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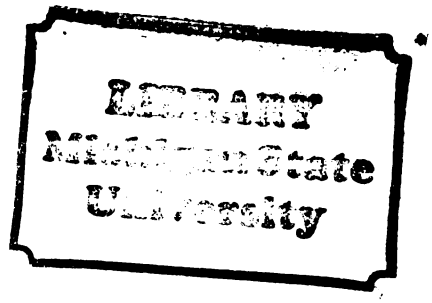

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BYRONIC WRITING

BY

Terrance Joseph Riley

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

BYRONIC WRITING

By

Terrance J. Riley

Recent deconstructive criticism is allied to comtemporary stylistics in its attempt to move beyond the limits of the sentence--a limit imposed by most linguistic theory in this century. Both modes of criticism stand at a midway point between the more rigorously descriptive linguistic approaches and traditional evaluative or thematic interpretation. They can, within limits, accomodate the older modes of analysis, allowing the critic to assign ethical or mentalistic values to the specifically discursive structures described by linguistics.

When we examine the area of Byron's text suggested by these recent theories--the terminal unit, or independent clause, and the arrangement of T-units into passages of unified import--we come upon a characteristic feature of the poet's style: the straining of the T-unit by extreme extension, the accretion of phrases. Byron's distinctive complication of syntactic structure is "right-branching": it proceeds by the conjunctive and disjunctive emendation of core propositions. Typically, in these crucial assertions (and the centrality to the particular work of any assertion can often be judged precisely by this criterion), an undistinguished initial proposition--a predication upon a subject--is revised, qualified, or partially withdrawn in a series of appended phrases. Significant redirections are common; the initial proposition is almost always heavily mediated; often

it is entirely negated.

We may interpret this discursive turn as the concrete, rhetorical form of Byron's skepticism. Or again, the structure of commitment and qualification, commitment and recantation, is textual evidence of the self-constitutive aspect of Byron's writing. The broad consequence of the discovery of this pattern, however, is to focus the attention of the critic on the unfolding drama of the composition of each of Byron's poems, as the apparently extemporaneous complication of assertions comes to control the grammatical unity of his sentences, and as the emendation increasingly dominates the initial proposition. By the end of Byron's career, in Don Juan, it is in the momentary and minute adjustments of the syntax that the reader must look to grasp the general principles of Byron's argument; and there also that Byron develops a theory of writing and signification that complements his own poetic practice.

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INTRODUCTION

i. The New and the Old Criticism

It is a long time now since Ludwig Wittgenstein announced, in the Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus, that he had come to put an end to philosophy--that he had discovered, in the famous formula, "all philosophical problems are linguistic problems." Sixty years and thousands of lesser tractati have passed; works and currents of thinking and schools of thought have developed out of, moved through, or expanded the early-Wittgensteinian moment. And yet it seems, to the reader even in part acquainted with the surface of post-Wittgensteinian material, that the primary and enduring achievement of Wittgenstein was not to remove philosophical problems to the linguistic domain, nor to have ennobled linguistics by the inclusion of epistemology; nor yet, as he probably hoped, to introduce a new, unified science. His significance seems rather that he was the one most forcefully to announce (from the positivistic side, in 1918) the arrival of a characteristic modern dilemma: that competition between philosophy and linguistics which has by now infiltrated all fields of the humanities, and whose familiar manifestations structure large portions of our professional activity: an institutional competition as to the adequacy of philosophical (or thematic) descriptions of experience as against logical (or rule-bound) or linguistic descriptions; and, at a more fundamental, originary level, a competition within individual writers between the claims advance by modern epistemology and contemporary discourse study as to the relation of language and thought.

We will deal here in greater detail with problems faced by the

individual theroist; but the specifically institutional dimension of this dilemma can hardly be overemphasized--that it is a competition articulated by and in university departments, each having its own structural and economic needs, comprising groups of individuals who contend with hierarchies of advancement. Three major results of institutional pressure can be discerned among organizations concerned with the theoretical study of the humanities; two are familiar. There is first a formal and thoroughgoing specialization (the most striking form of which is intra-departmental; that is, within particular departments of English, French, Humanities, etc., usually between specialists in theory and specialists in content). Second, we find, proceeding from the increasing interest in theory in the Humanities over the last thirty years, a multiplication of methodological models. Within departments and within specialties, individuals and schools are now distinguished not by the traditional criteria of period, genre, or theme, but by the methods of inquiry they employ. Method has to a large extent replaced subject matter as the defining feature of, for instance, history and literary criticism.

A third quality of modern scholarship in the Humanities can be traced to institutional pressures. As theories and methods have sharpened and focused each other, and as their social organization has isolated the concerns of academics, some surprisingly extreme forms of skepticism have evolved as well--and not at the fringes, but at the established hearts of disciplines.

Two exemplary cases are Richard Rorty in Philosophy and Stanley Fish in English. Rorty has been a historian of logical positivism and linguistic philosophy, and himself a worker in that field--one who has advance the general claims of linguistic philosophy. In the Introduction to The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method (1967), Rorty was able

to define his area in rather confident terms, in which an echo still sounded of the Tractatus: "I shall mean by 'linguistic philosophy' the view that philosophical problems are problems which may be solved (or dissolved) either by reforming language, or by understanding more about the language we presently use."[1] However, in his most recent work, Rorty has in large part repudiated the optimism and progressivism of analytical philosophy; the argumentative weight of Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (1978) is on the position that human knowledge, especially in its cultural, systematic forms (as in the institution of Philosophy) is primarily paradigmatic and conventional. Philosophy cannot claim authoritative conclusions, in this view (hence the position as a whole is labeled "defeatist by W. V. O. Quine); linguistic philosophy in particular has failed in "the attempt to underwrite or debunk claims to knowledge made by science, morality, art, or religion."[2]

The arguments Rorty has made here might appear to place a greater weight than ever on theories of language, and specifically on stylistics, which in some ways comprises the "linguistic turn" of modern Anglo-American literary criticism. But Stanley Fish, by most accounts the leading stylistician in contemporary letters, has not found in a decade's work any broad, synthetic theory of the relation of truth and discourse. On the contrary, the claims of his stylistics have contracted over the years, as he has worked through a variety of strategies for coping with the central paradox of his discipline--a paradox which is structurally similar to that recognized by Rorty as the paradigmatic quality of thinking. Fish has described it, among other places, in the essay "What Is Stylistics and Why Are They Saying Such Terrible Things About It?--Part II": "When one interrogates a text with a grammar, one populates the text with the entities the grammar is able to recognize, that is, with entities which are a function

of the grammar's categories; and if one of your categories is syntactic ambiguity, the question 'is this text ambiguous?' will always be answered in the affirmative."[3] Fish's most recent collection of essays covers the period of his most important stylistic theory, and documents his growing skepticism, the limitation of his claims: what was in 1970 ("Affective Stylistics") a theory of the ideal reader becomes in the later essays of this collection a theory of the hypothetical text of which the title is suggestive: Is There A Text In This Class?

One can see the historical and especially the institutional roots of this skepticism; one can see, even in the technical formulations of Fish, that part of the problem is precisely the discomforting proximity of philosophy and linguistics (of text and grammar), which seems to contaminate both. But also, as before, one can read through these recent statements to their precursors, and see that not only is our present disciplinary competition not a new problem; but that it is in many respects the central and persisting problem of Anglo-American language study, and the very form of twentieth century skepticism. In literary criticism, especially, the problem since the early Wittgenstein has been to keep the enterprise objective, free of ethical and evaluative biases. The complementary formulations of the problem by philosophers have been illuminating: most of the advanced and technical work done in epistemology and linguistic analysis since 1930 or thereabouts has been aimed at breaking philosophical discourse free of the "systematically misleading expressions" that Gilbert Ryle described in 1931.[4] But the current state of affairs, if we are to judge from the positions of Rorty and Fish, is not only of no advance; it is a stalemate, a dead-end, perhaps--at least a stand-off between what would appear to be certainties: that interpretation requires a paradigm; but that paradigms (in the manner described by Thomas Kuhn in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions) derail

advances in philosophy and interpretation--paradigms trick us into believing we have made substantive advances in knowledge.[5] Language and philosophy are inimical to each other. In English, poetics and interpretation are inimical to each other.

This last conclusion, increasingly clear around English departments over the last fifteen years, has itself been a source of skepticism; for linguistics and criticism have not only competed for territory, but have faced each other directly, destabilizing each other. The close reading of texts of scientific or empirical linguistics (such as Derrida's reading of Saussure or Kuhn's reading of Karl Popper[6]) have had the general effect of revealing the suppressed or invisible preconceptions of empiricism; texts in scientific linguistics work with theme and symbol, equally with novels; they too are figural works. Likewise, the multiplication of admissible interpretations of the literary work has, through the period of the hegemony of the New Criticism, increasingly trivialized and undermined that enterprise. The hope of I. A. Richards and F. R. Leavis (roughly contemporary with Wittgenstein and Ryle) that a well-informed community of thematic critics, working with and against each other over the years, would arrive eventually at general agreement about the nature of, at least, the most famous texts, was not borne out in fact. By the late 1960s the New Criticism had, for all purposes except undergraduate education, finally broken up under the weight of its failures; its pretensions to objective linguistics passed on to structuralism and speech-act theory; its ideal of historical accuracy passed, in different forms, into Marxist and sociological criticism. The institutional structure of the profession began to reflect, perhaps in resignation, a new pluralism.

This is to a great degree the current state of affairs in English studies; no single literary approach predominates in the way New Criticism

did in the 1950s. The outlines of some new positions are forming, however; it is likely that we are on the verge of some new, strong institutional position. A prediction is unnecessary; but from the point of view I have been developing, one group of recent critics deserves special attention. What is new, or happening anew, among these thinkers is that the intersection, or mutual interruption, of language and philosophy is not conceived as a contamination, but rather as, in large part, in the nature of things. Further, to the critic accustomed to their proximity, philosophy and language do not limit each other, but renew and reenergize each other. New models of the processes of composing have generated reconceptions of the competition of paradigm and discourse; and they have been found, by some, not in competition at all, but in essential cooperation.

In a 1977 review of Thomas Weiskel's The Romantic Sublime, Thomas R. Frosch classifies that book as one among those engaged in "the search for dissonance, anxiety, and latent structure conducted by antithetical and deconstructive critics."[7] If we discount the slightly disparaging tone (itself a latent structure, as we will see, connoting a certain anxiety), we can allow that this is a not unfair summary of much that has recently been called "deconstructionism." To summarize much is clearly a mistake. But we may say generally that the deconstructionists are a group of literary theorists, interested in the European scene, who were among the first to begin reading and writing about the works of Jacques Derrida in the late-1960s, giving special attention to the books published in English as Of Grammatology and Writing and Difference in 1976 and 1978, respectively, and to the paper delivered at the conference "The Languages of Literature and the Sciences of Man" at Johns Hopkins University in 1966 (later published in The Structuralist Controversy), "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences."[8] It has been argued that the appearance of

Derrida on the American scene, even specifically at this conference, served to fix, or further polarize, groups of unnecessarily antagonistic scholars. In the minds of those receptive to Derrida's ideas, though, the reaction was unequivocal and enthusiastic.

In a book on Thomas Hardy which appeared in 1970, J. Hillis Miller had already begun to set out some coordinates for what would develop over the next ten years into the Anglo-American form of deconstructionism.

> Literary criticism is language about language, or, to put it another way, a re-creating in the mind of the critic of the consciousness inscribed in the texts studied, generated there by the words. To say this is to put into question certain habitual metaphors for what happens in the act of criticism. Among these are all those visual metaphors which set the critic over against the literary work as a scientist is sometimes thought to survey the thing he investigates, dispassionately and objectively. Illicit also are the metaphors for criticism which propose to explain the text by something extralinguistic which precedes it and which is its generative source--the life or psychology of the author, historical conditions at a certain time, some event which is the model "imitated" or "reflected" or "represented" in the poem or story. The centuries old metaphors of mimesis obscure the nature of literary language. The pre-text of a given text is always another text open in its turn to interpretation. There is never an extra-linguistic "origin" by means of which the critic can escape from his labyrinthine wanderings within the complexities of relationship among words.

Miller proposes two projects for criticism. The first is the recreation of the subjectivity of the author--the "consciousness inscribed" in the words of the text: this, clearly a continuation of the existential and phenomenological traditions of European criticism. But there is in the second project a post-existential notion: the problem of figurality is prominent in Miller's mind, here on the first page of his preface. It is especially the language of the critic, the theorist, that must become aware of itself <u>as</u> figural; the critic is not exempt from any condition that applies generally to writers and thinkers:

> The critic, moreover, does not possess a power of looking from the outside in a sovereign view which sees all the text at once as a spatial design. To understand the text he must be inside it. The means of his entry is language, a medium within which he already dwells.

> He can insert himself into the text because both he and it are already interpenetrated by their common language. The means of his interpretation is also language, those words of his own which even in the most passive act of reading he adds to the text as he understands it. If there is no escape outside the text, if language is as much the source of consciousness or history as consciousness or history is the source of language, then far better than any visual metaphor for what happens in criticism is that image employed by Thomas Hardy in The Dynasts and elsewhere, the image of the text of history as a woven cloth. A literary text is a texture of words, its threads and filaments reaching out into the pre-existing warp and woof of language. The critic adds his weaving to the Penelope's web of the text, or unravels it so that its structuring threads may be laid bare, or reweaves it, or traces out one thread in the text to reveal the design it inscribes, or cuts the whole cloth to one shape or another. In some way the critic necessarily does violence of the text in the act of understanding it or of interpreting it. There is no innocent reading, no reading which leaves the work exactly as it is.[9]

"There is no innocent reading." In that one assertion, Miller rejects the objectivist paradigm of interpretation, parts company with the New Criticism, and begins to turn away from the concerns of existentialism. And he opens the way as well for a reconciliation, at a fundamental theoretical level, between the language of literature and the language of science. Ten years later this reconciliation has become for Miller an inescapeable unity of project; in "The Critic as Host," he describes the nature of his own literary criticism:

> "Deconstruction" is neither nihilism nor metaphysics but simply interpretation as such, the untangling of the inherence of metaphysics in nihilism and nihilism in metaphysics by way of the close reading of of texts. This procedure, however, can in no way escape, in its own discourse, from the language of the passage it cites. This language is the expression of the inherence of nihilism in metaphysics and of metaphysics in nihilism. We have no other language. The language of criticism is subject to exactly the same limitations and blind alleys as the language of the works it reads.[10]

A similar dynamics of interest--a kind of logic in the career--can be discerned in the work of Paul de Man. Like Miller, de Man began as a theorist interested in the deliberate projects of writers--we might say, in the existential situation of writing, or the presence in writing of certain philosophical concepts; but he has turned, in his more recent work,

to a recognition of the coexistence--the existence as a practical unity--of the philosophical and the literary within the larger category of written discourse. Note that in the following passage from "The Rhetoric of Temporality" (1969) we are after all concerned with just one "self":

> The ironic, twofold self that the writer or philosopher constitutes by his language seems able to come into being only at the expense of his empirical self, falling (or rising) from a stage of mystified adjustment into the knowledge of his mystification. The ironic language splits the subject into an empirical self that exists in a state of inauthenticity and a self that exists only in the form of a language that asserts the knowledge of that inauthenticity.[11]

We are concerned, then, not with two sorts of people, represented by "writer or philosopher," but with one self who, because of the peculiar quality of written discourse, is either writer or philosopher; he is both at once, the passage explains.

Finally, among the American critics associated with deconstruction, and to continue the present theme, we may note the more pragmatic, the more cautious recommendations of Geoffrey Hartman from the Preface to Deconstruction and Criticism, in which he urges a deliberate reunion of our two domains:

> The separation of philosophy from literary study has not worked to the benefit of either. Without the pressure of philosophy on literary texts, or the reciprocal pressure of literary analysis on philosophical writing, each discipline becomes impoverished. If there is a danger of confusing the two realms, it is a danger worth experiencing.[12]

This is, as I suggested earlier, a project which may be viewed as emerging out of the late ruin of the New Criticism, built upon the very phenomenon we have noted: the escape of significant texts from fifty years of devoted New Critical interpretors. Hartman treats the energy of that escape in this way:

> There are many ways of describing the force of literature. The priority of language to meaning is only one of these, but it plays a crucial role in these essays. It expresses what we all feel about figural language, its excess over any assigned meaning, or, put more generally, the strength of the signifier vis-a-vis a signified (the "meaning") that tries to enclose it. Deconstruction, as it has come to be called, refuses to identify the force of literature with any concept of embodied meaning and shows how deeply such logocentric or

incarnationist perspectives have influenced the way we think about art.[13]

Though we will have no pressing need to treat of Derrida himself in the present work, it will be well to remember, before we move on, that the crucial and defining set of deconstructionist principles are part of a conceptual unity in his work: the "excess" of figurative language, the inescapeably figural nature of language as it is used in discourse, the "ironic, twofold self" that comes into being through or in discourse, the common entrapment of text and critic in a superordinate context of language--these are the Derridean concepts that have become the most vital to American, post-structuralist critics. They are, by and large, a neo-existential, or psychologized, or personalized application of what, in Derrida, is part of a more often impersonal and grand history of Western writing:

> The reassuring evidence within which Western tradition has had to organize itself and must continue to live would therefore be as follows: the order of the signified is never contemporary, is at best the subtly discrepant inverse or parallel--discrepant by the time of a breath--from the order of the signifier.[14]

The order of written language, that is, is never perfectly covalent with the concepts we try to "express" in language; instead, the "order of the signifier" takes on a life of its own in its subtle discrepancy. Or we might equally say that our own, human existence takes on another extrinsic dimension--a borrowed life, as it were--from the independent order of the signified; that dimension appears in the late work of de Man as the authentic but temporary and artificial (non-empirical) "philosophizing self" of the writer; and in the work of Miller, the appearance of "metaphysics in nihilism and nihilism in metaphysics."

There have been a number of attempts to familiarize the Derridean impulses of American, post-structuralist criticism. Hartman's own recent Criticism in the Wilderness is in some respects such an attempt[15]--not to domesticate the theories of Derrida, but to show how their Anglo-American

form has been implicit in earlier theorists. (It was implicit, for instance, in Hartman's Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814[16]--a book which, with Thomas Weiskel's The Romantic Sublime, is the precursor of my own critical projects.) The fact remains, though, that the model of composing at the center of the various deconstructionist works is not like any other twentieth century description of writing. And the literary criticism which elaborates the model--though finding its own precursors in Freud and Nietzsche--has taken, and, strangely, continues to take the established literary critical institutions of America completely by surprise; and the methods of criticism are so subversive to the older model of composing for at least one writer--the usually perspicuous William Pritchard--to dub its major practitioners at Yale "the hermeneutical Mafia."[17]

The central feature of the Derridean criticism, then, is its model of composing. This may be thought of as, in the largest terms (though this is at face value a controversial association), a neo-Romanticist model; it regards writing as an enterprise which, in the manner described by Coleridge, "draws the whole soul" into activity. There is altogether sufficient matter in writing for the critic who looks for "latent structures," etc., for as they exist in the consciousness that signifies (remembering Miller's early description of the work of criticism), so they are "inscribed" in words in the text. Or again, writing, in the Derridean framework, is analogous to the objects of civilization for Carlyle--the concrete remnant of thought, the expression in space of metaphor (though never, in the case of Derridean writing, perfectly expressive; rather imperfectly expressive of thought, a "trace" of thinking). A connection to Freud is clear here too, and through Freudian analysis to the "dissonance" and "anxiety" isolated by Frosch as important to the deconstructive critic: for the subtly discrepant order of the signified makes the attempt to inscribe our thinking a continual

struggle with the (apparently) extrinsic authority of language; again, writing is never perfectly its author (as speech, prototypically, is perfectly centered within the speaker); writing is rather imperfect, subtly discrepant "by the time of a breath." The dissonance of all writing is caused by this inevitable space--which, Derrida suggests in the passage cited, though it is perceived as a function of time (writing seems too slow, "behind" a concept of reality), is actually a function of the thoroughly figural nature of language; the real "distance" is between the literal and figural meanings of our discourse. Writing, we may say more generally, is symptomatic of consciousness, which in the deconstructionist analysis clings to the notion of an originating point outside itself. We depart from Freud, however, to the degree that his understanding required the deployment of faculties or mental entities. Writing brings the whole soul into activity; and our model of consciousness is more directly conditioned by phenomenological concepts than Freud's. We especially allow, as the American Derrideans allow, for the intentional structure of consciousness. It is misleading to think of writing as a compromise or balance of impulses (though writing may be in several senses motivated by certain "imbalances" or by the necessity of "balance" or stasis. Writing itself, however, is a fully intentional act, impulse itself. We are not aware of ourselves while writing, as Sartre noted in What is Literature?[18]; we are never for very long aware of the motive for writing, but are rather altogether committed to the act.

We must depart also, then, from a traditional understanding of motivation; for motive, viewed in the deceptively clear light of Cartesian dualism, is not the whole soul, but rather an image of the operation of the mind slowed and made deliberate: a model of consciousness as we would have it--rational and selective. Our concept of will requires this enhanced or valorized addition: rational choice. It is a concept, however, that conflicts

with a consistent model of composition on several points. We may choose to write for any number of reasons (though this is probably no so clear-cut a matter as is usually thought); but having so chosen, we immediately put ourselves at some distance from choice (from felt or rational choice). Even so rationalistic a writer as T. S. Eliot had a clear perception of this when he wrote, in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," that one does not choose a career in writing for self-expression, but that rather "the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."[19] Part of this self-sacrifice, especially for a strong poet like Eliot, but also for most writers most of the time, is the choice to escape from the conditions which required the choice--one of which, of course, is the condition of selfhood. Hence the importance in contemporary criticism of the concepts of repression and sublimation; they are by no means deviant strategies for avoiding unpleasant or frightening revelations; they are names of the mechanisms by which we subvert the empirical self so that the brief, authentic philosopher may appear.

Here is one source of the perception of the "uncanny" in the methods of the new, Derridean criticism. In is not based on an irrationalist model of composing as some have claimed (E. D. Hirsch, for instance, in The Aims of Interpretation, has called the Derrideans "cognitive atheists"[20]); it is rather an anti-rationalist model, opposing the limited and limiting view that writing is a matter of practical, clarified, short-term goals--that writing is merely the execution of a purpose, a pre-existing intention (note again Miller's reaction to such a view in the first citation). Or again, our new model of composing stands in opposition to what seems to me the most impoverished and wrong-headed view of discourse, that writing is a form of speech--a delayed or second-order form of speech: a phonics. Denis Donoghue has recently joined the deconstructionist controversy on this side, arguing in

most strident but unconvincing prose that the primacy of speech is an incontrovertible fact. (The American critical "orthodoxy" of the "past forty or fifty years," Donoghue describes in this way: "The first assumption is that in reading a poem you think of the words on the page as a transcription of a voice speaking. . . . The vocal and acoustic character of poetry is widely accepted."[21] But this is so simplistic as to be merely incorrect; for most of the orthodox New Critics, the "vocal and acoustic" character of poetry was not of the first importance, but of third, fourth, or fifth importance, if that, running well behind such concepts as coherence, irony, ambiguity, tension--in short, the specifically discursive qualities of writing.) This view would apparently simplify the composing process (into transcription) and the nature of discourse (into a simple reflection or mimesis of thought: words, in the vocalist view, correspond to thoughts); but this simplification would be carried out at the cost of ignoring the central and in many ways defining feature of literature: metaphor, what Hartman called "the excess over any assigned meaning" of figural language. Were language the perfectly instrumental system that Donoghue and Hirsch think it--even for the successful communication of ambiguity or tension that Hirsch proposes as the model of literary language--then there would be no interpretive or thematic criticism.

We have, finally, among the deconstructionists, and emerging from the new models of writing they work with, not just an alliance of linguistic analysis and philosophy, but the unified project of a philosophical analysis of style--an interdependence of the two older modes which rests on two principles: first, the unavoidably creative and original aspect of criticism (that criticism does not naively explain or analyze the text, but weaves its own piece of cloth in response to it); and second, the nature of composing itself, which is not, in the view of these theorists, a transcription of

speech into phonetic form, nor a rendition or display of thought itself, nor yet the expression of belief; but rather, writing is the endless process of creating, sustaining, and abandoning the figures by which thought and belief become aware of themselves; it is, if a rendition at all, a rendering of the surprise of the writer in finding sudden correspondences between experience and abstraction; and this is another way of saying that writing is the result of awareness itself, the awareness that "experience" and "abstraction" are what they are. Writing does not express philosophy, for the critics to whom I have allied myself here: writing <u>is</u> philosophy; writing brings the philosopher into being, as de Man describes it in the citation above.

I tink that one need not become a true believer to see the force of the deconstructionist argument. But one conclusion--perhaps the least conclusion we can come to, in light of this convincing and massively learned body of work--ought to be that it is no longer profitable to split the literary work of art into intention and execution. This view, one component of the New Criticism and of some of the genre-intensive criticism that built away from New Criticism, impels a text- (or voice-) centered understanding of writing: the intentions of writing are beyond our ability to find or to understand (here is one variation of the skepticism in the Humanities I began by describing: the New Criticism is a strongly solipcistic mode of inquiry); what we can find in pieces of writing are rhetorical or compositional features that somehow echo or result from the intention. The central intuition of the position is that language is <u>symbolic</u> action, to use Kenneth Burke's phrase. Language use is analogous to action in the world, but is rather purified and distilled, abstract and mental "action." But as that intuition begins to unravel--as it has through the slow failures of New Criticism over the last thirty years; as we literary critics as a

group turn more toward the position of the late Wittgenstein (the position of Philosophical Investigations) that language is not a special, valorized "symbolic" action, but one human action, among others; as we begin to absorb, after the manner of the Continental critics, the lessons of Husserl, Heidegger, and Sartre, and come to see intentionality as a crucial aspect of the experience of composition; as we become aware, in fact, that all these trends are already unsystematically at work in our intellectual and academic lives; then it becomes clear also that the least conclusion we can come to in trying to understand the nature of writing is that the border between thought and language--intention and execution--is not a border at all; and that writing is best described not as the detached or concretized expression of prior thoughts, but rather as one of our kinds of thinking.

Now, put this way, as the disassembly of the wall between thought and language, the deconstructive position is not altogether radical. Analytical philosophy from the time of Moore, Russell, and the early Wittgenstein has argued that we all represent some part of our world--our reality--to ourselves in linguistic forms; sophisticated arguments on this score go back at least as far as Ryle and his theory of "systematically misleading expressions." Derrida, we might say, has simply made the rather larger historical point that the history of Western writing represents a systematic creation of a metaphysics of Presence; Paul de Man's work in the last decade has primarily focused on the deconstruction of systematically misleading discourse in individual authors. Their positions are not qualitatively different from that taken by Ryle when he writes that "God" and "soul" and "mind" are terms that have been used in systematically misleading ways. De Man and Derrida make broader claims for themselves; but their claims are not alien to our critical institutions. Why then should the deconstructionist project have attracted so many devoted and energetic

detractors? Why should it have polarized the profession?

The answer, I think, is precisely institutional--that Miller and de Man and the others are perceived as subversive to the critical enterprise generally. What's new among the deconstructionists--and this is either their strength or their weakness, depending on one's own affiliations--is that they take themselves as part of their subject matter; they regard objectivity as an outmoded concept; and therefore the empirical approach to literature seems to them quite thoroughly suffused with bad faith. We can conceive of the controversy this way: Ryle, the Rorty of The Linguistic Turn, and all three generations of literary analysts who have associated themselves with the objectivist paradigm of New Criticism share a--largely implicit--view of their own discourse as exempt from the conditions they place on other writers. This is exactly the position taken by Rorty in the citation above, that he will escape philosophical problems by one route or another, "either by reforming language, or by understanding more about . . . language"; and it is exactly such a notion, of a superior or objective or exempt or "reformed" language that Miller disqualifies, in the passage cited, when he writes: "We have no other language. The language of criticism is subject to exactly the same limitations and blind alleys as the language of the works it reads."

Miller and his colleagues are not anti-elitist; their books are not for the common reader. But whatever elite they belong to is not distinguished by any claims of objectivity or detachment from their special interests--nor, in particular, by claims of correct interpretations. They have often appeared to be anti-interpretive; and this, I think, is not altogether a response to the demands of their theories, but results in part from their antithetical attitude toward some of the escesses of the critical orthodoxy that preceeded them. I wrote earlier of the need for a new

conception of motivation in writing, accusing a nameless group of older critics with substituting a rationalist model of thought--lean and linear and deliberative--for the more chaotic and mysterious profusion of thinking that most of us experience most of the time. I think I can go farther than this, and charge the New Critics as a group with a generally impoverished idea of personality, or authorship. For the usually implicit belief of the New Critics that the analyst approaches the closed system of each literary work from the outside, untouched by the conditions that afflicted the author, when pursued side-by-side with the usually explicit premise that writing is an organized display of pre-existent units of thought, results in works of literary criticism that take as their goal the rearrangement of those units into simulacra of people.

Before I propose some concrete goals for myself, I would like to digress for a few pages to consider how the desire for unity and formula has influenced one aspect of the study of Lord Byron's poetry. Specifically, I will examine the double premise that most often remains hidden in the New Critical concept of the "major author" study: first, that the major author exists for us primarily as the source of a product--the canon of writing--which is a reflection of the historical individual himself; and second, how the function of such a study is to use the elements of the fixed canon to isolate a set of desireable traits.

ii. The Argument of Byron's Canon

There is a kind of affirmation in continuing to write at all, and, partly because it has seemed lacking elsewhere, the structure of Byron's poetic development has been scoured for signs of an increasingly systematic understanding of life. It has been thought that if the logic of the complex chronology of Byron's poetry could be uncovered, its unity glimpsed, then we would have arrived at a purer and more essential Byron, the poet less moved by passing circumstance. A repeated sequence or pattern, a reasoning from A to B, a similarity of sentiment at different times are all consistencies that suggest work, purpose, and commitment. Developmental and typological or synchronic study overlap in this regard, both tending toward the illumination of deeply held beliefs. We may thereby gain a more certain footing with respect to various works; at the very least, we can be sure that Byron's poetry is not a massive subterfuge--a position some critics still feel obliged to argue against.

We can note some historical irony in this search for consistency: that the other Romantic poets have been praised most highly for works in which they doubt and break away from their "deep beliefs," Byron for those in which he seems to approach one. But moreover, the principle of unity in variety is as multifarious as it is universal, and does not serve as a guide to specialized analyses. In extended critical works, especially, it is important to be aware of what kinds of solutions are allowed for by the form of our questions; the search for literary consistency is informed

by some model or norm of consistency; and when it is found, or induced as a "deep belief," something is deemed proven. The potential value of finding life patterns is that they can be (carefully) compared to assertions; there is significance in the choice of what to write next. But therefore the characteristic threat to valid canonical reasoning is reduction--that is, letting the search for consistencies become the search for a persisting ground of belief. We can judge the applicability of canonical generalizations by the maintenance of this distinction; for if one goal of canonical criticism is to reveal unity and not mere sameness, then an accompanying goal must be to preserve the variety of the background.

With these initial qualifications in mind, we can consider four powerful and influencial statements of the coherence of Byron's poetry, and the attempts of each to give form to the body of his work. Of these, William H. Marshall's The Structure of Byron's Major Poems[22] and Robert F. Gleckner's Byron and the Ruins of Paradise[23] employ a developmental-thematic approach to Byron's poetry; Michael G. Cooke's The Blind Man Traces the Circle[24] and George M. Ridenour's The Style of "Don Juan"[25] are synchronic-rhetorical studies. This selection is not intended as a cross-section of Byron criticism; these works are rather among the best that are available--each has been instrumental in laying to rest the opinion that Byron's poetry is a subterfuge. But for the purposes of this chapter we will be more interested in critical principles and premises; as a group, these critics comprise the major modern conceptions of the whole life work of authors.

