from Delano's own account of his adventure with a Spanish slave ship off the coast of Chile. See Delano, Voyages and Travels, Chapter XVIII. Certain details of Byron's work suggest he read Delano's account, especially his paraphrase of Edwards' Journal. It is from Edwards' account that we learn that the mutineers went to Toobouai instead of Tahiti as originally planned where they stayed for close to a year. Is "Toobonai" merely a poetic rendering of "Toobouai"? Further, Edwards captured the resistant mutineers, according to Delano by pursuing them in small boats over the water where they had escaped, also by boat, to a remote and mountainous part of the island (pp. 120-121).

It is a book that Trelawny would have known and more than likely was available in the Italian ports of Leghorn and Genoa. Delano argues rationally that it is against our understanding of human nature, as well as the facts of the case, to claim "depravity" for Christian and his followers, and he warns the "Quarterly Reviewers" that theirs is an attitude not likely "to engage the reader's confidence, or to conciliate his partiality". Speaking as the master of a ship, Delano admits to "a great horror of the crime of mutiny", finding that his "bias of mind" opposes all that may be seen as "rebellion" in crews and favours whatever supports "the prerogative of the commander".⁸⁵ He is nonetheless able to perceive from Bligh's account of the case that Christian probably acted out of "a sense of injury", not "malice and hatred", evinced in his refusal to put Bligh to death.⁸⁶ In the spirit that Byron had already expressed in Marino Faliero, Delano saw that the mutiny was not a case of evil against good but another of the grey areas of experience the understanding of which is not served by portraying Christian as the black character Barrow had drawn:

Let the conduct of Christian receive the censure of all good men, but let it also not be condemned beyond its turpitude, or beyond the purposes of good policy in regard to its use as a warning to others....Bad commanders as well as crews may learn a lesson from this story.⁸⁷

Like Byron also, Delano deplored the lawlessness of mutiny,

85. Delano, Voyages and Travels, pp. 145, 146.

86. Delano, Voyages and Travels, p. 148.

87. Delano, Voyages and Travels, pp. 148-149.

finding it better, no matter how painful, for a mistreated crew to wait for legal redress than to take justice into their own hands. Observing that violence "opens a train of evils which seems never to have an end", Delano warns mutineers in general that "Vengeance will not always sleep, but wakes to pursue and overtake them".⁸⁸ Compare this metaphoric statement with those lines in The Island in which Byron, having seen Bligh and the faithful safely to port, turns to consider the mutineers:

We leave them to their fate, but not unknown
 Nor unredressed. Revenge may have her own:
 Roused discipline aloud proclaims their cause,
 And injured Navies urge their broken laws.
 Pursue we on his track the mutineers
 Whom distant vengeance has not taught to fear.
 (I, x)

The paradise fever also received nourishment from the accounts of British citizens who emigrated during the massive depression that followed in the years after victory at Waterloo. Many of these were duly reviewed and evaluated in the Quarterly, which Murray continued to send Byron after he had banned all periodical publications. In Detached Thoughts Byron recalled that a few years earlier he had "thought of going to one of the Americas, English or Spanish", but was discouraged by the thought of living in a land which practised slavery.⁸⁹ By mid-1822, however, Byron's interests in "transatlantic projects of settlements" had revived and he thought of South America once more after Simon Bolivar seemed to have accomplished a stable republic in Columbia. Nor had Byron lost his

88. Delano, Voyages and Travels, p. 147.

89. PLJ, V, 451.

longing to become involved in some worthwhile action, so that he found his thoughts on South America "fluctuating between it and Greece", not to mention his obligation to Teresa whom he would not subject to "a residence in an unsettled country, where I shall probably take a part of some sort".⁹⁰ It was perhaps the 1822 issue of the Quarterly that led Byron's restless spirit to consider emigrating to Van Diemen's Land. In this issue the reviewer considers four books written by former Englishmen reporting on the wonders of America and another on Van Diemen's Land, a practical guide for the emigrant. That issue of the Quarterly contains Bishop Heber's review of Cain, and though Byron returned the volume to Murray "uncut and unopened", he read the review in "Galignani's pic-nic sort of Gazette" and may have read the other articles as well since he wrote to Kinnaird that he thought of going to "Van Diemen's Land, of which I hear much, as a good place to settle in".⁹¹

The reviewer is understandably hostile to the various authors' unbounded praise of life in America and over-reacts in defence of England with the smug insularity that Byron often attacked. After dutifully reporting the wonders of America, the reviewer reminds the reader that the achievement of Americans is no more than should be expected from a nation whose heritage is British:

90. PLJ, VI, 90, June 12, 1822; PLJ, VI, 110-111, August 27, 1822.

91. PLJ, VI, 143, October 23, 1822; LBC, II, 231, September 24, 1822.

...we cannot discover that they have stepped a jot beyond the mark which, with the advantages they possessed, they ought, in fairness, to have reached, and which might have been expected from the descendants of a great, a virtuous, and a magnanimous people. It is their chief happiness (and let it be their chief pride) that in establishing their independence they had the fortitude to follow the British institutions....most of the good which they enjoy (and long may they enjoy it!) they derived from England; the bad is mostly their own.⁹²

But it is in the reviewer's peroration, written out of blind pride and self-righteous complacency, that we find proper grist for Byron's Don Juan mill:

Meanwhile, England can afford to⁹³ part with her Fearons, her Flowers, and her Birkbecks. She continues, in spite of them, to make a steady progress in the general intelligence of all ranks of society, in the amount of her population, and with it, in the means of subsistence; peace, with her concomitant blessings, continues to spread her benign influence over the land, and all we want, as we have often observed, is thankfulness. Let it be recollected that...there is no country in the world where the mass of the people are so well fed, clothed and lodged, as in England; where life and property are so well protected and secured; and where real and rational liberty, the Englishman's birthright, is so fully and effectually enjoyed.⁹⁴

The reviewer's attitude reflects the general lack of awareness among the ruling class of Regency England who, as one historian has noted, "not only failed to find a common denominator for re-adjusting British society after the war; they failed even to realise one was needed".⁹⁵ Political leaders took no notice of the dispossessed peasants, the unemployed factory workers, or the unpensioned and starving

92. "Views, Visits, and Tours in North America", Quarterly Review XXVII (April 1822), 98. The April issue was published in July; the reviewer has not been identified (Shine and Shine, Quarterly Review Contributors, p.78).

93. Names of the British emigrants who wrote three of the books.

94. Quarterly Review, XXVII, 98-99.

95. Arthur Bryant, The Age of Elegance, 1812-1822 (London: Collins, 1950, reprinted 1975), p. 401.

soldiers who had returned from the Napoleonic wars. Freedom and security of property which the Quarterly reviewer praised were dependent upon the repressive Six Acts and were limited to the upper classes. Vision rested instead, according to Bryant, in England's poets:

Even Byron, writing Don Juan in adulterous exile on gin and water and announcing that he was going to be immoral and show things, not as they ought to be, but as they were, helped to restore the moral currency.⁹⁶

In the vitriolic stanzas that begin the English Cantos of Don Juan, written shortly after this issue of the Quarterly appeared,⁹⁷ Byron contends directly with the reviewer's imperfect vision. Those stanzas have been cited more fully above, but the opening lines remind us of the contrast that Byron found between England's view of herself and the truth in the eyes of the rest of the world: "that spot on earth / Which holds what might have been the noblest nation", "Alas! could she but fully, truly, know / How her great name is now throughout abhorred", "Would she be proud, or boast herself the free, / Who is but first of slaves?" (X, lxvi, lxvii, lxviii) In the next canto, Juan, approaching London by way of Shooter's Hill, is "wrapped in contemplation. . . And lost in wonder of so great a nation", before being attacked by footpads; and Byron speaks mockingly through the naive foreigner:

96. Bryant, Age of Elegance, p. 407.

97. Steffan, (Lord Byron, p. 684) finds that Byron began the canto before leaving Pisa, September 1822, and completed it after arriving in Genoa, October 5, 1822.

"And here", he cried, "is Freedom's chosen station
 Here peals the People's voice nor can entomb it
 Racks--prisons--inquisitions; Resurrection
 Awaits it, each new meeting or election.

"Here are chaste wives, pure lives, here people pay
 But what they please; and if that things be dear,
 'T is only that they love to throw away
 Their cash, to show how much they have a-year.
 Here laws are all inviolate--none lay
 Traps for the traveller--every highway's clear--
 Here".... (XI, ix-x)

The second article, written by the same reviewer much pleased to turn "from 'the swamps and prairies' of the preceding pages", is a review of a book describing the opportunities of Van Diemen's Land. This is an island to the reviewer's liking and one where he hopes "a better race from the same parent stock is about to spring up, than that of the 'back woodsmen' of North America". Van Diemen's Land is a "fertile and beautiful island" which, since the last report in the Quarterly two years before, "has already so far outrun the most sanguine expectations . . . as to have nearly doubled its population and produce...." In encouraging other settlers to join the new colony, he inadvertently names some of the ills of English society, ignored in his previous article in praise of English "peace, with her concomitant blessings":

To the farmer and the small landholder, who, from the exaction of high war rents, the depression of agricultural produce, improvident speculation, or any other cause, may incline to emigrate from the land of their fathers,--to the artificer, and indeed to all who can command a little capital and a good stock of labour, it will be found a land flowing with milk and honey.⁹⁸

98. "Van Diemen's Land", Quarterly Review, XXVII (April 1822), 99.

Byron might have written The Age of Bronze with this issue of the Quarterly at his elbow. The "uncountry gentlemen", the "landed self-interest groans from shore to shore, / For fear that plenty should attain the poor". Landowners seek to maintain the wartime level of profits by demanding ever higher rents from tenants already burdened with excess land turned to production of grain and by supporting the Corn Laws to force down the price of home grown grain, a practice which bankrupted many small landholders and tenants:

Up, up again, ye rents, exalt your notes,
 Or else the ministry will lose your votes,
 And patriotism, so delicately nice,
 Her loaves will lower to the market price;
 For ah! "the loaves and fishes", once so high,
 Are gone--their oven closed, their ocean dry,
 And nought remains of all the millions spent,
 Excepting to grow moderate and content.
 They who are not so, had their turn--and turn
 About still flows from Fortune's equal urn.
 (xiv, 602-611)

Byron also comments on the economic crisis affecting Europe following the war that in 1822 was bringing wealth to the Rothschild brothers and financial ruin to others, another of the causes of emigration in the 1820's:

How rich is Britain! not indeed in mines,
 Or peace or plenty, corn or oil, or wines:
 No land of Canaan, full of milk or honey,
 Nor (save in paper shekels) ready money:
 But let us not to own the truth refuse,
 Was ever Christian land so rich in Jews?
 (xv, 668-613)

The reviewer of the book on Van Diemen's Land promised his readers a paradise superior to America (and, indeed to Eden), free "from venomous reptiles and insects, which make life one endless torment". Settlers would also find cleared land ready for the plough and "nothing to

apprehend from drought at one season of the year, and inundation at another, for the rains fall in due season, and the rivers, however swollen, keep within their banks".⁹⁹ In the context of his indecision - South America, Greece, or Van Diemen's Land, and the general feverish longing for an island paradise, Byron began The Island early in January 1823. There is no evidence to tell us when he actually read "Mariner's Account of the Tonga Islands", nor Bligh's Narrative, and how these pieces came together in his consciousness at this time. But Trelawny records an incident aboard the Hercules when he and Byron were bound for Greece that gives us insight into the workings of the mature Byron's imagination. As they drifted southward along the Italian coast past an island dungeon of the Neapolitan government, Byron levelled a general curse against tyranny in the world. Trelawny recalls that he gave Byron pencil and paper and challenged him to put his thoughts into poetry. After much "scrawling and scratching out", Byron protested that the process was no spontaneous happening:

You think it is as easy to write poetry as smoke a segar--look, it's only doggrel. Extemporizing verses is only nonsense; poetry is a distinct faculty --it won't come when called--you may as well whistle for a wind; a Pythoness was primed when put upon her tripod. I must chew the cud before I write. I have thought over most of my subjects for years before writing a line.

Byron continued to struggle, however, for some time, as Trelawny remembers, before finally admitting temporary

99. Quarterly Review, XXVII, 99.

defeat: "You might as well ask me to describe an earthquake, whilst the ground was trembling under my feet. Give me time, - I can't forget the theme".¹⁰⁰

If, as Clinton claims, Byron had long sought for a way of using Mariner's description of the cave on the Tonga Islands, somehow Bligh's narrative of mutiny suggested itself as a frame within which he could explore the conflict between duty and desire which besets every man and find the corrective to the longing for escape to a perfect world which currently gripped his own thoughts and apparently the world's.

All that we hear of the composition of The Island from Byron's letters occurs in the same letter to Leigh Hunt in which Byron explained that he was sending additions to scenes of The Deformed Transformed for Mary Shelley to copy out. The bulk of the letter is Byron's reply to certain comments which Hunt had apparently noted on the manuscript of the poem, still incomplete. In answering Hunt's opinion that the poem is more tame than one would expect from Byron, he explains something of his intentions in writing the poem. While we would not expect Byron to be completely open with Hunt regarding his aims in the poem, what he says strongly implies the serious ethical purpose at bottom:

You are kind in one point, and right in the other. But I have two things to avoid--the first that of running foul of my own Corsair and style, so as to produce repetition and monotony--and the other not to run counter to the reigning stupidity altogether, else they will say that I am eulogizing Mutiny. This must produce tameness in some degree. But recollect that I am merely trying to write a poem a little

100. Trelawny, Recollections, pp. 121-122.

above the usual run of periodical poesy, and I hope it will be at least that. You think higher of readers than I do, but I will bet you a flask of Falernum that the most stilted parts of the political Age of Bronze, and the most pamby portions of the Toobonai Islanders, will be the most agreeable to the enlightened public, though I shall sprinkle some uncommon-place here and there nevertheless.¹⁰¹

The Island, like The Age of Bronze, is a return to the heroic couplet after a long absence, but, as Byron has termed it in reference to the satire, it is "an old friend with a new face".¹⁰² In The Island Byron's measure is vibrant with the confidence of his experience, full of resonance in description, sure and steady in unfolding the narrative. Coleridge, in judging whether the "new song is as good as the old", commented that "the poetic faculty is somewhat exhausted, but the poetic vision has been purged and heightened by suffering and self-knowledge".¹⁰³ The poetic faculty, however, responds to and reflects the poetic vision; and if The Island lacks the vigorous energy and daring of the earlier verse tales, it more than compensates in its philosophic understanding of basic moral issues important to all humans. As he had claimed his Corsair to have been written "con amore" and "to wring [his] thoughts from reality, and take refuge in 'imaginings'", so we sense The Island as a momentary haven wherein Byron indulges his heart-felt imaginings as a means towards rather than escape from reality and truth.