In the first mode, William Marshall determines that "the critic's function is primarily to give some conscious explanation of what goes on in the work itself (presumably, then, reflecting what has gone on in the mind of the writer) at a somewhat less than conscious level." (Structure, p. 20) By thinking of writing as a "reflection" we are able to strike

a balance between conscious and unconscious creation, "between the poet's intentions and the achievement of poetry." (p. 19) In this gray area of Byron's canon, Marshall finds evidence of growth toward dramatic irony, which "offers sustaining structural unity to perhaps half a dozen major poems written between 1816 and 1819, and is given its most complex development in Don Juan." (p. 20) Participating in no major literary or philosophical traditions (p. 15), Byron's intellect was attuned to paradoxes, which he resolved in his poetry through the multiplication of narrators and voices. Thus we can say that Byron "throughout his career pointedly used his art for cathartic purposes." (p. 13) And the continuity of Byron's poetry is a path, not always straight, toward a voice and idiom more expressive of the paradoxes of the world, a movement that is replicated (and explained in greater psychological detail) in each of Byron's literary creations; the speaker of Childe Harold III, for instance, "having failed to achieve interior resolution to his problem, attempts to project it; he strives to create a dream world, in which Harold, the image of the Self or alter-ego, is to assume and dramatize (thereby possibly resolving into harmony) the emotional elements disturbing the speaker." (p. 72)

There is room for charging Marshall with circularity--he begins a non-generic, chronological account (p. 26) with generic terminology, and concludes that genre is the controlling feature of Byron's development. But, more important, the argument that parts of Don Juan are similar to earlier work begins to shade off into the position that developments along the line toward Don Juan were, in essence, inevitable. Marshall follows Cleanth Brooks in believing that "dramatization demands that the antithetical aspects of memory be coalesced into one entity which--if we take it on the level of statement--is a paradox." (p. 21) These "antithetical aspects" are demanding themes in Marshall's discussion, and Brooks'

observation is turned around: "The Byronic cosmos . . . is essentially one of paradox needing expression by dramatization." (p. 21) This suggestion that there was somwthing compelling Byron has an impact on the treatment of certain poems. Their place in the development toward Don Juan is not only one source of interest in the middle period works, but perhaps their "real significance." (p. 21) Poems are flawed if they do not achieve dramatic irony when they ought; the later plays, except for Cain and Heaven and Earth, reveal little success because "it is apparent that in Marino Faliero, Sardanapalus, and The Two Foscari, the poet employed situations which were significant largely from an interior, rather than an exterior, viewpoint, and that he would have achieved sustaining irony had he constructed monologues about them." (p. 25) At the center of this statement is the assertion that it is the content of a chosen situation which determines the course of any poem; given a certain theme, Byron's options were limited. This belief is picked up again in the discussion of Parasina, which, it is said, embodies an "essentially dramatic situation." (p. 62) In both cases, the notion of drama is extended and made partly metaphorical--as "interior" and "exterior viewpoint"--to cover the relation ship of the writer to his material. Writing is bound to the perspective of the writer, or of some imagined self, and self-dramatization is analogous to a step into the natural world.

Because of this necessity--that successful self-dramatizing requires a stable perspective (or, in the case of Don Juan, a host of discrete voices /pp. 167 and 177/)--Byron was, on the whole, barred from certain kinds of statements. Marshall writes: "We must not seek sustaining, positive meaning in Byron's poetry." (p. 16) This is a very interesting statement, the more so because, despite its highly suspect wording (we could take exception to each of the embedded propositions), it is a familiar

comment on Byron, and we hear more than is said. We know that Marshall is missing more than a lucky affirmation or random joy: this is to be "sustaining" meaning, which, whatever or whomever it sustains, persists through time. But neither is he remarking only that Byron changed his mind often; what is lacking is "positive" meaning, that is, a proposal or guide to action. Beyond this, however, it is difficult to proceed with Marshall's terminology; as to what sort of meaning one can seek in Byron--whether it be intermittent positive meaning or just negative meaning--Marshall can say little, because, of course, "positive" and "negative" are not distinct forms of meaning, but descriptions of reactions to meaning. Marshall's rejection of consistency as a critical value to the contrary, it appears that the terms of the historical debate have captured his argument here, and he has confused positivity and duration, meaning and optimism.

Robert F. Gleckner also takes up the organization of the canon from a developmental point of view, and finds it to be "indeed canonical . . . elements in a fascinating history of a struggle for form." (Byron and the Ruins of Paradise, p. xv) As Marshall found continuity in the notion of self-dramatization, Gleckner locates a series of thematic, rather than generic, transformations under the surface; we discover that "continuous struggle" (p. 41) in the many manifestations of the theme of the Fall, Byron's evolving myth of human existence. The impact of the developmental emphasis on the treatment of the "elements" is, again, a wide range of associated values, from The Curse of Minerva being "interesting" as part of the development toward Childe Harold, to The Giaour forming a "crucial document in Byron's search for form." (pp. 32, 96) Either of these statements could be applicable to Byron's poetry in a number of ways. But they are often turned into the kind of self-fulfilling heuristic that damages Marshall's argument. From the evidence of certain developments Gleckner

educes a vast evidencial structure: "Byron's development as a p t must be seen as whole, continuous, and perhaps surprisingly consistent, encompassing all of his poetry." (p. 329) Particular poems derive form and energy from their place in the encompassing whole. In order for Byron to achieve the "sense of sureness" of the middle and late periods, he "must experiment further (in the tales) with point of view and narrative technique." (p. 88) Before Byron could "fully formulate" the idea of heroic defiance, "he had to explore its many ramifications in the tales and their heroes." (p. 74) Until that formulation, the only alternative open to Byron's heroes were "action--which leads only to death--or death itself." (p. 131) In expanding Byron's "surprisingly consistent" development to embrace Don Juan, Gleckner writes: "If one must call it anti-romantic or negatively romantic . . . in so doing we are only recognizing the inevitability of the form and the voice in Byron's age." (p. 139)

The heuristic is, in fact, fulfilled quite early in Gleckner's study, in an explanation of a contradiction between poems in Hours of Idleness: "He does not yet see clearly that his task as a poet throughout his life will be . . ." (p. 10) Given this kind of initial reduction, apparently a shift from the historical fixedness of a poetic canon to its inevitability, it is possible to show a broadly systematic Byron, who appears in each of the poems (who must be there). It is therefore also possible, perhaps attractive, to apply such a principle encyclopedically; poetry that does not instance the theme or fails to fulfill it may be, respectively, ignored (as The Waltz, excluded as "totally unlike anything else he ever wrote" /p. 27n/) or put off as "fuzzy" thinking on the part of the poet (Byron's initial intentions toward Harold /p. 43/).

But such a canonical reading creates the paradox it is trying to resolve: that on the whole Byron's poetry was freely chosen and wrought, yet

at any particular moment in his writing Byron was not free. On a much larger scale than in Marshall's theory, a predominant theme controls the course of the individual poem for Gleckner, as well as the passage from poem to poem. The function of criticism then becomes the liberation of the writer from necessity by the discovery of his awareness of the continuing theme (much as the tragic hero is liberated and doomed by his knowledge); poems become more valuable (as Don Juan does in the passage cited above) as they approach natural law. Thus Gleckner's argument takes thematic criticism out of the realm of methodology and makes of it an epistemology of literature. As a pattern for Byron's poetic development, it is backwards. "What is" in Byron's poetry becomes the standard for "what ought" to have been, and the only surprising feature of Byron's canon is its consistency (a point brought home in a set of locutions which forms Gleckner's own theme: "we should not be surprised," "It is perhaps logical" /p. 69/; "Perhaps it is no accident" /p. 63/). He confuses, not always, but at times, cause and effect: Childe Harold I "as a workshop" is a "fascinating document in any attempt to see Byron the poet at work. A greater sense of self-assuredness, of purposeful manipulation of his three main voices can logically be expected in Canto II." (p. 67 As evidence mounts up in Gleckner's argument, bordering as it does on the tautological, the issues are not sharpened, but generalized: "the satiric poems proceed not from the hope of redemption or correction or betterment, but rather from the same despair as do the other poems, the same sense of loss and nothingness, of inevitability and doom, here quietly articulated in bitter comedy or anger instead of compassion and a quiet despair." (p. 80) It is clear that in this passage Gleckner is trying to refer to one feeling, that "quiet despair," but in the attempt to cover everything at once, he splinters the notion is six directions.

As a result of this generalization, Gleckner's theory yields only the

bluntest tools for analyzing particular linguistic and symbolic structures. Some problematical readings ensue: Gleckner paraphrases "in creating/Live a being more intense as "the poet's _becoming_ through creation a 'being more intense'" (my emphasis); for Byron's delicate desubstantization, Gleckner substitutes one specific motive and act. In a larger context, images of darkness in all of Byron's poetry are consistently referred to his broadly pessimistic view of the world; paradoxically, in a developmental study, there is no mention of the growth of such images, or their relation to eighteenth century science. The language in which Byron's writing is described is made to bear a heavy burden: "the sum total of these roles /played in _Hours of Idleness_/ is an impressively consistent testament to the prevailing undertone of Byron's private/public voice." (p. 25) It is not Gleckner's specialized term "private/public voice" that proves troublesome here, but the suggestion that a "sum total" could be anything other than "impressively consistent." _The Siege of Corinth_, on the other hand, is characterized by an "almost total lack of theme." (p. 166)

In short, then, Gleckner's argument is flawed at those times when, and to the degree that, his means become his ends--when thematic continuity becomes a first principle and final cause. But this gradual shift out of the analytical and into the inevitable is not limited to developmental studies. It appears also in the other major mode of canonical criticism, the synchronic study. Broadly speaking, a synchronic understanding of poetic progress is dialectical rather than serial; the unifying principle of a canon resides in or with the poet, as a consciously wrought system, capable of generating a number of propositions or poems. That is, the canon coheres through closure rather than continuity.

Michael G. Cooke, though he names Gleckner as a foreshadower of his own method, presents a "synthesizing approach" that is fundamentally

corrective of Gleckner on several matters, especially on the value of tracing development. Cooke's approach "expresses the sense that Byron's poems transcend a collection and exist as a body of poetry, with a consistent and plausible articulation. The present study advances such a reading of the Byron corpus, attempting to follow the pattern of its development not because that appears abstractly desireable, but because it has projected itself as concretely necessary and sound." (The Blind Man Traces the Circle, p. x) That is, finding developmental patterns will not be an end in itself, but will remain a means to understanding the whole. Of the four canonical methods examined here, Cooke's is the most flexible among details; he is able to avoid imputing necessity and cause whenever he notices similarity.

Yet in one sense the reorientation is slight, from a consistent "collection" to a "consistent and plausible articulation"; moreover, this sense of transcendence is also a projected demand that the poetry be read, as the terms suggest, as an argument. Thus Cooke integrates some of Byron's lyrics into the Romantic tradition "not only in terms of philosophy, but also in terms of rhetoric.")p. 34) Certain stanzas on Childe Harold "help to test the natural philosophy that is professed"; in these, "it is not so much the expressed themes as the revealed method, the speaking intellect, that should be taken as basic." (p. 42) Or again, of the Juan-Julia episode: "Byron is aiming at a moral summary of their affair. By placing the logic of analysis before the logic of narration, Byron elicits from a mere encounter in love . . . a major statement of man's unpromising adventures against time." (p. 166)

As the concept of underlying argumentative structure--Byron's "logic of analysis"--supports more and more of Cooke's explanation, the question of Byron's argumentative intention assumes greater that usual proportions. Evidence of the "rationally chosen form" of Don Juan, for instance, grounds

speculation on the "direction" given that poem by Byron's "abstractive frame of mind." (p. 97) In the last chapter, Cooke seeks the "Byronic affirmation" in the conclusion to this underlying argumentative structure. He is surprised at first by the skeptical "dead-end" Byron seems to present (p. 177), but goes on to find the "limits of skepticism" in a sub-surface dialectic, which appears in his work at least as early as Lara . . . This is a third, viable option in Byron's thought, the peculiar form of humanism and stoicism that may be called the counter-heroic." (p. 181)

For Cooke, then, argumentative and rhetorical closure take on roughly the same aspect as thematic continuity in Gleckner's study. First, it is at all times a principle of poetic development: the "mind" of Childe Harold IV, "For all its lack of resolution . . . attains a viable state of being at once personal and analytical, idealistic and undemanding, humble and uncompromising. In Don Juan, its position is duly expanded into a philosophy, and complemented with a full-fledged personality." (p. 127) There are fewer imputations of necessity here than in Gleckner, but still more--in "duly expanded"--than Cooke needs to support his other claims of the unity of Byron's canon. There is an unnecessary implication also that some component of characterization is linked to the expansion of a "mind" into a "philosophy." The connection between systematic argumentation and the writing of particular poems is found again in "the force of analysis that surges everywhere in Don Juan, set free perhaps in the first instance by the story, but ultimately deflecting, if not directing any given passage of the narrative." (p. 162) Argumentative closure here assumes a second function that Gleckner attributed to thematic continuity: it becomes the form and motive energy of each poem. In the last citation, as in some of the earlier, Cooke suggests that argument precedes and directs poems.

The flaws in Cooke's reasoning are particular, and do not bias his

entire project; by returning always to the synchronic, by avoiding simple statements of cause, he keeps his argument intact. He may be contrasted in this to George M. Ridenour, who begins with a similar goal but has less success in the long run. In The Style of "Don Juan", Ridenour reads that poem in light of enduring features of Byron's poetry, so his approach is essentially synchronic. From a definition of "style" as both literary ("metaphor, tone, formal rhetoric" /p. xi/) and cognitive ("a characteristic way of meeting and shaping experience" /p. xi/), Ridenour forms a theory of writing in which certain literary devices are dramatizations of particular turns of mind. He is thus, in this book, of Cooke's opinion that philosophical and poetic closure are parallel and mutually indicative, and of Marshall's that certain experiences demand dramatization. What makes Don Juan "more than the rehearsal of a series of paradoxes . . . is a developing dramatic action (in which, of course, the paradoxes participate)." (p. x) The paradoxical world Byron saw, he dramatized in paradoxical poetry, and paradox--with most of its literary meaning still operative--is reapplied as a historical or "underlying principle of Byron's universe. . . . The poet's seemingly most irrelevant aside or digression is likely to turn out on examination to be another way of dramatizing his central paradox." (p. ix)

As for Cooke, the organizational goals of poetry for Ridenour are rhetoric and argument. The metaphor of styles that Ridenour finds Byron using in the Dedication to Don Juan (pp. 7-10) is expanded to a "formal, organizing device" in both Childe Harold and Don Juan (p. 153) The Dedication as a whole is analyzed "in terms of the poet's evident awareness of the traditional concepts of genre and stylistic level." (p. 88) Childe Harold is a "characteristically Romantic attempt at making a statement." (p. 153) This conception of poetry as a kind of philosophical exposition

has two corollaries in Ridenour: that Byron was "aware" of the prevailing currents of his argument (pp. 143 and 155), and that he was bound to it. Ridenour says of the Promethean theme--that art is both the result and the expiation of some original "crime"--that "This circular argument constitutes . . . a central Byronic paradox; the only means of coping with the fact of fall are themselves inextricably involved in the peril of fall." (p. 88) The paradoxes do more that participate in the unfolding dramatic action; they limit and direct it. The "only means of coping"--writing poetry--is under similar restriction in Don Juan: "Byron's moral forbids a hero who is an active seducer." (p. 69)

Thus the synchronic study of Byron's canon, when it is elevated from one analytic among others into a condition of meaning, must also take as a final position the inevitability of any particular act of writing. Ridenour's theory, in the end, simply refuses to make distinctions. By the end of Don Juan "the style of Byron's 'pedestrian Muses' has become a world view and a way of life." (p. 152) Byron's tone in treating loss in Don Juan "had been set many years before in a poem called 'To Romance,' which appeared in Hours of Idleness in 1807." (p. 92) This kind of collapse represents an extreme of Ridenour's argument and suffers out of context, but it is a logical extension of his theory of writing: that linguistic acts are guided by an overall, persisting attitude, which, as we will develop these terms, constitutes Byron's soul, and of which poetry is the supreme and very direct expression. Proving the inevitability of Byron's canon may at first be the means of endowing him with a mental life; but it becomes the self-justifying process of creating new metaphors to describe the inevitability.

We should be unwilling, therefore, to reason inward from theme to rhetorical necessity, or to believe that a closed rhetorical unit (either

a poem or a structure within a poem) indicates a self-sustaining system. Nor, equally, can we rely on canonical generalizations to explain any particular development in Byron's poetry; there is no reason to believe that certain poems must be written in order to get to other poems. Sometimes the most insightful critics needlessly undermine their own positions by trying to restore Byron's freedom to him in a domain--writing--in which freedom and necessity are not very sharply defined, and in which the facts of continuity are not evidence that the writer's options were limited. In other words, there is the danger, perhaps inherent in critical reconstruction, of stopping a system because it's stopped on the page.

We can trace the problems of our four exemplary critics to a split, especially clear in the theory of Cooke, between philosophy and language; less in Cooke than in the others, this initial dichotomy multiplies into a series of problematical, yet very resiliant, binary sets: intention and execution, idea and form, sentiment and rhetoric. Even so, the crucial theoretical sabotage these critics, and others, perform on themselves is not a result of their attempt to systematize or reorganize the texts of poetry into newly discovered patterns. They occur rather when such systems are made to describe authors, or made the basis of a general understanding of an author; for then the historicity of the text mistakenly fixes and factualizes the consciousness of the author. It is perhaps the central internal contradiction of the New Critical major author study--the canonical study--that in the attempt to elevate, valorize, and validate the achievements in signification of particular authors, they rather, in truth, make those accomplishments seem mean or unimportant, and make the authors themselves seem slightly dim-witted. At best, I think, the methods of the New Criticism are able to suggest to us what we were probably already aware of, that authors sometimes respond in their writing to the various demands

of argument, logic, reason, deliberate choice--and to the demands of consistency. But at worst--and this is not rare--all the New Critical approach can be said to prove is that a certain fixed and minimal model of a person--a kind of fictional homunculus--may be evoked from the surface patterns of canonical analysis.

iii. An Approach to Style

What we can propose as an alternative to this minimalist view of the msjor author is two-fold. First, we may generally rededicate ourselves to Miller's ideal of "recreating . . . the consciousness inscribed in the texts studied" and William H. Marshall's goal of giving "some conscious explanation of what goes on in the work itself (presumably, then, reflecting what has gone on in the mind of the writer)." These goals seem inherently desireable and self-justifying; if accomplished, they could lead to a number of valuable conclusions on the writer in question, on writing in general, on history, on reading, and so forth. But the juxtaposition of Miller and Marshall in this context suggests just how divergent may be the actual critical operations which conduct to that end.

And so, as a second and more concrete alternative to the old Byron criticism, I will propose a cautious and tentative application of some newer models of the processes of composing to a broad selection of Byron's poems. I will try to test both Byron and the new models of writing against each other, to find where Byron's poetry can be explained by deconstructive methods more adequately than before, to consider whether the story of Byron that emerges from the criticism is fuller, more intuitively accurate, more detailed, more recognizeable. And it ought in no way limit the value of such a study to steer a course away from broad psychological generalizations, to travel from poem to poem in smaller steps. I will not take as my goal the recreation of Byron, or the restoration to Byron of his freedom.

I will assume (in part in order to test the assumption) that Byron wrote the poems and that he was free to do so, or not. To follow the consequences of that assumption more rigorously, I will try at all times to find, not the philosophy in the poetry, nor the ideas contained within it, nor the beliefs which might be said to underlie it; but, to the degree I am able (and I am under a variety of paradigmatic restrictions in this project), I will rather read the poetry as philosophy, in the fundamental sense suggested by de Man; to read the turns and transitions in the rhetoric as themselves the traces of ideas; and to read the discourse throughout as the discovery of belief and non-belief. In general, then (and to give a name to what I do here), I will attempt a philosophical approach to style.

What may be said of such an approach? What strictures ought we put on the description of style in philosophical terms?

First, we may only offer such descriptions in a temporary and limited fashion, remaining ready to abandon them with regard only to the accuracy of appropriateness of each term--without regard, that is, for whether a discourse is rendered consistent by the approach. Second, generalized or summary descriptions of style are on the whole invalid; it may be correct or meaningful to say that the style of a certain poem or period is, for instance, "graceful" or "plain," but such summaries cannot explain any particular feature of discourse. They may be insightful; but they are more often that not a way of avoiding the hard, occasionally insoluble, problems of explaining the nature of discursive strategies. Third, for this reason we should distrust the analogical use of terms; we ought not to try to describe what the verse is like; but to describe more concretely how it functions, how its elements interact to become discourse.

We should aim at deploying our descriptions in a complex and ystematic way (even when the verse we so describe is not systematic). The value

of philosophical terms will not be that they can replace thetorical terms, but that they can restore to rhetoric its qualities of motion and process. For, we will say finally, we can name some turn in the discourse, some device or mode of expression by mentalistic or evaluative terms if we take a broadly functional approach to such entities within the discourse; if we consider, for instance, not only the ostensive content of poems and the terms that describe them (e.g., not only that parts of Childe Harold may be said to outline a philosophy of nature, or that Don Juan embraces a theory of writing); but to remember, in addition, that linguistic constructions interact within a discourse; that they function in regard to each other, impelling and limiting each other within the context of rules and materials encountered by the writer at each moment. Such considerations are, I think, implicit in the view of writing as an intentional act.

Thus we ought to focus narrowly, at least to begin--on sentences, terminal units, and transitions between units. It is at this level (or length or period) that language is most active, and here that the particular functions of language may most properly be termed spiritual, naturalistic, existential, or analytical; and likewise here, to some degree, that emotional terms are most appropriate, that linguistic constructions may seem angry, fearful, joyous, devoted, or anxious. It is in this area of discourse (which we will associate generally with the activity of the writer in generating the text) that language may appear to the writer as an obstacle, resistant and other than his own; here, then, I would hazard, that the activity of the individual in the fixing and arranging of writing is most like an individual cognition of the world.

What I attempt on the whole may be viewed as a small contribution to the larger critical trend toward the reconciliation of the academic enterprises of Linguistics and Philosophy. More obvious within my work, and perhaps

more within my grasp, is the attempt to achieve a methodological advance over some recent Byron criticism--at least to seal the breach between intention and execution, for that is the central antinomy. Or rather, to be precise, I do not want merely to bind intention and execution, or to speak of both at once, or to relate them; I wish instead to discard the concepts altogether, to see that they are not descriptive of the acts of composing--they are not even broadly descriptive of reading, but describe rather a set of notions that enter our reasoning during one particular sort of interpretation.

What is to be hoped from such an approach is a fuller and more dynamic conception of Byron's work--and not just of his poems but of his work in writing them. We may be able to catch Byron in the midst of his thinking. Such an approach risks much. Most obviously, it risks verifiability. But it is no longer certain, given the deconstructionist critique of literary institutions, that literary criticism was ever verifiable or empirical, on the order of algebra. We may, however, choose to regard it as a strength that we cannot "escape" from the conditions that beset all writers; it may put us that much closer to Byron to begin with. It may be true then--at least we can test it--that the writer remains crucially alive in his "inscription"; and that Byron, for one, can be discovered, not in the larger units of his writing, not in canonical patterns, but in the smaller and more pointed drama of particular syntactic and rhetorical activity.

Notes

[1] Richard Rorty, The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 3.

[2] Cited in The Chronicle of Higher Education, XXIII, 15, (Dec. 9, 1981), p. 26.

[3] Stanley Fish, "What Is Stylistics and Why Are They Saying Such Terrible Things About It?" in Boundary 2, VII, 1, (Fall, 1979), p. 129-45; see p. 139.

[4] Gilbert Ryle, "Systematically Misleading Expressions," in Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, XXXII (1931-32), pp. 139-170.

[5] Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), Chapters One and Two.

[6] Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), Part I, Chapter Two, "Linguistics and Grammatology." Kuhn's book is throughout largely a refutation of the positions taken on science and method by Karl Popper in Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

[7] Thomas R. Frosch, review of Thomas Weiskel's The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) in Studies in Romanticism, 16 (Winter, 1977), pp. 121-128; see p. 121.

[8] Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" in The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato,

(Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), pp. 247-64.

[9] J. Hillis Miller, Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. vii-viii.

[10] J. Hillis Miller, "The Critic as Host," in Deconstruction and Criticism (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), pp. 217-253; see p. 22.

[11] Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in Interpretation: Theory and Practice, ed. C. S. Singleton (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), p. 197.

[12] Geoffrey Hartman, Deconstruction and Criticism, Preface, p. ix.

[13] Hartman, Deconstruction, pp. vii-viii.

[14] Derrida, Grammatology, p. 18.

[15] Geoffrey Hartman, Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

[16] Geoffrey Hartman, Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964).

[17] William H. Pritchard, "The Hermeneutical Mafia, or After Strange Gods at Yale," Hudson Review, 28 (Winter, 1975-76), pp. 601-610.

[18] Jean-Paul Sartre, What Is Literature?, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); see especially pp. 14-15, 36.

[19] T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in Selected Essays (London: Faber and Faber, 1961). p. 17.

[20] The term "cognitive atheism" originally applies to Heidegger and Gadamer in Hirsch's The Aims of Interpretation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), Chapter One; throughout the work the term generalizes to cover most of Heidegger's intellectual descendants.

[21] Denis Donoghue, "Deconstructing Deconstruction," review of Deconstruction and Criticism in The New York Review of Books, June 12, 1980, p. 37.

[22] William H. Marshall, The Structure of Byron's Major Poems (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962).

[23] Robert F. Gleckner, Byron and the Ruins of Paradise (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967).

[24] Michael G. Cooke, The Blind Man Traces the Circle: On the Patterns and Philosophy of Byron's Poetry (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

[25] George M. Ridenour, The Style of "Don Juan" (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960).

Chapter One

Byronic Writing

We are led, then, not toward Byron the thinker (the holder of ideas) nor toward Byron the poet, as we would commonly use that phrase, but toward Byronic writing, and the study of its distinctive gestures. But we can begin where Byron the thinker left off, with the problem of the presentation of the self in writing, what he called during the period of the English Cantos "mobility"; and which is, in Byron's description, specifically not the question of what one does (writes, or writes about), but rather of how one is to regard the relation between the product of the immediate moment, and the process, in its passing: of what sort is consciousness, that it leaves so unmistakeable a trace upon the world, and yet can apparently exist without qualities of its own--that it has a past without any independent present?

> 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.[1]

The product of consciousness is memory, at least; and memory is the proof of the individual against the evidence of the present, in which an unmediated awareness of self is impossible. We are not only justified in finding the person in the product, initially it is the only access. In the stanza following the description of Lady Adeline's "mobility":

> This makes your actors, artists, and romancers,
> Heroes sometimes, though seldom--sages never:
> But speakers, bards, diplomatists, and dancers,
> Little that's great, but much of what is clever;

> Most orators, but very few financiers . . .
> (Don Juan, Canto XVI, st. 98)

The emphasis here on the spoken word--actors, diplomatists, orators, bards but not sages--may be taken equally as a reduction of rhetoric to a complex mnemonic or an elevation of memory to a mode of expression. In either case, the general exclusion of heroes and financiers makes it clear that an absorption in the present is not alone enough for mobility. What is required is the adaptation of memory "at the same time"--something like an instant recall of the present. The concept of cognitive coherence is not done away with entirely, but it is pushed back a few seconds into the past.

Despite the flavor of a traditional Lockean maladjustment in the definition, a number of critics have been tempted to employ it as an analytical premise concerning imagination. Harold Bloom and W. Paul Elledge have sensed the importance of Byron's term (and its counterpart in Don Juan, "improvisation") and recommended its extension to features of certain other poems as well.[2] But it is instantly questionable to explain a rhetoric by means of an unexplicated rhetorical figure, especially a metaphor which masquerades as an abstraction, and is therefore already twice removed from the sought-for moment of creation. Thus the list of possessors of the unhappy attribute comes as close as possible to, without finally mentioning, poets: any obviously particular observation would deflate the concept. If it claimed to explain its own source, it would become merely tautological: mobile effects proceed from mobility.

For this reason, too, any formalized application of the metaphor reduces its scope without making it more specific. "Mobility" is not in itself a heuristic or a critical concept; even the apparently more palpable "improvisation" is not a discovery procedure (i.e., not part of the reading experience), but still a description of an experience of writing. Therefore,

we are faced not with a distinction between the subject-consciousness and the objective world--not a thing of art--but rather between the subject-writer (the intentional consciousness, the will) and the conditions of that subjectivity, as captured (or if captured) in that writing; and in this sense, it is "a thing of temperment." Moreover, mobility in expression can only be associated with a certain fixity or inevitability of language. It is the unbound language that determines the self; plurality of meaning makes the language seem older and wiser than the writer. Certainly improvisation on the part of actors, artists, etc., implies a performance of conventions rather than an unconventional performance.

To make of mobility a principle of organization (or a principle of motivation, as Byron's goal or purpose) is to push the metaphor well out of its possible domain; as critical postulation, it is a return to the naive position that the self is separable from writing--specifically, that the subject-consciousness has an idea of form (apart from any individual act of writing) which is the source of the poem. The trap in this assumption is that we may only find, in a perfectly circular fashion (as Bloom and Ridenour[3]), that Byron's poetry is successful according to the criteria that Byron established; and to so conclude would be to redouble the stress on the vehicle of the metaphor (the bordered, physical body) and effectively abandon the tenor (for our purposes, the act of writing), or to collapse the latter into the former, to deny or ignore the distinction. That most treatments of mobility are limited to poems with "strong" narrators is some evidence that critics do, in fact, identify the psychological ego (or empirical self) of the writer with the ego-constructs of narration: in practice, that poetry involving a narrator is, on account of some reflexion or irony, qualitatively different from other kinds of verse. But while there is no doubt that narration can be a crucial semantic feature

of poetry, that we can distinguish among poems on this basis has never been shown.

It is rather the case that questions of the nature of the narrator infiltrate discussions of all of Byron's poetry; since a purely detached or dramatic narration is inconceivable, the narrator can only be kept out by some exertion. But neither the concept of the narrator nor of mobility, nor the two in some combination, is of much help in isolating units or systems of meaning, or in taking the correlative step in poetics of judging the openness or closure of a work. For we could not define the components of any closure if we were bound to understand the writer before the writing; we could never surpass the narrator in our attempt to reconstruct sense into the words. At best, theorists of writing have been able to say that style "transforms" the material, the object--gives it a perspective.[4] And by a misinterpretation of this truism, the search for style has often become coextensive with the identification of the narrator.

Epitaph on John Adams, of Southwell,
A Carrier Who Died of Drunkenness.

John Adams lies here, of the parish of Southwell,
A Carrier who carried his can to his mouth well:
He carried so much, and he carried so fast,
He could carry no more--so was carried at last;
For, the liquor he drank, being too much for one,
He could not carry off,--so he's now carri-on.

(September, 1807)

Word play may be regarded as a reflexive device. Here, the italicized repetition serves to locate the narrator for us: the narrator is the arranger of the repetition, and of the pun at the end. Given this initial likeness, we can find a number of other affinities to Don Juan: the sense of forward motion attained in pursuing a genre (the epitaph, here) into a caricature of itself; an interest in the sacrificial archetype reflected in the change of the object of "carry" from water to liquor; a stanzaic structure built of pairs of lines following an inverted syllogism, from

conclusion to minor to major premise. To the degree that a "strong" narration always overlays a poem with a potential irony, "Epitaph" teeters on an edge. On the one hand, it has a number of the features of the formally closed poem, fully stopped in rhyme, returning in the last line to the proximate object. On the other hand, what is usually called the tone of the poem is discordant; where the genre seeks to lay to rest, both rhythm and rhyme are agitative. So in reading, it would follow, we would be drawn in two directions: toward the tragedy of Adams, the resolved object of the poem, and toward the word play, the expression or style--the unresolved cynicism of the narrator. The tension between these two axes--the paradox of divided attention--has been said to constitute Byron's style; it is a style which trivializes art, and which opens itself to a purely pathological interpretation.[5]

But this is not an entirely accurate description of how the poem reads: if there are two, there must be a third coordinate axis, or better, a wave--an interrupted wave, which plots the decay of sense in the word "carry" as the word is reified (or made natural) through its repetition. This decay is an area of the poem without a narrator; the process of loss of meaning requires something less-than-style, an abstention of the narrator. A phenomenological reduction is the least possible breach of silence. To the degree that repetition is a tactic, there is no objection to calling this "control"; but it is a tactic which drawws attention to the superflousness of the plot, and the contingency of the narrator.

The third wave returns us to the present, and to the possibility of silence, because it resists an accumulation of meaning, refuses to have a past, and rejects an assimilation into the rest of the poem. The third wave returns us to the time-frame of speech (though not necessarily to any of its concrete aspects, such as sound): so that by its third appearance,

the iteration of "carry" momentarily obliterates the rest of the poem. The word assumes at these times a hegemony over the narrative of Adams and the word play; the latter are realigned, made the object of this third law of the poem. They must wait for it to disappear. And though the third wave is not without relevance to the other components, it is no defineable semantic content that causes the gravitation of plot and style into the cycle of repetition. Neither can it be precisely described as irony; the irony of the poem winks out along with the plot, before the ignorance of "carry." It is rather the absence of irony, and of several other features associated with narrators. It is a function of language: an exhaustion of possibilities which we must say was allowed to happen. It is a form of language--it is even a coded and deliberate convention--yet it operates such that we must say it was allowed to happen, and was not achieved.

The reappearance of localized meanings in the last line, then, is first of all an intervention in this process, and a concept of the narrator cannot be divided from the poem's reaction away from this characteristic of words to lose their meaning. We may claim, in a much broader way, that the narrator reasserts his presence; but this is not less metaphorical than saying that the narrator has died and been reborn. To reassert presence is to emerge from absence; and this may violate our common-sense notions of how poems get written. It would be more accurate to call it a rephrasing of the narrator--a new system drawn from earlier terms. But neither does this give the writer any special priority in the workings of the poem. The repetition has been the centerpiece, and it remains so--emphasized, rather than displaced, by the final interventions. We are directed, in the last line, to an elaboration of the narrator based on a phenomenon which has been inimical to the narrator. In any conception, that narrator can only be understood as a reaction or a series of reactions

to the frustrating immobility of language.

It is interesting that the assertion of significance comes at the moment of Adams' doom. If the third wave suggests the natural cycle of decay, the last line contradicts this flow, in two ways: it does present a stylistic innovation, however minimal; and by reversing the catastrophe to read "--off . . . --on," it intervenes in the tragedy linguistically. As we would describe both theme and verbal strategy, the last line separates itself from the rest of the poem. We are not thereby "released" from irony, but irony becomes of the same order as the other arrangements of the poem: not a principle of compositional control, nor in itself a special light on meaning, but a light reflected from the presence of a primordial word. To say of the "Epitaph" that subjectivity of the recognizeable sort appears only in the last line is really a way of saying that one is not sure how this poem could have been subjective; we can only tentatively and conditionally decide what principles guided its formation. But we have, at all events, a new domain to consider, which we may call, first: the domain of the operation of language itself--a reliance on language in a reduced or primitive state; and second, a field of signification premised on mediation of the objects of poetry: the excessive susceptibility to immediate impressions, in the "Epitaph," is certainly not a sensitivity to Adams; it is manifested rather in its eccentric subservience to language, and its trick of self-expression at the end.

This narrator, then, may be regarded as a post facto response to language and its conventions of usage; the narrator is that which, we will say, prevents language from becoming nature. And while not all poems react so explicitly to intrinsic linguistic conditions, we can observe the same dependency, the same movement, even in the traditionally "well-made" poem.

She Walks in Beauty

I

She walks in beauty, like the night
  Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
  Meet in her aspect and her eyes:
Thus mellowed to that tender light
  Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

II

One shade the more, one ray the less,
  Had half impair'd the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress,
  Or softly lightens o'er her face;
Where thoughts serenely sweet express
  How pure, how dear, their dwelling-place.

III

And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,
  So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
The smiles that win, the tints that glow
  But tell of days in goodness spent,
A mind at peace with all below,
  A heart whose love is innocent!

Like many other structurally rigorous lyrics of the period, "She Walks" is centrally an exploration of resolution: the poem fixes a moment in an image and then reacts to it, as Wordsworth and his leech-gatherer. But in Byron's version, resolution leads not to independence, but directly to analysis; resolution causes distinctions.

Each stanza comprises a single sentence, and each sentence is broken into intricate but clear pairs. Stanza I portrays the moment of resolution, and its three-part structure is the most grammatically formal: it moves from the inextricably metaphorical object of ll. 1 and 2; to the extrication in the second clause, in which the image is reconceived as a coincidence of opposites (dark/bright); and into the third pair, in which the metaphor of light from ll. 3 and 4 is elaborated and pursued, and found again to resolve, this time into a single, "mellowed" quality of light. The allusion

to divine decree in the last line elevates the moment, or the sentence, into natural law (a turn which was made possible by the second clause, which, despite its conjunctive appearance, did not add to the image, but restated it). Significantly, it is the "best of dark and bright" which is apotheosized here, and not "She." But the sentence closes formally in fitting the "gaudy day" of l. 6 to the "beauty, like the night" of l. 1.

Stanza II is composed of only two terminal units. The first--ll. 7-10--reintroduces opposition by locating the beauty of the light in a poise or suspension; it is a development of ll. 6 and 7, which had broadened the metaphor of light to encompass the day, and the external world of diurnal time. The delicacy of the image is now bound to a rationalist language, affecting the mathematical: "One shade the more, one ray the less,/Had half impair'd the nameless grace . . ."--a grace which is partly bestowed, and stipulated, by the material universe. By a similar association, the "mellowed light" of St. I implies a perceiver, and begins what would be in other Romantic lyrics a recoil into the self. And, in fact, all the imagery of St. II draws away from the initial project of ll. 1-2, and instead elaborates the new object of ll. 5-6. The temporal fragility, the insistence on variations of dark/bright, the use of a calculus--all suggest the cognitive crisis we saw in the "Epitaph": the post-verbal crisis, in which it appears that the profoundest intuitions are grounded in secondary sense characteristics, ideas; and that therefore the desireable experience is already one's own creation.

Yet even in the midst of these highly ambivalent images, the poem finds and follows a new track. The word "face" is a turning point, and the most explicitly thematic transition among the three stanzas. The light of nature falls on her for a moment, and becomes as if innate (an "aspect," as in l. 4). The light moves through the woman's features, as if to a depth;

the grace "waves in every raven tress,/Or softly lightens o'er her face." The "Or," a surprising disjunction, adds to the suggestion that the energy of the image is lambent, in motion. And both verbs in this pair return to the present tense, as in the contemplation of the ideal in ll. 1-2 ("walks" and "meet"). So the resolution is recovered, though now poised in a verbal construction rather than an astronomical one. This new tack is pursued, in the second clause of St. II, and it turns the poem away from the theme of impairment altogether. In ll. 11-12, the light, again as if active on the woman, reveals meanings across her face: "Where thoughts serenely sweet express/How pure, how dear, their dwelling place." The eyes observed in l. 4 take on an independent existence, both looked at and looking: they are windows to the soul, in the convention, but more important, windows to the metaphorical "room of the mind"--pure and dear for this moment because illuminated by a light from without. Thus part of the desired experience, the turning point and redefined object of the poem, is the woman's experience, her joy in the moment.

Although Stanza III announces itself as an indicative conjunction, it is still governed by the subjunctuve "Had half impair'd" of St. II; as indirect discourse, the verb "But tell" is also in this mood. But the stanza as a whole is a more particular and analytical restatement of ll. 11-12 (as 7-10 were a restatement of ll. 5-6), and follows the same pattern. Having made the disjunctive leap from "aspect" to "dwelling-place" of the thoughts, the writer concludes by taking up and replaying at length the metaphor of interior/exterior implicit in l. 12. Lines 13-15 move across the woman's surface again: "And on that cheek, and o'er that brow . . . the tints that glow"; lines 16-18 shift to metaphors of depth and interiority, and come by that route to mark out what has been expressed: "A mind at peace with all below/A heart whose love is innocent!" Stanza III is the third

major part of the poem primarily because it comprises the third such elaboration of a former term, and the third redirection. A new thematic orientation is suggested by the readmission of color ("tints"), will ("smiles that win"), and opposition ("calm/eloquent," "mind/heart"). A new sentence structure strings ten dependent phrases into a single, unstopped unit. Stanza III is an ongoing production of comments, comparisons, and qualifications--a reaction, perhaps, to the still "nameless" and inarticulable grace of 1. 8. That grace, fixed in natural time, has become the occasion for a story of time, a tale of "days in goodness spent." Inspired by his own description, and as expression is made viable by the metaphor in 11. 11-12, the writer creates a subjunctive story of days, and makes it his own, appropriates it. It is already his own; he is recovering his own statements.

"She Walks In Beauty" can generate rough outlines for two concepts crucial to the Byronic poetic: intersubjectivity (crucial because it is the promised reward of language) and innocence (which is the contrary tendency: innocence is meaning without motive, or simply silence).

Intersubjectivity is indeed a desire, even an ideal, of sorts, in the movement of Byron's poems, and its importance has been recognized by many analysts; intersubjectivity is the verification of the subject. It is not, however, as some have thought, a state or frame of mind, and it cannot be simply or directly achieved. In "She Walks," it requires several stages, and a gradual reworking of grammatical and thematic structures; it is won through to. The other appears in St. I and II as a removed object, articulable as image, but--"nameless"--not as narrative. In St. III, especially in the last two lines, he can begin a discourse on the woman's joy only because he has reasoned his way to a conception of his own. In psychoanalytic terms, intersubjectivity might be called a creative projection, in which

some posited thought is seen or made to be possible in the subject through a particular linguistic construction. The light of grace is the light of the narrator's language. The striving toward another, then, is coextensive in "She Walks" with the struggle to elevate the sense of self to the clarified level of the conceptions (this, often called Byron's "idealism"), and to bring the mind into correspondence with the potential of the language of the poem; and intersubjectivity, like rhythm, rhyme, and syntactic complexity, is an abstract creation, sustained moment by moment.

Innocence is closure, the end or (as here) the last word of a sequence: it puts an stop to the flow of words by asserting an internal consistency. It is "willful," in Michael G. Cooke's terminology[6]; it presents itself as a decision which has been reached. Innocence is success in the present moment. First, it is success in finding the present; that a certain surprise accompanies "innocent" is noted in "She Walks" by the exclamation point which follows it. Second, it is success in extending the present through the length of a formal unit. There is a danger in "She Walks" that the narrator will lag behind the multiple signification of the imagery. But by surpassing the unity of the object with the rational analysis into balance and poise between opposites, the third stanza sustains an objective account of beauty which yet depends on the subject-as-writer. The ideal is preserved as an activity: it is drawn out through time, drawn out of imagery, and made into narrative. For this reason, the destructive force of premature closure, the force that dislocates "Ode to a Nightingale," can be eluded. Where Keats is stopped by the presence of "forlorn," Byron takes up the central syntheses, "aspect," "face," "dwelling-place," and pursues them into new meanings. These draw the poem away from the original object; and the poem is nonetheless continually analytical. But it redeems that analysis by making it yield new matter for itself: it creates implications,

and then spells them out in detail. The poem establishes innocence, as it establishes intersubjectivity. It settles the self in perception, yet it makes of perception the liberation of thought, not the influx of the world.

Thus, at each moment that the post-linguistic perceptual unity (and the accompanying soplicism) is overtaken by language and its prelude of distinctions, then there is an experience of beauty, and a special light appears as if within the object--a light which is the writer's own, and which can be interpreted as the fulfillment of his own premonitory experience in writing. It is inherent in that moment, in opening the mind, to move toward expression, and further telling. Even the traditional resting point in St. III is "calm, yet eloquent," that is, already unfolding and explaining itself. The unknown present, the silent present, is filled with a critical noise.

With these two concepts, and working from the two poems considered, we may begin to derive a principle of the forward motion of writing, and a more sophisticated notion of what "mobility" might mean in regard to literary style. We have found a tendency to let language have its way for a while, and then to react, but in correspondence, to the language which has gone before; the narrator appears as an incorporation of certain features of language, the transformation of linguistic conditions into stylistic variations. In "She Walks in Beauty," this interference is only a subtle reassociation with those innate features of language; the narrator watches the form of his epiphany, and tries to copy his own inspiration. In the "Epitaph to John Adams," the language has its way <u>as</u> the narrator identifies with it. In each case, the narrator my be said to engage in an alternation with the inner strengths of language; and in either case, the struggle is clearest when expressed as an argumentative sequence.

Oh! that the Desert were my dwelling-place,

With one fair Spirit for my minister,
That I might all forget the human race,
And, hating no one, love but only her!
Ye elements!--in whose ennobling stir
I feel myself exalted--Can ye not
Accord me such a being? Do I err
In deeming such inhabit many a spot?
Though with them to converse can rarely be our lot.

Stanza 177 of Canto IV of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage gains a good deal of its strength from being a long, attenuated wish; and more specifically, from building and complicating that wish by a series of subjunctives ("Oh! that the Desert . . .," "Can ye not . . .," "Do I err . . ."). We may say then that the wish is grammatically fragile, subject to destruction, like the poise in "She Walks"; its unfixed, double verbs to not allow a direct fulfillment or response. No single answer could be a comprehensive answer.

Within this structure, the resolution sought for between the individual personality and the "stir" of the elements is equally tentative ("Can ye not" and "Do I err" are the wrong questions to ask in this case--their doubt blocks their fulfillment). Both components of this stanza strain toward the future: they are almost self supporting, in the manner of rhetorical questions, and so require extension. They must either be answered at length, or not at all. But rather than do either, the last line of Stanza 177 effectively destroys the intention of the preceding, by letting go of them. The last question is broken off prematurely, and the last qualifying clause is allowed to stand as the only declaration of the stanza. The complexity of the wish is merely left behind.

Stanza 178 begins again, with striking new forms of expression, which have the perspicuous and confident quality of existential statements:

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society, where none intrudes,
By the deep Sea, and music in its roar:

I love not Man the less, but Nature more . . .

The thrice-repeated evocation reacts further from the attenuated wish of St. 177, and yet is in answer to it. The fulfillment of the wish and the answer to the question "Do I err/In deeming such inhabit many a spot?" is that all the range of human experiences may be asserted. And in so de-specifying the spirits of place, this stanza abandons the individual/elements, question/answer format of its progress, and assumes a more general and judgmental attitude in regard to pleasure, rapture, and society.

Similarly, the rejection of the human race and love of the one Spirit is transformed into "not Man the less, but Nature more"; the elements are not inhabited by spirits, or rather, no longer is the attempt made to recreate human distinction by investing Nature with spirits. Where before the writer sought a reflection of human form in Nature (or "among" Nature), now the presence of the writer in the broad assertions is the humanizing force; the part of Nature in these "interviews" is not the hoped-for articulate conversation, but a musical roar. Hence a new opposition is derived, between the articulate human and the indistinct natural.

But the locution does not break at the fifth line; rather, lines 5-9 move ahead again as qualification and explanation of lines 1-4:

> I love not Man the less, but Nature more,
> From these our interviews, in which I steal
> From all I may be, or have been before,
> To mingle with the Universe, and feel
> What I can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal.
>
> (CHP, St. 178)

"I love not Man the less, but Nature more" is not an absolute evaluation, but a conditional, one judgment in the context of others (the first four lines of the stanza), and in regard to certain experiences, the "interviews," which are hard to render into human terms again. The escape from the self is away from the future and the past; the implication is that the self dissolves, or at least "mingles" a bit, when detached from the weight of

temporal conditions (the "may be" and "have been"). The last to drop away is expression itself, for writing does not exist in the immediate present; the predications in the last line cancel each other out. The lesson of Nature is that the subject stay silent. And yet, in the very moment of feeling what he "can ne'er express," he passes that Romantic closure point and leaps ahead into what he "cannot all conceal," which is a return to the high style, a new theme, and more poetry reclaiming more of the moment:

> Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean--roll!
> Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;
> Man marks the earth with ruin--his control
> Stops with the shore . . .
>
> (CHP IV, St. 179)

We will see this sequence again, so it is worth summarizing: the long, complex subjunctive of St. 177 does not admit of a direct response; and the first five lines of St. 178 do abandon it--in fact, they react away from it by adopting a structure in no way similar to it. But though its content is obscured, the form of the question remains in St. 177, and St. 178 takes the form of an answer--actually, four very definite answers, though all, perhaps, to the wrong question. The first part of St. 178 is an answer to St. 177, and the second an elaboration of the answer. But as a single, continuous unit, the stanza creates a blind alley: it runs out of things to say, and runs down to an argument for silence. Stanza 179 solves the problem encountered in 178, but again, not by response, but by removing itself. We could propose another summary: as syntactic structures are pursued they grow too complex to be sustained, and hinder the forward movement of the verse. But then a kind of structural metaphor is enacted, in which some isolable element of the outmoded grammatical construction generates a response at the level of grammatical form. Stanza 178 responds to the questions of 177; it does not answer them, but it answers. "I love not man the less, but nature more" marks a return to analysis from three

general syntheses. Stanza 179 is selective in its understanding of the lesson of Stanza 178.. So the poem does not stop altogether because while any one sequence may run out in this way, a new one has already begun, and can be followed some distance further.

A remark sometimes attributed to Kant has it that "laughter results from the transformation of strained expectation into nothing," and it would be hard to find a phrase that so aptly described this controlled collapse of one statement into another that we find so often in Byron. Note, in the following passage from Manfred (another example of the sequence outlined above), how the strain of opposition is transformed into assertion by negation.

> Ay,
> Thou winged and cloud-cleaving minister,
> (An eagle passes.)
> Whose happy flight is highest into heaven,
> Well may'st thou swoop so near me--I should be
> Thy prey, and gorge thine eaglets; thou art gone
> Where the eye cannot follow thee; but thine
> Yet pierces downward, onward, or above,
> With a pervading vision.--Beautiful!
> How beautiful is all this visible world!
> How glorious in its action and its self!
> But we, who name ourselves its sovereigns, we
> Half dust, half deity, alike unfit
> To sink or soar, with our mix'd 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.
>
> (Manfred, Iii, 11. 29-47)

Manfred has here conjured a crisis for himself, a specifically perceptual crisis at first which takes on and grows into a verbal crisis; within the general movement of the passage are several smaller crises and transitions of the same order. From the visual intimation of the hierarchy of the cosmos, Manfred is led to consider the esthetics of height and depth, and from this, the abstract concept of the beautiful. The dependence on

sight, however, begins to bend the argument: vision reminds Manfred of the limitations of perspective, and introduces the split between dust and deity, degradation and pride, etc. The middle position of humans in the hierarchy (figured, in this scene, by Manfred's position on the mountain) unfits us for any unmixed existence, and the passage winds down to the only possible characterization of consciousness under such conditions: an indirect definition, in terms of the unknown, the negations of 11. 46-47 representing the greatly reduced state of a merely visual imagination.

Manfred typically reaches this point in his thinking, but he never stays there. And although the object of the meditation changes at this point, the discourse on consciousness continues smoothly:

> Hark! the note,
> (The Shepherd's pipe is in the distance heard.)
> The natural music of the mountain reed--
> For here the patriarchal days are not
> A pastoral fable--pipes in the liberal air,
> Mix's with the sweet bells of the sauntering herd;
> My soul would drink those echoes. Oh, that I were
> The viewless spirit of a lovely sound,
> A living voice, a breathing harmony,
> A bodiless enjoyment--born and dying
> with the blest tone which made me!
>
> (Iii., 11. 47-56)

Manfred solves the problem of vision by closing his eyes. In a similar strategy, he does not refute the argument of the previous lines, but builds away from them by reintroducing the premise of the past and memory, and thus the possibility of a "viewless spirit." As before, Manfred fixes briefly on the external world, (11. 47-52), finds his reflection ("sweet bells") and is returned to himself; that the self has not been appreciably weakened is clear from the initial "I" and final "me" of 11. 52-56. But as in the passage from Childe Harold examined earlier, this resolution gains some of its coherence from its expression as a wish; so it is a resolution in suspension, utterly dependent on the future.

The sequence described in this passage has thematic parallels in

Byron's tales and plays. The step into history is abrupt and anxious for Byron's characters because it entails an enclosure of the self, loss of entire self-direction, and the possibility, as in Marino Faliero, of history becoming the present. To take historical action is to take the step into tragedy and create an inevitable fate; the problem of history is the problem of action. When Byron's paradoxes are broken down, they become quite properly dialectical in form: the first term is always the signifier of an necessarily absent being (the "being more intense" that Byron's rhetoric strains toward); hence, from the first moment, a poem humanizes and redeems the object. But as Morse Peckham points out,[7] the result of this redemption is an instant relativism, and a perpetual fall. It is not just that what one writes is of the same truth value as whatever is, but that any poem requires continual writing. And this comprises the second term: the signified, in Byron's poetry, is some future signifier; Byron's conditionals are a promise to continue.

Unfrozen, then, the Byronic paradox becomes a process in which each historical action--including writing--is in anticipation of, and in fact in part derives from, some future critical act, much like (drawing from Derrida's discussion of Hegel[8]) the integrity of the preface of a book is derived from its anticipatory function. To write at all is to admit the possibility of writing everything. Writing has no internally necessary or logical end, and therefore only in pretense can transitions follow syntactic rules; blocks of print are not periodic as a sentence is. From this point of view, a completed whole (say, a stanza in Don Juan) is like redeemed Nature: it only further signifies, and is a monument to its own instability.

This anxiety appears in Byron as a proliferation of writing, a surrounding and interpenetrating of all his poetry with footnotes and appendices, songs, envois, epigraphs, dedications, and prefaces--all of which

are prefaces, in the sense established above, all striving for independence. Practically this is because the poem is never enough; poems are not transcendent objects (though the writing of poetry may be a transcendent activity in a number of ways[9]). A closed lyric is at worst an act of bad faith, and at best, as in "She Walks in Beauty," an occasion requiring something more to be said.

These are the conditions of Byron's skepticism. It is not reducible to a negation of "Everlasting No," as Peckham believes; it leans rather toward a plenum of knowledge and existence, but one which needs perpetual renewal. And its pattern is not fully described as a reflex from nature to the self (though it may appear so in a strictly typological study); as in the passage from Childe Harold above, the self is not the synthesis or the last term of a self-nature dialectic, but the movement of simultaneous capture and surpassion of that fixed point. Accordingly, the characteristic feature of Byron's poetry is always a departure from fixity, and a reorientation.

This impels a substantially altered reading of Byron from the usual. For the gesture that is thought by most critics to be self-annihilative is, when followed further (as in Manfred and Childe Harold), found to be a reconception of self-as-writing: thus is is an effacement of the world through the self, rather than a self-effacement.

And so, the question Byron asked--the choice his paradoxes requires--has no content, or rather, it has any number of possible contents, because it was present in each act of inscription: each terminal unit, we may say, questions itself, "Is this to pretend permanence?" "Must this not wait on something else?" Madness and chaos always hang on words, especially, because words do not maintain order, even among themselves, and yet pretend continuity at each moment. (We can remember, in this regard, the importance

of Byron's sanity; this was one of the major incarnations of his question in the nineteenth century, and survives today as the question of his conscious control.) Byron's poetry plays with continuity, and with some of the temporal qualities associated with speech: the sense of an ending is seldom so refined as it usually is in writing. Crudely put, each closure is itself suspenseful; the past fails to explain or support the present. The turn to sound in the examples above (and elsewhere in Byron: "Quiet to quick bosoms is a Hell," Manfred later says) is correlative to the return to the unknown present, the uncomplicated present of speech. The reflex into the self, if it is still possible to call it that, is a questioning gesture, not a dead-end. It is in that motion that consciousness is located; and it is that moment that propels the verse forward.

Time and identity, then, as in Wordsworth, continually strengthen and renew each other, but only at the moment identity passes into the past (hence the frequency with which Byron determines character by synecdoches and markers: he is always describing the self that is falling away); constant memory, like consistent perspective in Manfred, is part of the material trap. They stop time and establish spurious limitations. This critique of memory is one of the major revisions Byron made on Wordsworthian romanticism. The two poets indeed approach at times; but the "Something ever more about to be" of Wordsworth is Nature enabling the self; Byron's "What I can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal" is the self absenting itself from nature.

The differences are suggested by the use the two poets make of the "river of years" metaphor. In the "River Dudden" sequence, Wordsworth uses the figure of the river for a naturally created memory, withdrawing as part of its natural motion.

Hints for the Fancy

> On, loitering Muse--the swift stream chides us--on!
> Albeit his deep-worn channel doth immure
> Objects immense portrayed in miniature,
> Wild shapes for many a comparison!
> Niagaras, Alpine passes, and anon
> Abodes of Naiads, calm abysses pure,
> Bright liquid mansions, fashioned to endure
> When the broad oak drops, a leafless skeleton,
> And the solidities of mortal pride,
> Palace and tower, are crumbled into dust!--
> The Bard who walks with Duddon for his guide,
> Shall find such toys of fancy thickly set:
> Turn from the sight enamored Muse--we must;
> And, if thou canst, leave them without regret.

The narrator stands toward memory as toward time generally--outside, detached and distrustful. He is limited to a single perspective; this is why the banks can be deceptive, and why, to remedy the dulling effect of memory on the imagination, he turns from "the sight" and looks ahead along the river. The natural metaphor seems to commit the poem to natural conditions. The narrator rests to engage the fancy; walks on to exercise the will. Geoffrey Hartman has written that such turns in the "River Dudden" sequence are a way of preserving the world[10]: if the narrator admits too close an alliance to the river, then he dooms both himself and nature to the same enormous uncertainty. Wordsworth's way of avoiding a potential apocalypse was to root the essential self apart from the flow of time, from memory, and even from the natural source of imagination.

Now Byron:

A Fragment

> Could I remount the river of my years
> To the first fountain of our smiles and tears,
> I would not trace again the stream of hours
> Between their outworn banks of wither'd flowers,
> But bid it flow as now--until it glides
> Into the number of the nameless tides.
>
> (11. 1-6)

For Wordsworth the past is distracting because its "deep-worn channel" contains fanciful shapes; for Byron, the "outworn banks" contain the wither'd flowers of past smiles and tears. The similarity of concept is striking.

But where Wordsworth looks back at a past that is flowing away from him, for Byron the past is upstream, toward the "fountain." Wordsworth makes progress by refixing himself out of time, on the bank; Byron begins a process of imaginatively reconstructing himself into the river, into the flow of time itself.

> What is this Death?--a quiet of the heart?
> The whole of that of which we are a part?
> For life is but a vision--what I see
> Of all which lives alone is life to me,
> And being so--the absent are the dead,
> Who haunt us from tranquillity, and spread
> A dreary shroud around us, and invest
> With sad remembrances our hours of rest.
>
> (11. 7-14)

This initial stage portrays a very particular perception of natural energies: only what he sees is alive--he cannot infer beyond his vision into a wider life. But this meditative state of mind is not so much ego-centric as phenomenological. It is not mourning; not "the dead are absent" but "the absent are the dead." We do not know death directly, but only as absence.

These lines take the form of a philosophical exploration ("What is this Death?" etc.) which merges with, or is overtaken by, a second stage, in which the philosophical problems attending the concept of life after death are integrated into the argument.

> The absent are the dead--for they are cold,
> And ne'er can be what once we did behold;
> And they are changed, and cheerless,--or if yet
> The unforgotten do not all forget,
> Since thus divided--equal it must be
> If the deep barrier be of earth, or sea;
> It may be both--but one day end it must
> In the dark union of insensate dust.
>
> (11. 15-22)

He repeats "The absent are the dead." This time, though, as if hearing that such a statement must be skeptical even of itself, he reverses himself--"or if yet/The unforgotten do not all forget . . ."--and, still meditating on absolutes, finds a new limit of knowledge: "but one day

end it must/In the dark union of insensate dust." Before we knew, not death really, but only absence; now, imagining death on the evidence, we know only "dark union" and loss of sense. Of what goes on on the other side of the "deep barrier" we can know nothing. And yet, in the parenthetical if-clause (in which he begins to wonder if memory is not so strong as to persist beyond death) and carried one line over into the next verse paragraph, a third stage emerges and overtakes the second, and goes on to map out the unknowable territory.

> The under-earth inhabitants--are they
> But mingled millions decomposed to clay?
> The ashes of a thousand ages spread
> Wherever man has trodden or shall tread?
> Or do they in their silent cities dwell
> Each in his incommunicative cell?
> Or have they their own language, and a sense
> Of breathless being?--darken'd and intense
> As midnight in her solitude?--Oh Earth!
> Where are the past?--and wherefore had they birth?
> The dead are thy inheritors--and we
> But bubbles on thy surface . . .
>
> (11. 23-43)

When sense and light have gone, there might still remain some intensified self-awareness, and language; indeed, these lines suggest that language can go anywhere, even beyond the grave. The sudden apostrophe "Oh Earth!/ Where are the past?" asks and answers: the past is the Earth. But more important, the "past" is plural; it is the individual dead. They as individual inherit the earth, and thus their own mystery. Earth and water are treated as one (both are "deep barriers"), and the living as bubbles on the surface; the initial figure of the river is resumed. Time flows into the future, from the source to the ocean. The last lines of the poem work from that earlier imagery: when he can see himself as a bubble on the river, then he can imagine the dropping off point, and the controlling metaphor changes from surface to depth:

> But bubbles on thy surface; and the key
> Of thy profundity is in the grave,
> The ebon portal of thy peopled cave,
> Where I would walk in spirit, and behold
> Our elements resolved to things untold,
> And fathom hidden wonders, and explore
> The essence of great bosoms now no more.
>
> (11. 33-40)

The "key" to the mystery of the past is inexorably the future. And to let go of a memory is to be pulled in that direction. He will not remount his years away from the present, nor will he, like Wordsworth, stay with us while he turns away from the past. He stops struggling against the current (in the apostrophe to Earth) and lets himself be swept by us, out of the present, and out of our sight; we are left behind now, and he is participating in a realm we can know only as "untold" and "no more."

Now we can perceive in this poem a kind of "latent structure"--not quite an allegory, but a sub-text or a picture story compressed in this series of figures, joined in this particular argumentative sequence: a suggestion, in the relation of the "I" to the river, of a way of conceiving of Byron's relation to the surface of his poetry; and a coincidence of the several stylistic and argumentative features we have taken note of in this chapter.

We have first, in "A Fragment," as also in the four other pieces examined so far, an association, deep in the fabric of the poetry, between time and language--specifically, between external or empirical time and the alien, unfamiliarized, reduced, or primitive aspect of language, represented in the "Epitaph to John Adams" in the effect of the repetition--a primordial word, beating in absence of human participation. In "A Fragment," language and time are one concurrent force into which the writer places himself (imaginatively placing himself into the river), but holding himself, as he thinks, deliberately--retaining control of himself in regard to the river of discourse-passing-in-time--and then letting himself go.

But that "letting go," or passing forward or whatever, is a moment of no small proportions here. It is a moment that fits into at least three sequences: there is first the figural drama of floating down the river (a drama which includes the passage of the physical body through time); second, there is the retrospective or memorial sequence, which tries to capture the life of the writer--not only to bring him up to date, but to survey the future (and which sequence, therefore, needs some sort of figure, like the river, to structure the thought); and finally--and this is the surface of the poem--there is the argument the writer arranges, or follows: more than the river or time, though partaking of both, the argument of the poem is what the writer floats along on, struggles against, recognizes, and releases himself to. Whatever else is implied in the "letting go," it also signifies the retreat of Byron into his own mind.

The passage forward, then (to look at it from the other side), can be variously interpreted. It does appear to be a relinquishing of choice, for instance, though I would not say a relinquishing of will. It is a willing of the inevitable, or of fate, and so, more generally, a reinterpretation of inevitability. In terms used earlier, the willful association of himself with the figure of time overcomes the innocence of the writer; the poem must run out to silence, but he is able to argue for himself a survival of empirical time--a "breathless" communication after death (which begins to sound very much like writing). Or again, the passage forward is the pursuit of that future, which is, though mysterious or in some obvious way unknown, nevertheless made familiar in the argument of the poem. And finally, the passage is also an escape: at once a reaction away from the complexity of analysis and pursuit of a greater mystery; a reaction away from the complications of memory and toward the unformed possibilities of the future. To the degree that the writer has committed

himself to seeking freedom, he has also to repudiate the images of himself that memory yields.

So we have, not deep within the fabric of Byron's poetry, but rather on its surface, constituting its surface at times, a pattern of syntactic development that matches the figural drama of the river: an initial proposition, complete in itself, is extended by the addition of dependent clauses which variously expand or limit the range of the proposition, revise, qualify, or partially retract it. This is a syntactic complication which moves entirely to the right; and it may suggest, therefore, the drama of composing which remains largely implicit in the figural drama. It is in these complications, these afterthoughts, that we can find most clearly and, I would add, most characteristically, the moments of the writing of Byron's poetry:

> I love not Man the less, but Nature more,
> From these our interviews, in which I steal
> From all I may be, or have been before,
> To mingle with the Universe, and feel
> What I can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal.

These conjoined emendations draw the reader after them, suspending the meaning of the sentence and weighting the accumulated revisions. They steal the subject from the initial proposition, replacing it with their own indefinite and variable "what." The same replacement occurs in the passage from Manfred, which is also a speculation on future possibility extended along the line of the discourse, also a complication toward the right.

> we,
> . . . with our mix'd 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.

The subject of the sentence is so secret here that not even the characters in the figural drama are allowed to name it. But "A Fragment" is illuminating

for both of these passages, for it introduces the possibility, in the same structure, that the missing subject is not secret and not inexpressible, but partly forgotten because of the passage of time.

> and the key
> Of thy profundity is in the grave,
> The ebon portal of thy peopled cave,
> Where I would walk in spirit, and behold
> Our elements resolved to things untold,
> And fathom hidden wonders, and explore
> The essence of great bosoms now no more.