When he explained to Hunt that the poem was tame because he had to guard against "running foul" of his

101. PLJ, VI, 164-165, January 25, 1823.

102. PLJ, VI, 161, January 10, 1823.

103. PW, V, 584.

Corsair, Byron was anticipating the inevitable comparisons which would be drawn between Christian and Conrad, or Christian and the Giaour and his other lawless, moody heroes. Early in 1822 when Murray had asked for something in his Corsair style "to interest the women", Byron had been quick to reject the idea: "I shall attempt of that kind nothing further. I follow the bias of my own mind, without considering whether women or men are to be pleased."¹⁰⁴ Not only did he not wish to seem to be pandering to public taste, a taste which he felt with some guilt that he had fostered, but he did not wish his more serious purpose in The Island obscured by a glorification of the rebellious Christian. In fact, the poem strongly suggests that Byron is recanting the moody, disaffected heroes of his earlier verse tales who had added so greatly to his fame. Those Byronic heroes, anarchic, irresponsible, brooding individuals, who had withdrawn from society, were now common-places. It was Conrad's personal magnetism that attracted a faithful band of followers and made them participants in his corruption. Byron's wish not to become entangled with the proud but warped hero of The Corsair whose only redeeming virtue was his love for Medora implies that Byron intended The Island as an expression of his deepened vision of the human dilemma and of his responsibility as a poet. Rather than lay bare his serious purpose to Hunt, however, he protects his vulnerability by putting the blame on the "reigning stupidity" of the public who, if he had developed

104. PLJ, VI, 40-41, March 15, 1822.

Christian in the tradition of his other heroes, would conclude that he was "eulogizing Mutiny". In putting aside Byronic common-places, he had no high hopes that his uncommon-places would be appreciated, or even noted, by his reading audience, but psychologically the poem was a necessity for Byron and, as he told Hunt, in spite of its tameness, "I am going on with the poeshie".¹⁰⁵

In Bligh's account of the Bounty mutiny and in the later reports communicated to the Admiralty on the fate of the mutineers afterward, history came made-to-order for Byron's tale. As we have seen in the dramas, history and facts are the truth of human experience for Byron and, for his purposes, they give substance and authority to poetry, making more respectable an occupation he had constantly to justify to himself. In the works of his last years Byron turns more frequently to history as the record of man engaged in events of the past that provides a perspective whereby the apparently irrational and chaotic present is made tolerable because it is part of the larger, unfolding process. History, memory and poetry are each a bridge from the past to the future. The facts of history seen from a distance form an intelligible pattern that appeals to man's basic need for system and order and confirms the value of human existence. Repeatedly throughout Byron's career history provided the man or the event onto which he projected feelings or memories to create poetry. As early as Hours of Idleness he had valued the truth shared by history,

105. PLJ, VI, 165, January 25, 1823.

poetry, and the imagination; but in his haughty and self-conscious, adolescent way, he said the opposite of what he believed. In a note identifying Pylades as the friend of Orestes, he dismisses the relationship as one with other legendary friendships which

have been handed down to posterity as remarkable instances of attachments, which in all probability never existed beyond the imagination of the poet, or the page of an historian, or modern novelist.¹⁰⁶

In this early poem "To Romance", the disillusioned young poet bids a reluctant farewell to this "Parent of golden dreams", forsaking her "realms for those of Truth". Byron uses "Truth" here as a vague, undefined generality that represents unchanging principles and certainty. The sense is the opposite of delusion and, as his note implies, his response grows out of a feeling of disappointment in unfulfilled dreams and faithless friends. He swings violently from past romantic illusions towards the opposite pole of some received verity. But the truth his later poems reveals is the experiential truth of his own discovery, valid for man because valid for him as one of mankind, and, more often than not in the later years, interwoven with the truth of history, fact already given "some leaven of a lie" to render it acceptable or bearable (Don Juan, XI, xxxvii). From Childe Harold onward, with few exceptions, Byron's poems have some foundation in historical fact or event or figure which in turn is suffused with his personal apprehension and consciousness to be transmuted into poetic truth.

In his later works such truth incorporates what

106. PW, I, 175, note 1.

we have already seen to be a more highly refined view of history in The Deformed Transformed and The Age of Bronze, and indeed beginning in the historical dramas. In Byron's mature understanding, what we call history, the past, arises first in present moments that are responded to and thus determined into future form by individuals acting out of human desires--for glory, love, power, public good, private gain--for whatever is seen as a necessary fulfillment of individual goals. Man as an individual draws history (events) into himself and is therefore the very heart of the process. He can be expressed symbolically in history while events of history can be renewed symbolically in individuals of the present. In his early poems, especially those in which the young poet reflects on the history of Newstead and his ancestors, Byron had taken the decayed state of the abbey and his own inferior status as evidence of history as a force inseparable from time and as relentlessly a record of decline. The understanding, however, is purely metaphorical - the "slow decay" of Newstead is like the decline of his ancestors now dwindled to himself. In his "Elegy on Newstead Abbey", Byron imagines the past of Newstead as vividly as if he recalled from memory the panorama of events that now are seen in his mind's eye, the succession of inhabitants from nameless abbots through secular owners lives again in his imagination. The closing quatrains sum up the inexorable deterioration from those past times to the present ruins.

Newstead! what saddening change of scene is thine!
 Thy yawning arch betokens slow decay;
 The last and youngest of a noble line,
 Now holds thy mouldering turrets in his sway.

Yet he prefers thee to the gilded domes,
 Or gewgaw grottos, of the vainly great;
 Yet lingers 'mid thy damp and mossy tombs,
 Nor breathes a murmur 'gainst the will of Fate.

Haply thy sun, emerging yet may shine,
 Thee to irradiate with meridian ray;
 Hours, splendid as the past, may still be thine,
 And bless thy future as thy former clay.

The young Byron has no concept, however, of why he prefers the hotch-potch of Newstead, as he comes to understand in Don Juan when Norman Abbey becomes a symbol of "life's infinite variety". Nor has he an understanding of the better times he envisions for the Abbey, as yet no appreciation of individual effort that can alter the march of history.

"Newstead Abbey", written four years later but not published until 1898, records a loss even of hope that change can occur:

And vain was each effort to raise and recall
 The brightness of old to illumine our Hall;
 And vain was the hope to avert the decline,
 And the fate of my fathers had faded to mine.

And theirs was the wealth and the fulness of Fame,
 And mine to inherit too haughty a name;
 And theirs were the times and the triumphs of yore,
 And mine to regret, but renew them no more.

And Ruin is fixed on my tower and my wall,
 Too hoary to fade, and too massy to fall;
 It tells not of Time's or the tempest's decay,
 But the wreck of the line that have held it in sway.

This is romantic passivity that makes virtue of vice, the apathetic submission to the hopelessness of events.

History's victim wears his helplessness as a badge of pride.

In Childe Harold III Byron expresses much the same view. His pilgrimage across Europe reveals history as an abstract force which had written the record of man's suffering and decay in the ruins that lay around the pilgrim.

He found comfort, however cold, in identifying himself as another of time's wrecks. This in itself is positive to the extent that the experience enabled Byron to re-integrate his shattered self and in the process required an activity of the mind:

to feel

We are not what we have been, and to deem
 We are not what we should be,--and to steel
 The heart against itself; and to conceal,
 With a proud caution, love, or hate, or aught,--
 Passion or feeling, purpose, grief, or zeal,
 Which is the tyrant Spirit of our thought,--
 Is a stern task of soul:--No matter,--it is taught.
 (cxi)

Such self-acceptance, however, is at best negative and despairing. The message of the later works shows that man writes history, and though he frequently acts without thinking and often out of petty motives, as Arnold found in The Deformed Transformed, he has choice and the power to change.

In The Island, Byron completes the apocalyptic process entered into on his personal level in that searching drama. The history of the Bounty mutiny becomes the metaphor of his personal myth, his truth, itself the poetic truth of mankind. The poem records his coming to terms with the world as a human being is capable of knowing the world and his own capacities. Behind the poem lies Byron's acknowledgement of the instinctive, human desire for a perfect world. He admits at the same time that forces frustrate individual goals and that limitations inherent in human nature thwart fulfillment. Bligh's dream of a perfect world of "toils rewarded" in England's appreciation for his duty done satisfactorily is shattered

because it is in conflict with the mutineers' earthier vision. Christian's perfect world is doomed from the start by his sense of betraying his captain and later the mutineers, even Torquil to whom he had hoped to give much. The Island honours these conflicting dreams. By accepting the world as it is, by loving man as and because he dares to live his dream, Byron gains the insight that frees him to set about accomplishing what can be achieved to make a less than perfect world better.

In terms of the time of the poem's composition, Byron journeys from the Old World recently surveyed in The Age of Bronze, the corruption and meanness of power employed in narrow self-interest and from the England of Cantos XI and XII of Don Juan, where he saw the activity of life as the vain and trivial pursuits of a heedlessly immoral aristocracy, to a New World island with the promise of an earthly paradise. It is a journey from north to south, cold to warmth, from harsh reality to a place where dreams may be fulfilled, from fact to factual fantasy. But against these traditional, symbolic interpretations, Byron counts the cost of escape from the duties and responsibilities of the real world to suggest that while facts do not prescribe values they do allow moral decisions. Though The Island is a straight-forward narrative, based on recorded fact, authorial comment interprets the events. We are in the presence of a consciousness who, though not a figure in the story, knows how the story will end and withholds that information for the sake of the story-telling art. At the same time, his

consciousness is expressed in digressions, in word choice, and in the arrangement of the materials of the story and foreshadows the final outcome. The effect is obviously different from the narrative technique of Don Juan in which the narrator tells a story primarily for the sake of opportunities to digress upon his own thoughts even more wide ranging than his well-travelled hero. What happens next to Juan is less important than what the narrator thinks about what happens or thinks with no apparent relevance to the story. We are drawn along by the surprising turns of the narrator's mobile mind. Don Juan is an inchoate and unindexed anthology of the narrator's often contradictory opinions, but The Island is a tightly controlled allegory, with the narrator retelling the dream that rises out of the unconscious of every man. Byron adds to the actual real-life Bligh and Christian of the historical account the imagined figures of Torquil, Neuha, and Ben Bunting, but all are already familiar to us as types of our divided selves and figures from our fantasies. We already know how the story must end, as the audience in Athens already knew the fate of Oedipus or as we know when we are in Byron's "mental theatre" the inevitable fate of a Faliero or a Sardanapalus. But we attend to the tale of the mutiny for the story-teller's insight. Order and responsibility to duty must triumph over the impulse to rebel, but the dream of a perfect world of innocence survives shattering experience. The mutineers in their desire for a better life even at the expense of others' suffering are no different from the mass of men:

Alas! such is our nature! all but aim
 At the same end by pathways not the same;
 Our means--our birth--our nation, and our name,
 Our fortune--temper--even our outward frame,
 Are far more potent o'er our yielding clay
 Than aught we know beyond our little day.
 (I, vi, 115-1200)

The microcosm of the South Sea island holds man's dream world but a world continually threatened with an invasion of the real world. In the structure of the poem it is the real world that dominates. When the ship is wrested from rightful authority in the rebellion, the mutineers sail in it to their dream world where it lies at anchor, a reminder of broken order and their guilt. Beyond their consciences, the mutinous band are burdened with watching the horizon for the sail of another ship that would inevitably appear and tell them that they had not escaped, that "their present lot was what they had foreseen, / And dared as what was likely to have been" (III, ii). Not until all but Torquil have been captured or killed in the penultimate stanza does the ship sail away. Thus, the arrangement of the stanzas says that earthly paradise consists of stolen moments from the pressure of the real world. Only the last stanza of Canto IV presents the ideal world as achieved. Torquil and Neuha have survived by living out the island's ancient legend of lovers who found refuge in the cave beneath the sea. They join the ranks of legendary lovers and life escapes into art, the dream world overtakes and outlives the real.

In contrasting the world of fact with the romantic world of man's longing, Byron admits that the dream is vital,

but he never loses sight of reality. Contrary to his usual insistence that he can only describe scenes he has seen, he sets The Island in a world he has never visited. But the details he sketches in create a landscape familiar to all men, yet always out of reach except in dreams. In this romantic world, nature smiles on man. She woos men to "the happy shores" where even laws are not necessary,

Where all partake the earth without dispute,
And bread itself is gathered as a fruit;
Where none contest the fields, the wood, the streams;
--The goldless Age, where Gold disturbs no dreams.
(I, x)

But Byron repeatedly emphasises the magic of the dream world and the hard truth of reality. As the mutineers set their course for the island, determined to "Do good with Nature, or with Nature err", beneficently a "breeze springs up", the sails are filled and the ship moves through the water with the same "dashing ease" with which the mythological "Argo ploughed the Euxine's virgin foam" (I, x). How different the experience of Bligh and his "faithful few" who sail in the real world. For them the "breeze now sank, now whispered from his cave", and given no help from Nature, "With slow, despairing oar, the abandoned skiff / Ploughs its drear progress" (I, ix).

In nature's perfect world, man escapes the bonds of time to participate in her natural rhythms:

Their hour-glass was the sea-sand, and the tide,
Like her smooth billow, saw their moments glide;
Their clock the Sun, in his unbounded tower;
They reckoned not, whose day was but an hour.
(II, xv)

As the cold, heaven-piercing Alps had enlarged Byron's spirit in Childe Harold, awakening a sense of identity

with the natural world (III, lxii), so the discovery of love creates a fiery pinnacle which transports the lover to heaven and awakens his spirit to a love of nature and a love of man. The alpine experience had merely reinforced a self-consciousness, making identification with nature a means of withdrawing from the world of man:

Are not the mountains, waves, and skies a part
Of me and of my Soul, as I of them?
Is not the love of these deep in my heart
With a pure passion? should I not contemn
All objects, if compared with these? and stem
A tide of suffering, rather than forego
Such feelings for the hard and worldly phlegm
Of those whose eyes are only turned below,
Gazing upon the ground, with thoughts which
dare not glow? (III, lxxv)

Byron rephrases these unanswered questions in the romantic world of The Island to reflect the enlarging experience of love which does not "leave vain man below", but teaches him his "other better self". The consuming flame of love, "kindled by another", leads to a deeper understanding of nature where selflessness is discovered and questions of man's base nature are precluded:

How often we forget all time, when lone,
Admiring Nature's universal throne,
Her woods--her wilds--her waters--the intense
Reply of hers to our intelligence!
Live not the Stars and Mountains? Are the Waves
Without a spirit? Are the dropping caves
Without a feeling in their silent tears?
No, no;--they woo and clasp us to their spheres,
Dissolve this clog and clod of clay before
Its hour, and merge our soul in the great shore.
Strip off this fond and false identity!--
Who thinks of self when gazing on the sky?
And who, though gazing lower, ever thought,
In the young moments e'er the heart is taught
Time's lesson, of Man's baseness or his own?
All Nature is his realm, and Love his throne.
(II, xvi)

In the innocence of youth and ideal, first love, nature

seems all sympathy. These claims of romantics collapse, however, when the real world reasserts itself and an indifferent but potentially destructive nature prevails. Nature does not sympathise with the few mutineers who in order to escape capture are forced to seek sanctuary

Beneath a rock whose jutting base protrudes
 Far over Ocean in its fiercest moods,
 When scaling his enormous crag the wave
 Is hurled down headlong, like the foremost brave,
 And falls back on the foaming crowd behind,
 Which fight beneath the banners of the wind....
 (II, ii)

The epic simile sums up their fate. Though still retaining "something of the pride of former will" and "the lingering hope" that had sustained thoughts that they might go unnoticed or, "if sought, their distant caves / Might still be missed among the world of waves", the little remnant now knew

Their sea-green isle, their guilt-won Paradise,
 No more could shield their Virtue or their Vice:
 Their better feelings, if such were, were thrown
 Back on themselves,--their sins remained alone.
 (III, ii)

"Time's lesson" ultimately teaches them that nature at best is capricious. "Nature played with the stalactites/
 And built herself a Chapel of the Seas" which became Torquil's escape, but the remaining mutineers found no haven: they were left "exiles of the hollow rock" (IV, vii, x). Further, in their search for shelter, they sailed the same impartial ocean as their pursuers: "The waves which bore them still their foes would bear" (IV, x). As they died defiantly on the rocks above the sea, "calm and careless heaved the wave below, / Eternal with unsympathetic flow" (IV, xiii).

The character of Ben Bunting provides further evidence of the dichotomy of the real and the romantic world. He breaks in upon the magic, twilight tranquillity of Torquil and Neuha as "a Voice", unwelcome as it comes "through palm and plantain". Not the soft sound of the "dying night-breeze. . .Striking the strings of nature, rock and tree", nor the mournful tones of the "hermit owl, / Exhaling all his solitary soul", the voice is "a loud, long, and naval whistle" (II, xviii). Nor does he come into the lovers' bower smelling "like a 'bed of violets' on the gale", but of tobacco "such as wafts its cloud o'er grog of ale" and "from East to West / Cheers the tar's labour or the Turkman's rest" (II, xix). Ben Bunting is an emblem of the world of men and action, and his attempts to accommodate to the dream-life show how ludicrous such efforts are. He is a hybrid blend of old and new, without identity in either world:

Our sailor's jacket, though in ragged trim,
His foremast air, and somewhat rolling gait,
Like his dear vessel, spoke his former state.
(II, xx)

Bunting has given up trousers for native dress, a "curious sort of somewhat scanty mat", yet continues to wear the weapons of the old world - a pair of pistols, a cutlass "unconscious of a sheath", and a rusting bayonet. He brings the unwelcome news to Torquil that a ship approaches and, when the youth suggests "'Tis time, belike, to put our helm about'", Bunting reasserts a return to the manly code of the old world: "We'll make no running fight, for that were base; / We will die at our quarters, like true men." While Torquil languished with his love, the other

mutineers had thrown themselves into the activity they understood and the discipline they had learned. With pleasure, and perhaps relief, Bunting reports the preparations being made for battle. While the confrontation is one they cannot hope to win, the action is a re-engagement with old-world, real-world order and participation, though perverse, in responsibility and duty.

Ben Bunting's intrusion into the dream world occurs at the poem's precise centre and works literally and figuratively to express the meaning. His appearance marks the apogee of hope rising towards wish fulfillment, the mutineers' tenuous belief that their choice of an island paradise would succeed. Beyond this scene the world of order gradually resumes control and the mutineers must lose. Bunting's motley garb forewarns of this inevitable end. While he is "A human figure", in his dress he is the epitome of unreality: "A seaman in a savage masquerade", more appropriately dressed for the mocking shipboard ceremony of crossing the line into Neptune's realm (II, xx). Though Fleck interprets Bunting in his fantastical garb as a device "to make the romance of the lovers look real", his function ought to be seen as a model of the disorientation of the lawless world of dreams and of the impossibility of success in a world divorced from reality. His concluding remark as Torquil returns to duty, promising eternal devotion to Neuha "whatever intervenes", measures Bunting's enlightenment. Only the marines would believe such romantic nonsense.

This reading again conflicts with Fleck's understanding that the remark is a Byronic joke that "allows us to retreat from the intensity of the romance without retreating from its substance".¹⁰⁸ The point of the jest seems rather that naive youth alone can participate in perfect, ideal love.

Point by point Byron attacks the romantic world to affirm the real because that is the only arena in which man can act. Cooke has traced this affirmative mode appearing in some of Byron's works, specifically The Two Foscari, and the Siege of Ismail cantos of Don Juan, describing it as "a peculiar form of humanism and stoicism that may be called counter-heroic".¹⁰⁹ According to Cooke, the counter-heroic "rebukes" the extremes of both heroic "activity" and "passivity", "by virtue of its austere sense of responsibility to be principled and humane in action, to acknowledge without collapse the normal perplexities and corruptions of existence, to profit and be honored by the opportunity of confronting the self and the universe through suffering".¹¹⁰ While Cooke sees counter-heroic humanism operating to question value assumptions made about "Glory, or war, or any form of political egotism",¹¹¹ Byron in The Island considers aspirations of a more ordinary variety. The notion that

108. Fleck, "Romance in Byron's The Island", pp. 179-180.

109. Cooke, Blind Man, p.181.

110. Cooke, Blind Man, pp. 181-182.

111. Cooke, Blind Man, p. 182.

a harmony exists, or is possible, between man and nature is a delusion born out of a moment of intense passion during which nature seems to participate in our moods. Like the "piecemeal" apprehension of the magnificence of St. Peter's which leads to an understanding of the magnificence of the mind of man, this romantic view of nature is only partial understanding. In his later works Byron mistrusts the value of the heightened experience, whether the sublimity of the Alps, the grandeur of St. Peter's, the rapturous response to nature, when such experience is not tempered with a more encompassing vision. "The flower of value must be plucked not on the sunny mountaintop, but in the very abyss. The worship of sorrow is divine", as we have heard Peckham claim.

In The Deformed Transformed, The Age of Bronze, and in The Island, Byron explores the implications of choice. Torquil is

A careless thing, who placed his choice in chance,
Nursed by the legends of his land's romance;
Eager to hope, but not less firm to bear,
Acquainted with all feelings save despair.
(II, viii).

Under other circumstances he might have had heroic aspirations to match his unfettered spirit. Such vaulting ambition, however, when it has achieved the pinnacle of its aim collapses and turns to feed upon itself:

For the same soul that rends its path to sway,
If reared to such, can find no further prey
Beyond itself, and must retrace its way,
Plunging for pleasure into pain.... (II, ix)

Whatever Torquil might have been, "A patriot hero or despotic chief", the fact is that he became "A blooming boy, a truant mutineer...The husband of the bride of

Toobonai". And Byron pauses to consider lack of ambition, what is implied in passivity that makes no choice. Having given himself over to love, Torquil has cut himself off from achievement and recognition gained through manly accomplishment:

His heart was tamed to that voluptuous state,
 At once Elysian and effeminate,
 Which leaves no laurels o'er the Hero's urn;--
 These wither when for aught save blood they burn;
 Yet when their ashes in their nooks are laid,
 Doth not the myrtle leave as sweet a shade?
 (II, xiii)

The question is left unanswered here, but Byron's observation that follows implies that given the state of the world the question is irrelevant, and towards the end of the poem laurel leaves win over myrtle. Had Caesar given himself over to Cleopatra's love, he would not have conquered the world which gave rise eventually to the despotic Roman Empire and then to absolutism. Byron, on the one hand, is conscious of the potentially destructive in the acts of a Caesar or a Torquil, but he also recognises, as the poem unfolds, that to assert nothing or to assent wilfully for the wrong cause is equally damning. The lines on the need for another Brutus which break into his reflections on Torquil seem almost irrelevant in the context of The Island except when we remember the first few lines of The Age of Bronze that are usually overlooked:

Great things have been, and are, and greater still
 Want little of mere mortals but their will (3-4)

Present times, Byron says in The Island, find men too tame, but they could breed another Brutus to put down tyranny:

Still are we hawked at by such mousing owls,
 And take for falcons those ignoble fowls,
 When but a word of freedom would dispel
 These bugbears, as their terrors show too well.
 (II, xii)

Byron continues the theme of choice and will in the remnant of the mutineers who refused to be captured alive. Much of what seems in life a matter of choice, an activity of the free will, is in reality either a wilful step taken, sometimes mindful of the risks, often without regard for consequences, or an act, though seeming free, actually forced upon us by duty or conscience. As Faliero had explained to Israel Bertuccio, his participation in the plot to overthrow the Venetian government was not an act of free will, as Bertuccio had presumed. His act is a wilful going against his nature and a thing that he must "abhor and do" (III, ii, 514-521). His sense of personal injustice outweighs whatever results from violating his duty to the state. Likewise, Christian and the mutineers, though "bleeding, thirsty, faint, and few", defy their captors with

something of the pride of former will,
 As men not all unused to meditate,
 And strive much more than wonder at their fate.
 (III, ii)

Theirs also is a wilful commitment to their rebellious course with little hope of success. They have determination to die resisting capture, but possess no penetrating insights into the significance of their act. While Faliero in his rationalising mind could sanction his defiance as an act for the good of the state, the mutineers assume that in resisting capture they are choosing to die bravely. Byron's view, however, puts a different light on their situation:

But though the choice seems native to die free;
 Even Greece can boast but one Thermopylae,

Til now, when she has forged her broken chain
 Back to a sword, and dies and lives again! (III, ii)

He expands the point further in the next canto to make plain the difference between the ennobling and ignoble sacrifice of life. Because the mutineers were left unsheltered after Torquil and Neuha had disappeared into the sea beneath the rock, and though "another choice had been their course", they were forced to steer for the nearest available rocky shore to make their stand: "No further chance or choice remained" (IV, x). Here, to face the enemy stood

the three, as the three hundred stood
 Who dyed Thermopylae with holy blood.
 But, ah! how different! 'tis the cause makes all,
 Degrades or hallows courage in its fall.

A Victorian study of Bligh's mutiny, in which the author misunderstood Byron's references to Thermopylae, demonstrates the fate that continues to befall The Island today. Reading The Island as a tale in which Byron "converted the guilty mutineers into a band of heroes", the author finds that "Lord Byron wrongfully compares with the Spartans of Thermopylae, Christian and his comrades, who...were murderous vagabonds merely".¹¹²

Byron in reality is contrasting the mutineers with the Spartans. The mutinous band have not distinguished between sheer defiance and heroic bravery. Unlike the heroes of Thermopylae, the mutineers earn only dishonour:

No grateful country, smiling through her tears,
 Began the praises of a thousand years;

112. Peter Burke, Celebrated Naval and Military Trials (London: W.H. Allen, 1866), pp. 200-201.

No nation's eyes would on their tomb be bent,
 No heroes envy them their monument;
 However boldly their warm blood was spilt,
 Their Life was shame, their Epitaph was guilt.
 (IV, xi)

Even in originally choosing the act of mutiny,
 Christian had staked his own and the fate of his fellow
 mutineers on chance:

...born perchance for better things, [he] had set
 His life upon a cast which lingered yet,
 And now the die was to be thrown, and all
 The chances were in favour of his fall. (IV, xi)

Christian is indeed the lineal descendant of the heroes
 of the earlier verse tales, summed up in Lara, "A thing
 of dark imaginings, that shaped / By choice the perils he
 by chance escaped " (I, xviii). Christian's pursuers, on
 the other hand, have been deprived of the power to choose.
 Though they would prefer "to go / Against a nation's than
 a native foe", the demands of duty and of obedience to law
 and conscience pit them against one of their own, a "poor
 victim of self-will" (IV, xii). In this final encounter
 between the authority of the state and individual claims
 to act according to individual conscience, Byron poses
 once again the moral question of freedom versus respon-
 sibility. Christian regrets his defiance to the extent
 that Torquil seems to be a victim of it:

"And is it thus?" he cried, "unhappy boy!
 And thee, too, thee--my madness must destroy!"

He acknowledges that his act is one of great cost to both
 sides in the conflict:

"Dearly they have bought us--dearly still may buy,--
 And I must fall....

.

For me my lot is what I sought; to be,
 In life or death, the fearless and the free".
 (III, vi)

Yet Christian in insisting on his personal freedom of choice has threatened the innocent boy and compromised not only his fellow mutineers but those who accept their duty to uphold the laws. In refusing to accept capture rather than death, the last three mutineers are an example of the futility of ill-considered protest:

The desperate trio hold aloof their fate
But by a thread, like sharks who have gorged the bait.

At the last, "twice wounded" Christian still refuses the "mercy" of surrender to die in a commingling of pathos and bathos. He felled one last foe with a vest button fired from his gun;

then, like a serpent, coiled
His wounded, weary form to where the steep
Looked desperate as himself along the deep;
Cast one glance back, and clenched his hand and shook
His last rage 'gainst the earth which he forsook.
(IV, xii)

Christian remains Byron's Promethean hero to the end, but one of the uncommon-places of the poem, which Byron had expressed to Hunt as an aim of The Island, is the narrator's judgment that Christian's end is inglorious. Nothing remained of the hero splattered on the rocks below "save a life mis-spent" (IV, xii). Order is restored: the authority of the state survives as the ship prepares to sail back to England with the captive prisoners, and the waves of the sea wash away all trace of the struggle as the natural world restores its indifferent supremacy (IV, xiii).

In The Island, however, Byron does not become the moraliser. Rather, his position is the "empathetic assertion" of the self in others which Peckham finds is

"the basis of Romantic social morality". Byron finds himself in sympathy with Bligh who would uphold duty and preserve order and with the mutineers who rebel against authority. And there is no mistaking the pleasure he takes in Torquil's discovery of perfect love, although the lover earns no laurel leaves. The dream of perfect love must survive even if it is only a legend. The poem, as a whole, centres around the power of legend, myth, fable, poetry--in a word, art. The simple songs of the islanders invite, attract, and inspire, and Byron asks, "what can our accomplished art / Of verse do more than reach the awakened heart?" (II, v) But Byron also recognised that art works for both good and ill. Torquil is a victim of "the legends of his land's romance", Christian and the mutineers of the Christian myth of paradise. The charms of Toobonai, symbol of the fabled Eden, are powerfully seductive, and Byron as narrator enjoys but resists the dream. For him the journey to the island is a descent into the abyss of his being, his tripartite self, symbolised in Bligh, Christian, and Torquil. The Garden of the Old Testament, after all, is the Gethsemane of the Gospel, an interlude of introspection and assessment necessary to orientation and commitment to the future task. Byron's experience of the island addresses itself to his personal indecision about the future, flight to some new-world settlement or fight in the cause of Greece, and marks his final and uncollapsing acceptance of "the normal perplexities and corruptions of existence". As a part of the process, he

rids himself of the Promethean spirit of fire and ice, the antipodal aspects of the hero, to find the point of equipoise;¹¹³ at the same time, in the reawakening of themes of his youthful poetry, a logical consequence of the journey into his past, Byron reaffirms the values of the child: the child is indeed father of the man.

Byron, in The Island, is drawn back from within and without to memories of childhood, to memories of people and places which had remained vividly alive for him because of the feelings and passions that they had aroused in him to survive "whatever intervenes / Between us and our Childhood's sympathy" (II, xii). Medwin records that Byron, in talking of his early life, attributed the sources of his poetry to his experiences of that time:

I don't know from whom I inherited verse-making; probably the wild scenery of Morven and Loch-na-gar, and the banks of the Dee, were the parents of my poetical vein, and the developers of my poetical boss. If it was so, it was dormant; at least, I never wrote any thing worth mentioning till I was in love....[Mary Chaworth] was the beau ideal of all that my youthful fancy could paint of beautiful; and I have taken all my fables about the celestial nature of women from the perfection my imagination created in her--I say created, for I found her, like the rest of the sex, any thing but angelic....For a man to become a poet (witness Petrarch and Dante) he must be in love, or miserable. I was both when I wrote "Hours of Idleness": some of these poems, in spite of what the reviewers say, are as good as any I ever produced.¹¹⁴

Byron's memory, however, in confirming the eternal in the child, selects the positive longings of the

113. See M.G. Cooke, The Romantic Will (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), especially pp. 201-222. His conclusions about Romantic Will, especially in Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley, are similar to my understanding of Byron's evolving concept of will, though we have arrived by different routes.