For the moment, I would just mention that this last sentiment also sounds like a cryptic designation of reading.

We have already adduced one rather lengthy set of interpretations surrounding the figural drama of "A Fragment"; another corresponding set ought to be applied to the rhetorical drama, this right-branching that so strongly suggests improvisation. This dissertation will be concerned in large part with finding variants on this structure and proposing ways of regarding them; but we can close this chapter, and our consideration of these five poems, by advancing some tentative observations on the similarities among the uses of the structure we have seen so far.

The structure is, perhaps, related to, a miniature of, the proliferation of writing I have said is characteristic of Byron. We may have a sense that the initial proposition is being protected or encased--held off from the reader's judgment--by the appended qualifications. To the degree that this is so, it may also be viewed as a protection of the intellect of the writer: an unwillingness to commit himself too fully to a definite assertion or an irrevocable position. The complication itself, then, may be thought of as a holding back, a recognition of the dangers of simplicity. Or again, to the degree that the pursuit of complication is a reaction away from simple assertion, we may interpret the structure as representing the finding and testing of limits (the sort of testing explicit in the argument

of "A Fragment")--both the limits of writing (what the writer "can ne'er express") and the limits of himself as a writer (what he "cannot all conceal"). This double impulse in the discourse, to commit and to withdraw, to let go and to hold back, is evident too in the incessant pursuit of beauty in "She Walks in Beauty"; here the initial proposition corresponds to a premonition of beauty, the fulfillment of which is sought through the qualifying and complicating clauses. This pursuit, like the letting go in the river of time, leads us back to the subjectivity of the writer; the beauty, as I suggested in my analysis of that poem, is in the writer. And finally, the simultaneous flight and pursuit the structure instantiates is associated with the concept of "mobility" as I expressed it at the outset. What Byron aims at in "A Fragment" is the displacement of the past by the future--again, something like a recollection of the future, a recognition of the new.

I have, in this chapter, set out a kind of thesis; I have marked out a territory in Byron's poetry that is of special interest to me. Through the more systematic study of Byron's work that begins in the next chapter, I will necessarily range rather far our of that territory, and away from that thesis. But the arguments made and the associations proposed in this chapter will be near at hand throughout. In the next chapter, we will find that the simultaneous demands of memory and of composing appear in Byron's earliest poetry--not developing gradually, but springing fully formed, as part of the situation of the writer, into the arguments of his poems. In Chapter III we will take note of a series of experiments in emphasis--the creation of the "Byronic hero"--in which Byron works with a variety of strategies for escaping from and rejoining the "flow" of discourse. The structure of complication will begin to appear again in a more recognizeable form as stychomythia (or cooperative dialogue) in

the plays, treated in Chapter IV. And in Chapter V, we will find it in its fullest and most elaborate dimensions in the great monologues written between 1816 and 1820. We will end in a traditional way, with a reading of Don Juan from the points of view developed throughout, and with special attention to the theories of writing that Byron himself wove into that poem.

That is our general direction. We must begin, however, by steering a circuitous course through the problems of Byron's early poetry.

Notes

[1] Byron, Poetical Works, ed. Frederick Page, John Jump (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 920 (note to Don Juan, XVI, st. 97); citations throughout are to this edition.

[2] Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), pp. 5-6.

[3] Bloom, Company, p. 168; see also Ridenour, The Style of "Don Juan", pp. 165-67.

[4] See for instance Louis T. Milic, "Rhetorical Choice and Stylistic Option: The Conscious and Unconscious Poles" in Literary Style: A Symposium, ed. Seymour Chatman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 77-94, especially, pp. 81-82.

[5] Peter J. Manning, Byron and His Fictions (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978), p. 122.

[7] Morse Peckham, "Toward a Theory of Romanticism" in Romanticism: Points of View, ed. Robert F. Gleckner and Gerald E. Enscoe (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975), pp. 231-57, especially p. 241.

[8] Jacques Derrida, La Dissemination (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972), p. 15ff. Se also Spivak's discussion in the Preface to Of Grammatology, pp. ix-xii.

[9] Michael G. Cooke describes the limited sort of transcendence I mean and makes a point in sympathy with my own when he writes that the word "art" for Byron refers specifically to "the complex, temporal act of composing"; Blind Man, pp. 42-43.

[10] Geoffrey Hartman, Wordsworth's Poetry, pp. 336-37.

Chapter Two

Hours of Idleness

Among the long-standing critical commonplaces attending the study of Byron, few have gained easier acceptance, or are more widely held at present, than that his poetry is premised on or emerges from a great loss or disappointment. Even in the study of Byron's literary style (the search for principles of transition, which this monograph joins) it has seemed impossible to most readers to make much progress without recurring to that invisible or unexpressed motive, that something is gone that used to be, or that something is wrong that used to be right.

There have been two ways of accounting for this, a thematic and a biographical explanation. The first is to assimilate the theme of loss to the larger and specifically literary theme of mankind's fall from grace. This thematic unification is widely accepted also; indeed, it is part of the Byron currency, and for that very reason ought to be handled with caution. I find the very bulk of documentation suspicious, for to have located the coordinates or symbols of this theme, or to have enumerated their appearances, does not go far toward explaining how the theme operates. Too often, such an approach reduces the "theme" to a dead or dying counter; treated in this way, it does not seem like the product of active thought. Rather the opposite, one could get the impression that Byron held a single notion of the Biblical type for his whole life, and that two references to the Fall in different poems are really the same idea. For the purposes of this study, at least, it will be important to recognize that such appearances are

inevitably different too; it will be important to unfold the theme, or to set in motion as part of a sequence of thought.

The biographical explanation of loss in Byron's poetry is not distinct from the thematic explanation. They often accompany each other, the theme of the Fall being interpreted as a literary counterpart or symbolization of some actual experience (which need not be specified). And as before, I have no fundamental argument with this notion until it is used as an explanation for particular features of the poetry. There is no reason to coubt that some "moment of loss" occurred in Byron's early life--or in his late or middle life. But what then? We sould still have all our work ahead of us, as we would in any thematic study: we would still have to say why such and such a theme appears and how it functions in the sequence of the poem.

I am ready to propose a third way of conceiving of the variable losses we feel to be part of Byron's poetry; but to do so I must depart from some of the standard, developmental interpretations of Byron's canon. It is usually thought that Byron began his career as a shallow thinker and a derivative versifier; and that his early works, though interesting to the Byron specialist, cannot stand on their own. They are usually regarded as a kind of practice for the great flowering of imagination that began in the summer of 1816, and continued, with some abatement, throughout his life. Now, there is a great deal of poetry in the corpus prior to 1816; so it is probably not surprising that the developmental organization of Byron's works has become pre-eminent. But as I wrote in the Introduction, the developmental view can become a self-fulfilling prophecy; it can cause us to miss the more subtle directions of Byron's career. It is often thought, for instance, that the history of Byron's poetic maturation is coeval with his contact with, and eventual acceptance of, the romantic

philosophy of his contemporaries. But Michael G. Cooke has argued convincingly that the High Romantic view of Nature underlying Childe Harold III was not a discovery of 1816, but rather a recovery of an aspect of Byron's earlier poetry.[1] I would like to make a similar revision of the current view of Byron's development, and claim that already, in his earliest poems, Byron had built for himself a version of the romantic epistemoplogy--a dialectic that moved from nature to the self to a renewed or reconstructed self; that the workings of that epistemology (though often in bits and pieces) are the main source of Byron's apparent preoccupation with loss; and that, far from finding ourselves in the vicinity of any original or prototypical loss, we are, among Byron's early poems, in an an almost purely abstract realm, in which the coneept of loss is almost entirely disembodied.

On consideration, Hours of Idleness seems to me an essentially forward-looking and experimental volume of poetry: uncertain, hesitant, even modestly courageous. There are two important reasons, however, why it has not appeared to be. The first is its thorough-going rejection of its own project: the rejection of poetry which turns up again and again. The second is the use of eighteenth century conventions. The former reason is complex and ambiguous; we will deal with it in due course. But that the genres and literary devices of Hours of Idleness are firmly rooted in the eighteenth century seems unambiguous and undeniable. Byron draws from Augustan material at almost every turn, so often that he appears to have decided preemptorily against originality of phrase and thought. But the use he makes of the conventions and cliches of sentimentalism is so summary, so far removed from their original context, that it is hard to read their meaning, hard to find their plausibility. Accordingly, the general critical judgment has been that Hours of Idleness cannot be taken seriously.

The use of personification, for instance, is neither decorous nor

consistent, as in Pope, but instead becomes at times wildly and indiscriminately scholastic, as in the following from "Childish Recollections":

> When slow Disease, with all her host of pains,
> Chills the warm tide which flows along the veins;
> When Health, affrighted, spreads her rosy wings,
> And flies with every changing gale of spring;
> Not to the aching frame alone confined,
> Unyielding pangs assail the drooping mind:
> What grisly forms, the spectre train of woe,
> Bid shuddering Nature shrink before the blow,
> With Resignation wage relentless strife,
> While Hope retires appall'd, and clings to life!
> Yet less the pang when, through the tedious hour,
> Remembrance sheds around her genial power . . .
>
> (11. 1-12)

There is at least the form of confidence in such liberal capitalization--confidence in the officially sanctioned style of poetry and a certain amount of confidence in the abstractions themselves to render a set of sentiments. And yet there is a competing notion, as confidently expressed, that poetry is wholly inadequate to capture any real or important experience. In "The First Kiss of Love" Byron argues a complex, anti-poetic position:

> Away with your fictions of flimsy romance;
> Those tissues of falsehood which folly has wove!
> Give me the mild beam of the soul-breathing glance,
> Or the rapture which dwells on the first kiss of love.
>
> (11. 1-4)

He begins with a relatively complete rejection of poetry: the complex of ideas woven by unrestrained imagination must be actively denied, and the attention returned to simple, soul-involving perceptions; as elsewhere in Byron, the search for truth reorients the senses, especially the eyes (the "glance" here). In the second stanza, the blame is shifted slightly, to poets themselves, poetry becoming potentially justifiable:

> Ye rhymers, whose bosoms with phantasy glow,
> Whose pastoral passions are made for the grove;
> From what blest inspiration your sonnets would flow,
> Could you ever have tasted the first kiss of love!
>
> (11. 5-8)

That is, presumably, had the rhymers had the secular inspiration, the blest,

their sonnets would have been more truly matched to human passions. The rejection of classical models in the third stanza would appear to close this argument:

> If Apollo should e'er his assistance refuse
> Or the Nine be disposed from your service to rove,
> Invoke them no more, bid adieu to the muse,
> And try the effect of the first kiss of love.
>
> (11. 9-12)

The argument does not end there, however; it is repeated in the next three stanzas.

> 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.
>
> Your shepards, your flocks, those fantastical themes,
> Perhaps can amuse, yet they never can move:
> Arcadia displays but a region of dreams:
> What are visions like these to the first kiss of love?
>
> 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.
>
> (11. 13-24)

The fourth stanza begins, not with a rejection of romance, but with the author's reaction; and here the problem is nor that poetry does not match up to life, but that it is a "cold composition" of it. This is a subjunctive version of the first argument, because the first proved the partial validity of poetry; this proves the ability of the mind to delude itself. In Stanza 5 it is not (as in St. 2) that "pastoral passions are made for the grove," that is, are misplaced, but rather that "Arcadia displays but a region of dreams." In the sixth stanza (corresponding to the third) the dream of a pagan Arcadia suggests the Christian counterpart; and here Byron tries to reconcile the sensual human and the old pastoral: the only paradise possible is an emotional one, "revived" in the kiss. It is clear too that this stanza is most obviously read as an address to the "cold

composition" itself; hence the argument against romance is advanced once more: romances not only don't match human passion and reality, they drain and damp the life of the individual by "affirming" their own escapist intentions; they remind the reader that humankind is miserable. When Byron moves to graveside in Stanza 7, as he often does to examine a question from a firmer standpoint, the memorial is not fame, but the kiss; and not entirely the kiss, but the memory of it. A further and corresponding tension appears here, for it is recalled that, while a heaven on earth seems within our power, it could only be temporary; it must become a past pleasure.

> When age chills the blood, when our pleasures are past--
> For years fleet away with the wings of the dove--
> The dearest remembrance will still be the last,
> Our sweetest memorial the first kiss of love.
>
> (11. 25-28)

"To Romance" achieves a more thorough critique of abstract poetry and is less self-destructive in its turn from the older idiom.

> Parent of golden dreams, Romance!
> Auspicious queen of childish joys,
> Who lead'st along, in airy dance,
> Thy votive train of girls and boys;
> 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 'tis hard to quit the dreams
> Which haunt the unsuspicious 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;
>
> (11. 1-14)

Romance and mysticism are parents to the imagination, and maturity is equivalent to rejecting these modes of thought and their attendant perceptual inaccuracies. That this is a rejection of system is clear too ("votive train," "mystic round"), but this is at first a natural process, a growth or coming of age. "And yet 'tis hard": an innocent or "unsuspicious" soul is beset by romantic visions, not only of an ideal world

where women might be goddesses, but of an abstract world, as it appears to the maturing writer. The thought that we mature out of the realm of romance, and that the abstract world can be revealed as untrue by a gesture of rebellion against the parent, leads him to a revelation of sorts:

> And must we own thee but a name,
> And from thy hall of clouds descend?
> Nor find a sylph in every dame,
> A Plyades in every friend?
> But leave at once thy realms of air
> To mingling bands of fairly elves;
> Confess that woman's false as fair,
> And friends have feeling for--themselves!
>
> (11. 17-24)

The departing child can see that the whole of the realm might have been merely an illusion of language--that it was not the realm that produced the abstract diction, but the reverse: not "where every nymph a goddess seems," but "find a sylph in every dame." Where in the second stanza he saw through the figure of the woman to the potential ideal, in the third stanza the woman's traits are merely juxtaposed and paradoxical: "false as fair." Romance, then, is the childish world of unity, and maturity is the fall into opposition. From this new, complex perspective, he can see that the remnants of romance from childhood are the means of emotional fraud:

> Fond fool! to love a sparkling eye,
> And think that eye to truth was dear:
> To trust a passing wanton's sigh,
> And melt beneath a wanton's tear!
>
> (11. 29-32)

In preparation for a complete break with that world, the writer evokes a pastoral ritual. He calls the court together for his own funeral, and does so whole-heartedly in the very idiom he is about to leave. This is a final summoning up of that world, with all its proper correspondences:

> Romance! disgusted with deceit,
> Far from thy motley court I fly,
> Where Affectation holds her seat,

And sickly Sensibility:
Whose silly tears can never flow
For any pangs excepting thine;
Who turns aside from real woe,
To steep in dew thy gaudy shrine.

Now join with sable Sympathy,
With cypress crowned, array'd in weeds,
Who heaves with thee her simple sigh,
Whose breast for every bosom bleeds;
And call thy sylvan female choir,
To mourn a swain for ever gone,
Who once could glow with equal fire,
But bends not now before thy throne.

Ye genial nymphs, whose ready tears
On all occasions swiftly flow;
Whose bosoms heave with fancied fears,
With fancied fears and phrensy glow;
Say, will you mourn my absent name,
An infant bard at least may claim
From you a sympathetic strain.

(11. 33-56)

But instead of turning to leave the court and the woods, the writer performs the corresponding mental act.

Adieu, fond race! a long adieu!
The hour of fate is hovering nigh,
E'en now the gulf appears in view,
Where unlamented you must lie:
Oblivion's blackening lake is seen,
Convulsed by gales you cannot weather;
Where you, and eke your gentle queen,
Alas! must perish altogether.

(11. 57-64)

Hours of Idleness works revisions on eighteenth century convention much as the Poetical Sketches of Blake did. Blake's volume is twenty years older, of course; we may conclude that Sentimentality was still lively enough in Byron's conceptions to require active rejection. But among the many differences between Blake and Byron, I would note one in particular: for Blake, personification, as one rhetorical figure, was fundamentally allegorical in nature; Byron, however, does not incline toward the allegorical use of personification, but toward further rhetorical use. "To Romance" shows a pattern of alternately unfolding and compressing meanings and systems into abstract (often capitalized) terms, and introducing the

probability that words do not signify beyond themselves. That art is purity takes on a peculiar meaning for Byron, succinctly expressed in the valedictory stanza of the epistle "To the Sighing Strephon":

> Now, Strephon, good-bye, I cannot deny
> Your passion appears most absurd;
> Such love as you plead is pure love indeed,
> For it only consists in the word.
>
> (11. 33-36)

This view of language (not to mention this view of love) has special repercussions on the activity of the poet. The title of the volume, for instance, may be more than the bit of aristocratic condescension it has usually been taken for; if emotions are mostly verbal, and the use of words (as in "To Romance") is itself a source of delusion, then there is not much left of poetry except the occasion for memory it provides; the hours spent in poetry are idle in several important ways. And between the abstracted world of language and the falsifications of emotions in the present, the only "real" world--even truth itself--would appear to be that memory. Cooke finds three instances in Hours of Idleness of release from pain through the use of Wordsworthian memory as a mediation between art and reality (a kind of redemption of the present).[2] Passages which suggest the power of memory over the present are rather more frequent, as in "Childish Recollections":

> 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.

This is the more common sentiment, that memory rules the senses and controls the subject's relation to the external world. I mentioned in the last chapter that Byron's later definition of "mobility" contains some echo of a Lockean, perceptual crisis. A more detailed form of that crisis turns up throughout Hours of Idleness. "To a Beautiful Quaker" gives

a poetical account of a Lockean function:

> Sweet girl! though only once we met,
> That meeting I shall ne'er forget;
> And though we ne'er may meet again,
> Remembrance will thy form retain.
> I would not say 'I love,' but still
> My senses struggle with my will:
> In vain to drive thee from my breast,
> My thoughts are more and more represt;
> In vain I check the rising sighs,
> Another to the last replies:
> Perhaps this is not love, but yet
> Our meeting I can ne'er forget.
>
> (11. 1-12)

This is roughly the vocabulary of faculty psychology, and both the struggle of will and perception and the associative train suggested in "Another to the last replies" recall the Lockean model of mentality. Remembrance (here exactly the same as "the senses") is stronger than the will. And rather than pursue the rejection of the image, in the next stanza he begins to unfold the memory of the meeting, and find in it something truer, perhaps, than love:

> What though we never silence broke,
> Our eyes a sweeter language spoke;
> The tongue in flattering falsehood deals,
> And tells a tale it never feels:
> Deceit the guilty lips impart,
> And hush the mandates of the heart;
>
> (11. 13-18)

There is falsehood in the renderings of language, not only as a result of conscious deceit (and it is never written that the girl herself is honest, only that she is pure in his memory), but also because once again language is an abstraction, separate from feeling--it interferes with the "mandates of the heart." The narrator is on one level justifying a willful looking, perhaps an impoliteness. But he finds in his exploration of the memory a second language of sense which reveals and interprets the soul (similar to the sub-surface communication in "She Walks in Beauty").

> But the soul's interpreters, the eyes,

Spurn such restraint, and scorn disguise.
As thus our glances oft conversed,
And all our bosoms felt rehearsed,
No spirit, from within, reproved us,
Say rather, ''twas the spirit moved us.'
Though what they utter'd I repress,
Yet I conceive thou'lt partly guess;
For as on thee my memory ponders,
Perchance to me thine also wanders.

(11. 19-28)

The memory is not merely an atom of faded sense, but carries with it a compression of the experience, and even a linguistic component, an unuttered narrative. What he retains of the experience is ephemeral in itself, but with his participation it becomes pressing, almost real. The narrator turns in this, the longest of the three stanzas, to stress the indelibility of the image; and in the third stanza to a prayer, good wishes which run down to the concluding lines:

May that fair bosom never know
What 'tis to feel the restless woe
Which stings the soul, with vain regret,
Of him who never can forget!

(11. 53-56)

With the fourth repetition of "never can forget" there is a special mechanism, a relinquishing of the will earlier asserted; we are partly back in the Lockean world of commanding sense impressions. But this is at least a partially platonized world; a sense of present loss results from the argument on the image; and the image is not a fixed particle, but a "restless woe."

A slightly different emphasis in "To Mary, On Receiving Her Picture" puts the subject into a platonic dilemma.

This faint resemblance of thy charms,
  Though strong as mortal art could give,
My constance heart of fear disarms,
  Revives my hopes, and bids me live.

(11. 1-4)

At first the picture is welcomed, and the heart de-martializes in a gesture of sympathy. The artifact itself is merely mortal and imperfect, but it

acts through to some deeper sense. The initial sympathetic gesture made, the writer attends to the image and begins to use it to construct a livelier mental image, a memory:

> Here I can trace the locks of gold
> Which round thy snowy forehead wave,
> The cheeks which sprung from beauty's mould,
> The lip's which made me beauty's slave.
>
> (11. 5-8)

There is some mechanical pleasure in this reconstruction by tracing the copy; this is the associationistic esthetic in action. But it is unmistakeable too that this tracing has its uncomfortable aspects: it is cold and fixed--"locks of gold," "snowy," "mould." The heart is prepared, even re-martialized, in conceiving finally of this subjection to the image as slavery. He begins again, but breaks off when from memory the full ideal rushes back and recaptures him.

> Here I can trace--ah, no! that eye,
> Whose azure floats in liquid fire,
> Must all the painter's art defy,
> And bid him from the task retire.
>
> (11. 9-12)

There is a double movement in this stanza: first, toward the truer recollection (perhaps the correct association), distinguishing the artistic from the mental image; and second, toward the source of the enslaving power, which now would seem to be within the writer. Where in the second stanza the associative train recalled physical features, here it leads to a concept (beyond the "painter's art"), not a sense impression. It is that concept which, while it creates the sympathy, the passionate side of the experience, also enslaves the beholder of beauty. Thus part of the emotion of the "ah, no!" is a little sublimity in discovering within himself the hidden life behind the picture, or, we may say, in the encounter with an ideal. He continues in the associationistic pattern of the second stanza, but now with an instructed calm.

Here I behold its beauteous hue;
  But where's the beam so sweetly straying,
Which gave a lustre to its blue,
  Like Luna o'er the ocean playing?

(11. 13-16)

The complex rests here for a moment, with the more general realization that art is a poor copy; specifically, it misses the action of the light ("Luna o'er the ocean playing" is another version of "that eye/Whose azure floats in liquid fire"). It does not move (or nothing moves on it), and this is the best that "mortal art could give." But it is significant that the writer continues to be held by the eye; understanding does not necessarily bring liberation. He is nostalgic for the momentary changes that art cannot render, but it is clear in the concluding stanzas that he can supply that action from within himself. He can afford to be more charitable toward the representation here. What was wrong with the copy in the first place was the attempt of the observer to animate, to experience through it, without reference to the mental image--the memory which holds the truth.

Sweet copy! far more dear to me,
  Lifeless, unfeeling as thou art,
Than all the living forms could be,
  Save her who placed thee next my heart.

She placed it, sad, with needless fear,
  Lest time might shake my wavering soul.
Unconscious that her image there
  Held every sense in fast control.

Through hours, through years, through time, 'twill cheer;
  My hope, in gloomy moments raise;
In life's last conflict 'twill appear,
  And meet my fond expiring gaze.

(11. 17-28)

As the image in the external world is nearest his heart (hanging around his neck, or perhaps in his pocket) the ideal image is in contact with his soul; hence the enslaving power is not a commanding sense impression, but a commanding ideal. To the degree that Byron redeems Lockean memory, he platonizes it, redeeming certain features of romance as well. As in "To Romance,"

an internal system of ideas and images dwells near the abstract term (the picture, in this case); in both "To a Beautiful Quaker" and "To Mary" the abstraction holds within it a compressed story, the elaboration of which forms the main matter of the poem. The relinquishing of will is much the same in the latter two poems; it is a relinquishing on his own terms, to the story he has evoked from the memory. Moreover, in "To Mary," by willing his bondage he achieves a kind of freedom from the pain of passing time; the image will hold his senses in "fast control"; he will not be shaken by time. The memory become hope. Thus if one can find the right sort of ideal, commitment to it is not only unavoidable, but somewhat to be desired. By contemplation of the ideal (especially the imagined meeting of the eyes) the observer--now more properly called the thinker--is drawn into participation with a realm in which past and future are continuous.

This is not, however, an altogether comforting prospect. In "To Mary" and a large number of other poems in Hours of Idleness, as soon as the step into the ideal world is taken, the writer is run out immediately to the end of his life. In the short poem "Remembrance," memory is anticipatory and prophetic:

> 'Tis done!--I saw it in my dreams;
> No more with Hope the future beams;
> My days of happiness are few:
> Chill'd by misfortune's wintry blast,
> My dawn of life is overcast;
> Love, Hope, and Joy, alike adieu!
> Would I could add Remembrance too?

Memory transcends the present moment, but rather too much: the unnamed "it" here levels all emotions but itself. The price of too strong devotion to the mental image is the loss of present possibilities. The same effect is achieved in poems of a more familiarly sentimental order. Among some of its other romantic turns, "Childish Recollections" moves from the consolations of reliving the past to the more sobering thought that the past

can become more vital than either the present or the future. In the opening stanza, from which I have quoted, a slightly faded "sun of memory" still holds the writer's senses "with unbounded sway,/The past confounding with the present day." But by the end of the poem, having elaborated what memories remain to him, it is more the case that the writer's present is confounded with the future:

> amidst the gloomy calm of age
> You turn with faltering hand life's gloomy page;
> Peruse the record of your days on earth,
> Unsullied only where it marks your birth;
> Still lingering pause above each chequer'd leaf,
> And blot with tears the sable lines of grief;
> Where Passion o'er the theme her mantle threw,
> Or weeping Virtue sigh'd a last adieu;
> But bless the scroll which fairer words adorn,
> Traced by the rosy finger of the morn;
> When Friendship bow'd before the shrine of Truth,
> And Love, without his pinion, smiled on Youth.
>
> (11. 401-12)

The effect of memory here is to turn the whole of life into a story. The past itself is a kind of writing on the mind (a Lockean metaphor repeated elsewhere in the volume); studied and interpreted, the past yields "themes" which will persist. Participation in this ideal realm captures the writer; he is fixed in relation to the unchanging text of his memory.

Another principle is drawn from the book of life in "L'Amitie Est L'Amour Sans Ailes"--a poem on the same crisis, but more introspective and analytical. Beginning from the same complex of thought as the ending of "Childish Recollections":

> Why should my anzious breast repine,
> Because my youth is fled?
> Days of delight may still be mine;
> Affection is not dead.
> In tracing back the years of youth,
> One firm record, one lasting truth,
> Celestial consolation brings:
> Bear it, ye breezes, to the seat,
> Where first my heart responsive beat,--
> 'Friendship is Love without his wings!'
>
> (11. 1-10)

Friendship is a relation that is all one's own, purely the product of the subject's will. Love, on the other hand, is unfree, enthusiastic, unearthly ("winged"). The fourth stanza reads like a critique of commitment to ideals, in the manner of "To Romance":

> Oh, Love! before thy glowing shrine
> My early vows were paid;
> My hopes, my dreams, my heart was thine,
> But these are now decay'd;
> For thine are pinions like the wind,
> No trace of thee remains behind,
> Except, alas! thy jealous stings.
> Away, away, delusive power,
> Thou shalt not haunt my coming hour;
> Unless, indeed, without thy wings.
>
> (11. 31-40)

Love is an unearthly experience, but less true for that reason--it is not within the subject's control. It comprises a memory of pain here, too, which momentarily pulls the writer, but which is rejected--"away, away"; it is a delusive power, a ghost rather than a more elevated spirit. And love brings jealousy, which is perhaps the sufficient reason for love's decay. But he is able to have his will over memory in this poem, to decide how his mind will be occupied. When the memory is subordinate to the will, memory can again be a faculty of hope. He addresses the desireable memories in Stanza 8:

> Ye few! my soul, my life is yours,
> My memory and my hope;
> Your worth a lasting love insures,
> Unfetter'd in its scope;
> From smooth deceit and terror sprung
> With aspect fair and honey'd tongue,
> Let Adulation wait on kings;
> With joy elate, by snares beset,
> We, we, my friends, can ne'er forget
> 'Friendship is Love without his wings!'
>
> (11. 71-80)

This rejection of Love is well within the range of much traditional eighteenth century sentimental poetry. Even the minimally sublime moment carries within it, often as part of its beauty, its future decay (whether

by association with the natural cycle, as in Gray, or the social cycle, as in Pope). Any present joy is tinged with sadness, overshadowed by the knowledge of future loss. In the extreme to which Byron follows this train of thought, the only interesting spot in an otherwise univormly painful mental landscape is the moment of loss itself. But two complications, in the poems we have read here, distinguish Byron's poetry from the background of neoclassical sentimentality. The first is that the moment of loss is practically indistinguishable from the awareness of the possibility of loss in any poem; and second, the struggle in Hours of Idleness to bring meaning and order to the past is coeval with the assertion of will among memories. The writer's encounter with the external world is to that degree already a struggle with himself, to pull himself away from obsessive and painful memories, to fix on the moments that give him hope.

In the three poems entitled "To Caroline," the two functions of memory coincide, memory as a preserver of past pain and willed memory as a faculty of hope or transcendence of the present. And as they seem representative to me of the course of thinking we find generally through the volume, I will try to work out from them a summary of Byron's early attitude toward the relation of memory and subjectivity. First, let us examine them in the context of ideas we have found elsewhere.

In the first "To Caroline," a moment of parting is recalled, but as an argument upon an occasion. The writer's feelings at that moment have been called into question, and he begins his response with a question in return.

> Think'st thou I saw thy beauteous eyes,
> Suffused in tears, implore to stay;
> And heard unmoved thy plenteous sighs,
> Which said far more than words can say?
>
> Thou could not feel my burning cheek,
> Thy gushing tears had quenched its flame;

And as thy tongue essay'd to speak,
  In sighs alone it breathed my name.

And yet, my girl, we weep in vain,
  In vain our fate in sighs deplore;
Remembrance only can remain,--
  And that will make us weep the more.

(11. 9-20)

The argument takes an interesting turn here. First he affirms that he was, in fact, in pain at that moment, just as she was; but then in the last stanza above he returns to his own present of recollection to claim that weeping is vain--either that they should not weep any more or that they should have stopped earlier. Weeping and sighs do no good; they cannot recover any moment of joy; they will not change the fate of the two. The memory is unable to be selective here, presumably because joy and pain are inextricable in the parting. And so the only course left to them is to will away the past altogether. The writer does so with another of his "last adieus"--a device which, in this poem as in many others, signals not an adieu in the external world, but forgetting, a final eradication of memory:

Again, thou best beloved, adieu!
  Ah! if thou canst, o'ercome regret;
Nor let thy mind past joys review,--
  Our only hope is to forget!

(11. 21-24)

In the second "To Caroline" we find a longer and more analytical description of the sentimental-nostalgic experience--a development of the future out of the present:

When I hear you express an affection so warm,
  Ne'er think, my beloved, that I do not believe;
For your lip would the soul of suspicion disarm,
  And your eye beams a ray which can never deceive.

Yet still this fond bosom regrets while adoring,
  That love, like the leaf, must fall into the sere;
That age will come on, when remembrance, deploring,
  Contemplates the scenes of her youth with a tear;

(11. 1-8)

The regret he feels secularizes his love, makes it more like friendship, and puts it under his control. A shift into the future is completed here; the writer anticipates a time when the present will be past--"when remembrance, deploring"--and so the present of his utterance is rendered momentarily obsolete (and the poem on the whole is an anticipation of an objection rather than a reply to one). He continues, elaborating the story of the future that his memory contains:

> That the time must arrive, when, no longer retaining
> Their auburn, those locks must wave thin to the breeze,
> When a few silver hairs of those tresses remaining,
> Prove nature a prey to decay and disease.
>
> 'Tis this, my beloved, which spreads gloom o'er my features,
> Though I ne'er shall presume to arraign the decree
> Which God has proclaim'd as the fate of his creatures,
> In the death which one day will deprive you of me.
> (11. 9-16)

The last line represents a rather startling turn in the argument, from the beloved to himself: she ages, but he dies. We can speculate that she has been fading from his mind, fading out of the poem, for some time when he writes this line; and although the remainder of the poem is re-addressed to Caroline, it never re-establishes her presence:

> Mistake not, sweet sceptic, the cause of emotion,
> No doubt can the mine of your lover invade;
> He worships each look with such faithful devotion,
> A smile can enchant, or a tear can dissuade.
>
> But as death, my beloved, soon or late shall o'ertake us,
> And our breasts, which alive with such sympathy glow,
> Will sleep in the grave till the blast shall awake us,
> When calling the dead, in earth's bosom laid low,--
>
> Oh! then let us drain, while we may, draughts of pleasure,
> Which from passion like ours may unceasingly flow;
> Let us pass round the cup of love's bliss in full measure,
> And quaff the contents as our nectar below.
> (11. 17-28)

He returns, in these last three stanzas, to the main object of his argument, which is that his feelings on that occasion in the past were not doubts about Caroline, but rather this temporal complexity in relation

to her--that the moment of his adoration is tinged with regret, that his very strength of feeling proceeds from his recognition of the future. And at the same time he is able to use his imagination of the future to relocate himself in the present and rededicate himself to passion. The certainty of death lends a substance to present joy.

The third "To Caroline" is structurally similar to the second; it propounds the same temporal coordinates, but from the point of view of a present pain rather than a present joy.

> Oh! when shall the grave hide forever my sorrow?
> Oh! when shall my soul wing her flight from this clay?
> The present is hell, and the coming tomorrow
> But brings, with new torture, the curse of to-day.
> (ll. 1-4)

The present is hell at least partly because of the certainty that it will not change--tomorrow will bring the same misery. And the final moment of life becomes, as in "To Caroline" II, significant and desirable; death is not only an analog of personal loss or the loss of the beloved--it is the next stage in a mental process, and the only distinct point in a life which is now completely foreseen. With a double movement similar to that in "To Caroline" I, there follows a justification of stoicism or what looks like stoicism and an accompanying assertion of will.

> From my eye flows no tear, from my lips flow no curses,
> I blast not the fiends who have hurled me from bliss;
> For poor is the woul which bewailing rehearses
> Its querulous grief, when in anguish like this.
>
> Was my eye, 'stead of tears, with red fury flakes bright'ning,
> Would my lips breathe a flame which no stream could assuage,
> On our foes should my glance launch in vengeance its lightning,
> With a transport my tongue give a loose to its rage.
>
> But now tears and curses, alike unavailing,
> Would add to the souls of our tyrants' delight;
> Could they view us our sad separation bewailing,
> Their merciless hearts would rejoice at the sight.
> (ll. 5-16)

The fury which could be loosed on the enemy is turned inward instead,

to forcibly repress the present pain, to will himself forward away from it. And in that direction he sees only one possibility:

> Yet still, though we bend with a feign'd resignation,
> Life beams not for us with one ray that can cheer;
> Love and hope upon earth bring no more consolation;
> In the grave is our hope, for in life is our fear.
> (11. 17-20)

Here then is another conclusion to the sentimental-nostalgic argument: the foresight implicit in memory is turned fully to bear on the future and on the only feature in it distinct from the painful present. In "To Caroline" II, death is what makes the present rich and enjoyable. In "To Caroline" III, death is the only possible release from pain. In both cases it is deeply implicated in any analysis of the present. In the last stanza of "To Caroline" III, death is simply equivalent to hope:

> Oh! when, my adored, in the tomb will they place me,
> Since, in life, love and friendship for ever are fled?
> If again in the mansion of death I embrace thee,
> Perhaps they will leave unmolested the dead.
> (11. 21-24)

Considered as a series then, as printed in the volume (though they were not written in this order), the "Caroline" poems represent an analysis of the aftermath of loss in its various psychological dimensions: as the motivation for forgetting, as an intimation of the story of the subject's life, as a humanization (or mentalization) of death. And each of the poems, speaking generally, comprises a corresponding pattern of emphasis from memory through will toward the future; each poem is an instance of the forgetting that the writer claims is necessary; each poem tries to leave the beloved behind. We are still in a complex of familiar sentimental ideas: what is beautiful or splendid carries within it an intimation of its end; what is desirable or beautiful is therefore painful; and the painful is necessarily to be eluded. Byron never says "Hello" to his women in Hours of Idleness. The "first kiss of love" implies

an almost simultaneous "last adieu." But if we look for the presence of the writer's will in these poems, if we conceive of them as recreations of the movement of his will in avoiding the pain of love, another structure becomes apparent.

"To caroline" I portrays as much of the moment of loss as we are ever given in Hours of Idleness; and that is not all of the experience, but only the last part of it: the final parting of the "lovers" after "love and hope lay both o'erthrown." Correspondingly, the poem begins as an argument upon an occasion of remembering: with slightly decayed atoms of sense--"think'st thou I saw . . . and heard." We are already in the midst of a well-developed train of thought. The answer it makes to the implied question is that the writer was truly moved at the recollected moment, but that his reaction was so at one with the externals of the situation that he could not be clearly distinguished from them.

"To Caroline" II employs a similar notion of unity. First, it begins also with sense impressions--"When I hear you, etc."--hearing her voice, watching her eye, perhaps kissing her: impressions which are, he affirms, at one with his belief and trust of her (though that trust is expressed negatively: her lip would "disarm" suspicion; her eye could "never deceive"). But within that unity of perception and ideation is a complicating factor; it is not, he writes, that he doesn't believe she's true, but rather that he recognizes his belief; he recognizes himself in their relationship. The negative descriptions suggest this; and we have seen that adoration is a matter of will, a platonizing development of obsessive imagery. The turn at "regrets, while adoring" marks the self-recognition; and the poem, from that point on, shows the effect of this recognition on the writer's thought. The adoration of an ideal which is now of his own choosing leads him out of that relationship,

toward the future and a "remembrance" that he will die. The poem is increasingly self-involved; and corresponding to that ego-centricity and his newly platonized conceptions, through most of "To Caroline" II (noticeable also at points in "To Caroline" I), is his growing sense of something hidden, as memory grows into thinking (as thinking becomes systematic, and as if independent of him). There is the possibility that he was mistaken about her. She may make mistakes about him if she judges by perception only. A moment merely remembered--remembered as sense only--is as deceptive as any present, uncomplicated perception may be.

This "fall" into distinctions, then, is the result or characteristic of a certain phase of thinking, a movement of thought which lay implicit in the initial encounter. There is first the consuming, unself-conscious, and unified relation of perceiver and object of perception which is recreated in momory; memory is at first consuming and obsessive; it feels like slavery. But when perception is articulated it becomes belief; the object of perception becomes the beloved, a kind of system or systematic ideal; and this feels like devotion or worship. The initial naive relationship comes to have implications ouside itself; it propels the writer out of that relationship at the moment it makes him aware of himself; and that is the complicating factor: the mind of the writer becoming active, devotion becoming, as in "To a Beautiful Quaker," a "restless woe."

And in "To Caroline" III we are in a much more familiar world, full of implications; and within a structure of thought and discourse which implies nor only the writer and Caroline, but an audience of tyrants distinct from both of them. The writer is fully outside the present now, and well outside the relationship with Caroline: feeling that he is observed, wanting to hide from the audience implied by his thinking,

by his stance toward himself.

> Oh! when shall the grave hide for ever my sorrow?
> Oh! when shall my soul wing her flight from this clay?
> The present is hell . . .

To move at all will increase his pain; it will "add to the souls of our tyrants' delight." Any further articulation increases his subjection, and drains him.

> From my eye flows no tear, from my lips flow no curses,
> I blast not the fiends which have hurl'd me from bliss;
> For poor is the soul which bewailing rehearses
> Its querulous grief, when in anguish like this.

The lovers themselves are now necessarily deceitful; they "bend with a feign'd resignation." And the writer now seeks only some relief or stasis; he seeks the end of implications (of distinctions): and most of all, he seeks a way out of the immediate repercussions of thinking--"The present is hell."

We see in these three poems, then, not only a sentimental definition of the nature of the world, and not even primarily that; but primarily the attempt at self-definition or self-establishment of a subject for whom sentimentality is no longer sufficient; we see an attempt to establish himself that involves a double motion: toward the elaboration of memory into systematic ideals, but at the same time, through that elaboration, to find an escape from his own constructs. And what's finally remarkable about this argumentative sequence is how little room it leaves for anything outside the writer. These poems, and most in Hours of Idleness, begin with a reaction away from memory, away from the products of the writer's thinking. There is little of uncivilized nature, of course; but even the objects of the civilized world are initially abstracted (Harrow School, for instance, is "Ida"). And even allowing for Byron's poetical diction, allowing for the conventions of his genres, the poems do not start from experience, but usually from slightly faded sense impressions, as

in the first two "Caroline" poems; and often, as in "To Caroline" II and III, with an argument upon those impressions that further effaces them. We are already in the middle of a well-developed argument at the outset, with the writer--the second term in the sequence--recognizing himself in his distance from the relationship, recognizing his belief or assent or will. And there is finally a third term, a projected or proposed stance--a hoped-for attitude which is fully willful and independent, and which does away with ideals: it finds itself in the rejection of systems and in rededications to truth, which are at the same time relocations of the present around the subject. This term or phase is potential throughout the volume; and it is perhaps most complete in "Remembrance": "'Tis done!--I saw it in my dreams . . . Love, Hope, and Joy, alike adieu!"

Now I think it can be understood why it is misleading--slower than Byron--to think of loss as a ground or origin of the sentiments of these poems: for the articulation of himself in these poems establishes the writer's distance from experience. There is no lack of lost things in Hours of Idleness. There are multiple losses--of beloveds, of youth, of self in death; but this temporal variability of loss is itself some indication that loss is not conceived of here as an event; at least, not an event bound to a particular time. It is past, present, and future--love, joy, and hope--and the poems move on, not from an experience of loss, but through the structure of remembering: of the action of the mind upon its objects; through the assertion of the writer into that action; and in the momentary creation and rebellion against past systems of thought. And writing or articulation recreates forgetting, for its starting point is not unity with the object, but distance from the beloved.

From this point of view, the poems we've read may be seen as all reactive in structure, and as truly occasional. But the occasion is

thinking; and the writer's response is to assert control over thought--to assert his presence in his thinking, to feel devoted rather than enslaved, and independent rather than devoted. When we search for a period of adherence, we don't find it; when we search for moments of love, we find only assertions of loss. Loss in Hours of Idleness is finally essential, purified, and abstract. It is not presence followed by absence, but absence outside the consciousness of the writer; specifically, it is absence outside of his momentary rededications to truth, a void outside his articualtion. Everything outside him is uncertain.

Byron's compression of systems into finally eradicable ideas is, I think, a gesture that corresponds to his self-involvement in these early poems. And it persists in varying forms throughout his career; it will be one of themes of the present work, that what looks like stoicism is more often a willful intervention in memory; and that temporal uncertainty in Byron's discourse often accompanies his attempts at self composure: to maintain order in a world that will crumble if you turn your attention away from it, self-assertion becomes the willing of impermanence. We will find other reasons for ambivalence toward writing, not the least of which is that there is usually an audience of tyrants lurking somewhere around Byron's conception of the scene of writing. But in the following chapter we will focus on one specific consequence of Byron's egocentricity in composition: his several attempts through several years to find what seemed to him an adequate way of expressing subjectivity in a public form--his attempts to render character.

Notes

[1] Michael G. Cooke, The Blind Man Traces the Circle, p. 39.

[2] Cooke, Blind Man; see especially the discussion of "On a Distant View of the Village and School of Harrow on the Hill," pp. 11-12, and of "To Edward Noel Long, Esq.," pp. 17-20.

Chapter III

Childe Harold and the Oriental Tales

The introductory verse to Childe Harold's Pilgrimage is entitled "To Ianthe," and comprises five stanzas in the Spenserian, the major compositional unit of the four cantos. It is very much in the tradition of the dedicatory epistle, touching time, place, occasion, and motive; and all of it is the very model of Stanley Fish's "self-consuming artifact"--a tour de force of self-referentiality. Perhaps to a degree attained by no other poem in the canon, "To Ianthe" integrates the verbal strategies noted in Chapter One: indirection, assertion by negation, the elaboration by means of particles of relatively simple into complex predications, the cumulative supremacy of the conditional and the meta-conditional. Most of all, "To Ianthe" demonstrates that progress by surpassion in which complex verbal structures are begun, developed, and abandoned in favor of obliquities.

Each of the stanzas except Stanza 2 is a single sentence (and it could be argued that the exclamation point in St. 2 indicates an interjection rather than a termination). But even if each pause were a full stop, the stanzas could not very accurately be divided into discrete components; each clause and phrase overlaps its neighbors semantically; each is qualified by those surrounding it. Still less, for reasons which will become clear, could any one stanza be singled out as especially important. Therefore I will cite the poem in full, making only brief observations between stanzas.

Not in those climes where I have late been straying,
Though Beauty long hath there been matchless deem'd;
Not in those visions to the heart displaying
Forms which it sighs but to have only dream'd,
Hath aught like thee in truth or fancy seem'd:
Nor, having seen thee, shall I vainly seek
To paint those charms which varied as they beam'd--
To such as see thee not my words were weak;
To those who gaze on thee, what language could they speak?
(11. 1-9)

The answer to the last question is, of course, this language: an extraordinarily noncommittal sentence. The negations in the first and third lines suspend the meaning of those clauses, heavily weighting the predication to come. Thus the whole stanza pivots on the equivocal "seem'd." The last four lines should be an explanation, but instead they move on as before, asserting what is not the case about something which has not yet fully appeared.

The poem follows its long rhetorical question with an apostrophic wish (a sequence we have seen before, in Childe Harold, IV, 177-79).

Ah! may'st thou ever be what now thou art,
Nor unbeseem the promise of thy spring,
As fair in form, as warm yet pure in heart,
Love's image upon earth without his wing,
And guileless beyond Hope's imagining!
And surely she who now so fondly rears
Thy youth, in thee, thus hourly brightening,
Beholds the rainbow of her future years,
Before whose heavenly hues all sorrow disappears.
(11. 10-18)

As elsewhere in the poem, the subjunctive seems to remove some restriction on the length and construction of the clause. The first five lines contain seven phrases, of various functions: parallelism, comparison, positive and negative conjunction. But the last four, while ostensibly conjoined to the first clause, depart altogether from the wish. The transition from "And" to "And" in the fifth and sixth lines ought to indicate an extension of the theme, more prayer upon the image. Instead, it begins again (and in parallel to the first line) "And surely she . . ."--as

if the wish had not been conditional, or as if it had already been granted.

And on again, abruptly, in Stanza 3:

> Young Peri of the West!--'tis well for me
> My years already doubly number thine;
> My loveless eye unmoved may gaze on thee,
> And safely view thy ripening beauties shine;
> Happy, I ne'er shall see them in decline;
> Happier, that while all younger hearts shall bleed,
> Mine shall escape the doom thine eyes assign
> To those whose admiration shall succeed,
> But mix's with pangs to Love's even loveliest hours decreed.
> (11. 19-27)

The difficulty of paraphrasing these sentences or reducing them to basic propositions is especially marked here, in the transition from "Happy" to "Happier" (actually a change in usage, from "glad" to "fortunate," rather than a shift to the comparative), and in the last line, which, among other tangles, initially takes "mix'd" as a main verb, but then reorients around the final "decreed."

Stanza 4 is another apostrophe, and so begins with a suspended intention, as Stanza 2 does.

> Oh! let that eye, which, wild as the Gazelle's,
> Now brightly bold, or beautifully shy,
> Wins as it wanders, dazzles where it dwells,
> Glance o'er this page, nor to my verse deny
> That smile for which my breast might vainly sigh
> Could I to thee be ever more than friend:
> This much, dear maid, accord; nor question why
> To one so young my strain I would commend,
> But bid me with my wreath one matchless lily blend.
> (11. 28-36)

Not even the subjunctive, however, enables the intention of the first clause to emerge. A smile is requested. For what? Either for the verse or for the narrator's breast. What kind of smile? "That smile for which my breast might vainly sigh/Could I to thee be ever more than friend " As before, the wish trails off into a series of fine distinctions.

> Such is thy name with this my verse entwined;
> And long as kinder eyes a look shall cast
> On Harold's page, Ianthe's here enshrined

> Shall thus be first beheld, forgotten last:
> My days once number'd, should this homage past
> Attract thy fairy fingers near the lyre
> Of him who hailed thee, loveliest as thou wast,
> Such is the most my memory may desire;
> Though more than Hope can claim, could Friendship less require?
> (11. 37-45)

The connection of theme and structure, such as it is, is described here: the poem seeks an entwining with "Ianthe," which perhaps explains the interdependence of tense, mood, and attribution. It could be an attempt to grammatically fix the poem. But again, as in the other stanzas, the objects of the pivotal verbs are indistinct. If we ask at the end, "could friendship require less than what?" or "what is the most your memory could desire?" we could only answer, in full, that "(m)y days once number'd, should this homage past/Attract thy fairy fingers near the lyre/Of him who hail'd thee, loveliest as thou wast . . ."

What is remarkable about "To Ianthe" is that it seems to be entirely context; it seems to prepare for some emphasis that never appears. There is no gradual inclination into simplicity, no generally indicative passage, no foreground assertion that can be isolated from the mass of background grammar. The poem remains a perpetual "if-" with no "then-" clause. But this is not because the poem's connections to the original image disappear: not a single term of the poem's development is allowed to lapse. It is rather because too many connections are asserted. The poem leaves the reader in systematic doubt about exactly what would happen if the sentences were to be realized.[2] The poem seems to announce loudly that it has no intention; and this strategy, if it may be so called, is carried over into the first stanza of Canto I, in which the narrator invokes the Muse to say that he won't be invoking the Muse.

What we see, then, in stylistic terms, is that a reliance on certain strong syntactic constructions--prominently, negative conjunctions and

subjunctive verbs--tends to obscure the referent. The grammatical complexity contributes much to the opacity of the poem, but, paradoxically, it makes the intention more fragile; as an element in the poem, "Ianthe" has meaning but no significance.[3] The poem is not productive: it generates no theme, or, more precisely, the theme is inextricable from a full rehearsal of the poem. In respect of its alternating attraction to and withdrawl from the object, "To Ianthe" is reminiscient of the crisis overcome in "She Walks in Beauty" (though again no one crisis point can be singled out). The difference is that here we remain firmly introspective; this project never breaks into narration.

The reasons why this should be so are bound up in the larger question of the topics of narrative poetry: what is to be separated from the context, and in what way? what are foregrounds and backgrounds? Therefore this is also partly a question of the interaction of theme and narration. To explore this interaction more fully, we will examine a group of works, Byron's middle period tales, in which a variety of techniques of emphasis are used, and in which emphasis and narration can be arranged into general patterns.

One of the reasons that Byron's narratives--especially the Oriental tales--have usually been considered a minor part of his work is that, from one perspective, the poetry of the middle period does end up where it began. Byron perfected the Popean satire in "The Waltz" in 1812 and did not return to satire in earnest until Beppo, five years later. He achieved a sort of psychological realism in the involuted structure of The Giaour, and did not attempt anything similar until his experiments in narration in Don Juan. Most apparent to critics has been his return to his friend Childe Harold in 1816, six years after finishing the second canto of that poem. The general judgment of history is that in that

year Byron returned to what he could do best and resumed the main direction of his development; the intervening tales are a slight deviation--so many "adumbrations," as Gleckner has it, of Childe Harold I and II.[4]

But on closer examination, the tales are not really much alike: they are "Oriental" only in being set somewhere generally southeast of England (two take place in Greece, two in Turkey, one in Italy, and of one--Lara--we know only that the setting is not Spain[5]); the plot structures and the handling of plot are different in each; the style of characterization undergoes three recognizeable evolutions; and, most important, the tales display at least three distinct conceptions of narrative technique. The Byron who emerges from such a reading is, if anything, more actively experimental during this period than at any other time in his career. His approach, mastery, and eventual abandoning of traditional verse narrative can be seen as coeval with his transition from lyric to dramatic narrator; from the older poetic of decoration to an identifiably romantic esthetic; from an inability to represent characters comfortable to great ease and facility in characterization; and, finally, out of the stylistic anxiety of Hours of Idleness and Domestic Pieces, into the frank radicalism of the great short poems of 1816: The Prisoner of Chillon, "The Dream," "Prometheus," and "Darkness."

The Giaour must be most emphatically distinguished from the rest of the tales, by virtue of the experimental nature of its narrative structure. Its peripheral first-person point of view (there seem to be several distinct voices in the poem, collocated in the memory of a main narrator, a friar to whom the Giaour has confessed[6]) destabilizes the plot, and prefigures the removal of stance achieved in Don Juan; these are the only two of Byron's non-dramatic poems in which linguistic continuity and psychological consistency are not at odds with each other. In The Giaour,

their integration takes a stiffer and more mechanical form: the friar's reconstruction of the central images and events of the story, in the order of their importance to him. This approach makes of the poem a poetic montage rather than a chronicle.

The unfixed perspective works in two ways. First, it creates a sympathetic narration, in the narrower sense of the term: we are, like the friar, outside the events of the story, free to associate details. Second, it allows for an experiment in suspense. The long exploratory image of the Pasha's ruined palace--the friar's third memory--determines at least one aspect of the story's outcome, and attention is shifted just that much to the causes of Hassan's downfall. This is not tragedy yet, nor even, strictly speaking, dramatic irony, but it is a strategy common to both. Effects derived from the manipulation of chronology also become increasingly important through the lyrics of the middle period.

Byron was not pleased with his first tale. He continued to publish it with the subtitle "A Fragment of a Turkish Tale" through several revision; he called it "that snake of a poem" and said that his revisions left it "a little less unfinished (but more unintelligible)."[7] We have no way, and perhaps no need, to know precisely what he meant by this, but given what the poem does accomplish, and compared to the tales which follow it, we can locate one noticeably unsuccessful vein. There is no real access to the Giaour himself in this poem, and, in fact, the Giaour seems to exist largely as the product of those prominently featured structural experiments and the accompanying plot devices (the friar's testimony, for instance, and the political and religious oppositions which motivate some part of the conflict). When we probe the poem we find out nothing more about the Giaour, only something of the friar, something of the nature of memory. The protagonist remains a figment of the

plot, rather than a round, layered character.

The same is true of The Bride of Abydos, the following tale; except that it was his first attempt at a woman,[9] there is an obvious continuity of technique of characterization from The Giaour to The Bride. In the latter, character is largely a function of massive social, political, and familial relationships, and of prolonged monologues on those relationships. The affinities with drama are strong in The Bride, even more so than in The Giaour. But in both these early tales, character is approached by way of the plot; we come to understand a character by reference to those social, political, and familial coordinates.

In The Corsair and the sequel, Lara, new strategies are employed. The innovative plot structures are discarded in favor of the standard conflict, climax, and denouement--a regression, perhaps, in regard to form, but a great liberation of the narrator. These plots are almost automatic. Even the plot twists (Conrad's disguise, Lara's lover/servant) are drawn from long-established traditions; in all other respects, once these plots were set in motion they worked themselves through. This cleared a space in the flow of determinations for the creation of a character which would have a reality, a substantial quality, apart from the plot of the story; if we can judge by the number of lines given to characterization, Conrad and Lara are meant to be very substantial indeed. But The Corsair and Lara are companion poems in more that subject and structure. They mark an important point in Byron's growth as a narrator.

He had already academically defined the nature of the heroic solitary, in Childe Harold I and II. It remained to make this figure plausibly active. The Harold of the first two cantos was always on the verge of transparence; and Byron in 1816, probably realizing that Harold had always been an ephemeral character, himself stirred up and dispersed the

cloud: Harold is an admitted pretext in Canto III; he does not exist, even as a figment, in Canto IV. Byron wrote the third and fourth cantos for reasons other than Harold's potential as a character; the most profitable course was to let Harold sink to the level determined by the language that surrounded his creation.

Childe Harold I and II, The Giaour, and The Bride of Abydos have two things in common: first, they rely on syntagmatic forces of literature--plot material and description--to carry the weight of characterization; second, the language they employ--substantive, historical, literalistic--creates characters which are purely creatures of the moment. One reason Harold disintegrates is that he has not the language, neither the amount nor the sort, to hold him together. Harold is briefly and, in every way, summarily described; and moreover, from far outside, as a slightly less than omniscient narrator might see him:

> Childe Harold he was hight:--but whence his name
> And lineage long, it suits me not to say;
> Suffice it, that perchance they were of fame,
> And had been glorious in another day . . .
>
> (Childe Harold, I, St. 3)

> For he through Sin's long labyrinth had run,
> Nor made atonement when he did amiss,
> Had sighed to many though he loved but one,
> And that loved one, alas! could ne'er be his.
>
> (I, St. 5)

> Yet oft-times in his maddest mirthful mood
> Strange pangs would flash along Childe Harold's brow
> As if the memory of some deadly feud
> Or disappointed passion lurked below:
>
> (I, St. 8)

Not even the qualifications "perchance" and "Yet" save Harold from over-determination here. The mystery fastened to the character is itself demystifying. The catalog of sins is complete and fairly explicit, and fixes Harold quite as firmly as the reference to social position. By indirection in St. 3 Harold is placed in an established, aristocratic

bloodline; he even has a mother and a sister (St. 19). It makes little difference that Harold is defined in opposition to his history, society, and family (that is, as an alienated hero); the very stanzas that affirm his separateness and independence locate Harold in regard to everything that will happen in the poem. The verse used to create Harold, like that used for the Giaour and for Selim and Zuleika in The Bride, is poetically final, filled with determinacies of language and tone:

> Ah me! in sooth he was a shameful wight,
> Sore given to revel and ungodly glee;
>
> (I, St. 2)

> The Childe departed from his father's hall:
> It was a vast and venerable pile;
> So old, it seemed only not to fall,
> Yet strength was pillared in each massy aisle.
> Monastic dome! condemn'd to uses vile!
>
> (I, St. 7)

The strident moralizing here, though it is partly in fun, nevertheless draws Harold's characterization into a background of received information; the language of sin is so strong in these opening stanzas that only with some effort can we make of Harold anything other than a moral emblem. The title of the poem is a constant reminder of the religious and penitential context; and, ultimately, that mark of Cain across the brow is all we need to know about Harold. The medieval and Christian symbolism through which Harold is created affix him to certain inalterable ideas and attitudes; he becomes an idea, in fact, or rather, a subordinate symbol denoting the reality of the narrator (Harold, of course, is a herald). He does not, could not, become a character. It would have been impressive indeed if Byron had succeeded in writing his way out of this:

> The sails were fill'd, and fair the light wind blew,
> As glad to waft him from his native home;
> And fast the white rocks faded from his view,
> And soon were lost in circumambient foam;

And then, it may be, of his wish to roam
Repented he, but in his bosom slept
The silent thought, nor from his lips did come
One word of wail, whilst others sate and wept,
And to the reckless gales unmanly moaning kept.

But when the sun was sinking in the sea
He seized his harp, which he at times could string,
And strike, albeit with untaught melody,
When deemed he no strange ear was listening:
And now his fingers o'er it he did fling,
And tuned his farewell in the dim twilight.
While flew the vessel on her snowy wing,
And fleeting shores receded from his sight,
Thus to the elements he poured his last "Good Night."
(I, St. 11-12)

These are stanzas of closure, and Harold's "Good Night" is final. His image, complete with mysteries and fixed ambiguities, has been fashioned, and is not subject to change.

The representation of the Giaour is similarly closed. In trying to delineate character along, and by, plot-line--by factitious oppositions of Christian/Moslem, East/West, authority/rebellion, and so on--Byron let the character itself fall from view, and become merely the product of those plot devices. The same is true of The Bride of Abydos, in which the characters are formed by social symbols and family relationships. In Childe Harold I and II and The Bride, this bias toward the circumstantial results finally in a kind of Wordsworthian "poetry of place" (the last seventy lines of The Bride recount how the place of Selim's and Zuleika's death came to be known as "Pirate-phantom"s pillow"). In The Giaour, it results in the incessant search for an adequate perspective. In all three poems, it leads to characters which cannot outlive their contexts, who are overdetermined by plot, and proleptic, plot-related description.

But in The Corsair and Lara, the language surrounding the protagonists seems designed precisely to remove them from the strands of the plot. Rather than the brief summation of character in Childe Harold I

and the simple attribution of qualities in The Giaour, in these later poems the narrator moves around, above, and far inside the characters, rolling out hundreds of lines of poetry. The very weight of words is enough to separate the characters from their context (it is Conrad's central trait, in fact, to be without context, a hero whose values and attachments are entirely self-directed). The particulars of the feud between Conrad and Seyd are unknown and unimportant. The setting of Lara is left indeterminate. Both characters become more flexible, and more interesting, to the degree that they are no longer fixed by the grid of the plot.

> Lone, wild, and strange, he stood alike exempt
> From all affection and from all contempt;
> His name could sadden, and his acts surprise;
> But they that feared him dared not to despise;
> Man spurns the worm, but pauses ere he wake
> The slumbering venom of the folded snake:
> The first may turn, but not avenge the blow;
> The last expires, but leaves no living foe;
> Fast to the doom'd offender's form it clings,
> And he may crush--not conquer--still it stings!
>
> (The Corsair, I, ll. 270-80)

This is highly metaphorical poetry, but it is not particularly symbolic. We can distantly relate Conrad to the Fall (ll. 252 and 275-76), or see him as an agent of fortune (the "worm turns," above), but far and away, the portrayal of Conrad is remarkable for its lack of a symbolic component. Only by juxtaposition is his characterization linked to the plot. And the language of his birth does not attach itself to anything beyond itself: Conrad is created by a system of connotations rather than by a system of references to the world of the poem.

> Unlike the heroes of each ancient race,
> Demons in act, but gods at least in face,
> In Conrad's form seems little to admire,
> Though his dark eyebrow shades a glance of fire:
>
> (I, ll. 192-96)

> Too close inquiry his stern glance would quell.
> There breathe but few whose aspect might defy
> The full encounter of his searching eye;
> He had the skill, when Cunning's gaze would seek
> To probe his heart and watch his changing cheek,
> At once the observer's purpose to espy,
> And on himself roll back his scrutiny . . .
>
> (I, 11. 214-20)

> The lip's least curl, the lightest paleness thrown
> Along the governed aspect, speak alone
> Of deeper passions; and to judge their mein,
> He who would see, must be himself unseen.
>
> (I, 11. 231-34)

Conrad's creation is itself a digression from the plot. The clustering of traits around related words (here, "face" and "eye") was a tactic Byron had used in The Bride of Abydos ("Turk/Greek," "seems/is"), but in The Corsair, the description of Conrad's personality has nothing to do with the course of the story; Conrad is not defined by his situation, nor even by his actions, but by his narrator's language.

The result of this strategy--despite its heavy dependence on literal description--is one of the least conditional characters Byron ever wrote. Conrad stands apart from the plot of the tale, the very model of the detached hero. The poetry of his creation, because it dispenses with symbol and establishes itself by internal rather than external reference, leaves Conrad open to change, and he does in fact change through the course of the poem. The character is saved from overdetermination by a kind of linguistic impressionism: as is usual in Byron, each assertion implies its own qualification--looking/looked at, inside/outside, wisdom/foolishness. Conrad and Lara do not disperse when critically probed; Byron himself dramatically probed the characters by following their responses to various situations. In The Corsair, the plot exists largely to provide new experiences for Conrad.

Immediately, in Lara, Byron began to experiment with his discovery,

and to integrate character into an appropriate story. Lara (indistinguishable from Conrad because the style of characterization is exactly the same) participates in a plot of larger dimensions and less episodic construction. In The Seige of Corinth we are again on the broad canvas of The Giaour, and the later poem is in many respects a new version of the earlier: both are attempts to represent large political and social forces acting on and through individuals--a love story and a war. The difference is that in the later poem, the hero, Alp, is little more than a minor occasion, a way of writing in another event. He is the Byronic hero lyricised, the first of a line including Prometheus and the later Childe Harold--not protagonists, but a means of varying the topic and modifying the tone. The Seige of Corinth is finally an experiment in narration as it surrounds character.

Parasina is an experiment in characterization, as it concentrates plot, and it is very much a rewrite of The Bride of Abydos. The same cluster of motifs--family, incest, confusion of birth--operates here, but not as the structure of the plot. The complex circumstances are rather a stage from which the main characters may make pronouncements on love and loyalty. The plot serves as a thematic background--an occasion--for the dialogue (or, really, the series of monologues); it is significant that in Parasina by far the greater portion of the verse is devoted to the speech of the characters.