114. Medwin's Conversations, pp. 60, 61, 64.

child for development in the Torquil-Neuha sequences. Byron sees the Hebrides child that he had been across the gulf of some twenty-five years but excludes - because forgotten or imagined away - the agonising pain recorded in his juvenile poems. The dreams of childhood find a happy ending in The Island. Torquil does not ask despairingly, as did the speaker of "The Adieu" (1807).

Why did my childhood wander forth
From you, ye regions of the North,
With sons of Pride to roam?
Why did I quit my Highland's cave,
Mar's dusky heath, and Dee's clear wave,
To seek a Sotheron home?

Nor must he lament, as in "I Would I Were a Careless Child" (1808), the disparity between the dream and reality:

Once I beheld a splendid dream,
A visionary scene of bliss;
Truth!--wherefore did thy hated beam
Awake me to a world like this?

As he had in many of his early poems, Byron stresses in his maturity the pleasures of memory. Although events of experience usually uncover the pain of existence, memory provides a pleasurable haven. Notably, "On a Distant View of Harrow" (1806) and "Childish Recollections" (1807) emphasise the sustaining thought that future moments of pleasure will drive the mind backward to early pleasing memories. In the latter poem Byron had claimed that even when "Hope retires appall'd", the pain of life can be diminished through recourse to memory:

Remembrance sheds round her genial power,
Calls back the vanish'd days to rapture given,
When Love was bliss and Beauty form'd our heaven.

He repudiated this view in one of the "Stanzas for Music" written in his painful spring of 1816:

They say that Hope is happiness;
 But genuine Love must prize the past,
 And Memory wakes the thoughts that bless:
 They rose the first--they set the last;

And all that Memory loves the most
 Was once our only Hope to be,
 And all that Hope adored and lost
 Hath melted into Memory.

Alas! it is delusion all:
 The future cheats us from afar,
 Nor can we be what we recall,
 Nor dare we think on what we are.

Aspirations for the future are in themselves a pleasure normally and in time live only in the memory where they continue to give pleasure, but in 1816 the trauma of dashed hopes for fulfilling love destroyed all pleasure to be found in memory. In The Island, however, Byron returns to the earlier attitude, finding pleasure once more in memory.

The love of Torquil and Neuha restates Byron's early belief expressed in "The First Kiss of Love" (1807) that love inspires poets to grander achievements than Apollo or the Muses. Imaginings of love yield only "cold compositions of art", but actual experience enables the poet to recreate an earthly paradise and "Eden revives in the first kiss of love". In fact, woman is herself essential to paradise, as he wrote in "To Eliza" (1806): "Your nature so much of celestial partakes, / The Garden of Eden would wither without you". Byron's haunting dreams of his unrequited love for Mary Chaworth, most directly marked in "To a Lady" (1807), "To My Dear Mary Anne" (1804,

pub. 1831), "To Mary Chaworth" (1804, pub. 1831), "Hills of Annesley" (1805, pub. 1830), "Remembrance" (1806, pub. 1832), and "The Dream" (1816), find fulfillment at last in Neuha's gift of love to the boy Torquil. Years of wasted passion, the pain of remembering her, the desire for forgetfulness, and the fantasy that married to each other they might not have ended "both in misery", all find recompense in the love story of Toobonai.

Neuha is an idealising of the actual Mary and both participate in Byron's portraits of two other "celestial" women who dwell in Paradise. Haidée and Juan in their love discover that "Each was an angel, and earth Paradise" (Don Juan, II, cciv), but a paradise too soon destroyed by Lambro. Aurora Raby, though angelic, has no such naive and romantic vision. She is like the angel placed outside the gates of paradise who regretfully prevents man's return: in the "Seraph's shine" of her eyes she "looked as if she sat by Eden's door, / And grieved for those who could return no more" (XV, xiv). The differences between these two figures indicate the extent to which Byron had purged his vision of romantic concepts of heroism in The Island. Haidée, "Nature's bride", "Passion's child" (II, ccii), is uninhibited and free of restraints; but she is also unfit for the real world and unable to survive the loss of Juan:

The World was not for them--nor the World's art
 For beings passionate as Sappho's song;
 Love was born with them, in them, so intense,
 It was their very Spirit--not a sense.

They should have lived together in deep woods,
 Unseen as sings the nightingale; they were

Unfit to mix in these thick solitudes
 Called social, haunts of Hate, and Vice, and Care.
 (IV, xxvii, xxviii)

Haidée's love is the passionate intensity that when thwarted turns to feed on itself to destruction. Aurora, on the other hand, is self-contained and detached from the world, but to the point that she becomes a cold passivity.

She was a Catholic, too, sincere, austere,
 As far as her own gentle heart allowed,
 And deemed that fallen worship far more dear
 Perhaps because 't was fallen: her Sires were proud
 Of deeds and days, when they had filled the ear
 Of nations, and had never bent or bowed
 To novel power; and as she was the last,
 She held their old faith and feelings fast.

She gazed upon a World she scarcely knew,
 As seeking not to know it; silent, lone,
 As grows a flower, thus quietly she grew,
 And kept her heart serene within its zone.
 There was awe in the homage she drew;
 Her Spirit seemed as seated on a throne
 Apart from the surrounding world, and strong
 In its own strength--most strange in one so young!
 (XV, xlvi, xlvii)

Between these two extremes Lady Adeline stands closest to the ideal, that "fair most fatal Juan ever met" (XIII, xii). In temperament and attitude toward the world, she approaches the desired reconciliation of intense involvement and aloof withdrawal that reflects Byron's final identity. Self-possessed and self-assured, yet not indifferent, she is the union of fire and ice conceived in the perfection of Byron's metaphor of the bottle of champagne,

Frozen into a very vinous ice,
 Which leaves few drops of that immortal rain,
 Yet in the very centre, past all price,
 About a liquid glassful will remain;
 And this is stronger than the strongest grape
 Could e'er express in its expanded shape:

'T is the whole spirit brought to a quint-essence;
 And thus the chilliest aspects may centre
 A hidden nectar under a cold presence.
 (xxxvii, xxxviii)

Lady Adeline, not wise from years but because "her Experience made her sage, / For she had seen the World and stood its test" (XIV, liv), further embodies Byron's own recently hardened, non-escapist philosophy:

'T is better on the whole to have felt and seen
That which Humanity may bear, or bear not:
'T will teach discernment to the sensitive,
And not to pour their Ocean in a sieve. (XIV, xlix)

The perfect, undersea cave of The Island also bridges Byron's early poems on his ancestral home with the last of the English Cantos of Don Juan, linking Newstead with Norman Abbey. The four major poems on Newstead, "On Leaving Newstead Abbey" (1806), "Elegy on Newstead Abbey" (1807), "To an Oak at Newstead" (1807, pub. 1832), and "Newstead Abbey" (1811, pub. 1878), show how strongly the ruined abbey appealed to the young Byron's imagination. It was a reminder of the historical times and events which it had outlasted, from its founding as a religious centre by the repentant Henry II, through the secularisation by Henry VIII when the abbey came into the possession of a Byron ancestor. In its decaying state it was an emblem for Byron of the inevitable ravages of time, patterned in its descent from its original sacred purpose to its final mundane function and in its inhabitants who decline from holy men through Byron's illustrious ancestors, men who fought and died heroically, coming at the last to his own undistinguished self. At the same time, the abbey is a challenge to him as it feeds his young aspirations to bring glory and honour to the family name. The cave described in The Island, on the other hand, retains its perfection untouched by time. It is a "self-born"

imitation of Gothic architecture, an apparently chance creation of fantastical beauty wrought out of the seismic violence of earthquake "When the poles crashed and water was the world; / Or hardened from some earth-absorbing fire" (IV, vii). Both Newstead Abbey and Neuha's cave have been in their times havens for the guilty, as well as the innocent. In "Elegy on Newstead Abbey", Byron meditates on the former days of the abbey, in function remarkably similar to the cave:

In thee the wounded conscience courts relief,
Retiring from the garish blaze of day.

Yes, in thy gloomy cells and shades profound,
The monk abjur'd a world, he ne'er could view,
Or blood-stain'd Guilt, repenting, solace found,
Or Innocence from stern Oppression flew. (v,vi)

Even having glimpsed the ideal, when he drew Norman Abbey in Don Juan, Byron took his model from Newstead down to the details of the ruined chapel. In the "Elegy" he had found Newstead "more honoured in thy fall, / Than modern mansions, in their pillar'd state", and in creating Norman Abbey in Don Juan he followed the instincts of his childhood sympathy. Although the "Elegy" is a meditation on the decline of Newstead, the poet then had not subsided into gloom. Through "inspiring Fancy's magic eye," he repeoples the abbey through its successive stages with imaginary figures of the past involved in their appropriate activities, and he understood even then as a boy that periods of war's desolation and horror gave way to happier times when peace was restored and the normal life of the house resumed in feasts and hunts. Though the English Cantos remain incomplete, the narrator^{had} more

genial than when he, ^{had} interrupted ^{his story after Canto ~~XII~~} ~~the last cantos~~ joins in the feasts and foolishnesses of Norman Abbey with less of mockery than of amusement.

When Byron returned to Don Juan after The Island, he establishes from the first stanza the mood which dominates the remaining cantos and reflects his final view of the world and his duty as a poet to the world he sees.

I now mean to be serious;--and it is time,
 Since laughter now-a-days is deemed too serious;
 A jest at Vice by Virtue's called a crime,
 And critically held as deleterious;
 Besides, the sad's a source of the sublime,
 Although, when long, a little apt to weary us;
 And therefore shall my lay soar high and solemn,
 As an old temple dwindled to a column.
 (XIII, i)

There is more at issue in this stanza than Ridenour in his thoughtful study of Don Juan has allowed. He reads the first four lines as expressing Byron's "uneasiness as to the way his satire has been received", and certainly that is the surface meaning. The lines would seem to be an acquiescence to public taste and, as Ridenour and the stanza go on, to indicate that Byron threatens retaliation: "A public which so misunderstands what the poet is about . . . deserves punishment in its own terms--the 'sad sublime'".¹¹⁵ The sense of the stanza, however, expands far beyond this apparent meaning when we take into account the syntactical ambiguities and the rich variety of meanings to be associated with the key words and phrases--"be serious" and "serious" as they are opposed in the first two lines and then reconsidered in the last four lines; the phrase "and it is time", which links the interpretations of "serious"; and the implications

115. George M. Ridenour, The Style of Don Juan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 98.

of the fourth line found in the multiple meanings of "critically" and "deleterious".

Being serious means being grave, sober, or stern; or keeping a straight face, thus hiding true feeling by dissembling; but it also means taking oneself seriously. All of these meanings must operate against the more contextually limited "serious" of the following line. Here, if we take "serious" to mean unfunny, without taste, as in the case of a bad joke or a social gaucherie, it reflects the opinion the public holds toward Byron's Don Juan and the third and fourth lines merely amplify the attitude of those readers who object: they consider that treating vice lightly is an evil and, in their judgment, a harmful practice. The lines can also be read as Byron's interpretation of the reason why readers are uneasy when he pokes fun at vice. Laughter is menacing, ominously threatening to their protected but unadmitted prejudices. In this reading, the third and fourth lines explain the harm Byron sees in this narrow-mindedness in public opinion that self-righteously judges his attitude toward vice to be evil. Such views are crucially, moralistically, fastidiously corrosive; they are destructive to the society which holds them and to his hopes as an ethical poet. Thus, Byron will "be serious". He will appear at least less frivolous, but at the same time he cannot suppress the laughter that keeps him from weeping. More importantly, he reaffirms his commitment to the high purpose of poetry to tell the truth about the world as he has observed and experienced it. The phrase

"and it is time", though grammatically joined with the line which follows, must also be read as reinforcing his obligation to be true to himself: "I now mean to be serious" (my italics). The phrase also belongs to the following line: time is pressing because "now-a-days" folks have no sense of humour and that is fatal in the world we live in.

As Byron carries the intention of being serious into the last four lines, he equates "serious" with solemn and sad, but asserts the positive view that what is sad can raise us to heights, given the proper perspective. The sad truth which he must relate is not different in matter from what has gone before: we live in a fallen world. What has changed is Byron's attitude towards this truth and his manner of presenting it. Ridenour has observed that the beginning of Canto XII, with the stanzas on the power of money, "marks a turning point of some importance in the development of the poem", revealing "a vision which presents mutability as more than merely loss"; he sees this as evidence that Byron "faces the hard facts of experience and finds them not lacking in their own kind of charm".¹¹⁶ Byron, however, could not sustain that view throughout the canto, as we have seen, but required the weeks of retrenchment between Cantos XII and XIII for coming to terms with himself, the world, and his mission. The first stanza of Canto XIII promises acceptance of the imperfect world, the good and the bad, in a tone that can best be described as "bitter and gay".¹¹⁷ Byron

116. Ridenour, *Style*, pp. 115, 117.

117. I am indebted to Yeats for this phrase, which he had
footnote continued....

makes no attempt to reconcile the inconsistencies of the world; indeed, to do so would be to falsify the nature of existence. His purpose is to present the world as it is, to celebrate the sad truth of reality by lifting it up grandly in its ridiculousness and its sublimity but without losing sight of the fact that it is as imperfect "As an old temple dwindled to a column". Byron has re-established what Ball has called the "joyous incongruity which is the mainspring" of Don Juan.¹¹⁸ He is restored to his "comic vision" that, as Ball notes, is "synthetic, not analytic; creative rather than critical; balanced, not unco-ordinated" and whose "movement is not one of repulse but of welcome".¹¹⁹

Byron states specifically the newly-acquired stance that allows him to welcome all of life and view the high and the low with equanimity, the appropriate balance of wrath and partiality. Characterising himself as the mature observer whose dulled passions have made possible his "walk in Wisdom's ways" (XVIII, iv), he expresses no lament for the loss:

Footnote 117 continued....borrowed from Ernest Dowson, to explain the direction which he felt twentieth century poetry was taking. His statement seems remarkably apt to describe Byron's last identity: "I think that the true poetic movement of our time is toward some heroic discipline. People much occupied with morality always lose heroic ecstasy...."Bitter and gay", that is the heroic mood. When there is despair, public or private, when settled order seems lost, people look for strength within or without". Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 8.

118. Patricia M. Ball, "Don Juan: The Comic Vision-Byronic Reorientation", Twentieth Century, October 1960, p.333.

119. Ball, "Byronic Reorientation", p.331.

For my part, I am but a mere spectator,
 And gaze where'er the palace or the hovel is,
 Much in the mode of Goethe's Mephistopheles;

But neither hate nor love in much excess;
 Though 't was not once so. If I sneer sometimes,
 It is because I cannot well do less,
 And now and then it also suits my rhymes.
 (XIII, vii, viii)

In returning to the English Cantos of Don Juan, Byron picks up the narrative thread with sure control and exchanges the "summer paradise" of Toobonai for the autumnal paradise centred around the life of the English country house. Though it is a "paradise of Pleasure and Ennui" (XIV, xvii), "Formed of two mighty tribes, the Bores and Bored" (XIII, xcv), Byron paints the scene to advantage. Norman Abbey itself stands in a setting that affords the landscaped beauty of "Nature methodized" to man's enjoyment. What remains of the church is one ruined wall, as at Newstead, "A glorious remnant of the Gothic pile", but the mansion is a "vast and venerable" conglomeration of the original cloisters and cells of the monks and the additions and improvements of its later secular occupants:

Huge halls, long galleries, spacious chambers, joined
 By no quite lawful marriage of the arts,
 Might shock a connoisseur; but when combined,
 Formed a whole which, irregular in parts,
 Yet left a grand impression on the mind,
 At least of those whose eyes are in their hearts;
 We gaze upon a giant for his stature,
 Nor judge at first if all be true to nature. (XIII, lxvii)

Like the sublime experiences of St. Peter's, the Alps, or the sense of kinship with nature, the first impression of Norman Abbey, for the sensibilitous at least, was one of awe. As we are lead further into the life of Norman Abbey, the commingled structure of the sacred and profane holds a microcosm of the good and bad of the world. Although

Byron's focus is on the privileged aristocratic world, the guests are a deliberately chosen cross-section of that class; and the lower and middle classes impinge upon that world to good, satiric effect in the plight of the poor who receive "justice" from Lord Henry and in the gathering of Amundeville's constituency at the public-day celebration. With his double vision Byron reveals the country seat as a gracefully pleasant way of life for those who had access to its favours but arbitrarily and despairingly exclusive for the non-privileged.

His final poetics, stated in these last cantos, suggests that he would have continued to record bitterly but gaily the life of the real world. He had begun Don Juan, as the Dedication reveals, as an attack on the Lake Poets in general and Southey in particular, slashing vitriolically at their narrowness, their egotistical system, their pretentious appeal to posterity, and at the bigotry of their politics. Accepting Horace's challenge, "Difficile est proprie communia dicere", and with no clear plan of his direction, Byron launched his epic and from the first canto claimed to know the rules for writing poetry as well as the right to break them. He threatened some day in some work of prose to revise the rules for poetry and "carry precept to the highest pitch" in a work he would call "Every Poet his own Aristotle" (I, cciv).

In the years that went into the writing of Don Juan, Byron hammered out his poetic theory in the quarrel that he had with Murray and his friends, with the reading public and with himself. From the beginning Don

Juan represents Byron's view that the purpose of poetry is moral and ethical. He had progressed from the view that poetry is self-indulgence either as the public utterance of the orator or the anti-social expressions of the moody out-cast. Nor does he any longer view poetry as he had in that middle state found in Childe Harold III and IV - a retreat from reality, an escape from a painful identity to create a new life in the imagination "and in creating live / A being more intense" (III, vi) "And multiply in us a brighter ray / And more beloved existence" (IV, v). The final cantos of Don Juan find Byron's poetry the humanistic expression of a man who has known life richly, but otherwise an ordinary man. His passage through Don Juan, however, is a fretful course toward the secure serenity of his last position. Once there, contrasting himself with "great Locke", "greater Bacon", "Great Socrates", and Christ, "Diviner still", "Redeeming Worlds to be by bigots shaken" (XV, xviii), he makes an honest assessment of his own unheroic purpose, his modest aims and lack of pretension, and his originality:

I perch upon an humbler promontory,
 Amidst Life's infinite variety:
 With no great care for what is nicknamed Glory,
 But speculating as I cast my eye
 On what may suit or may not suit my story,
 And never straining hard to versify,
 I rattle on exactly as I'd talk
 With anybody in a ride or walk.

I don't know that there may be much ability
 Shown in this sort of desultory rhyme;
 But there's a conversational facility,
 Which may round off an hour upon a time.
 Of this I'm sure at least, there's no servility
 In mine irregularity of chime,
 Which rings what's uppermost of new or hoary,
 Just as I feel the Improvisatore.

(XV, xx, xxi)

Along the way Byron had toyed with the poet's function to stir men to heroic action in "The Isles of Greece" (III) only to conclude ambivalently that poets "are such liars" (lxxxvii), yet "words are things" and have power to live on beyond the poet and to inspire. He had deplored the perversity of his imagination which "Turns what was once romantic to burlesque" (IV, iii) and the pain of his poetic vision:

And if I laugh at any mortal thing,
 'T is that I may not weep; and if I weep,
 'T is that our nature cannot always bring
 Itself to apathy, for we must steep
 Our hearts first in Lethe's spring,
 Ere what we least wish to behold will sleep.
 (IV, iv)

This pain increases to an agonising intensity in the middle sections as he thinks of the poem as "A versified Aurora Borealis, / Which flashes o'er a waste and icy clime" (VII, ii). He is unsure whether to share his knowledge of the "nothingness of Life" with his readers; but in his most impassioned rebellion against reader opinion, Byron concludes that truth must be served and his readers, men worse than dogs, may "Read, or read not" of the vanity of seeking after love or glory (VII, i-vii passim). In Canto X he touches briefly on the pleasure he takes in the creative possibilities of poetry, comparing himself as a poet to Newton who with his apple reversed man's fall caused by Adam's apple and opened up the way for man to reach the heights, even as far as the moon. Viewing Newton's achievement as "A thing to counterbalance human woes", Byron wishes "to do as much by Poesy". The thought of a like accomplishment

gives him "a glorious glow" and causes his "internal spirit [to] cut a caper" (ii, iii). Byron is certain that his experience, personal integrity, and indomitable will have fitted him for this high calling:

In the wind's eye I have sailed, and sail; but for
 The stars, I own my telescope is dim;
 But at the least I have shunned the common shore,
 And leaving land far out of sight, would skim
 The Ocean of Eternity: the roar
 Of breakers has not daunted my slight, trim,
 But still sea-worthy skiff; and she may float
 Where ships have foundered, as doth many a boat.
 (iv)

With this spirit of determination and courage Byron settled for the region of the ordinary world as the province of his poetry, less exalted than Newton's heavens and one which required no telescope for reporting what he had seen and learned from sailing into the "wind's eye" of existence.

In the final cantos of Don Juan, Byron exults in the fact that as a poet and a man he is no retreator from the real world. He takes as his particular focus the segment of society most familiar to him and generalises his vision so as to encompass the wider human condition. Like the butterfly, newly conceived of in these cantos as his Muse, Byron makes no overt, pretentious claims to his special importance nor any demands to be noticed:

I say, in my slight way I may proceed
 To play upon the surface of Humanity.
 I write the World, nor care if the World read.

Yet, under his apparent indifference Byron presumes that the poet is nonetheless important. As the stanza continues, he admits that while his "Muse hath bred, and still perhaps may breed / More foes . . . still I am,

or was, a pretty poet" (XV, lx). Whether or not he has readers, the poet must express his mind and in doing so claims a value intrinsic in the activity. He believes in his insights and in the truth of his view of the world and therefore accepts his obligation to speak.

Byron offers a progression of reasons why he continues to write and publish when he has exhausted the possibilities of fame and profit and "the World grows weary" (XIV, x-xiii). Taken at their face value, the reasons remain self-indulgent: he writes from habit, as an activity of mind, or for his own pleasure in recording his experience; but primarily he writes because he is contentious:

I think that were I certain of success,
 I hardly could compose another line:
 So long I've battled either more or less,
 That no defeat can drive me from the Nine.
(XIV, xii)

This last reason for writing takes Byron out of all self-centred, private limits imposed by his easy answers and places him in conflict with an opponent. Confessing that he probably never would have "worn the motley mantle of a poet, / If someone had not told me to forego it" (XV, xxiv), he cannot now resist his poetic quarrel as he believes in the validity of his mission, inspired by a Muse that "mostly sings of human things and acts" (XIV, xiii). No doubt the epigraph from Horace, published with the earliest cantos, resurfaced in Byron's mind in these last cantos as his contentious spirit relishes the difficulty in writing of common things which his current subject requires. Though

writers have had ample access to the "beau monde", no one has yet produced a "real portrait of the highest tribe" (XIV, xx). Veiling only thinly his disapproval of this world in which "there's little to describe" (XIV, xx), a way of life unpoetical both indoors and out, Byron accepts the challenge of describing it with delight:

a bard must meet
 All difficulties, whether great or small,
 To spoil his undertaking, or complete--
 And work away--like Spirit upon Matter--
 Embarrassed somewhat both with fire and water.
 (XIV, xxx)

His purpose is clearly public and satiric as he approaches his uninspiring subject - "Knights and Dames . . . Such as the times may furnish", "present [days], with their common-place costume" (XV, xxv, xxvi). With no more than a hint of apology for including "Politics, and Policy, and Piety" in his scheme, he explains that they are

subservient to a moral use:
 Because my business is to dress society,
 And stuff with sage that very verdant goose.
 (XV, xciii)

Apart from moral considerations, Byron also understood the value of describing this "Paradise of Pleasure and Ennui" for its contribution to social history. Shortly after beginning Canto XVI he met Count D'Orsay in Genoa and read the Frenchman's journal account of his impressions of English society. Byron seems to have been almost at a loss for words sufficient to praise this "very extraordinary production, and of a most melancholy truth in all that regards high life in England". Conveying his gratitude and appreciation through the Earl of

Blessington because he felt his French inadequate to write directly to the Count, Byron says,

I know, or knew personally, most of the personages and societies which he describes; and after reading his remarks, have the sensation fresh upon me as if I had seen them yesterday....The most singular thing is, how he should have penetrated not the fact, but the mystery of the English ennui at two-and-twenty. I was about the same age when I made the same discovery, in almost precisely the same circles ...but I never could have described it so well. Il faut être Français, to effect this.

Byron adds his own reminiscences of ennui to be seen at hunting season in the country, "the gentlemen after dinner (on the hunting days), and the soiree ensuing thereupon,--and the women looking as if they had hunted, or rather been hunted". He also recalls a dinner party in London when five out of twelve guests were asleep by the time dessert was served and concludes that the pity of the matter is that "our dearly beloved countrymen have only discovered that they are tired, and not that they are tiresome".¹²⁰

When D'Orsay apparently considered publishing his portrait of English society, Byron gave encouragement because the work was so true to life, so true, in fact, that he felt it necessary to say that it bore "some strange coincidences" to a canto of Don Juan in manuscript in London.¹²¹ The undertone of the letter, however, suggests that his approval is not unqualified; Byron obviously adheres to his belief that foreigners should not attack individuals of other nations:

120. PLJ, VI, 186-188, April 5, 1823.

121. PLJ, VI, 191, April 9, 1823.

I would not on any account deprive him of a production...but how to keep it secret? literary secrets are like others. By changing the names, or at least omitting several, and altering the circumstances indicative of the writer's real station or situation, the author would render it a most amusing publication. His countrymen have not been treated, either in a literary or a personal point of view, with such deference in English recent works as to lay him under any great national obligation of forbearance; and really the remarks are so true and piquants, that I cannot bring myself to wish their suppression...though many of these personages "were my friends"....122

Byron is torn between a loyalty to his countrymen that would protect them, as in his politics, against a foreign oppressor, and by his reverence for truth as a way of making man free. In the case of D'Orsay's account he can almost justify the foreign invader as an instance of retaliation, the same contentious spirit which provoked most of his own writing.

The desire to tell the truth for the purpose of making man free remains in the last Don Juan cantos one of Byron's strongest reasons for writing. Though Shelley would take away "the veil of familiarity from the world" to reveal "the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the spirit of its forms", Byron would not only "remove the cloke, which the manners and maxims of society. . . throw over their secret sins, and show them to the world as they really are",¹²³ but in the doing reveal the world in all its contradictions where whatever we may accept as true "may after all turn out untrue" (XIV, iii). He found in Don Juan the ideal vehicle to contain his poetic vision.

122. PLJ, VI, 190, April 6, 1823.

123. His Very Self and Voice: Collected Conversations of Lord Byron, ed. Ernest J. Lovell (New York: Macmillan, 1954), p. 442.

Flexible enough to permit the full range to his digressive mind, "Sometimes with and sometimes without occasion", Byron called the poem a

...narrative...not meant for narration,
 But a mere airy and fantastic basis,
 To build up common things with common places.
 (XIV, vii)

In every way Don Juan urges Byron's view of the paradoxes and inconsistencies of existence. Form, idea, and language attack the prevailing belief that through a "wise passiveness", Negative Capability, or searching for the shadowy forms behind the chaos of apparent reality we can discover the harmony of the universe. Insisting that his poem is an epic, Byron violates the epic tradition which centred a narrative about the episodic adventures of a man of heroic proportions, significant in conveying the values of a race or nation, and told objectively in language appropriately elevated and dignified. By inverting epic conventions to take as his hero an ordinary man passively involved in escapades that are primarily sexual, expressed in language that rarely rises above the ordinary, cliché-ridden language of the every-day world, Byron creates in Don Juan a poem that is peculiarly and perversely true to the purpose of the traditional epic. The meaning for contemporary man lies in the subjective narrator's exploration of the contradictions between the world we have and the world we would have, between aspirations and the impossibility of fulfilling them, between the ideal and the real. Thus, Byron as narrator, bitter and gay in his accepting this world,

assumes heroic proportions.

Unlike his fellow Romantics, Byron made no claims for poetry as a means of revealing truth to make an imperfect world acceptable or, in Keats's words, "capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth...." Antithetical man in an antithetical world, he could not avoid seeing all aspects of life compounded of opposites; and, in his view, the value lies in accepting the truth of irreconcilable opposites. That quality which he called "mobility" would not allow Byron to accept self-deluding views of the nature of the world. Defining the term as expressive of "an excessive susceptibility of immediate impressions--at the same time without losing the past: and is though sometimes apparently useful to the possessor, a most painful and unhappy attribute",¹²⁴ it is the chameleon-like quality of identifying with the immediately given situation without being able to forget that a counter-condition exists which is equally demanding of an empathetic response. Thus, there can be no certainty of self or truth inviolable.

In his last analysis, Byron claims that poetry is the reflection of the world as it exists. Expressed in prose in his second Bowles letter, "poetry is in itself passion, and does not systematize. It assails, but does

124. PW, VI, 500-501, note 1. See also Don Juan, XVII, xi, in which Byron acknowledges that he possesses a variety of character traits and their opposites, "So that I almost think that the same skin, / For one without-- has two or three within".

not argue; it may be wrong, but it does not assume pretensions to Optimism".¹²⁵ In Don Juan, he elaborates the definition in the stanza we heard at the beginning of this investigation of his poetics:

You know, or don't know, that great Bacon saith,
 "Fling up a straw, 't will show the way the wind blows!"
 And such a straw blown on by human breath,
 Is Poesy, according as the Mind glows;
 A paper kite which flies 'twixt Life and Death,
 A shadow which the onward Soul behind throws;
 And mine's a bubble, not blown up for praise,
 But just to play with, as an infant plays. (XIV,viii)

Through these images Byron connects poetry intimately with events of the real world. Just as the course of a straw is determined by the force of wind, so poetry relates the currents of actuality. Released to rise above the earth, the straw, the kite, the bubble--poetry, is the creative act of body and spirit that informs and guides us how to catch the wind of direction; as art it soars beyond the present to anticipate the future; and as an airy bubble, insubstantial though it be, poetry reflects the "world exactly as it goes". Thus, poetry does not reason or philosophise with us, but simply presents the truth of existence to our view.