These last two middle period tales (they might more accurately be called scenes or vignettes) are at yet another remove from traditional verse narrative, and they share a simple yet profound disturbance of traditional continuity: both have explanatory headnotes which set down the source and shape of the story, its main characters, and its ending. This signals two developments. First, in revealing at the outset the

events of the story, Byron dissolved suspense; the outcome of the events could no longer serve as the object of reading. The attention of the reader is shifted from the tale to the telling. This is a substantial departure from the method of The Corsair, in which the next step of the sequence, the plot twists, and especially the ending are still crucial to the poem's operation. Allied to this increasing unconcern with suspense is Byron's increasing interest in tragedy. Though he was still claiming in his letters and journals through 1815 that he felt unequal to the form, The Siege of Corinth and Parasina indicate that he was moving toward it. The headnotes are not historical documentation or pretended historicism--Byron freely admits his license in changing names, guessing at contexts, imagining the complications. They are records of the inevitabilities of the poems: Corinth will fall; Parasina and Hugo will be punished. Within those final limits, Byron is announcing, is an area of invention. We can see, in these last two Oriental tales, the final steps in Byron's move from the outside of stories to the inside, the move that changed the merely factual Harold of Canto I, who "had a mother--not forgot . . . A sister whom he loved" (St. 10), into the metaphorical Harold of Canto III, "the wandering outlaw of his own dark mind." (St. 3)

Byron's footnotes have been overlooked as often as his headnotes, and there is a reason for this: it is easy to mistake the notes for a show of erudition, or an anxiety of accuracy or verisimilitude: it is easy to forget that annotation itself widens, rather than narrows, the gap between literature and life. Like the tales, Byron's footnotes have often been considered as a single component, and their various functions and tones collapsed into one impulse. In truth, the notes are a rich addition to the poetry, and could be endlessly subdivided under topics and types. With regard to the development of Byron's narrative

technique, they fall generally into three sorts; and though the three are found all through his career, by way of frequency of appearance they may be called early, middle, and late.

The early style of footnote comprises definitions of foreign words, explanations of facts, and documentation. Nearly all the notes to Childe Harold's Pilgrimage are of this sort: the notes to Cantos I and II are primarily brief relations of the author's own experiences on the Continent in 1809-10; the notes to the 1816 cantos are largely verifications drawn from other travelogues and from histories. The latter, given the sort of annotation Byron was doing for other poems in 1816, are anomalous; their use suggests, not the need to substantiate, but an attempt at an extended and inclusive dedication to Europe (the disappearance of the main character also turns the poem toward the lyric, away from the "romaunt"). In this respect, Childe Harold III and IV, with notes, is a precursor of Don Juan rather than the successor of the middle period tales.

But it is in the tales that the direction may most clearly be traced. In 1812 and 1813, Byron was still entranced with the language and the imagery of the East, and the bulk of the notes to The Giaour and The Bride of Abydos reflect his preoccupation with etymology:

> "Her hair in hyacinthine flow." Hyacinthine, in the Arabic "Sunbul"; as common a thought in the Eastern poets as it was among the Greeks.
>
> (The Giaour n, l. 496)

> "Holds not a Musselim's control." "Musselim," a governor, next in rank after a Pacha; a Waywode is the third; and then come the Agas.
>
> (The Bride n, l. 374)

> "Nor raised the craven cry, Amaun!" "Amaun," quarter, pardon.
>
> (The Giaour n, l. 603)

This early style of note establishes an intractable connection between poem and annotation; more than anything, they mark Byron as the poet of

truth he always maintained he was. Poetically, the most distinctive feature of the early notes is their perfect contiguity; they do not disturb or interrupt the narrative. The explanations of metaphors are simple translations; the further descriptions and documentation are designed to render some scene more intelligible. All annotation is additional significance; Byron's early notes add to the narrative, where he thought significance resided.

The middle style of footnote is developed and perfected through the last four Oriental tales, and appears fully-fledged and heavily weighted in the historical tragedies of 1820-22. These notes are still directed along the narrative line, but in a different way. Byron began, in 1813-14, to append the sources of his stories, and, as he was to do in the headnotes to The Seige of Corinth and Parasina, to outline the shape and historical context of the narrative. The long Appendix to Parasina (mostly a quote from Frizzi's History of Ferrara), like the headnote, de-emphasizes suspense as the motive of the narration.

And there are, within the telling, even more striking departures from the literal realism of the early documentation. Byron begins to stand back from the poems and comment on the action and the characters:

> The Corsair. The time in this poem may seem too short for the occurrences, but the whole of the Aegean isles are within a few hours' sail of the continent, and the reader must be kind enough to take the wind as I have found it.
>
> (The Corsair n, l. 1)

> "Escaped, is here--himself would tell the rest." It has been observed, that Conrad's entering disguised as a spy is out of nature. Perhaps so. I find something not unlike it in history . . .
>
> (The Corsair n, l. 50)

And in a long footnote to the last line of The Corsair, Byron locates two historical analogs to Conrad: Jean LaFitte and Archbishop Blackbourne. This is something new in his poetry. The analogies add nothing to the

narrative, especially coming as they do at the very end of the poem. They are at most a substantiation of the cliche of "honor among thieves." The referent of the footnote is general enough that it could have been placed anywhere among the notes; it could have been the sort of documentation that he appended to The Bride of Abydos (e. g., to Canto II, l. 47). Instead, Byron placed it precisely where it would become a digression or distraction from the conclusion of the poem. It makes of Conrad's fall an anti-climax. A long footnote to the last episode of Lara works in the same way: it gives the source of Byron's idea for the assassination and the disposal of one of the characters (and for one or two more elements of the poem) in an extensive quote from Roscoe's Leo Tenth. The citation is interesting on its own merits, but it is entirely too long and covers too much to suppose that Byron's only reason for including it was fidelity to history. Like the footnote to The Corsair, this annotation slants off from the main narrative line of the poem.

In fact, both of these footnotes are more related to the poems' contents by association that contiguity. They are prototypes of Byron's third or late style of annotation, the style that dominates the footnotes to Don Juan. These notes are neither documentation nor substantiation, and they do not contribute to the progress of the narration. In their fullest form, as notes to Don Juan, they are an opportunity to say something more, something new, and so are part of that gesture toward inclusivity we find in Byron's last poem. But as early as The Corsair Byron was moving in that direction, away from narrative for its own sake, away from suspense. By 1816, it is no longer the ending of a tale that brings it full circle, it is the headnotes and footnotes.

We are in a position now to recall "To Ianthe"--not to explain why it stands at the beginning of Childe Harold, but to remember its

similarities to the parent poem (and to notice also that it stands at the beginning of the middle period): in following the theme of character, and the style of characterization, from "To Ianthe" through Childe Harold IV, we discover that the received opinion of Byron's middle period is not incorrect (though for reasons other than the received); the poetry does end up where it began.

If we take the direction of the tales as evidence, Byron cared less and less about rigourous narrative sequence: he very casually dropped the suspense of ending, for the first time in The Giaour, later in The Seige of Corinth and Parasina; in The Corsair, he began to slant off from narrative linearity with the digressive, late style footnotes. Less and less space is devoted to the outside of the tale, its plot; Byron began borrowing stories, and refocusing his attention on the development of character and voice; in this work, he began to emphasize metaphor and connotation over plot and symbol.

All of these changes in technique and in attitude are immediately relevant to the change that must have occurred between the Byron of 1815, who said he could not write a tragedy, and the Byron of 1816-17, who in Manfred composed a fine formal tragedy. No longer did Byron have to stay far outside his characters and define them by saying things about them; he made a complete shift to the interior, and began speaking wholly in his characters' voices. Though in some respects it is just another form of narration, drama demands that plot be approached through character, and not the other way around. And it also demands a greater attention to the associative and verbal than to the mimetic: consistency of action alone is a poor delineator of character; consistency of voice is what is required. Many of Byron's later characters--Arnold, Sardanapalus, Juan--act more or less at random; it is the language of their appearance

that keeps these characters solid.

We find, finally, that Byron's attention was never much devoted to trimming his plots into realizable propositions. Some of the middle period tales court the kind of narrative Scott wrote, but even when most interested, Byron was always pulling away from the story, always finding something new that needed saying. In the midst of his most sustained linear narrative--Lara--there are gaps in, digressions from, and attenuations and compressions of the plot line that can only be adjusted by the imaginative leaps of the reader: a requirement that could never have been sanctioned by the Scott-Rogers-Campbell school of absolutely determinate narration. Even passing from Byron's text to his footnotes requires a good deal of associative thinking. There are excellent and exciting passages of narrative all through Byron's work. But study of the middle period tales shows that, ultimately, narrative for Byron served the purposes of a larger metaphorical structure.

Notes

[1] Stanley Fish, Self-Consuming Artifacts (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University press, 1970), Chapter One, passim.

[2] A similar phenomenon has been described in "Kuble Khan" in the essay "Kubla's Construct" by A. C. Goodson, Studies in Romanticism, 18 (Fall, 1979), pp. 405-25.

[3] This distinction is drawn from E. D. Hirsch, The Aims of Interpretation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 1-13.

[4] Robert F. Gleckner, Byron and the Ruins of Paradise, p. 39.

[5] The first footnote to Lara refers to the first line of that poem: "'The Serfs are glad through Lara's wide domain.' The reader is appraised, that the name of Lara being Spanish, and no circumstance of local or natural description fixing the scene or the hero of the poem to any country or age, the word 'Serf,' which could not be correctly applied to the lower classes in Spain, who were never vassals of the soil, has nevertheless been used to designate the followers of our fictitious chieftain."

[6] There is still some controversy over who narrates The Giaour; no one character in the tale could have access to all the information provided in it. Since the friar is in all other respects a repository of confessions, it is not misleading to speak of his narration, his memory. But, of course, thise solves none of the difficulties of interpreting the tale.

[7] "that snake of a poem," found in Leslie Marchand's Byron's Letters and Journals, III, p. 62; "a little less unfinished," III, p. 57.

[8] Byron made much of this in a letter to Edward Daniel Clarke, Dec. 15, 1813: "I have also wished to try my hand on a female character in Zuleika--& have endeavored as far as ye. grossness of of our masculine ideas will allow--to preserve her purity without impairing the ardour of her attachment." Marchand, L&J V, p. 208.

Chapter IV

History and Tragedy

Perhaps no single critical term has been used as often as "dramatization" to describe Byron's poetic procedure. It is standard to refer to Byron's dramatizations of his experiences, of his psyche, of his major themes, and, always and everywhere, his dramatizations of paradox. Like all institutional metaphors, the word draws its force from a forgotten history, and like all critical superstitions, it remains significant even when it has ceased to by specifically meaningful. But it is not now my object to devalue any particular use of the word, as long as it does not imply the psychologically obscure notion that the process of writing is a function of the author's hopes for the finished text; to this we have already found numerous objections. It is sufficient here to point out one striking deficiency in the critical literature on Byron: that while there have been studies of Byron's dramaturgy, of the thematic structures of his plays, analyses of his plays as epics and of his epic as a dramatization, there has been no attempt to focus on the most obvious and immediate "dramatization" that the four regular plays represent: the dramatization of a philosophy of speech.

This is true even though the constant problem in the interpretation of the plays has been to find this philosophical bridge--to find or forge a context of ideas against which the plays can be measured, and in which we can discern a principle of growth or progress or change. I would not ask for a principle of unity, for, as is true of Childe Harold, the

difficulty in reconstructing the plays is not the recognition of theme or variation--not, that is, in finding the larger units of plot and structure--but in finding the logic of the smaller units. In Childe Harold, how does the theme of nature versus society react to the tortuous sentences in which that theme is expressed? In the plays, how may we characterize the relation between story, which we recognize readily enough, and style, which baffles not only recognition, but, on this scale, description?

The search for connections of this sort, which can only be expressed philosophically, is at once the most interesting and the least justifiable of critical endeavors. In is an increasingly accepted view that, a priori, there can be no objective certainty to associations of style and meaning.[1] Any stylistic criterion, as any thematic emphasis, is preselective and self-fulfilling. And I do not wish to circumvent the problem; rather the opposite, I would like to acknowledge it fully, and state at the outset thath the more convincing such connections appear at first, the more willing we must be to abandon them immediately; that we ought not to look for conclusions at every point, but sometimes be satisfied with revealing premises; that literary ideas are not analytical propositions, and are more often the beginnings of philosophy that its result; and that however far we pursue Byron the thinker, it is Byronic writing that we will find.

This brings up another problem, a question I would prefer to reserve, but cannot, since it is not an empirical question: are there any special conditions of writing drama, as distinct from writing, say, essays or romances? And at the most fundamental level, we must answer no--no more that there are truly fundamental, originative, differences between the writing of a lyric and a narrative. In all writing the task, the work, is to go forward at each moment; knowing in advance that there will be

four acts does not help one write the first line of Act IV. Nor can the plays be distinguished by the absence of a narrator; we have already seen that Byron's writing cannot be classified on this basis. Both presence and absence, and the transformation of character into narrator into absent (undramatized) narrator are qualities of the text which may be referred to narration. On the other hand, we may speak of character development even in a minimally dramatic poem like the "Epitaph on John Adams." There has been a natural, and on the whole commendable, tendency to treat Byron's plays as plays, that is, in terms of European theatrical traditions. But even this most generous of principles ought to be suspect, and not a first principle, for it assumes that the genres are distinct, and that we share an understanding of what they are.

Yet, having so said, we may revive the generic study of the drama, not by attention to what is there, but to what cannot be there, its necessary lack of continuity, its white spaces. And we can propose a condition that will suggest how Byron's plays can be generically distinct and stylistically indistinct simultaneously: that the space between any two speeches is the same as the transition between any two sentences; at any termination, even at any moment, a speech may be continued, interrupted, or responded to. And yet any response, in dramatic form, presents itself--needing no further cues, clues, or specifications--as a response to the preceding speech. This is fundamental, and it is different from saying that the plays mimic real speech.

Likewise, we can remain conscious of the initial limitations set by our taking as an area of study the ways Byron's characters respond to each other; our associations may seem less arbitrary as they grow more deliberate. It may also be of some support to our project here to point out that it continues a discussion opened in the last chapter--or, more

precisely, it repeats that discussion in a different guise. There we asked how theme may be separated from context; here we ask whether either can be said to be responsible for the other. What is the relation between the identity--the self-identity--of any speech and the norms, conventions, and history to which it must conform if it is to be recognized as human speech (or human language, at any rate)? To what degree may any utterance depart from an accepted context and remain meaningful? May we hope, in such an investigation of the "plays as plays" to find an analogue of the poetic process?

And these questions, I think, are not asked arbitrarily of the plays. For though there are rich and strange associations of language and identity throughout Byron's poetry, in the plays they are imbued with a strength and sense of wonder that makes them unmistakeably important. The plays are about language and identity, in two ways. First, they contain a systematic pattern of assertions about language and about the linguistic relations among characters; images, symbols, and especially figures of speech which reflect characters' attitudes toward these relations; and a pattern of explicit references to identity, its constitution, and its relevance to language. No one of these elements is complete, and their system as a whole is not serial or conclusive. But they are important indicators of the logic of the plays at particular points.

Second, and practically inseparable from this system of references, the plays locate their characters in regard to a secondary system of signification--a set of fixed attitudes, perceptions, and prescriptions for action which is not ethics (though it is called on to legitimize behavior) and not a sub-system of language (though speech is said to derive from it). It resembles a code of honor (and has been mistaken for simply that[2]), but it is also much more that a principle of motivation.

It is an active, internally coherent, and persuasuve imagination of the past, which may be compared to the modern concept of figural history: both an extension of the past into the present and a reasoning backward from the present toward an image of the past, as all part of a single continuous field.[3] The presence of that image is the predominant characteristic of the societies in which Byron's protagonists move; it forms the most obvious "context." It is from this ideational system, for most of Byron's characters, that the identity may be said to draw its substance.

Finally, both of these aspects of the plays--the discourse on identity and the presence of the secondary code--are in almost every clear appearance bound to each other and to a range of possible responses from others, which are associated with the speaker's position in regard to the code. These responses form sets of verbal or conversational strategies which, generally, serve the function of character development, at times displacing motivation as the major means of differentiating characters. They may be initially distinguished as "locutionary" (reflecting a concern with the meanings of words, the truth or falsity of statements); "illocutionary" (concerning the traditional categories into which locutions are arranged: questions, answers, commands, etc.); and "perlocutionary" (touching the effect a speaker intends the statements to have). In contemporary speech-act theory, any well-formed utterance contains a measure of all three "forces."[4] In Byron's plays, it will become convenient to think of them as types or levels of response.

A consideration of responses suggests certain likenesses among a group of characters, notable between Marino Faliero in the play which bears his name and Marina Foscari in The Two Foscari. Most often, for these characters and others caught between personal interest and historical necessity,

that response is an admonition to calm down. A brief selection of the responses of others to Marino Faliero can serve to make this point; from his nephew: "My princely uncle! you are too much moved;" (I, ii, l. 110): from his wife: "Do not speak thus wildly--" (II, i, l. 262); from his co-conspirator, Israel Bertuccio: "My lord, you are much moved:" (III, i, l. 342). This becomes a kind of marker, similar to those used in the tales--something that can be said of Faliero in his absence; in the exposition, the minor character Battista: "'Tis said he is much moved,--" (I, i, l. 18); Marianna to Angiolina: "His highness has of late been greatly moved" (II, i, 126); and Faliero himself: "You mistake me./It is not Steno who could move me thus;" (II, i, l. 403). This last remark is representative of a strategy we will see again in Faliero: the attempt to correct a mistake in communication by reference to and emphasis on himself. That Faliero uses the same word as his correspondents suggests assent to a common communicative context, but everything else--the attempt at correction, the assertion of self, the ambiguous use of "could"--suggests rebellion. In terms of the dramatic action, as Faliero begins to plan his revolution--the overthrow of Venetian society and all it presupposes--as he draws away from the supporting code, his words are misconstrued, perceived as merely symptomatic of a certain state. There is a sense in which the code operates only at the level of illocution; content, locution, is not as important as form. It is the form of his response that both his enemies and his compatriots find puzzling, and it is in regard to form rather than meaning that they respond to him. In terms of stylistic function also, the repetition of "moved" de-emphasizes the content of Faliero's speeches; it blocks and restrains the language which is marked as Faliero's, becoming both the standard response of a repressive regime and a symbolic indication of an irresistible decay of

communication.

The same conditions apply to the most important speeches of Marina Foscari. Her first appearance in the play introduces a set of responses which recur whenever she is present throughout. Memmo and another Venetian senator speak of Jacopo Foscari, Marina's indicted husband, in a hall in the ducal palace. Marina enters, seeking an audience with Jacopo. Note that Marina begins with a mistake.

> Marina Foscari. What; no one?--I am wrong, there are still two;
> But they are senators.
> Memmo. Most noble lady,
> Command us.
> Mar. I command! Alas! my life
> Has been one long entreaty, and a vain one.
> Mem. I understand thee, but I must not answer.
> Mar. (fiercely). True--none dare answer here save on the rack,
> Or question save those--
> Mem. (interrupting her). High-born dame! Bethink thee
> Where thou now art.
> Mar. Where I now am!--It was
> My husband's father's palace.
> Mem. The Duke's palace.
> Mar. And his son's prison!--True, I have not forgot it;
> And if there were no other nearer, bitterer
> Remembrances, would thank the illustrious Memmo
> For pointing out the pleasures of the place.
> Mem. Be calm!
>
> (I, i, 11.198-211)

There is a kind of communication here; both Marina and Memmo appear to understand that the clash between them is illocutionary--a matter of "questions" and "answers." But they are obviously at odds, and Memmo's speech is guided by his belief that he "must not answer." None of his responses are answers; they are, in order, a command (to be commanded); a acknowledgement qualified by a refusal to answer; an interruption with a warning to reconsider; a rephrasing of a simple noun clause; and another command--this time something specific: that she calm down. This is all centrally linguistic--the very topic is communication--but there is no exchange, only opposition. In contrast to Memmo, Marina seems eager to make contact at the level of locution; her speech is full of concessions,

admissions, and repetitions of her correspondent's words. But to all of her apparent effort, Memmo's final answer is that she ought to calm down.

Elsewhere in the play, responses to Marina are variations of these; from Francis Foscari, her father-in-law: "Daughter, know you/In what a presence you pronounce these things?" (II, i, LL. 287-88); in her presence, from Francis Foscari to the antagonist Loredano: "You hear, she speaks wildly," (II, i, 1. 318); from Jacopo: "I pray you, calm you:/What can avail such words?" (III, i 11. 266-67); and in her final defeat, the compassionate Barbarigo: "Heed not her rash words;/Her circumstances must excuse her bearing." (V, i, 11. 365-66). As is the case with Faliero, it is an indication of Marina Foscari's divergence from the code that she now speaks, as we may say, locutions rather than illocutions--words and particular meanings rather than formal responses. But it is as if her speech has only a perlocutionary effect: her questions are not answered, her requests are not met, and she is persistently checked and blocked in her attempt to make assertions.

Francis and Jacopo Foscari represent excess of calm and excess of passion, yet both speak and act as models of the social being. Jacopo's dilemma of conscience in regard to Venice, and even his rebellion against it, are perfectly in accord with the abstract standards of the state. He does not blame his father (who, as Doge, has the power to intervene) for allowing his trial to proceed (III, i, 1. 224) and blames his enemies only for their political corruption, not for their persecution of him. He does not understand the aspect of personal assault in the persecution and misunderstands Marina's rage as an abstract emotion of the sort that he feels: "If I am silent,/Who dares accuse my country?" (III, i, 11. 239-40) Where Marina's first scene is marked by a flurry of challenges,

denials, and accusations, Jacopo's first conversation in the play is this cooperative and sequential exchange:

> Guard. Let him rest.
> Signor, take time.
> Jacopo Foscari. I thank thee, friend, I'm feeble;
> But thou may'st stand reproved.
> Guard. I'll stand the hazard.
> Jac. Fos. That's kind;--I meet some pity but no mercy;
> This is the first.
> Guard. And might be the last, did they who rule behold us.
>
> (I, i, ll. 62-67)

This is a very formal interaction, but it is not competitive; the two characters jointly create a parallel construction in the last pair of remarks. Jacopo next has a similarly agreeable discussion of Venetian justice with one of his opponents:

> Jac. Fos. Whose voice is that?--'Tis Barbarigo's! Ah!
> Our house's foe, and one of my few judges.
> Bar. To balance such a foe, if such there be,
> Thy father sits amongst thy judges.
> Jac. Fos. True,
> He judges.
> Bar. Then deem not the laws too harsh
> Which yield so much indulgence to a sire,
> As to allow his voice in such a high matter
> As the state's safety--
> Jac. Fos. And his son's. I'm faint;
> Let me approach, I pray you, for a breath
> Of air . . .
> Bar. (to the Guard). Let him approach.
>
> (I, i, ll. 79-89)

Barbarigo even suggests that they two answer the summons of the tribunal together (I, i, 77-79). The cordiality of this exchange, the way all the remarks contribute to and allow for each other, extends to all of Jacopo's political and social relations to Venice. His alternating trial and torture in the first two acts (as well as the larger pattern of his exiles from and returns to Venice) is a ritual of which all the participants know the form and can see the outcome. Guilt or innocence is not even at stake in the trial (I, i, ll. 300ff.); only certain of the

forms of prosecution are incomplete: Jacopo has not admitted to the idea of conspiracy against the state, though he has confessed to the particulars involved. The only question left is whether to execute him for his third unlawful return or to exile him once again.

Exile and execution are ethically equivalent for his judges (except for Loredano, who will be considered later) and merely the same for Jacopo. His "soul is social" (III, i, l. 109); banishment to Candia will result in his death.

> Loredano. Foscari--you know
> Your sentence, then?
> Jac. Fos. Return to Candia?
> Lor. True--
> For life.
> Jac. Fos. Not long.
> Lor. I said--for life.
> Jac. Fos. And I
> Repeat--not long.
>
> (III, i, ll. 271-74)

That Jacopo does in fact die when severed from Venetian society substantiates the elder Foscari's claim that the Venetian code is a "mystery" (II, i, ll. 85-86) and Jacopo's claim to Marina that his single-minded devotion results from contact with a power, supernatural force:

> You call this weakness! It is strength,
> I say,--the parent of all honest feeling.
> He who loves not his country, can love nothing.
>
> (III, i, ll. 182-84)

"It" at least appears to support Jacopo; nowhere in the play are his words doubted or misunderstood, except by Marina, and by Loredano in the single passage cited above.

Francis Foscari is in a slightly different position in regard to the Venetian code--not a son, but "the state's servant" (II, i, l. 38)--and in light of his son's persecution it becomes unclear whether the code supports him or he keeps alive the code. His concern throughout is to maintain an identity which can encompass the range of emotions he feels

and the range of statements he must make; and though he is just balanced, through the first four acts, on the brink of personal responsibility, the identity he clings to is the fading, impersonal, historical Doge.

In his first scene he is working on state business, still able (unlike Marino Faliero, who has abandoned the office entirely) to function in this role. But the trial of his son is now implicated in his state responsibilities, and in response to this conflict he cloaks himself in an extreme, partly ironic assertion of his duties. To the Council's request that he choose the time of their reconvening, he replies:

> Say, when they will--now, even at this moment,
> If it so please them . . .
> I have no repose, that is, none which shall cause
> The loss of an hour's time unto the state.
> Let them meet when they will, I shall be found
> Where I should be, and what I have been ever.
>
> (II, i, ll. 37-38, 40-43)

The factitious conception of the Doge in the last line, expressing ethics as location and essence as persistence of the past, is an indication early in the play of Foscari's need to define his political identity in very concrete and unambiguous ways. It is also one of a series of two-part responses, instances of the play's epigraph: "The father softens, but the governor's resolved." For four acts Foscari firms himself in the role of governor as the father grows desparately responsible. Soon most of Foscari's speeches are two-part responses of this sort, attempts to assert identity while denying personal responsibility. As to sorrow: "You behold me:/I cannot weep--I would I could." (II, i, ll. 77-78) As to the law:

> I found the law; I did not make it. Were I
> A subject, still I might find parts and portions
> Fit for amendment; but as a prince, I never
> Would change, for the sake of my house, the charter
> Left by our fathers.
>
> (II, i, ll. 395-99)

As to the illocutionary distance between Doge and parent:

> Loredano. Doge! Have you aught in answer?
> Doge. Something from
> The Doge; it may be also from the parent.
> Lor. My mission here is to the Doge.
> Doge. Then say
> The doge will choose his own ambassador,
> Or state in person what is meet; and for
> The father--
> Lor. I remember mine. Farewell!
>
> (II, i, 11. 323-28)

Loredano (alluding here to his belief that Foscari had engineered the deaths of his father and uncle) cuts off the personal response, as he will at other points in the play, trying to limit Foscari to the language of the state, and to the weakening role of Doge. Significantly, in the first episode of this scene (II, i, 11. 1-8), Foscari receives and signs a state document, only to find that, in his preoccupation, he has not signed it at all. In this scene is prefigured both Foscari's inability to reconcile name, state, and responsibility, as well as the progressively nominal or categorical nature of the conflict.

But Foscari does maintain his participation in the social forms for most of the play, and so understands the context and can be understood within it. He claims to enjoy especially clear communication with Loredano (though the claims are suspect: this clarity may be perlocutionary only--of intent but not of meaning): during key encounters he says, for instance, to Loredano: "I understand you" (II, i, 1. 219); of Loredano: "He speaks truth" (III, i, 1. 407); and to Barbarigo, with Loredano at hand: "I spoke not to you, but to Loredano./He understands me" (IV, i, 11. 238-39). He maintains the illocutionary forms associated with what he calls "Venetian thought" (II, i, 1. 276).

To Marina, for the same reason, he remains obscure. To another of his impenetrable assertions of identity, "I am what you behold," she replies, "And that's a mystery" (II, i, 1. 331)--from her perspective, as mysterious

as the Venetian code. Foscari also, more explicitly, recognizes a reflection of himself in Venice; contradicting Marina earlier, he says:

> That answer only shows you know not Venice.
> Alas! how should you? she knows not herself,
> Ina all her mystery.
>
> (II, i, 11. 84-86)

Two other passages in the same scene support the comparison of Venice and Foscari, and point out some important differences in the ways that Foscari Marina experience language; to Marina's charge that he abets the tribunal (note again the deflection of Marina's words):

> Doge. I forgive this, for
> You know not what you say.
> Mar. You know it well,
> And feel it nothing.
> Doge. I have borne so much,
> That words have ceased to shake me.
>
> (II, i, 11. 125-28)

And again:

> I must bear these reproaches, though they wrong me.
> Could'st thou but read--
> Mar. 'Tis not in thy brow,
> Nor in thine eyes, nor in thine acts,--where then
> Should I behold this sympathy? or shall?
> Doge (pointing downwards). There,
> Mar. In the earth?
> Doge. To which I am tending: when
> It lies upon this heart, far lightlier, though
> Loaded with marble, than the thoughts which press it
> Now, you will know me better.
>
> (II, i, 138 44)

We see paired again Foscari's assertions of identity and rejection of responsibility; this time, in both passages, both assertion and rejection are bound to particular attitudes toward meaning and understanding. Foscari is not moved by language from without, and his own emotional expression is an unreadabld inner, or rather, "lower." He locates his sympathy in the earth, not only of Venice, but of his grave; he trusts that history will record him, express his feelings. As before ("I will be found/ Where I should be, and what I have been ever"), the question of identity

comes to rest on time, and the temporal condition is linked to a spatial metaphor; Foscari places himself in a temporal context which is as if spatial--concrete, known, environmental.

Marina Foscari's attempts to make verbal contact with the unreadable characters around her and Francis Foscari's repeated assertions of his social role, and denials of his personal responsibility, form boundaries to one of the major polemical equations of the play, an equation which provides some psychological basis for Foscari's ostensive definitions of himself, and begins to explain how the political conflict drifts toward the verbal. His enemies (Foscari would rather say "Fortune" /II, i, l. 342/) use a political issue for personal revenge; they at once distinguish and confuse the two roles of father and Doge in their legal persecution of Jacopo; they outline Foscari's political ineffectiveness as they deprive him of the amenities of the position of Doge. But Foscari does not turn away from the political and social context; he clings to it. His "I am . . . 'There'" cited above is the utterance of an individual reduced to dependence on that concrete temporal environment. He believes that in that context all but the lowest passions reside:

> --the rest was nakedness,
> And lusts, and appetites, and vanities,
> The universal heritage . . .
> And the original ordinance, that man
> Must sweat for his poor pittance, keeps all passions
> Aloof, save fear of famine! All is low,
> And false, and hollow--clay from first to last,
> The prince's urn no less that potter's vessel.
> Our fame is in men's breath, our lives upon
> Less than their breath; our durance upon days,
> Our days on seasons; our whole being on
> Something which is not <u>us</u>!
>
> (II, i, 344-46, 349-57)

The last remark is a succinct description of a consciousness in a figural-historical crisis; the monologue as a whole (II, i, ll. 332-67) describes not all people (it is not difficult to read Foscari's "us" as "me"), but

the consciousness which searches its environment for an identity: it is Foscari who feels false and hollow, he who keeps all passions aloof. The crisis is one in which the protagonists of all four of Byron's plays find themselves, which is the basis of the social and political conflicts of the plays, and which surrounds a certain powerful conception of time as a concrete environment--that is, as a figural history. The polemical equation that Byron's plays work with is that it is a certain conception of time as history which endows what is usually thought of as the identity; in Foscari's monologue, that which differentiates among individuals on the basis of the higher order of passions. This understanding or perception of time as history is the Venetian code--a set of thoughts, possibilities, actions, and reactions, drawing form from precedent and energy from the natural passions (those which frighten Foscari, for instance), and which is essentially backward looking: oriented toward a past which is, for Jacopo and Francis Foscari, father. governor, guardian and determiner of the present.

It is unwise to draw conclusions yet, but it should not go unnoticed that we have had occasion to examine this last premise as it appears implicitly in some of Byron's lyrics, and found that many of his poems resist a reading from this point of view: they evade a serial interpretation, as they preclude a traditional identification of the narrator. We see now that the style of the Venetian plays can be made to yield an analogous resistance, of which the basic structure has already been suggested in the respective semantic-illocutionary conflicts clustered about Marino Faliero and Marina Foscari. Equally with the lyrics, the plays offer a critique which opposes the statist conception of the individual as the repository of the past--both the receptacle of national history and the product of his or her own past experiences; and they propose, not

a final solution, but a representation of the figural-historical mind in the process of recognizing its own alienation and becoming politically radicalized. The two gestures are simultaneous in the Venetian plays, as we will see; alienation and radicalization in all four of Byron's plays are initially the identification of the self as not-equal-to-history.

If we turn to Marino Faliero, we find a similar, though not the same, complex of ideas: where Foscari clings tenaciously to his old identity, Faliero denies from the outset the reality of the political role: to his nephew's evocation of "The Duke of Venice," he replies: "There is no such thing--/It is a word--nay, worse--a worthless by-word:" (I, ii, ll. 99-100). And unlike Foscari's repression of passion, Faliero's "fury doth exceed the provocation" (I, ii, l. 136), for two reasons. First, he realizes that Michael Steno's slander has deprived him of that last and fundamental gesture to which Foscari refers in II, i, l. 142(his "I am . . . 'There'"): an honorable and therefore, theoretically, fully expressive death. For the reward of a life-long ministration to history, here as in The Two Foscari, is an assured union with it--the promise that one will become part of the set of intransigent identities which are precedent to others. The hope, and part of Faliero's loss, is the glance of history, the validation that only an unchanging historical figure can receive.

> I would have gone
> Down to my fathers with a name serene
> And pure as theirs; but this has been denied me.--
> (II, i, ll. 466-68)

He would have become one of them, a figure, reaching that state of completion, perfection, abstraction out of change, and finally fatherhood. Steno damages a life spent in preparation for this entry into history, a life which, Faliero repeatedly says, has been spotless (save one important incident[5]); and to repair it, to re-place himself in history, Faliero must start over and build it all again--be re-born, as we will come to say.

Second, and proceeding from the first, Faliero has been cheated into action, since faith is now out of the question. "They have defrauded me of both my rights" as sovereign and as citizen; toward both these social roles the state is "faithless." Faliero himself is a destroyer of faith: not just in his rebellion against Venice, but earlier, in the thought that he might rebel, Faliero denies the most fundamental beliefs of his culture, and his own beliefs as well. For figural history, as an ideational structure, is sustained by the will (though it provides a means for the escape from and arguments for the denial of will). As long as will (in this case, belief) and social mandate are at one, no motion, no will, is perceived. But even a slight maladjustment reveals all at once that a concrete imagination of the past is based on an act of faith; the past does not of itself extend into the present, but must be constantly drawn forward and recreated. Thus it is possible for Faliero to turn away from the past by a coordinate act of will, but it is not possible for him to rebel against Venice while retaining the identity endowed by the Venetian code; he must forget his own past as he forgets the history of Venice. Angiolina tries several times, without effect, to return him to the past;

> Ang. you will be
> Serene, and what you should be--what you were.
> Doge. I will be what I should be, or be nothing . . .
>
> Ang. Remember what you were.
> Doge. It were in vain!
> Joy's recollection is no longer joy,
> While sorrow's memory is a sorrow still.
>
> (II, i, ll. 482-84)

He wants to believe in salvation, and still does believe in the power of history; the apparatus of the code is still strong. But his recognition of his own strength--that he is equal to history, could change it--precludes belief in a transcendent history, a history independent of his conception of history. He himself is no longer history itself, so he can no longer

accept Angiolina's equation of what he should be with what he was. As he considers his plan to meet with the revolutionaries, he speaks a doctrinal question, but answers by willing himself regretfully away:

> And will not my great sires leap from the vault,
> Where lie two doges who preceded me,
> And pluck me down amongst them? Would they could!
> For I should rest in honor with the honored.
> Alas! I must not think of them.
>
> (I, ii, 11. 583-87)

To think or not to think, faith and skepticism, are prominent and momentarily balanced in Faliero's soliloquy in Act I, scene ii, in which he speaks directly to the play's major symbol of faith in figural history: the representations themselves, the statues of his ancestors.

> --Scene, the Space between the Canal and the Church of
> San Giovanni e San Paolo. An equestrian Statue before it.
> --A gondola lies in the Canal at some distance.
> Enter the Doge alone, disguised.
> Doge (solus). I am before the hour, the hour whose voice,
> Pealing into the arch of night, might strike
> These palaces with ominous tottering,
> And rock the marbles to the corner-stone,
> Waking the sleepers from some hideous dream
> Of indistinct but awful augury
> Of that which will befall them.
>
> (III, i, 11. 1-7)

As elsewhere in the play, Faliero is early--"before the hour" as he has been ahead of other characters in thinking and acting, and speaking in advance of his own thought. In a structure characteristic of Faliero, he is doubly ahead here--in advance of an hour which is itself prophetic. There are suggestions throughout the play that Faliero's forwardness has put him already in partial contact with the dead (Angiolina, for instance, has said that in Faliero all things wear an "aspect of eternity' /II, i, 1. 187). His entrance here, alone, disguised, at night, indicates his shame in their presence, as well as his reluctant departure from his old role (though as yet no new role has been chosen: note his stumbling over the question of what role he will play in the revolution in III, ii, 11. 220-

224). His suspension between alternatives is imaged in his position in "the Space between" the cleansing waters of Venice, "the healing wave" (1. 15), and the statue of his ancestor. Others are before him, and it suggests Faliero's uncertain skepticism that, at first, he addresses not his ancestors, but the church they lie in:

> Tall fane!
> Where sleep my fathers, whose dim statues shadow
> The floor which doth divide us from the dead,
> Where all the pregnant hearts of our bold blood,
> Moulder'd into a mite of ashes, hold
> In one shrunk heap what once made many heroes,
> When what is now a handful shook the earth--
> Fane of the tutelar saints who guard our house!
> Vault where two Doges rest--my sires! who died
> The one of toil, the other in the field,
> With a long race of other lineal chiefs
> And sages, whose great labors, wounds, and state
> I have inherited,--let the graves gape,
> Till all thine aisles be peopled with the dead,
> And pour them from thy portals to gaze on me!
> I call them up, and them and thee to witness
> What it hath been which put me to this task--
> Their pure high blood, their blazon-roll of glories,
> Their mightly name dishonour'd all <u>in</u> me,
> Not <u>by</u> me . . .
>
> (III, i, 11. 15-34)

All the elements of faith are here: the appeal to the "tutelar saints," each as father and guardian; the acceptance of himself as passive inheritor of this past; the need for witnesses to justify him, in particular, to look at him; and the increasingly specific, even visual, nature of this imagination--he sees their wounds. All this comforts him, of course; he pities his own wounds, and aspires to the state of unchanging significance he sees in his fathers. There is likewise a sense (as perhaps in all soliloquies which purport to speak to spirits) in which this monologue is intended to convince Faliero rather than the ghosts of his forebearers; the prayer is heretical because its purpose is to argue that the rescue of history can "in all life" be linked to the denial of precedent. But Faliero manages a balance, and ends his monologue by asking again for the glance of history--

the approving glance of the spirits:

> Spirits! smile down upon me; for my cause
> Is yours, in all life now can be of yours,--
> Your fame, your name, all mingled up in mine,
> And in the future fortunes of our race!
> Let me but prosper, and I make this city
> Free and immortal, and our house's name
> Worthier of what you were, now and hereafter.
>
> (III, i, ll. 41-47)

So two impulses may be observed in Faliero, corresponding to the reward of historical imagination and its debilitating effects. The first impulse is to cling, like Foscari, to a code of thought, belief in which is an obvious act of will, but which, even so recognized, remains a powerfully attractive fiction. Just as the denial of history is made difficult by Faliero's active visual imagination, his rejection of his own past conflicts with strong particular memories of the nobles who will die in the revolution; to Israel Bertuccio:

> You never broke their bread, nor shared their salt;
> You never had their wine cup at your lips;
> You grew not up with them, nor laugh'd, nor wept,
> Nor held a revel in their company . . .
> And can I see them dappled o'er with blood?
>
> (III, ii, ll. 459-62; 471)

The second impulse is to let go of the past because it is painful to him--"sorrow's memory is a sorrow still" (II, i, 484)--and it is to this impulse that Faliero most often gives expression: speaking again of the nobles:

> Farewell all social memory! all thoughts
> In common! and the sweet bonds which link old friendships . . .
> farewell the past! I died to all that had been . . . .
>
> (III, ii, ll. 327-28; 347)

There is one important point of relative stability in Faliero's vacillations: the importance of his name. It is with the preservation of his name that Faliero busies himself. Angiolina, in her arguments, is concerned with properties and qualities themselves: with referents. "What is virtue . . ." she asks, "if it must depend upon men's words?/

The dying Roman said ''twas but a name.'" (II, i, ll. 57-56) But words and names are obsessive to Faliero, especially his own name and its opposition to the impugning language of Steno (which is known at large to be false). Specifically, he is afraid that the meaning of his name will be changed, that his honor will become a "by-word" (II, i, l. 430). The second use of "by-word" indicates Faliero's fear. That "the Duke of Venice" is a by-word is certain; the Doge has disappeared with Faliero's first crisis of faith (I, ii, ll. 99-100). The only Doge appropriate for this state, as Faliero sees it now, would be "A thing of robes and trinkets, dizen'd out/To sit in state as for a sovereign's picture;" (III, ii, ll. 188-89). But the name "Marino Faliero" is a different matter. Though it is a remnant of his devotion to history--one way Faliero justifies his revolution is, as in the soliloquy, by reference to a more noble or corrective conception of history--it also grounds an alternative to the older figural conception (in which the Doge is simply a "picture"); and to Faliero it means the possibility of entering history as an individual, since it has been made impossible for him to enter history as one in a series of honorable Doges. Faith is impossible, will is necessary; and as he moves away from the statist philosophy, he is thrown more upon that solitude of will, and the entity in the present named "Marino Faliero"; if that becomes a by-word, he has already lost the struggle to rest in honor among his fathers, and the opportunity to control the meaning of his death. In Faliero's mind, then, the political revolution is linked to conflicts of meaning and interpretation; and in Act I he can foresee only two possible outcomes of the struggle over his name:

> I will redeem it
> Back to its antique lustre in our annals,
> By sweet revenge on all that's base in Venice,
> And freedom to the rest, or leave it black
> To all the growing calumnies of time,

Which never spare the fame of him who fails,
But try the Caesar, or the Cataline,
By the true touchstone of desert--success.

(I, ii, 11. 597-97)

Francis Foscari's response to displacement from history is comparable to Faliero's; he does not incite a revolution, but he does turn back upon his persecutors their own political machinery raised to a higher order. When informed of his forced retirement, he rejects it on the grounds of a more fundamental commitment:

When I twice before reiterated
My wish to abdicate, it was refused me:
And not alone refused, but ye exacted
An oath from me that I would never more
Renew this instance. I have sworn to die
In full exertion of the functions which
My country call'd me here to exercise,
According to my honor and my conscience--
I cannot break my oath.

(V, i, 11. 39-45)

He reaches, more gradually, the position or point of thinking from which Faliero consistently speaks; in this passage, a renewed adherence to issues of honor and patriotism--the same code, but transformed now into terms which surpass the present purposes of the government. And as soon as he begins to speak in this fashion, the other characters begin to halt, undo, and question his words. The turning point is his first uncodified expression of grief in the play: his weeping over the body of Jacopo. In an important reversal of his earlier location of his sympathies "there":

Marina. Where is now
The stoic of the state?
Doge. (throwing himself down by the body). Here!

(IV, i, 11. 213-24)

In his first exchange thereafter (to the business of the Ten):

Doge (rising). Sirs, I am ready.
Barbarigo. No--not now.
Loredano. Yet 'twas important.
Doge. If 'twas so, I can
Only repeat--I am ready.
Bar. It shall not be

Just now . . .

(IV, i. 11. 228-31)

His communicative efficiency is lost; he hears throughout the fifth act the sort of response Marina Foscari and Marino Faliero consistently hear. From the Chief of the Ten: "We grieve for such an answer; but it cannot/ Avail you aught." (V, i, 11. 58-59); "You speak in passion,/Else . . ." (V, i, 11. 261-62); from Marina herself comes the key phrase" "You speak wildly, and/Had better now be seated." (V. i, 11. 300-301). Also like Faliero, Foscari reacts to the sudden presence of personal responsibility by broadening and generalizing his expressed purposes, even as he defines himself as the bearer of responsibility; of Venice:

> I am ready to lay down my life for her,
> As I have laid down dearer things than life:
> But for my dignity--I hold it of
> The whole republic: when the general will
> Is manifest, then you shall all be answered.
>
> (V, i, 11. 53-7)

His "answer" here and others through Act V adopt the oblique style we have seen in Faliero; he is not quite in touch with his questioners.

> An Officer. Prince! I have done your bidding.
> Doge. What command?
>
> (V, i, 11. 4-5)

To the announcement of his retirement:

> Doge. Do I hear rightly?
> Chief of the Ten. Need I say again?
>
> (V, i, 1. 33

Foscari is drawing away from the supporting system of illocutionary forms provided by the code of Venice; his reactions to the old conventions of the state are abrupt and unconventional:

> Chief of the Ten. Hear you then the last decree,
> Definitive and absolute!
> Doge. To the point--
> To the point! I know of old the forms of office,
> And gentle preludes to strong acts.--Go on!
>
> (V, i, 11. 164-67)

The conflict between Foscari and Loredano is, by the end of the play, centrally a conflict of language. For Barbarigo, the prosecution of Foscari is a "proposition" (V, i, l. 126); to Barbarigo's objections to it Loredano says, "You talk but idly" (V, i, l. 149). The Ten must "press their answer on the Doge" (V, i, l. 119), and he singles out a particular "clause" of the decree to respond to (V, i, l. 175). The final political assault on Foscari, the moment of the coup, comes in this form:

> Chief of the Ten. Your answer, Duke!
> Loredano. Your answer, Francis Foscari!
>
> (V, i, ll. 177-78)

Foscari's answer, is an attempt, as before, to partially deflect the responsibility for his own downfall thus laid on him by supplementing the meaning of the decree:

> If I could have foreseen that my old age
> Was prejudicial to the state, the chief
> Of the republic would never have shown
> Himself so far ungrateful, as to place
> His own high dignity before his country;
> But this life having been so many years
> Not useless to that country, I would fain
> Have consecrated my last moments to her.
> But the decree being rendered, I obey.
>
> (V, i, ll. 178-86)

From this point until his death, the Doge essays a series of symbolic and verbal strategies to evade the meaning the Ten would impose on these events, strategies which, for the most part, depend on redefinitions of his identity and role; as an aggrieved father (preparing to leave the palace immediately):

> Chief of the Ten. Why
> So rashly? 'Twill give scandal.
> Doge. Answer that; (to the Ten)
> It is your province.--Sirs, bestir yourselves:
> (To the Servants) There is one burthen which I beg you bear
> With care, although 'tis past all further harm--
> But I will look to that myself.
> Barbarigo. He means
> The body of his son.
> Doge. And call Marina,
> My daughter!
>
> (V, i, ll. 202-209)

as a weak, old man:

> Signors, you may depart; what would you more?
> We are going; do you fear that we shall bear
> The palace with us? Its old walls, ten times
> As old as I am, and I'm very old,
> Have served you, so have I, and they and I
> Could tell a tale;
>
> (V, i, ll. 212-17)

as a Samson who condescends to spare his enemies:

> but I invoke them not
> To fall upon you! else they would, as erst
> The pillars of stone Dagon's temple on
> The Israelite and his Philistine foes.
>
> (V, i, ll. 217-20)

He is opposed in these evasions by Loredano and the Ten (who, as Barbarigo says to Loredano, "speak your language"). This exchange between Foscari and Loredano suggests the legal, semantic, and illocutionary form of their conflict as in has finally evolved in Act V:

> Doge. Adieu, good signors!
> May the next duke be better than the present!
> Lor. The present duke is Paschal Malipiero.
> Doge. Not till I pass the threshold of these doors.
> Lor. St. Marks' bell is soon about to toll
> For his inauguration.
> Doge. Earth and heaven!
> Ye will reverberate this peal; and I
> Live to hear this!--the first Doge who e'er heard
> Such sound for his successor: happier he,
> My attainted predecessor, stern Faliero--
> This insult at the least was spared him.
> Lor. What!
> Do you regret a traitor?
> Doge. No--I merely
> Envy the dead.
>
> (V, i, ll. 224-34)

At issue here is whether Foscari's immediate departure from the ducal palace will cause a scandal. The Ten would have the people believe that Foscari retired in friendship. Foscari tries to counter in two negating sequences. First, he denies the existence of the "people":

> Doge. And here's my staff: thus propp'd will I go forth.
> Chief of the Ten. It must not be--the people will perceive it.
> Doge. The people!--There's no people, well you know it,

> Else you dare not deal thus by them or me.
> There is a populace, perhaps, whose looks
> May shame you; but they dare not groan nor curse you,
> Save with their hearts and eyes.
>
> (V, i, 11. 255-61)

The distinction here between a "people," which apparently suggests activity and/or expression, and a mute, inexpressive populace may encourage Foscari toward a final attempt to extablish a new identity as a citizen--in opposition to and as he at last explicitly denies his identity as Doge. It is perhaps a moot point, since he is being forced to leave anyway; but he would avoid the ceremonies of retirement as "insults," and respond to the symbolic gestures of the Ten with his own significant gesture:

> You shall not
> Stir--in my train, at least. I enter'd here
> As sovereign--I go out as citizen
> By the same portals, but as citizen.
> All these vain ceremonies are base insults,
> Which only ulcerate the heart the more,
> Applying poisons there as antidotes.
> Pomp is for princes--I am none!--That's false,
> I am, but only to these gates.
>
> (V, i, 11. 272-80)

The partial retreat and redefinition in the last two lines demonstrate speed of thought, and perhaps desparation to keep up with the struggle--certainly the need to establish an unimpeachable position. But it demonstrates as well a kind of willed obscurantism, a protection of himself from response. The assertion is comparable to his earlier ostensive definitions of himself; like them, it is explicitly spatial, implicitly temporal. But this last is also literal, and legal (or legalistic), and it constitutes for Foscari a momentary identity which is conditional not on a concrete temporal environment, but on his own physical movements.

This is Foscari's last strategy, though, and the Ten have already subverted it by arranging for St. Mark's bell to ring in the new doge (11. 280ff). That signal is a metaphor for Foscari's final fall into history, into the past; he has dropped behind the present moment and out of

effective impact on the struggle. Thereafter he is without hope; he weakens at once, does not have the strength to walk from the hall (11. 285-90), and can only, by way of participating in, if not controlling his end, call for a cup of water and receive it from Loredano. In this, his last exchange, he speaks a final ambiguity--knowledge of his defeat, uncertainty of what it will mean. Referring to the legend that Venetian crystal will break if touched by poison, he says to Loredano:

> Then it is false, or you are true,
> For my own part, I credit neither; 'tis
> An idle legend.
>
> (V, i, 11. 297-300)

This is his last complete sentence; he dies seven lines later in a delerious rant aganist the bell. There is no answer from Loredano, who remains silent until the last three lines of the play.

The struggle is not quite over. Marina attempts to stop Foscari's state funeral and the revised pretext of the Ten (which is now that Foscari died before he was replaced), but she realizes that she was wrong in thinking that "the dead had been beyond even you," (V, i, 1. 334). They are in control of the meaning of Foscari's death. To her final charge of "splendour in hypocrisy," she hears only what she has heard throughout the play: "Know you lady,/To whom you speak, and the perils of such speech?" (V, i, 11. 361-62) and "Heed not her rash words;/Her circumstances must excuse her bearing." (V, i, 11. 365-66) In response to this, the Chief of the Ten in his last decree, as always formal and proper, condescends to a legalistic mercy: "We will not note them down." (V, i, 1. 367) Loredano closes the play, taking personal possession of the moment and claiming, as he writes, the last word.

> Barbarigo. (turning to Loredano who is writing upon his tablets).
> What art thou writing,
> With such an earnest brow, upon thy tablets?
> Lor. (pointing to the Doge's body). That he has paid me!

> Chief of the Ten. What debt did he owe you?
> Lor. A long one and a just one; Nature's debt and mine.
> (V, i, 11. 367-70)

Much of Marino Faliero's action and speech is channeled into the kind of maneuvering for historical position that Foscari attempts only at the end. Faliero's political revolution is historical action, meant to correct the historical mistake which has befallen his name; his historical speeches--close, careful, often quasi-legal descriptions of what he has done and been, his current position, and the justice of his future acts--are second only to condemnations of the Forty in frequency in Faliero's speech. His long expository dialogue with Angiolina (II, i, 11. 291-441) is the most prominent example of this sort of positioning--an anxious reasoning of rights and responsibilities, concurrent with assertions of non-identity and the temporal maladjustment noted earlier (Faliero's language is slightly ahead of his control, so that he must subdue his own conversational tendencies: "But let us change the argument . . ." /II, i, 1. 270/; "but let me lead you back . . ." /II, i, 1. 410/) In both speech and action throughout the play, Faliero evinces his belief that "true words are things" (V, i, 1 289). His ethical reasoning is especially revealing of his attempt to make this principle work; abstractly:

> A slave insults me--I require his punishment
> From his master's hands; if he refuse it,
> The offense grows his, and let him answer it.
> (III, ii, 11. 409-11)

in practice:

> Angiolina. You would not have /Steno/ die for this offence?
> Doge. Not now:--being still alive, I'd let him live
> Long as he can; he hath ceased to merit death;
> The guilty damn'd hath saved his hundred judges,
> And he is pure, for now his crime is theirs.
> (II, i, 11. 235-39)

This transference of responsibility is immediate and apparently certain for Faliero, and he does not hesitate to apply the same rigor to himself:

> The die was thrown
> When I first listen'd to your /Israel Bertuccio's/ treason.--
> Start not!
> That is the word; I cannot shape my tongue
> To syllable black deeds into smooth names,
> Though I be wrought on to commit them. When
> I heard you tempt your sovereign, and forebore
> To have you dragg'd to prison, I became
> Your guiltiest accomplice:
>
> (III, i, 11. 55-62)

as he applies to others: "The once fallen woman must for ever fall." (II, i, 1 395)

It is clear from such quick judgments throughout the play that Faliero's morality, though at odds with the Venetian code, is nevertheless codified and absolutist. It is for this reason, and because for most of the play he remains so deliberately committed to historical action, that Faliero so often pronounces himself unfree:

> the very means I am forced
> By these fell tyrants to adopt is such
> That I abhor them doubly for the deeds
> Which I must do to pay them back for theirs.
>
> (III, i, 11. 114-17)

The denial of responsibility makes the ethical code prominent here, and, even through the repeated "I," obscures the subject; it cannot be easily discerned what the impact of the "I" is in this reasoning. The same occurs in the response to Israel Bertuccio's "You acted, and you act, on your free will." (III, ii, 1. 502), in which Faliero appears to confuse, or perhaps simply to seek significance in the homonymy between, "will" as an expression of futurity and as an expression of desire:

> Ay, there it is--you feel not, nor do I,
> Else I should stab thee on the spot, to save
> A thousand lives, and killing, do no murder;
> You feel not--you go to this butcher-work
> As if these high-born men were steers for shambles:
> When all is over, you'll be free and merry,
> And calmly wash those hands incarnadine;
> But I, outgoing thee and all thy fellows
> In this surpassing massacre, shall be,
> Shall see and feel--oh God! oh God! 'tis true,

> And thou dost well to answer that it was
> "My own free will and act," and yet you err,
> For I will do this! Doubt not--fear not; I
> Will be your most unmerciful accomplice!
> And yet I act no more on my free will,
> Nor my own feelings--both compel me back;
> But here is hell within me and around,
> And like the demon who believes and trembles
> Must I abhor and do.
>
> (III, ii, ll. 503-21)

Faliero at first denies that he feels, but as he continues to imagine the event, as he imagines himself in the future--"I . . . shall be,/Shall see and feel"--it is as if he realizes those emotions now locked some distance in the future. Concurrent with this location and unleashing of emotion, he realizes also (apparently with some dread) that he is free and responsible; but at the same time not free, if he is responsible, to act in any other way: his realization of freedom reminds him of what he must do, and his repetition of "will" in ll. 514-15 conflates the necessity of willful, individual action with the necessity of fixing his mind on the future. The two necessities are barely distinguishable in this passage: Faliero is free in the future, or, more precisely, the only evidence he has of his freedom is what he can imagine about what he is going to do. Both will and feelings seem to Faliero ahead of him--compelling him back; as he explains to Bertuccio just before this last passage: "I quiver to behold what I/Must be, and think what I have been!" (III, ii, ll. 498-99) It is the future, at these moments, that Faliero beholds.

These are important instances of Faliero's vacillation between "high resolves" and "shallow weakness" (III, ii, l. 399), because they show the movement of his thinking from the pain of the past to the indefinite fury (the "hell") of the present to the fullness of the future: an imaginative fullness which not only robs the past, but kills it. This direction in Faliero's thought is bound to the principal changes in his manner of expression. As already noted, Faliero's language affects the physical;

it aspires beyond the immediacy of speech toward the surety and continuity of objects. His positioning descriptions are attempts to establish or strengthen certain of his relations to the world; as he expresses an increasingly paradoxical and interdependent state of affairs, his language does indeed grow thing-like: impenetrable and without exact equivalent or paraphrase. It may also be true that an obsession with those external relations contributes to Faliero's wavering on the matter of responsibility. At least it is certain that as Faliero forces himself out from under the tyranny of history, brings himself to look only at the future, and begins to use language to support an ego-centric conception of the present, he is disengaging not only from the Venetian code of ethics, but also from its common communicative bases; for it is precisely this kind of willful positioning that is most often perceived as wild, and that most often confuses and alarms the other characters.[6]

So Faliero's rebellion, like that of Foscari and Marina Foscari, involves speaking a new and rebellious language. But Faliero moves farther on from the intermediate legalisms with which Foscari expires (which are positionings bound to a code which needs to be surpassed). The psychological metamorphosis toward which he has been tending and which has informed his language all along is completed in Faliero's catastrophe, and he begins to break with particular communication altogether. A turning point, comparable to Foscari's breakdown in The Two Foscari, may be discerned: moments after hearing of the failure of the revolution, Faliero meets his nephew for the last time:

> Bertuccio Faliero. Who would have deem'd it?--ah! one moment sooner!
> Doge. That moment would have changed the face of ages:
> This gives us to eternity--We'll meet it
> As men whose triumph is not in success,
> But who can make their own minds all in all,
> Equal to every fortune.
>
> (IV, ii, ll 274-79)

Both the loss and the gain are weighted here; with the same decisiveness, or at least speed, he has shown elsewhere in ethical matters, Faliero revokes the earlier "touchstone of desert--success" and redefines their position. Along with the approach of "eternity" (a term Faliero uses three more times in Act V) and the abandonment of success as a criterion comes a reinterpretation of the significance of the present failure:

> The price of such success would have been glory,
> Vengeance, and victory, and such a name
> As would have made Venetian history
> Rival to that of Greece and Syracuse . . .
> Failing, I know the penalty of failure
> Is present infamy and death--the future
> Will judge, when Venice is no more, or free;
> Till then, the truth is in abeyance.
>
> (V, i, ll 249-52; 254-59)

These passages are not entirely discontinuous with Faliero's earlier dependence on history, but they are a substantial development. The success of the revolution would have been historical ("would have changed the face of ages"), but its failure is not an equivalent historical fact, Faliero asserts; it rather suspends the truth, and makes the meaning of Faliero's name and acts dependent on the future. This is true even though, as he had feared, part of the retribution of the Giunta is directed specifically at his name and at the symbol of his place in figural history--his portrait in the gallery of Doges:

> Benintende. Thy goods are confiscate unto the state,
> Thy name is razed from out her records . . .
> The place wherein as Doge thou shouldst be painted,
> With thine illustrious predecessors, is
> To be left vacant, with a death-black veil
> Flung over these dim words engraved beneath,--
> "This place is of Marino Faliero,
> Decapitated for his crimes."
> Doge. . . . --What crimes?
> Were it not better to record the facts,
> So that the contemplator might approve,
> Or at least learn whence the crimes arose?
> When the beholder knows a Doge conspired,
> Let him be told the cause--it is your history.

(V, i, ll. 486-87;
495-500:
507-12)

This last remark suggests that Faliero's new attitude is less a trust in the wisdom of future citizens than a transference of the responsibility for explication. But more important, it is a giving up of history--it is their history, not his; he is no longer moved by it or responsible for explaining it. He says to Angiolina in their last scene together, "I have done with Time," (V, ii, l. 6) and "I stand within Eternity" (V, ii, l. 87).

However one chooses to describe the changes that Faliero undergoes in Act V (and there are several relevant ways to describe them[7]), it is clear that those changes are allied to a final phase in his evolution as a speaker--specifically, to the completion of his belief that "true words are things." The phrase occurs in Faliero's decision not to defend his sedition before the Giunta; the "secret" he would speak in such a defense,

> were too mightly for your souls:
> Then let it sleep in mine, unless you court
> A danger which would double that you escape.
> Such my defense would be, had I full scope
> To make it famous; for true words are things,
> And dying men's are things which long outlive,
> and oftentimes avenge them; bury mine,
> If ye would fain survive me:
>
> (V, I, ll. 485-92)

The price of Faliero's expanded temporal imagination--his turn from history toward eternity--is the end of normal communication (and, nearly the same thing in Marino Faliero and The Two Foscari, death); the benefit is an active, and actual, order of speech: language which is truer because, like things, it outlives the speaker. Of this Faliero is confident, and the Giunta is disturbed: as in The Two Foscari, the denouement of Marino Faliero comprises a struggle to establish the meaning of the protagonists'

deaths, and five times in the last act the Giunta expresses its fear that some uncensored meaning will escape their control.[8] But Foscari dies chastened, in relative certainty that his enemies have gained at least a personal victory over him; he runs out of verbal strategies. Faliero's last speech is an unbroken, purposive, and well-formed seventy-five lines. Completing his reorientation away from history and particular communication, he now speaks fully "to Time and to Eternity,/Of which I grow a portion, not to man." (V, iii, l. 26-7) He offers up his words to be as a spirit on the elements, and delivers on Venice his curse, which takes the form of a prophecy in which "far ages/Float up from the abyss of time to be,/And show these eyes, before they close, the doom/Of this proud city." (V, iii, 41-4) He waits for no response, and, taking the last word, himself delivers the order (five times) that his head be struck off. (V, iii, ll. 101-4)

There is a neurotic element in Faliero's embrace of eternity; the generalization of his language and intention, like his disavowal of responsibility throughout, are ways of escaping from particular pressures. Speaking to Time and to Eternity is risk-free: since no answer is expected, none can disprove him. This figures in the eagerness with which he orders his execution; this too is partly an escape from response, or from the need to respond. There is, moreover, a peacefulness about Faliero in the last act, a relaxation which seems to begin near the moment of the failure of the revolution; he has been released from the obligation to carry out the destruction of the idols of history, and released from personal responsibility altogether: "I find a comfort in/The thought, that these things are the work of Fate;/For I would rather yield to gods than men," (V, ii, ll. 65-7); "I <u>am</u> at peace: the peace of certainty" (V, i, l. 78). But whether we regard his motivation as primarily escape from pain

or as a reassociation with a greater reward, the result is equally that he is represented as feeling time, not thinking about it; he stands within eternity, sees the vision from the abyss of time, describes what he sees in very particular terms; and he exists so and speaks so immediately following his only simple assertion of identity in the play: "I am again Marino Faliero." (V, iii, l. 2) His vision and the curse he reads out to Venice are not, then, an entire departure from history, but a chance to enter history on his own terms and to reestablish the meaning of his death--not to change himself, finally, but, as we will say of Cain, to change history to suit himself.

And, to a degree, it works. Faliero throws everything he has left into one effort of imposition, and part of his meaning does in fact escape outside the palace walls. The last scene of the play is given to a group of citizens gathered outside the gate during Faliero's last moments. They neither see nor hear Faliero distinctly (and they themselves are not distinct), but they begin to wish for and to construe a meaning, and, in a crude way, to think rebelliously, as Faliero would have had them. In the last two lines, the Chief of the Ten comes forward and proclaims the state's interpretation--"Justice hath dealt upon the mighty traitor!"--but the first citizen calls back to the rest what he sees: "The gory head rolls down the Giants' Steps!" The play ends resting ambiguously in the present.

Faliero can be said to continue a series that Foscari is only able to begin, a series which ought to be seen as a complex of irrevocable premises; a certain personal problem, in the institutionally historical and anti-individualist Venetian system, will bring with it a quick succession of revelations, all of which are embryonically contained in the original idea that the will is not necessarily coincident with history.

The series begins for each, then, with the possibility of rebellion: for at the moment that rebellion is recognized to be distinct from duty, all rebellion is made possible. For this reason, both Foscari and Faliero begin to suffer the effects and show the symptoms of absolute freedom; although the characters are by no means identical, it is in these symptoms that they most resemble each other: the denial of freedom, the rejection of role, the desparate clinging to the name as a sign of individuality, the vehement denial of responsibility. Freedom is partly to blame for Faliero's rage, and also for his protestations of non-freedom: he really is not free, in that he can feel no other way than absolutely free.

In response to this anxiety over freedom, both characters try to fix themselves more firmly, to locate themselves <u>in</u> language, we may say, for two reasons: because increasingly the characters' denial of responsibility complicate and decenter all their assertions (their assertions are removed from a common communicative basis, and in need of interpretation); and second, because, sooner for Faliero, later for Foscari, the only way of encompassing the extremes of their situations is by tentative and repeated redefinitions of themselves and their positions. It is because of this turn in their growth that the conflict in each play grows linguistic: each character initiates the evolution of the conflict into a struggle of definitions; their enemies simply follow their lead.