When Peckham undertook his first attempt at defining Romanticism which was to prove so influential in our thinking about Romantic poets, he required a corollary definition called Negative Romanticism in order to include Byron in the class. In Peckham's view the negative romantic was a poet whose development towards "dynamic organicism" was incomplete, "a man who has left static mechanism

125. PLJ, V, 582.

but has not yet arrived at a reintegration of his thought and his art...." Byron, in other words, remained in a limbo-like status "in the situation of Wordsworth after the rejection of Godwin" or like "The Mariner alone on the wide, wide sea".¹²⁶ As our understanding of both Byron and Romanticism has grown, no special category need be made to include Byron. In summing up his latest evaluation of Romanticism, Peckham sees that the Romantic is constantly dislodging his identity, disorienting the self in order to discover new worlds. Though Peckham does not make applications to specific poets in this essay, in his new view it seems that Byron could lay claim to being the most Romantic of the Romantics, that what Peckham had earlier called negative romanticism ought to have been termed positive. He calls it "The logic of Romanticism...that contradictions must be included in a single orientation". Further, the Romantic is "tough-minded" capable of accepting a less than perfect world and affirming the value of that world as he finds it. He "does not escape from reality; he escapes into it".¹²⁷

Beyond all the Romantic poets Byron has the ability to live with uncertainty without the comfort of reconciling world-hypotheses. Byron's vision allows him to see and accept that man is both physical and spiritual, good and bad, ridiculous and sublime. Individual man is

126. Morse Peckham, "Toward a Theory of Romanticism ", PMLA, LXVI (1951), 15,20.

127. Peckham, "Reconsiderations", pp. 7-8.

a reconciliation of these opposites. Byron's break-through in Don Juan to celebrate this fact positively is a fitting culmination of his poetic growth. While he may be no philosopher, Byron has found a way to accept the world with all its incongruities. Against the impulse of art to create a world that pretends that human life is something other than it is, Byron's poetic theory in its last phase insists on the value of art to reveal the truth of reality. This is the absolute and liberating reconciliation.

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1. J. D. Jump, "A Comparison of 'Marino Faliero' with
 Byron's 'Venice Preserved'", Byron Journal, 2 (1971), 20-
 21, p. 27.

Marino Faliero and the Power of Words

A recent discussion of Marino Faliero raises again the question of how we are to interpret Byron's "non-political" drama. Professor Jump compared Byron's handling of conspiracy in Venice with Otway's in an attempt to discover why a play damagingly declared by its author to be historically "accurate, regular, and unactable" continues to attract an audience of admiring readers.¹ He found that the appeal lies in "the vigour and eloquence" of the speeches, especially those of the old Doge, who is strongly outspoken in favour of freedom and against despotism. "What mainly holds our attention" is, according to Jump, "the concentrated, collected fury of Marino Faliero himself".² At the same time, Jump could not put out of his mind Byron's insistence, in more than one letter, that the play was not political.

He concluded his article with the unanswered question and an unresolved paradox:

But what is to become of [Byron's] assurance to Murray that Marino Faliero "is not a political play, though it may look like it"? Can he have meant that it was not a veiled attack on the British government, such as would have scared the Tory publisher? For in a broader sense it is indubitably a political play, a tissue of political passions, political stances, political judgments, and political clashes.³

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1. John D. Jump, "A Comparison of 'Marino Faliero' with Otway's 'Venice Preserved'", Byron Journal, 5 (1977), 23.
 2. Jump, p. 37.
 3. Jump, p. 37.

Most critics of the play have not questioned its political nature. They have assumed that it was and, quite logically, accepted Byron's disclaimer as no more than camouflage for the already gun-shy Murray, one more of those Byronic inversions of truth. Yet, their studies also usually end on a note that suggests the critic is not satisfied with his analysis, that somehow the play has eluded him. The feeling is betrayed in a range of devices from the desperate platitude to the straight-forward confession. In his perceptive study of the relation between the language and structure of Marino Faliero, Professor Knight finally was forced to admit that "We are continually caught by an unexpected reverse of what we thought the play's thesis".⁴ Professor Johnson read the play in the light of Byron's letters that commented on the current political events in Italy and England. He blamed the play's failure to offer a consistent and positive philosophy on the fact that Byron is "an eighteenth-century Whig where England is concerned, a nineteenth-century liberal on the continent".⁵ Covering his disappointment, however, Johnson asserts that "Marino Faliero is the record of those conflicting and fundamentally irreconcilable ideals which make the exploration of Byron's mind such an exciting voyage of discovery".⁶ Later opinions arrive at

4. G. Wilson Knight, "Byron: The Poetry", in Poets of Action (London: Methuen, 1967; first published as "The Two Eternities", in The Burning Oracle, 1939), p. 213.

5. E.D.H. Johnson, "A Political Interpretation of Marino Faliero", Modern Language Quarterly, 3 (1942), 421-3, 424-5.

6. Johnson, p. 425.

similar, frustrated conclusions.⁷

Anne Barton, however, has approached Marino Faliero in the spirit that the faults of the play perhaps lie in the reader and not the writer. Recollecting that Byron had responded to Gifford's objections to Sardanapalus and The Two Foscari with faith in the future -- "I have a notion that, if understood, they will in time find favour (though not on stage) with the reader", she considers the possibility that the time has now come for Byron's political dramas to find an audience, especially in the

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7. Paul West, Byron and the Spoiler's Art (London: Chatto and Windus, 1960), p.108, finds that the play fails to live up to his expectations of Byronic facility with language, especially in its prosaic rant and "sloppy" versification; Andrew Rutherford, Byron: A Critical Study (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1961), pp. 187-197, explains Byron's apparent political inconsistencies but remains uneasy with the unresolved political tensions in the play and is relieved when Byron returns to Don Juan and the English Cantos, where he dropped "the political pre-occupations which involved him in such difficulties, both emotional and intellectual"; M.K. Joseph, Byron the Poet (London: Victor Gollancz, 1964), pp.113-116, can accept the political waffling, but finds the last act "something of an anticlimax"; Jerome J. McGann, Fiery Dust (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 214-215, sees Faliero's tragic apotheosis in his decision to join the plebians in their conspiracy, thereby affirming and redeeming life, but he acknowledges that this resolution leaves no encouraging word for the plebians; Carl Woodring, Politics in English Romantic Poetry (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), p.186, objects to Byron's aristocratic brand of politics and to Marino Faliero because "it has no good word for mixed government, that balance of forces praised by Plato, Aristotle, Polybius, Locke, Montesquieu, and many between"; and Thomas L. Ashton, "Marino Faliero: Byron's 'Poetry of Politics'", Studies in Romanticism, 13 (1974), 1-13, reads the play as a handbook for political activists today, with the Doge's consciousness-raising experience when he finally fulfilled the prophecy a reminder that "history does not victimize man, indeed man too often victimizes time, by his failure to become history, to multiply his soul" and through "the poetry of politics" we may be inspired to aid "other equally 'hopeless' conflicts".

wake of such playwrights as Brecht who have helped to create a "mental theatre" in the twentieth century.⁸ Her claim that Byron was "more acutely and intelligently aware than any of the other Romantics of exactly what was wrong with the contemporary London stage"⁹ is a challenge to allow Byron's intellect another opportunity to prove itself. The accumulation of grievances and qualifying comments, the feelings of inadequacy in the reader and the play, actually set up another way of looking at Marino Faliero. Suppose we read the play, accepting Byron's claim that it is not political, forgetting for the moment what we know about Byron and what we think we can predict that he will say, and remembering only what we know about how poets work.

Freed from preconception and bias, Marino Faliero unfolds as an exploration of the power of words, a study of manipulative and affective language and responses to such language. Instantly we know not only that Byron is capable of such an exercise but also that the play is "mental theatre" worthy of Byron. His reassurances to Murray take on new meaning: "...recollect that it is not a political play--& that I was obliged to put into the mouths of the Characters the sentiments upon which they acted".¹⁰ The play is therefore not about the politics

8. Ann Barton, "'A Light to Lesson Ages': Byron's Political Plays", in Byron: A Symposium, ed. John D. Jump (London: Macmillan, 1975), p.138.

9. Barton, p. 140.

10. Byron's Letters and Journals, ed., Leslie A. Marchand (London: John Murray, 1977), VII, 184. September 29, 1820.

of England or Italy; but politically corrupt Venice of the fourteenth century provides the setting for the play, and Byron knew that it would have particular application to affairs in nineteenth-century England. Indeed, the meaning of Marino Faliero reaches beyond England in the aftermath of the French Revolution and the war with Napoleon and beyond Italy's struggle against Austrian domination. It stands as a lesson for any tyrannised state of being, whether an overwrought individual or the body politic, a reminder of the persuasive uses of language and a warning of the consequences of responding without weighing words.

Concern with words frames the play. From the thoughtless words which Steno scrawled on the ducal chair, precipitating the plot, to the final scene in which the citizens strain unsuccessfully to hear the last words of the Doge, the play calls attention to various communication problems--words used, misused, or not used; words heeded or not heeded, wrongly or rightly. Word or words appears at least thirty-five times; and synonyms denoting words used in particular senses, usually having strong emotional connotations, abound in Marino Faliero: for example, nouns such as insult, curse, libel, slander, lampoon, spell, reproof, blasphemy, oath, creed, prophecy, eulogy, epitaph, and frequently, where possible, their adjective or verb forms. In speeches, characters employ tricks of rhetoric to persuade and often reveal self-deceptive forms of reasoning, such as sophistry, rationalising, mythologising. Throughout the play Byron displays his certain knowledge

that communication is important to man individually and in social groups but that it is human nature to select and order words to favour self-interest. Marino Faliero emphasises the necessity of constantly evaluating words according to the situation and circumstances in which they are spoken. Since words do not always have fixed meanings and often cannot be taken at face value, they must be understood in their context.

What Byron owed to Otway's Venice Preserved has received attention from his own time to the present, but much of what we might learn from his allusions to Julius Caesar has been overlooked. Barton noted that Byron's references to Shakespeare's play were "riddling and intellectually provocative" and raised but did not pursue the question whether the play "engaged in dialogue with Shakespeare's play, as though Marino Faliero were a sequel to Julius Caesar in a different mode".¹¹ Two of Shakespeare's passages are, indeed, central both to the plot of Julius Caesar and to the meaning of Marino Faliero. The first, the dissembling peroration with which Antony concludes Caesar's funeral speech, in a ghoulish way, provides characterisation for Byron's play:

I am no orator as Brutus is;
 But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man
 That love my friend....
 For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
 Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech,
 To stir men's blood: I only speak right on;
 I tell you what you yourselves do know,
 Show you sweet Caesar's wounds, poor dumb mouths,
 And bid them speak for me: but were I Brutus,
 And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony

11. Barton, p. 145.

Would ruffle up your spirits, and put a tongue
 In every wound of Caesar, that should move
 The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny. (III. iii)

In Marino Faliero wounds are given tongue to speak. Byron's unoriginal image of the Venetian body politic as a human body, albeit abnormally "Hydra-headed" (I.ii.421), takes on new interest when compared with the much-wounded body of Caesar, symbol of the Roman state. Further, Byron reaches beneath the apparent irony of Antony's speech to demonstrate in Marino Faliero that there is no such thing as "a plain blunt man", especially when self-interest is at stake. The wounds of Faliero and Israel Bertuccio disguise personal and private wrongs to speak the rhetoric of public good; patrician and plebian are parts of the whole corrupt body. Calendro's observation that the patricians are "one mass, one breath, one body" (III.ii.34) expands to include the plebians when the conspirators, believing themselves to be betrayed, advance on Faliero and Bertuccio. Bertuccio calls them "ungrateful suicides" who "strike at their own bosoms" (III.ii.97-98). He anticipates Faliero's similar figurative description of Steno as the "hand" and the Senate as the "head" of the state (III.ii.416-418) and his confession that "Each stab to them will seem my suicide" (III.ii.472). Both elements of the Venetian state, "Divided like a house against itself" (IV.i.277), further unite to dramatise their cause in Bertuccio's allusion to the self-sacrificing pelican. In his first meeting with Bertuccio, Faliero had equated his service to the state with "the bleeding pelican ...who / Hath ripped her bosom ... for all her little ones"

(I.ii.441-443); and at the same time he incorporated the shed "plebian blood", described by Bertuccio, into the same myth. When Bertuccio is coyly reticent to reveal the planned mutiny, Faliero suggests their kinship:

And suffering what thou hast done--fear'st thou death?
Be silent then, and live on, to be beaten
For those for whom thou has bled. (I.ii.475-477)

As Antony's words incited the citizens of Rome to avenge the dead Caesar, so the wounded Venetians during the course of Marino Faliero display the persuasive skills which Antony claimed to lack--wit, words, utterance, "the power of speech,/ To stir men's blood". The play then is a dramatic debate about revolution in which the facts are presented with the subjective "honesty" of victimised parts of the political body. Byron reminds us that he "put into the mouths of the Characters the sentiments upon which they acted" and we, like Murray, are asked to "read the history--and judge".¹² Thus, the various charges that the play is "undramatic", that the last act is "anti-climatic", that the language suffers from artificiality caused by a "rhetorical elevation of the style" disappear. The speeches are the point of the drama, not the political issues, and the final act is necessary to complete the debate. Moreover, we are shown that the speech-spinners fail when it comes to action, although their rhetoric continues. Marino Faliero looks into the limits of language.

Another speech from Julius Caesar suggests the atmosphere, setting, and action of Byron's play. In the

12. ML & J, VII, 168. August 31, 1820.

words of Brutus, as he analyses the state of his interior being since he was first persuaded to conspire against Caesar, we see the Venice of Marino Faliero.

Since Cassius first did whet me against Caesar,
I have not slept.
Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream:
The genius and the mortal instruments
Are then in council; and the state of man,
Like a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of revolution. (II.i.)

Brutus's nightmarish inner turmoil, magnified, shapes Byron's drama, played out against the background of politically corrupt Venice on the verge of anarchy. The action of Marino Faliero takes place in the oppressive, "thick and dusky" atmosphere of the sirocco, much of it under cover of the late-rising moon (I.ii.569-571). Yet, in the night there is no sleep. The conspirators travel disguised to meet in secret (III.i); Lioni, unable to sleep, meditates on the quiet beauty of the night until interrupted by the cloaked and muffled Bertram (IV.i); the Council of Ten sits in a secret, pre-dawn session (IV.ii); and the Doge restlessly awaits daybreak and the signal of the "sullen huge oracular bell" (IV.ii). The world of Venice is caught in the interim between the idea and the act, agonisingly perceived by Brutus in his divided self. The murky, moon-lit night is a world of half-light made murkier with deceits and half-truths.

Machine images and dream imagery are appropriate to the nightmare world. The state, itself a political machine, has transformed its citizens into "mere machines" (I.ii.302) and rules them robot-like "with a word / As

with a spell" (II.ii.118-119). Venice holds all the hideousness of a bad dream in which our limbs refuse to do our bidding. It is also peopled with the phantoms and spectres of dreams. Faliero conjures up a self-torturing vision of Steno's offensive words with the reality of palpable things as they "pass from mouth to mouth / Of loose mechanics...and sneering nobles" (I.ii.160-164); and again, keeping time to the hammers of "jolly artisans" and the oars of "galley slaves" (I.ii.391-395). The Doge is haunted by the memory of his dead ancestors and obsessed with the thought that he must restore honour to the name. He tells Angiolina that "there is that stirring / Within--above--around" which will bring destruction to the city (II.i. 505-506). He invokes the spirits of his dead fathers and other noble Venetians buried in the church, asking their blessing on his act of vengeance (III.i.30-47) and alarms Bertuccio with his phantasy that the statue watches their midnight meeting in the Piazza (III.i.84).

In this world of "political passions, political judgments, political clashes" the rhetoric of special interest obscures underlying motives. True communication within the body politic has broken down on all levels. The patricians remain aloof from the plight of the plebians; the plebians are unable to make themselves heard. The old Doge, at the centre of the play, belongs in a sense to both groups, yet he is ironically the most isolated and alienated figure in the play. Elevated to the highest position in Venice, he has lost contact with his peers and former friends, nor is he emotionally suited to the

populist role he has adopted. He recalls nostalgically and frequently the pleasant days when he served Venice as a career soldier and enjoyed the camaraderie of his compatriots. As a man of action, he is traditionally ill-suited for the politics and diplomacy required in his present position. The opening lines of the play image the Doge in his world of words. As he awaits the Council's decision on Steno's punishment, he sits in his office alone, distractedly moving the papers on his desk --"the apparel of the state--petitions / Despatches, judgments, acts, reprieves, reports" (I.i.8-9).

Faliero feels distanced even from members of his family. He considers his nephew insensitive to his injury and prevents his reading aloud that portion of the Council's decision that contained Steno's words:

Would'st thou repeat them?
 Would'st thou repeat them--thou, a Faliero,
Harp on the deep dishonour of our house? (I.ii.62-64)

The Doge restates his exaggerated sense of wounded honour when he berates his nephew again for seeming to lack a proper amount of family pride. When the young man tries to calm his uncle's fury, the old man raises the memory of the dead to shame his nephew:

I tell thee--must I tell thee--what thy father
 Would have required no words to understand?
 (I.ii.148-149)

Young Faliero's reminder to the overwrought Doge about to trample on his ducal cap, symbol of his humiliation, that he is Duke of Venice elicits the Doge's retort, "There is no such thing-- / It is a word--nay, worse--a worthless by-word" (I.ii.99-100).

Faliero's assertion that words do not equal things emphasises his failure to consider words in perspective. The excessive importance he places on Steno's false words leads directly to his conspiring against the state, to the dishonour to his title and the family name that he was determined to protect, and to his death. The attitude anticipates his apparent tragic insight in the last act when he warns his executioners of the power of words:

...true words are things,
 And dying men's are things which long outlive,
 And oftentimes avenge them.... (V.i.289-291)

Whether or not Faliero achieves a redemptive apotheosis is called into question in the scene which follows. The obvious irony that the dying words of Angiolina's father have indirectly been responsible for Faliero's downfall is doubled by the awful irony that the words unconsciously apply to the old bishop's prophetic curse, provoked by the young and rash Faliero. We realise the Doge has lived out his life, impervious and almost immorally insensible to meanings of words, yet able to manipulate them to his own ends.

Appealing to the example of the glorious past, the old Doge eventually whets his nephew's appetite for revenge against Steno. Provocatively, he asks, "What is it that a Roman would not suffer, / That a Venetian Prince must bear"? (I.ii.171-172). He tells Bertuccio Faliero that Steno should have died for his insult, loading his language to convince his nephew of the seriousness of the offence: as sovereign he has been "Insulted on his very

throne", made "a mockery" to his subjects, "scorned" as a man, "reviled, degraded" as a ruler (I.ii.192-196).

In terms of the reactions of other characters in the play the Doge's response to Steno's thoughtless slur must be seen as an over-reaction. Cooke has noted that the Doge was not "alone in regarding Steno's insult as the gravest of crimes",¹³ yet Angiolina thinks too much is made of the episode and the only characters who openly sympathise with him are his nephew and the conspirators who have an obvious advantage to gain. Significantly, we are not told in the text of the play precisely what words were written on the throne, a dramatic touch that serves to heighten the attention on words. Nor do we observe until the last act the "monster" Council, only relying on the opinion of the Doge and the conspirators that the Council is oppressive and unfair; but, as Knight has pointed out, at the trial the nobles appear as "perfectly just, if austere and cold".¹⁴ In the first scene, Pietro, a member of the Doge's staff, sets a rational way of looking at the offence. He agrees with Battista that it would be considered "foul scorn" in a "poor man", but taking into consideration that Steno is a member of Faliero's class and that he is young, high-spirited, and thoughtless, Pietro implies that a severe sentence is not to be expected. The most to be hoped for is a "just" one (I.i.19-23). We can only judge in terms

13. Michael G. Cooke, "The Restoration Ethos of Byron's Classical Plays", *PMLA*, 79 (1964), 577.

14. Knight, p. 213.

of Angiolina whether the sentence was just; and she felt the incident should be treated lightly, that the shame of Steno's conscience was sufficient punishment (II.i.52-55). Young Faliero's agreement with his uncle comes in the wake of tantrums and tirades; it seems more a placating acquiescence than genuine conviction.

Once Faliero secured his nephew to his point of view, he discourages a vendetta against Steno. Having now seen the incident as an excuse for punishing the entire body of patricians, the Doge puts on an outward composure which draws a naively ironic remark from his nephew:

Why, that's my uncle!
The leader and the statesman, and the chief
Of commonwealths, and sovereign of himself.
(I.ii.238-240)

Unaware that his uncle has sublimated his passion against Steno and taken comfort in the thought of revenge against the state, he also is too inexperienced to realise that the old man is neither a statesman in the accepted senses of the word nor master of his emotions. Left alone, Faliero begins the cold calculation to wrest power from the state, to turn, as he says, his ducal cap into "a diadem" (I.ii.265-271). His desire for revenge is "as yet but a chaos / Of darkly brooding thoughts" (I.ii.282-283). In the scenes which follow Faliero works through the process between the idea and the act described by Brutus, the debate between the "genius and the mortal instruments" of the individual self necessary to rationalise the atrocious deed he must commit.

The process begins with the Doge looking for good

reasons to replace real reasons. He submits his grievances to his "fancy" for closer scrutiny, "Holding the sleeping images / For the selection of the pausing judgment" (I.ii.283-286). Having accepted the idea of revenge, Faliero enters the word of "hideous dreams" where he loses all sense of will and becomes himself the victim of forces beyond his control, a machine-like being. He describes this helplessness later to Bertuccio:

...I act no more on my own free will,
Nor my own feelings--both compel me back;
But there is Hell within me and around,
And like the Demon who believes and trembles
Must I abhor and do. (III.ii 517-521)

Hesitations and doubts disappear only when the mind can focus at last on the moment of action. As they await the dawn and attack, he explains to his nephew this calm:

...the hour of agitation came
In the first glimmerings of a purpose, when
Passion had too much room to sway; but in
The hour of action I have stood as calm
As were the dead who lay around me....(IV.ii.94-98)

With the rationalising completed the act can be viewed as both necessary and right. It can be given a more acceptable name than anarchy:

...there are things
Which make revenge a virtue by reflection,
And not an impulse of mere anger; though
The laws sleep, Justice wakes, and injured souls
Oft do a public right with private wrong,
And justify their deeds unto themselves. (IV.ii. 103-108)

Israel Bertuccio comes to the Doge in those "first glimmerings of purpose", and the Doge's instinctive response is to consider how he might use him to further his plot: "This patron may be sounded; I will try him" (I.ii.297). The scene that follows is one of mutual

exploitation, with each of the wounded manoeuvring the other toward his private end. When he hears that Bertuccio (his grievance also provoked by an angry exchange of words) has been struck by a noble, the Doge in a bid to win confidence registers surprise with a question that challenges Bertuccio's manhood: "Doth he still live"? (I.ii.337). The suppliant is a match, however, for the vulnerable old man. Since gossip travelled fast in the sick society of Venice, he had brought his complaint to the Doge, knowing he would be ripe for persuasion. To the Doge's admission that he cannot obtain justice for himself, Bertuccio with studied reluctance gradually and seductively unfolds a plan whereby the Doge can recoup his honour, gain absolute power, and serve the citizens of Venice:

I. Ber. Ah! Dared I speak my feelings!

Doge Give them breath.
Mine have no further outrage to endure.

I. Ber. Then, in a word, it rests but on your word
To punish and avenge--I will not say
My petty wrong, for what is a mere blow,
However vile, to such a thing as I am?--
But the base insult done your state and
person.

Doge. You overrate my power, which is a pageant
This Cap is not the Monarch's crown; these
robes
Might move compassion, like a beggar's rags;
Nay, more, a beggar's are his own, and these
But lent to the poor puppet, who must play
Its part with all its empire in this ermine.

I. Ber. Would'st thou be King?

Doge. Yes--of a happy people.

I. Ber. Would'st thou be sovereign lord of Venice?
(I.ii.404-418)

Like Satan tempting Christ in the wilderness, Bertuccio

catalogues the discontents of the people who "Groan with the strong conception of their wrongs" (I.ii.462ff) and reveals to the lonely Doge the secret "band of brethren" where with the help of comrades he can miraculously save himself and the state.

Alone, the Doge rationalises his precipitate decision to conspire against the state, further risking family honour in league "with common ruffians" (I.ii.581ff). He mythologises his alliance with the class he ought to have least in common with, trusting that the end will justify the means--Time will "try the Caesar, or the Cataline, / By the true touchstone of desert--Success" (I.ii.596-597). In his self-pitying mood he had found Bertuccio's plan irresistible.

The Doge's marriage is also a source of his alienation. Faliero had married Angiolina in obedience to the dying words of her father, his friend. The disparity in years and temperaments prevents the confiding intimacy which might have been expected in marriage founded on love. From the union Faliero had expected only to earn her friendship and trust in exchange for his respect for her virtues and his concern for her welfare (II.i.348-366). Such an arrangement bears more than the usual hazards of a December-May marriage. Looking only to doing the honourable thing, and desiring only to give honour to and gain honour from his wife, the Doge must demand extreme retribution when honour is questioned. When he and Angiolina meet, Faliero refuses to discuss his disappointment in the Council's sentence against Steno. Dissembling

to hide his wounded pride, he makes idle chatter about the weather and Angiolina's day (II.i.160-5).

He cannot long, however, keep from turning the conversation to himself. Without allowing Angiolina opportunity to answer his questions about her day's occupation, out of his own self-pity he calls upon her sympathy:

Say, is there aught that you would will within
The little sway now left the Duke, or aught
Of fitting splendour, or of honest pleasure,
Social or lonely, that would glad your heart
To compensate for many a dull hour, wasted
On an old man oft moved with many cares?

(II.i.166-170)

Such constant recurrence throughout the play to himself as the subject of his speeches emphasises the Doge's feeling of isolation. Going beyond the ordinary demands of exposition, plot, and character delineation required by the drama, the technique calls attention to the Doge's need to be acknowledged. His frequent recitals of past achievements and present injustices are cries for recognition expressing his need to be noticed. He senses a chasmic separation between Angiolina's idealistic and somewhat simplistic belief that the pangs of Steno's conscience are sufficient punishment and his own deep sense of humiliation which now can only be satisfied in destroying the system. He elevates his personal insult to rank with:

The violated majesty of Venice,
At once insulted in her Lord and laws. (II.i.407-408).

Given that the core of Faliero's code of behaviour is right conduct to gain respect and approval both from Angiolina and the observing world (II.i.411-420), even false words have the power to shatter the fabric of his

existence because they represent a judgment that calls all into question:

A miscreant's angry breath may blast it all....
 A wretch like this may leave upon the wall
 The blighting venom of his sweltering heart,
 And this will spread itself in general poison;
 And woman's innocence, man's honour, pass
 Into a by-word.... (II.i.421, 426-430)

Although he cannot confide in her his conspiracy plans, he repeatedly hints at his untimely end and other dire things to come. Looking for compensation in his name restored to honour, the Doge makes a further bid for Angiolina's sympathy:

When I am nothing, let that which I was
 Be still sometimes a name on they sweet lips,
 A shadow in they fancy, of a thing
 Which would not have thee mourn it, but remember.
 (II.ii.509-512)

It is with the dead, however, that the Doge seems most comfortable. Invoking the spirits of his dead fathers, he justifies the course on which he has embarked as a means of redeeming the "mighty name dishonoured all in me, / Not by me" (III.i.33-34). He seeks their approval of his actions--"Spirits! Smile down upon me!" (III.i.41) and suggests in his enigmatic exchange with Bertuccio when they meet by the statue of Faliero's grandfather that he has received their blessing. Bertuccio's answer to the Doge's belief that they are observed is the realistic reminder that "There are / No eyes in marble", but the Doge replies,

But there are in Death.
 I tell thee, man, there is a spirit in
 Such things that acts and sees, unseen, though felt;
 And if there be a spell to stir the dead,
 'T is in such deeds as we are upon. (III.i.94-98)

Actions are the words that reach the dead. Having gained the approval of his ancestors, the Doge has psychologically set himself for the conspiracy.

In his relationship with the conspirators Faliero reveals the full powers of his rhetorical art. Although, or perhaps because, they are the group with whom he is least likely to find a common ground of communication, with them he is at his persuasive best. Having faced the truth that he is guilty of treason--

That is the word; I cannot shape my tongue
To syllable black deeds into smooth names,
Though I be wrought on to commit them,

and the fact that he has shamefully cast his lot with "stung plebians" (III.i.57-59, 102), when he speaks to the assembled conspirators, the Doge employs devices traditionally available to the orator who would convince others to a course of action. The speech (III.ii.130-277) is a masterpiece of demagoguery, employed to allay the fears of the plebians who are angry to find that their leader has apparently betrayed them and necessary to channel their hostility against the state toward satisfying his grievance. The Doge balances passages of elevated language idealising the struggle against humble down-to-earth talk to create a bond between patrician and plebians. He alternately dazzles them with the magnificence of their cause and stirs their sense of outrage. The contrast between appearance and reality he sets before them is designed to ingratiate:

...yesterday you saw me
Presiding in the hall of ducal state,
Apparent Sovereign of our hundred isles,
Robed in official purple....

a level they cannot mistake and presses his suit to join with them in their conspiracy. Disavowing all association with tyrants, evident from his past record--"read it in the annals", he points with pride to the fact that he has never been the contemptible creature sought by the Venetian nobles:

A thing of robes and trinkets, dizen'd out
 To sit in state as for a Sovereign's picture;
 A popular scourge, --a ready sentence signer....
 A tool--a fool--a puppet.

He explains that he finds himself in miserable straits because of his "pity for the poor" and promises to devote to their cause what power remains to "a man who has been great / Before he was degraded to a Doge". He closes humbly asking acceptance of a "Prince who fain would be a Citizen / Or nothing".

When his claim to have the common touch meets with the enthusiastic approval of the plebians and they would heap praise upon him, the Doge modestly reminds them that "This is no time for eulogies, nor place for exultation", that he requires no more than a simple answer to his question "Am I one of you?" Calandro impulsively proposes that he be their "General and Chief", and for a terrible moment the Doge exposes his haughty loathing for the whole enterprise. Only with stammering difficulty does he recover his demagogic stance to conclude on an appropriately populist note:

Chief!--General!--I was General at Zara,
 And Chief in Rhodes and Cyprus, Prince in Venice:
 I cannot stoop--that is, I am not fit
 To lead a band of -- -- patriots: when I lay
 Aside the dignities which I have borne,
 'T is not to put on others, but to be
 Mate to my fellows....

They came not near me-- such approach gave umbrage;
 They could not love me--such was not the law;
 They thwarted me--'twas the state's policy;
 They baffled me--'twas a patrician's duty;
 They wronged me, for such was right to the state;
 They could not right me--that would give suspicion,
 So that I was slave to my own subjects;
 So that I was foe to my own friends;
 Begirt with spies for guards, with robes for power,
 With pomp for freedom, gaolers for a council,
 Inquisitors for friends, and Hell for life!
 (III.ii.348-360)

Although West has cited this speech as a "speech-spinning" device,¹⁵ in the context it seems appropriate. The Doge must not only shore up his own courage which had sagged moments before when he remembered the former sense of community that had been his, but he must also allay any fears of the plebians that he might weaken in the mutiny. Byron's use of anaphora here, and elsewhere in the play, reflects his ear for such accustomed patterns of speech used in highly emotional situations among ordinary people. The paradoxical inversion of meanings in the concluding lines--right is wrong, friend is foe, ruler is slave, is another common device of emotional persuasion - in this case, measuring the gap between the Doge and his world.

He can therefore exaggerate truth with the generalisation that men who so behave "have no private life, / Nor claims to ties they have cut off from others" and conclude that they are without claims to mercy (III.ii.382-386).¹⁶ The Doge's resolve, however, does not address itself to Bertram's hesitancy, a point

15. West, p. 108.

16. Barton, pp. 149-150, has called this a moment of "self-deception, and of desperate sophistry".

overlooked as Calendro issues a call to action--"and may this be / The last night of mere words: I'd fain be doing!" (III.ii.388-389)

When the others have left to await the bell that will signal at dawn, Faliero remains with Bertuccio and confronts the enormity of his decision: "And is it then decided! Must they die?" (III.ii.449) To Bertuccio who has no qualms about killing patricians he tries to explain the difference between killing impersonal oppressors and those with whom one has shared the amenities of daily life (III.ii.450-468). Bertuccio, knowing the old man's vulnerable point, has only to remind the Doge that such feeling for former friends "were a pity more misplaced / Than the late mercy of the state to Steno". To these ruthless words, Faliero admits, "Thou has struck upon the chord which jars / All nature from my heart. Hence to our task" (III.ii.537-541).

Lioni, placed at the mid-point of the drama, is the sole example of a consciousness which perceives meaning beneath the surface seeming. Stage directions require that he lay aside his mask and cloak as soon as he appears, a gesture foreshadowing his forth-right assessment of events and his ability to glimpse a momentary island of honesty in the deception and intrigue of the Venetian night. His long soliloquy establishes him as a reflective man and one who prefers the natural to the artificial. Having left a party which should have been pleasant but, instead, filled him with an inexplicable sense of foreboding, he meditates on the artificiality of the scene he has left in contrast

with the unspoiled beauty of the Venice before him. There, the light from torches and lamps "showed all things, but nothing as they were", created a "falsehood" of reality (IV.i.28-42). The painted, ornamented, and opulently clad women aroused in him base desires and delusions as unsatisfying as the mirage of an Arabian desert to "parched pilgrims" (IV.i.51-68). In the light of the moon, however, the beauty of Venice inspires Lioni with the thought that her buildings, reflected ornaments of Venice's past glory, are like "altars...each a trophy of some right deed" rising from the sea (IV.i.74-84). The beneficent atmosphere permits honest communication: a "cautious opening of the casement" acknowledges the tinkling guitar of a sleepless lover; and gondoliers raise "responsive voices ...answering back with verse for verse" (IV.i.87-100).

Bertram's intrusion on his reverie returns the drama to the world of deception. Once the disguised Bertram has revealed himself, an ideal Venice is again sighted briefly in the memories of boyhood friendship between patrician and plebian (IV.i.199-221). The former friends have, however, been lately out of touch (IV.i.229-230), and Lioni refuses to understand Bertram's warning without details. Bertram's impassioned description of the "Shame and Sorrow" of Venice, where

accursed tyranny...makes men
Madden as in the last hours of the plague
Which sweeps the soul deleriously from life!
(IV.i.235-240),

merely calls forth from Lioni the charge that his is not Bertram's "old language" that "Some wretch has made thee

drunk with disaffection" (IV.i.242-243).

The conspiracy fails because of Bertram's divided loyalties. While he believes a compact "more binding / In honest hearts when words must stand for law", he cannot sanction the "domestic treason [which] plants the poniard / Within the breast which trusted to his truth" (IV.i.300-304). At great cost to his self-esteem, Bertram decides to sacrifice the lives of the conspirators and the liberty of future generations rather than be labelled "assassin" (IV.i.307-311). Lioni, on the other hand, finds no conflict in the personal injury he must inflict on Bertram and the public good of saving the state. He can arrest him and see him subjected to the rack, if need be, although he names his motive Bertram's "safety" and "the general weal" (IV.i.329-346). The scene contrasts the ambivalent emotions of the Doge when faced with destroying former friends and Lioni's unhesitating decision to act for what he considers to be the good of the state.

The final act, far from anti-climatic, brings face to face the state and the conspirators to complete the debate about revolution and to crystallise attitudes about the power of words. True to the nature of debate, the case is not resolved, but questions are raised, insights provided, which invite the audience to make informed judgments: the issue must rest on individual conscience. The state with Benintende as spokesman is seen to be not only powerful and machine-like in its efficiency but also reasonable in its decision to execute the leaders of the conspiracy. The punishment is no less than we or the

conspirators themselves expected. When Bertuccio tells the Council that information gained under torture is worthless, that

Groans are not words, nor agony assent,
Nor affirmation Truth, if Nature's sense
Should overcome the soul into a lie
For short respite... (V.i.50-53),

we hear this as an ironic summary of the message of the play. Under pressure of physical pain or emotional stress of whatever nature, the words men speak must be judged accordingly. The instinct for self-preservation, self-interest, profoundly alters what a man says and must be taken into account by interpreting his remarks in context.

The Council knows, however, the power of words to incite and inflame an already aroused audience and orders Bertuccio and Calendro gagged at their public execution. Bertuccio consoles Calendro with the belief that the harsh manner of their deaths will

To their atrocities, than could a volume ^{more testify}
Spoken or written of our dying words.
(V.i.119-121)

The vindictive and retributive act itself will, he believes give encouragement to the oppressed citizenry.

The Council's dealings with Faliero also stand for integrity in the body in its instinctive move to protect against the enemy within. Although met in an extraordinary session to decide the fate of the Doge, we must agree that the extraordinary situation requires irregular procedure. There is basic truth in Benintende's explanation to the Doge that "On great emergencies / The

Law must be remodelled or amended" (V.i.184-185). His recourse to Roman example is more acceptable than the Doge's earlier references to the military virtues of Sparta as incentive to the conspirators. Since the Roman law-givers had not conceived of crime so heinous as the Doge's, the Council has had recourse to the general legal principle of equity, which is applied to cases not covered by laws. Justice is seen to be done to one who overthrew all law, when as leader and upholder of the law he sought to conspire against the state. Although Faliero was understandably frustrated by the "curtailed / And mutilated...privileges" of the Dogeship, so that Steno's ribald remark became "the last drop / Which makes the cup run o'er" (V.i.216-217, 245-246), we ask with Benintende how a man of his years and achievement could throw all away "on such / A Provocation as a young man's petulance?" (V.i.243-245)

The disappointment of the Council in the Doge mirrors our own. Although tyranny and oppression must be opposed, the Doge had acted hastily and with no clear vision of what he hoped to achieve. He has allowed his vision to shape itself increasingly toward an idealistic form of government, but his philosophy seems to evolve in proportion to his need to justify his rebellion and to put a better name on his action. In his thinking he has moved from his initial concept of absolute power (I.ii.267) to the idea of a republic (III.ii.169-170) and finally to a democratic government, which would exonerate the terrible act he must commit (IV.ii.159-161). While there is no doubt

he would be speaking to a private and limited audience. Insisting that "true words are things" to be reckoned with, that what he might say could bring down destruction on the Council, Faliero begs for silence (V.i.289-296). The most generous interpretation we can apply to this attitude is that the Doge is unwilling to urge so great a burden on others as has been his. More accurately, however, it seems that personal revenge is more important to him than the possibility of awakening reform. His vengeance lies in his knowledge that the tyrannical state moves inexorably toward defeat, as described in his prophecy (V.iii.26ff).

It remains for Angiolina to bring into sharper focus the meaning of the play. While in her earlier appearance her cool assurance made her seem little more than a foil to the agitated and emotional Doge, in the last act she is fiery-spirited as well as self-possessed. In denying Steno compassion she speaks as the voice of right reason. While his words did not disturb her, they "were as the wind / Unto the rock", to the sensitive Doge they were unbearable. Angiolina now realises that although words are nothing to some, to others they are things which can set up a chain of devastation. She acknowledges that words impose responsibility. The speaker must be prepared to accept possible dire consequences following careless or thoughtless words:

...Steno's lie, couched in two worthless lines,
 Hath decimated Venice, put in peril
 A Senate which hath stood eight hundred years,
 Discrowned a Prince, cut off his crownless head,
 And forged new fetters for a groaning people!
 (V.i.444-448)

When Angiolina sees her father's dying wish as a link in

the awful chain of events, the Doge's answer that something within him "shaped out for itself some great reverse" again emphasises the Doge's life-long inability to cope with words--a blind acceptance of words at face value. We discover with a horror equal to Angiolina's that the Doge has lived out his life fully accepting as irrevocable truth a curse placed on him by an old bishop whom the Doge while a rash young man had provoked. Told he would be in his old age so irrational and impassioned as to bring about dishonourable death, Angiolina wants to know why he had not attempted to mend his ways to avoid such a disaster (V.ii.15-44). The Doge's reply shows that he, however, had accepted the bishop's words fatalistically:

I own the words went to my heart so much
That I remembered them amid the maze
Of Life, as if they formed a spectral voice,
Which shook me in a supernatural dream;
And I repented; but 'twas not for me
To pull in resolution: what must be
I could not change, and would not fear. (V.ii.46-51)

The effect of this information coming at the end of the drama is to force a re-evaluation of the character of the Doge. We realise that Faliero has lived most of his life under the constant cloud of believing in the ultimate disgrace and dishonour, although he has concealed this information even from his wife. His decision to join with the conspirators takes on literally the character of a suicide, whether motivated to try by desperate means to disprove the bishop or to meet his fate headlong. We realise that we, like the conspirators, have put our trust in a doomed and flawed leader. The suppression of information about a significant event in his life, even

from his wife, underlines the lack of communication between the Doge and his world and the gap in understanding that inevitably exists between members of a political system and the leaders whom they follow. Because we can never know precisely what motivates people, we must weigh the words they use to persuade us to their course of action. The inability of the citizens in the final scene to hear the Doge's last words reiterates the difficulty of true communication. The final scene reveals the meaning of the "oracular bell". Its knell had in this case been both "for a princely death" and for "a state in peril" (IV.ii.184-186). The tension created as the Doge awaited the sound of the bell whose meaning for him was veiled in ambiguity is maintained through the end of the drama. The answer to the question of revolution is as ambiguous as the tolling bell and, like the words of the oracle, is frequently understood only in hindsight.

One of the final remarks of the Doge asks for informed judgment in political affairs: "I am not innocent --but are these guiltless?" (V.iii.40) We are shown the terrible price of anarchy, which pits evil against evil and not, for all the words we can speak, good against evil. Barton concluded that the play demonstrates that when men resort to violence to overthrow tyranny, "they must be prepared to trample on their human instincts and emotional ties, to falsify their own natures and mythologise those of their victims."¹⁷ The failure of the Doge to present

17. Barton, p. 151.

a constructive solution to a tyrannical government seems not, as Johnson would have it, to result from Byron's political uncertainty, but from his desire to present the facts of revolution for individual assessment.¹⁸ Through Marino Faliero Byron warns us in making that assessment that it is human nature to distort language in order to satisfy private and personal needs, and he calls attention to the ways in which individuals exploit and are exploited by rhetoric. The play is "studiously Greek" in raising moral questions that demand answers from every age.

18. Johnson, p. 425.

THE REELING ROMAİKA

BYRON scholars owe a great debt to Professor Marchand for his generally scrupulous editing of the letters and journals and appreciation for his correcting some of the notes found in the Prothero edition. In the same spirit in which he has improved upon Prothero's notes, I should like to set right one of Marchand's notes. In explaining the Romaika, when Byron had admired John Galt's description of that dance in *Letters from the Levant*,¹ Marchand quotes a passage from Galt's work which describes the Highland Reel, a dance not at all similar to the traditional Greek dance still seen in Greece today, nor like the explanation Coleridge gave for Byron's reference to the Romaika in "The Waltz" in his edition of Byron's poetry—"a modern Greek dance, characterized by serpentining figures and handkerchief-throwing among the dancers".² The passage which Marchand ought to have cited to illustrate the Romaika occurs several pages before Galt's nostalgic description of the Highland Reel. The sentence which Marchand has omitted from the quotation, in his first elision, makes it unquestionable that Galt in this instance is describing the Scottish dance, recollected from his early days in Scotland, and not the Romaika.

The idea Galt develops in the series of letters written from Athens is his notion that topography and climate determine the traits of nations and men, a notion which leads him to the conclusion that emerging cultures, during the course of their development, repeat the manners and customs of earlier cultures.³ In the letters from which Marchand quotes, Galt speculates that the dance he witnessed on the previous day by a group of primitive Albanians before the Temple of Theseus resembles the dance invented by Theseus and performed by early Athenians in an equivalent state of civilization. Then, noting a topographical similarity between the Greek islands and the Hebrides, Galt conjectures that "the war-dance of the antients", could it be retrieved from the past, would be "very like the Highland-reel . . . the Pyrrhic dance of the Scotch Celts". Marchand picks up Galt's theorizing at this point, but omits the sentence which makes clear that Galt is merely reminiscing about the Scottish dance: "You recollect, Mrs. Memory, in what way the Highland-reel is performed."⁴

Marchand should have used Galt's description of the Albanians, who were performing the Romaika. Galt records that as he watched from his window a group of musicians were joined by

. . . about twenty young fellows, drunk, holding each other by the hand. These were the dancers. The leader was shaking a handkerchief over his head, admiring at the same time his feet, which were cutting strange capers.⁵

Surely, this is the account that drew Byron's praise since it seems unlikely that he would have confused the Romaika and the Highland Reel.

DORIS H. MERIWETHER.

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¹ *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand (1974), iii, 58, note 2.

² *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron*, ed. E. H. Coleridge (1898), i, 492, note 1.

³ John Galt, *Letters from the Levant* (1813), 181-6 *passim*.

⁴ Galt, pp. 193-4.

⁵ Galt, p. 190.