As part of the denial of the persisting self (which is the role--the old name) and concurrent with redefinition, both characters try to spread, generalize, and attenuate themselves: Foscari by identifying himself with the general will of the people, Faliero by rejecting the human and particular altogether, and identifying himself with the temporally supra-human. But here they diverge. For Foscari's escape from responsibility and generalization of himself remain essentially communicative--

illocutionary; he requires contextual response and validation. His last gesture of binding his identity to his physical movements is appropriately willful and ego-centric, but it is too little and too late, and still contextual. We may see it as symbolic of Foscari's need for legality. Faliero, on the other hand, acts on his understanding that the appearance of will subverts history and identity based on history; and he, at his end, begins a series that Sardanapalus embodies: that of continually dissociating himself from the past--from the figural past, from his past identity, from what he has believed, desired, and said in the past. And in the absence of validation by precedent, he tries (not entirely successfully) to do without validation; he speaks so that response is impossible; he orders himself killed to escape from response.

All of this bears directly on the question of genre, which was mentioned at the outset and which has been the cause of some controversy in the criticism of Byron's plays.[9] For the purposes of my reading, we may summarize the matter this way: the Venetian plays are historical tragedies because the protagonists are betrayed in history, by historical means, and because they resort to variations of historical argument to reestablish themselves. When the enemies of Faliero and Francis Foscari try to edge them out of conventional participation in society, both protagonists try to break back into the social structure by drawing on a larger, more noble and powerful conception of history (which is also an egocentric and personalist conception). From beginning to end, and even in large part in their ethic of rebellion, the Venetian plays are defined by forces of history, and are about characters--Francis Foscari, Marina Foscari, Marino Faliero--who set themselves to do battle with the corporeal representations of history--Michael Steno and James Loredano.

But there is another, more dynamic sense in which these plays can be called historical tragedies; the term can describe not only genre and

conflict, but the series of acts in the plays that impels a tragic conception of history and of the previously historical identity. The forms of the Venetian code constitute a barrier between the identity which is conceived as an extension of the past and the one which awaits the future (individuality). The step out of the supporting code--the deliberate break with an already reduced role for Faliero and Francis Foscari--and into a less conventional existence is time is the step into tragedy for these characters; they engage in a pattern of action and belief which is visionary, sacrificial, and necessarily creative. For the break from history marks the end of objective significance; when figural history is recognized to be the product of the will, all values (in the largest sense of "value," including the values of words) and identity itself are made contingent, factitious, and refutable; identity requires history, just as communication requires a continuous code, and reality the persistence of figures or representations in the imagination. Tragedy reinstitutes significance by trying to bypass the obsolete representations (of the past) and work with meanings--it feels active, whereas the historical consciousness, or that part of the subject that desires history, feels acted upon. And so, further, tragedy makes the presence of the will a thing to be loved and not feared, because it is validated and verified on the basis of the new meanings it can create, not on external agreement. My earlier description of the Venetian tragedies as portraying the figural-historical mind in the process of recognizing its alienation may be restated in this way: the plays demonstrate the historical consciousness in the process of becoming a subject. Or, we may say, history becomes tragedy for the thinker whose will has become part of his thought, i. e., whose thought has become deliberate.

It is Faliero who finally removes himself from the last vestiges

of social participation, planning to return to the hierarchy at a different level. By turning away from the role he was born to, his historical role, he gains equal access to any number of other roles; this is one reason for his continuing anxiety over choosing among them. It is perhaps the major reason for the sacrificial aspect his actions take on: he is a pelican (I, ii, 11. 441-42); he wears a crown of thorns (I, ii, 1. 260). As his cause grows less specific, he draws a painful strength from generality; this is why his assertions of non-responsibility are so elaborate and lengthy. Foscari, too, comes to see himself as the type and representative of all repressed people; he gives up his family history when Marina asks hism, "Where is now/The stoic of the state?" and he answers, "Here!" (IV, i, 11. 213-14). For both characters, the turn away from the history of Venice toward the broader authority of human history entails dropping Roman models for Greek. The tragedies that Foscari and Faliero come to see themselves as part of is no less rigorous and demanding than the wheel of history (and both Faliero and Foscari are still desirous of history at their ends), but they try to make their deaths significant in a way that a conventional historical death, which is just one more example of history, could not be. Both characters try to create a new context in which to be understood.

In the way that language operates in the plays, this evolution from history toward tragedy is signalled by a shift from language which is produced by and bound to an identity to language and systems of language that produce a momentary identity. Language is not, then, for these characters, merely communicative, and its communicative function decays as it becomes gestural or constitutive (Foscari's quick redefinitions of himself; Faliero's positioning speeches). The subject, in this complex, becomes primarily a willful speaker, the locus of a voice. This is clear

in three ways: the illocutionary disruption which befalls the characters; the set of metaphors and images which have been described as proposing the problem of temporal maladjestment, and which, taken as a set, outline a struggle to align speech with some new and authoritative ground of self; and the shift of emphasis from action to meaning, corresponding to which we find the growth of the plots, by way of the characters' increasing reliance on language, from specifically political conflicts into conflicts in which the political is inseparable from, and ultimately subordinate to, the verbal.

We may even say, subordinate to the scriptural. There is a final complication which ought to have far-reaching implications for this chapter; but like many of the intricate, interesting, and puzzling effects Byron was able to achieve in symbols, it demands acknowledgement while resisting interpretation. It forms an association between the antagonists, Steno and Loredano, an association which is neither stylistic nor motivational; they remain distinguishable villians. But they are alike in this more suggestive way, that both are writers. Loredano, like Hamlet, keeps tablets; he closes The Two Foscari by marking down that Foscari has paid his debt. It is the last moment of the play, and the notation is the completion of Loredano's revenge. Michael Steno, who is the flattest of all Byron's important characters, is most interesting because he demonstrate Iago's "motiveless malignity"--to rework Coleridge's characterization to Byron's play: Steno lies without motive, slanders without truth; he writes a purely non-empirical assertion on the ducal throne. He speaks only once (V, i, ll 398-406), a forgettable statist apology for the "inexorable past." His presence in the play is as a writer, or better, one who has written; he ceases to be important as a motivated character in the second scene of Act I (l. 206), though his writing remains

central.

In contrast to the authorial status of Steno and Loredano, we find in the protagonists a discomfort and confusion about writing. Faliero refers to Steno's writing as his "breath" (II, i, l. 421) and to its tolerance by the Forty as "this last loud insult" (III, ii, l. 369). Foscari tries to sign his name, but misses (II, i, ll. 45); man, for Foscari, is "that loathsome volume" (II, i, l. 335). The downfall of Jacopo Foscari is a letter he has written; books, for Jacopo, are "those lying likenesses of lying men" (II, i, l. 113).

The suggestion of these symbolic references to writing is that the plays outline a struggle between speech and writing, analogous to the struggle between the individual and history. As writers, Steno and Loredano are able to have an impact on history that, as speakers, Foscari and Faliero have little hope of matching. Steno can say what the two protagonists can never say: in opposition to their "I am . . . Here," "I am . . . There," Steno can say, "Yes . . . that <u>was</u> me." The writer can integrate past and present in a single ostension; he has evidence of his own past existence. This, Foscari and Faliero do not have.

And if there are allegorical elements in the interpretation we have given the Venetian plays, one is here, in this struggle between speaker and writer; in the developing attempts of the speaker to generate a language which is monumental and permanent; in short, we find not the expected attempt of writing to equal the immediacy and sincerity of speech, but of speech to imitate the permanence of writing.

These points being made, we can move quickly through <u>Sardanapalus</u>, a "tragedy" in which all the associations we have seen among speech, responsibility, and identity spring forth fully formed and operative. There is no evolution from a historical imagination to a tragic: Sardanapalus

has apparently long since ceased to be moved by the images of Assyrian history (though they do appear in the nightmare we will examine later). But the major conflict of the play is again between the arguments of the protagonist and a codified statist philosophy--"the echoes of the nation's voice" (I, ii, 1 95). Here also, as in the Venetian plays, the code of thought and action is inseparable from a manner of speaking and from an illocutionary context--to believe in history is to speak in a certain way, and especially to have fixed expectations of what constitutes an appropriate response.

Speech and identity are linked right away, in the opening lines of the statist Salemenes:

> He hath wrong'd his queen, but still he is her lord;
> He hath wrong'd my sister, still he is my brother;
> He hath wrong'd his people, still he is their sovereign;
> And I must be his friend as well as subject.
>
> (I, i, 11. 1-4)

Anaphora in Byron's plays is an argumentative device, a way of lining up premises drawn from the external world. Here and throughout his opening monologue, Salemenes attempts to fix Sardanapalus (and his own relation to him) by reference to familial, political, and historical coordinates; this triple proposition leads him to a definition of himself and his duty. A subjunctive follows which signifies the undefined state of Sardanapalus, and his ability to escape from such political definitions:

> If born a peasant, he had been a man
> To have reach'd an empire: to an empire born,
> He will bequeath none; nothing but a name,
> Which his sons will not prize in heritage:
> Yet, not all lost, even yet he may redeem
> His sloth and shame, by only being that
> Which he should be, as easily as the thing
> He should not be and is.
>
> (I, i, 11. 14-21)

Sardanapalus' first attempts at communication in the following scene bear out this description of him as not what he should be, not as Salemenes

understands it, but by going immediately awry:

> Sardanapalus. And thou, my own Ionian Myrrha, choose
> Wilt thou along with them or me?
> Myr. My lord--
> Sar. My lord!--my life! why answerst thou so coldly?
> It is the curse of kings to be so answer'd--say, would'st thou
> Accompany our guests, or charm away
> The moments from me.
> Myr. The king's choice is mine.
> Sar. I pray thee say not so . . .
>
> (I, ii, ll. 13-20)

Mistakes of identity and, as Sardanapalus will come to see it, mistakes of history, make conversation difficult for him. Myrrha's placing of responsibility for her actions on Sardanapalus makes him feel that "I do not dare to breath my own desire,/Lest it should clash with thine;" (ll. 22-23). He presses for a different answer, and Myrrha replies:

> I would remain; I have no happiness
> Save in beholding thine; yet--
> Sar. Yet! what YET! . . .
> Myr. I think the present is the wonted hour
> Of council; it were better I retire.
>
> (I, ii, ll. 25-26; 29-30)

Salemenes steps forward with a political definition of Myrrha:

> The Ionian slave says well: let her retire.
> Sar. Who answers? How now, brother?
> Sal. The queen's brother,
> And your most faithful vassal, royal lord.
>
> (I, ii, ll. 31-33)

Sardanapalus throws Salemenes' identity into doubt for a moment here, but Salemenes reasserts himself as "the queen's brother," the way he would like to be understood in this conversation. The next exchange is between Sardanapalus and Myrrha, and this is another miss:

> Sar. Myrrha! I thought thou wouldst remain.
> Myr. Great king,
> Thou didst not say so.
> Sar. But thou lookst it:
>
> (I, ii, ll. 36-37)

Myrrha hands Sardanapalus an identity he would rather do without, as "Great king." She then hands Salemenes an identity he has already denied,

and he corrects it as before:

> Myr. Sire! your brother--
> Sal. His consort's brother, minion of Ionia!
> How darest thou name me and not blush?
>
> (I, ii, 11. 39-41)

Myrrha begins to weep, and this occasions a more passionate exchange between Sardanapalus and Salemenes; the degree of indirection is intensified as well, and the exchange is a flurry of deflections and displacements:

> Sar. Cursed be he who caused those tears to flow!
> Sal. Curse not thyself--millions do that already.
> Sar. Thou dost forget thee: make me not remember
> I am a monarch.
> Sal. Would thou couldst!
>
> (I, ii, 11. 49-52)

The deflected "curse" here is the "curse of kings" again: that Sardanapalus' words do not rest where he speaks them, so he is not allowed to rest from conversation (as he has wished to rest in this passage since his "what YET?"). But even his own reflected curse does not come directly back upon him, but on the willfully forgotten monarch self. Sardanapalus asserts not wishing to remember, Salemenes that he cannot. But then Salemenes' return of the curse was empty, because he believes that Sardanapalus has forgotten that self; and so Salemenes, in so saying, has also forgotten himself. In the attempt to make a strong statement, both characters conduct a raid on the identity of the other, and in the process cast doubt on their own; both tacitly accept responsibility as they accuse the other of not accepting it. This unusual fencing continues; identity and responsibility are unfixed at the moment they are asserted, taken on when they are avoided.

> Sar. Brother!
> At least I can command myself, who listen
> To language such as this: yet urge me not
> Beyond my easy nature.
> Sal. 'Tis beyond
> That easy, far too easy, idle nature,
> Which I would urge thee. Oh! that I could rouse thee!

Though 'twere against myself.
Sar. By the god Baal!
The man would make me tyrant.
Sal. So thou art.
Think'st thou there is no tyranny but that
Of blood and chains?

(I, ii, ll. 58-67)

These initial exchanges establish a pattern for conversations to follow, a pattern of characters asserting, eluding, and passing around responsibility for their actions, beliefs, words, and even for their identities. The constant missing seems to generate itself, given some occasion; characters are not able to speak without inadvertantly cancelling or blocking out another character. Sardanapalus, especially, is not able to speak without causing a disquisition on responsibility and identity. Myrrha and Salemenes avoid frustration in communication in two ways: by continual self-assertion (Salemenes as a prince of Assyria, brother of the queen, etc.; Myrrha as a slave and as a Greek) and by expressing themselves in subjunctives; both speak of Sardanapalus subjunctively: Salemenes in I, i, and elsewhere, Myrrha, for instance, in III, i, l. 412: "I would not have him less that what he should be." Sardanapalus is not able to avoid the problem, but he goes farther in understanding it, and several times in Act I explicitly notes its basis in language:

Pania. May the king live for ever!
Sar. Not an hour
Longer than he can love. How my soul hates
This language, which makes itself a lie,
Flattering dust with eternity!

(I, ii, ll. 563-66)

and in naming:

Myrrha, I can bear all these things, these names,
Lord--king--sire--monarch--nay, time was I priz'd them;
That is, I suffer'd them--from slaves and nobles;
But when they falter from the lips I love . . .
a chill
Comes o'er my heart, a cold sense of the falsehood
Of this my station.

(I, ii, ll. 443-49)

That Sardanapalus is trying, in this conversation, to avoid responsibility does not compromise the truth of his analysis; as we have seen, these names are a part of the greater mistake that moves the events of the play; as Sardanapalus says sadly later, "I am not what I should be." (IV, i, l. 334)

Thus the dilemma of Sardanapalus is comparable to that of Faliero and Foscari: all must try to identify themselves against history, to change the course of history, though none wants to; the abstract code of history does not apply to their present feelings. Rather the opposite, it blocks those feelings; there is a persistent danger of solipcism in Sardanapalus, an inability to communicate anything personal or subjective; Sardanapalus to Myrrha: "And dost thou feel this?" (I, ii, l. 454); Salemenes to Sardanapalus: "Then thou at last canst feel?" (I, ii, l. 380). In Sardanapalus' case there is this also, that his dispute is not only with history, i. e., with the politics of Assyria, but with eternity itself. As he often remarks, he is surrounded by reminders that his least act borders on the infinite:

> To what gulfs
> A single deviation from the track
> Of human duties leads even those who claim
> The homage of mankind as their born due . . .
>
> (IV, i, ll. 432-35)

Perhaps because of his understanding of this massive responsibility, he is finally convinced to try on the royal armor (he thinks he looks "Passing well" in it /III, i, l. 165/) and to move against the political coup that has come upon him. But only sporadically does Sardanapalus commit himself to history; he only makes forays into it, as he charges the rebels outside the palace. After two of the latter sort of forays, he is still unwilling to be named: to Salemenes', "You talk like a young soldier," he replies, "I am no soldier, but a man: speak not/Of soldiership,

I loathe the word." (IV, i, 11. 564-66) In light of his earlier recommendation that Salemenes "Humanise" himself (I, ii, 1. 183), Sardanapalus' attempts later in the play to "man" himself or to prevent himself from being "unmanned" take on a significance beyond the sexual opposition noted by Gleckner.[10] Sardanapalus has been called a god, and he has been willing to exist in an undefined middle state, between god and man, slave and monarch, active and passive. (III, i, 31ff) Part of the change that he undergoes in the play is his attempt to become more human while feeling the full force of Assyrian history, that force which "flatters dust with eternity." This is the meaning of his nightmare in IV, i, in which his ancestors Nimrod and Semiramis appear and tempt him toward their fixed historical condition. It is specifically a dream of figural history: the other phantoms sit "like a row of statues" (IV, i, 1. 154), and Sardanapalus himself, in that realm, feels himself turning into "marble, as they." (1. 131) But as he awakes, still half in touch with the world of imagination, he rejects the temptation of history:

> Not so--although ye multiplied the stars
> And gave them to me as a realm to share
> From you and with you! I would not purchase
> The empire of eternity. Hence--hence--
> Old hunter of the earliest brutes! and ye,
> Who once hunted fellow-creatures as if brutes!
> Once bloody mortals--and now bloodier idols . . .
>
> (IV, i, 11. 24-30)

Sardanapalus associates himself with the human and rejects the prospect--real, at that moment--of eternity.

That he needs a strong identity, and by his warring has gained some measure, is the opinion of Salemenes and Myrrha; Sardanapalus, in that he rejects his life along with the war that becomes inextricalbe from it, agrees (IV, i, 11. 573075). But he is never a king for long, and he is not willing, even late in the play, to admit to a consistent identity:

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, 11. 24-30)

Sardanapalus' strategy of avoiding responsibility be not being there when it comes at him is never abandoned wholly; as at the beginning of the play, speech is therefore constantly difficult, never simple or complete:

Sar. Well, Pania! Have you placed the guards, and issued
The orders fixed on?
Pan. Sire, I have obey'd.
Sar. And do the men keep their hearts up?
Pan. Sire?
Sar. I'm answer'd! When a king asks twice, and has
A question as an answer to his question,
It is a portent.

(V, i, 11. 168-73)

He identifies himself as a king for the purposes of interpretation here, but he is willing to compromise, to be circumstantial, on this as on other matters. When Pania disobeys a command to quit the palace:

Sar. So all men
Dare beard me now, and Insolence within
Apes Treason from without. Question me no further;
'Tis my command, my last command. Wilt thou
Oppose it? thou!
Pan. But yet--not yet.
Sar. Well, then,
Swear that you will obey when I shall give
The signal.
Pan. With a heavy but true heart,
I promise.
Sar. 'Tis enough.

(V, i, 11. 268-75)

That conversations still go amiss is evidence that the problem hasn't changed: if Sardanapalus would avoid responsibility, he must also do without easy communication. But that he recovers quickly, moves to compromise, and is willing to assume the burden of interpretation all bespeaks some acceptance of this difficult medium. Though not past noticing them, he is "past the fear of portents" in this act (V, i, 1. 219), that is, past

worrying about how profoundly significant everything, especially language, still is. This may be why he is able to continue to court definition only to pull back from it; he feels, for instance,

> not despair precisely. When we know
> All that can come, and how to meet it, our
> Resolves, if firm, may merit a more noble
> Word than this to give it utterance.
> But what are words to us? we have well nigh done
> With them and all things.
>
> (V, i, 11. 223-28)

Against this indeterminate attitude toward the definitive and the generalized, Sardanapalus' final purpose, his philosophical suicide, takes on the appearance of a problem, as he himself says ("A problem few dare imitate, and none/Despise--" /V, i, 11. 447-48/). That it is meant as a lesson is clear--his funeral pyre will be "a light/To lesson ages," (V, i, 11. 440-41)--but exactly what it means and what state or condition in Sardanapalus can now produce "Resolves" are less certain. But if we bear in mind that structure of approach and withdrawl, affirmation and escape, we can see that part of the resolve is to create a meaning despite the difficulty of words, and that the state which produces the resolve is a continual dissociation of himself from the past and from the just passing. This time-frame distinguishes Sardanapalus from his predecessors in this study: Foscari struggles along for a few minutes in the present, then drops into the past; Faliero dies to the past (to "all that had been") and is reborn in the future; Sardanapalus remains poised for some time, unwilling to commit himself to eternity. But his sense of imminent departure is strong in his last persuasion of his friends:

> My best! my last friends!
> Let's not unman each other: part at once:
> All farewells should be sudden, when for ever,
> Else they make an eternity of moments,
> And clog the last sad sands of life with tears.
> Hence, and be happy: trust me, I am not
> Now to be pitied; or far more for what

> Is past than present: for the future, 'tis
> In the hands of the deities, if such
> There be: I shall know soon.--Farewell--Farewell.
>
> (V, i, 11. 400-09)

He speaks in similar terms to Myrrha, asking if she understands the nature of their self-immolation:

> If at this moment--for we are now on
> The brink--thou feel's an inward shrinking from
> This leap through fire into the future, say it:
> I shall not love thee less;
>
> (V, i, 11. 413-16)

Pointedly, Myrrha's answer is two indirections:

> Myr. Shall I light
> One of the torches which lie beneath
> The ever-burning lamp . . . ?
> Sar. Do so. Is that thy answer?
> Myr. Thou shalt see.
>
> (V, i, 11. 418-22)

Their resolve has not cured their difficulty with communication, and, in fact, to the end of the play they cannot quite agree on terminological specifics. But this does not stop them from going on, and Sardanapalus can understand, though she's not said it, that "She's firm." (V, i, 1. 423) They are about to leave the world and its linguistic instability. Myrrha has already shown that she follows Sardanapalus' thinking in this: to his "what are words to us? we have well nigh done/With them and all things," she replies:

> Save one deed--the last
> And greatest to all mortals; crowning act
> Of all that was, or is, or is to be--
> The only thing common to all mankind,
> So different in their births, tongues, sexes, natures,
> Hues, features, climes, times, feelings, intellects,
> Without one point of union save in this,
> To which we tend, to which we're born, and thread
> The labyrinth of mystery, call'd life.
>
> (V, i, 11. 228-36)

Myrrha regards death as an act which will obliterate the distinctions (all of which have operated in this play) that cause separation among individuals, a position which merges with Sardanapalus', who believes that

death will purify him of "some/Of the gross stains of too material being," (V, i, ll. 424-25), and that "the commingling fire will mix our ashes." (V, i, l. 471) For both of them a turn toward the future is freedom from the fixed meanings of the past. But it is also for both an essentially human act, the "only thing common"--and as they draw toward it, they manage to understand each other, and almost to communicate, through the obscurity of language.

As to the meaning of the lesson, Sardanapalus' agnosticism suggests that we conceive of his escape from response as psychological, rather than spiritual in the manner of Faliero's: Sardanapalus' address to his fathers is very uncertain:

> My fathers! whom I will rejoin,
> It may be, purified by death . . .
>
> (V, i, ll. 423-24)

The "It may be" attaches equally to either of the phrases that enclose it; Sardanapalus maintains his non-committal position. This reinforces his momentary commitments and makes his denial of language a matter of priorities: as he approaches certain death, the difficulties of language simply do not matter as much--language is less important that death. But nevertheless, the structure of this priority indicates that language precedes Sardanapalus in his suicide; that meaning is more important than corresponding; and that meaning (within the structure of conversation, for instance) may be suspended--it may be valid without direct response. By calling his death a "problem," Sardanapalus seems almost to revel in the fact that his death will not be immediately meaningful, but will have to be interpreted and drawn out into analysis. We may look to Sardanapalus' characterization of his agnosticism: in contrast to Faliero's "I find a comfort in/The thought, that these things are the work of Fate," Sardanapalus says: "There's something sweet in my uncertainty/

I would not change for your Chaldean lore;/Besides, I know . . . all clay can know of aught above it, or below it--nothing." (II, i, ll. 263-66) The same conditions apply to the meaning of his death: it will survive uncertainly--without intellectual content--because he has departed from convention, and entered history as a king who has done something different from the past heroes and empire builders (V, i, ll. 422ff). He has created a new context in which to judge the death of a king.

In this sense, Sardanapalus can be said to achieve a humanization of tragedy, that is, of will; he feels the psychological metamorphosis which overcomes Faliero as visionary, prophetic, and supremely ego-centric, but he secularizes and familiarizes it: he shares his ego-centrism with Myrrha; his prophecy is open-ended, without prescriptive meaning. And yet, even so, he changes less than the other protagonists we have examined: he makes a circle around eternity through the course of the play, but changes only to return to a more philosophically elaborate version of his original project: remaining human. It has been his concern all along to identify himself with what he conceives of as the human--the weak, the unstable, the momentary. As he contemplates death, these human characteristics are given an eternal form (less frightening because cloaked in human concepts). Paradigmatically, the inability to communicate is not frightening because it has been reduced from an eternal problem to a momentary difficulty. Similar reductions occur unilaterally: in saying "What are words to us? We have well nigh done/With them and all things," Sardanapalus affirms several positions from the first act of the play. Less specifically (and much more hesitantly than Faliero and Foscari), he associates himself with the masses: "I take no licence/Which I deny to them. We are all men." (I, ii, ll. 265-66) As to the figures of history which may be made present--Bacchus as wine (by way of tricking

Salemenes into pledging to the gods): "Here's that which deified him--let it now/Humanise thee; my surly, chiding brother . . ." (I, ii, 11. 182-83) And as to the implicit lie of language: "I feel a thousand mortal things about me,/But nothing godlike,--unless it be the thing which you condemn, a disposition/To love and to be merciful . . ." (I, ii, 11. 273-76) The lie is that all humans are consistent; the truth is that "All are sons of circumstance" (III, i, 1. 320).

So we have in Sardanapalus a continuation and a development of the philosophy of language we found in the Venetian plays: a continuation of the set of conditions which surround speaking and naming, and a development of the alternatives to a purely codified identity. We may distinguish among the three protagonists on the basis of the illocutionary formulas by which they identify themselves. When Francis Foscari speaks most intimately about himself, he almost always uses some variation of "I am . . . There." He tries, without success, to remain with and speak from the statist position. Faliero is a revolutionary; he abandons, and sets himself in opposition to, the state-supported roles. His characteristic utterance is, as we may say, "I am here" (i. e., now, as I speak). And finally, people speak to Sardanapalus as if he were a state figure, but he denies the effectiveness of their speech by saying, as it were, "I was not there," (i. e., when you spoke to me); Sardanapalus builds on the self-constitutive speech of Faliero, but moves beyond it, toward a speech which signifies not identity, but movement and thought.

It is probably misleading to think of these three characters as representing three phases of the same rebellion against language and history. It has been convenient for my purposes to treat them as a dialectic, but, as I said at the outset, the plays are not syllogistic or didactic; they are complexes of ideas, associations, trains of imagery,

and spatial/temporal metaphors. All literary criticism aims at system (or we would not call it criticism, but something else), but as we have seen, to systematize Byron's poetry is neither desireable nor necessary. I have tried in this chapter to abstract a philosophy which exists potentially in Byron's plays; I have also tried, secondarily, to associate that philosophy with some of the more interesting knots and difficulties presented by the styles of response in the plays. But I am not concerned with making the plays consistent; or, to the degree that I have unified them, it has been in order to understand why theme, character, and style of response are not consistent. That reason, I believe, is that these plays are about the rebellion against the tyranny of sequentiality. And rather than three different phases of the same rebellion, we have found really three different kinds of rebellion against a double enemy: history and language, both of which are systems of figures, and systems which invest those figures with a (in the case of Sardanapalus, certainly) nightmarish independence.

Straightened, then, and without the rough edges of self-expression, this is the philosophy of language embodied in the plays.

The concept of a persisting and consistent identity is bound to a coherent figural imagination of the past--the belief, the feeling, that anything which is past stands valid and fixed, and that it is the accumulation of the "inexorable past" (as Steno calls it) which forms the "present." (The alternative--a concrete present, a felt present--for those who exist in crisis, is an abstract and undefineable state; words cannot figure the present as they can the past. For Sardanapalus it is ultimately a pre-verbal, or better, a pre-significant state; it is vague and unsignifying hell for Faliero; it is death-dealing for Foscari.) As applied to particular acts of speech, this statist epistemology makes of any

utterance an implicit assertion of identity; thus Sardanapalus and Faliero are "moved" to disclaim responsibility for their speech as they break from the past. As applied to conversation, the epistemology places greater value on illocutions than on locutions; illocutionary forms are the context of an utterance, as history is the context of the individual, and any utterance, for the statist, is or ought to be another instance of the known forms--that is, another instance of history.

To speak is to take on an identity--to identify, locate, and define oneself (and so gain some amount of impact on the world). And yet there is an inherent anxiety in speaking, that in choosing to speak the willful person must also recognize that the identity so chosen is momentary--that to speak fully and truthfully and naturally, etc., entails the continual, the simultaneous, denial that acts of speech are the product of a persisting identity; that the truth, in fact, is more nearly the opposite: that the fiction of identity is the product of acts of speech (as they merge with or emerge from a context of communication).

Moreover, to speak within the normal context of communication is to put oneself at the mercy of a response. It does not matter whether one affirms the identity implicitly asserted in initiating a conversation: to initiate a conversation is to ask for a response, and thus to hang one's meaning on the future. (This is one important reason why soliloquies--in all drama, not just Byron's--are revelatory of character: we see in a soliloquy--in the character's responses to himself or herself--what that character's ideal audience is /Faliero's fathers, for instance/, and what the character deems an appropriate response.) If the answer is not of the proper illocutionary form, or if there is no answer (see the conversations of Sardanapalus and Salemenes in Act I for examples), that identity is invalidated, along with purpose, desire, effectiveness, etc.

If the response is proper--an answer to a question, obedience to a command, protection to an assault--the correspondent has reinforced an identity which is dangerous to the speaker because it limits options in the future--being codified, it ignores the future--and because the willful speaker knows it to be a false but powerfully attractive fiction: it is comforting, lulling, stable, and dangerous, because it will not cause the world to change, but will give the appearance of compromise when in fact (and the willful person--the subject--knows this also) the code itself will have won.

In sum, to speak is to deny the basics of figural history. To speak is to try to say, "I am . . . Here" (rather than "there," in that structure or system). But even this (rhetorical) figure is illusory, and a product of the will: that speech is immediate demands that, to be accurate, one tries to mean by it, "I am there" or "That was me." Speech emerges from the present and suggests the present, but in the moment of interpretation--even of significance--it is already past, or passing. Or else entirely to come. Much of this is captured in Manfred's single remark, "In life there is no present." Speech and writing are part of the same field for Byron--both inevitably past. The escape from responsibility is equivalent to the escape from response; and this complex of escape is one pole of the denial of history which "moves" the protagonists at all levels.

Speech gravitates toward writing for characters in crisis, for writing, though it suggests the past where speech suggests the present, is under a regular condition that speech is not. Writing needs no immediate response, and it waits for no response; rather, it waits for the future, for the reader who is to come, but who need not be present and cannot respond. The way out of the anxiety of speech is to attain this self-sufficient condition of writing; and this is the other, positive pole of the denial of history. Our three protagonists all, in their various

and more or less effective ways, start out along this path of identifying themselves with the future. The curse, the prophecy, and the lesson and the final illocutions of Faliero and Sardanapalus; Foscari, not quite so advanced, binds his identity to the physical movements he is about to make. All align themselves with the future-orientation of speech, but dispense, in authorial fashion, with the need for response (or they try to dispense with it--they escape from response, in any case). And they do this in the ways we have noted throughout: obscurantism, identification with the passing moment (Foscari and his movements), asserting the death of the past (in Faliero's case, the killing of the past), and the blocking out of all but an abstract and temporary production of meaning (Sardanapalus). At its least effective, as during Foscari's last moments, the resulting assertions are merely obscure; at its most effective, it is forced into validity by Sardanapalus' and Faliero's suicides. It may be objected that those suicides are passive (Myrrha lights the fire; Faliero bows to the executioner); but this, I think, is a symbolic indication that it is the mental gesture--the willing away--that liberates the two, and the mental rebellion which has an effect on the world. Had they actively killed themselves, their verbal effectiveness would have been in doubt; instead, they say "I will die now," and it is accomplished.

But the most important point about the rejection of language, it seems to me, is that these characters are more and more emphatically <u>just about</u> to stop speaking; they never in fact stop until they die (though we must interpret the relation between death and silence as coincidental rather than causal). In fact, toward the ends of these plays, the protagonists redouble their efforts and multiply their verbal strategies; crisis causes language. Foscari speaks "More than my wont: it is a foible which/Was not of mine" (V, i, ll. 262-63)--not a foible of his until he begins

to recognize that the hateful and temporary speech is his only weapon in a battle of meanings. Faliero's last request is, "May I speak?" (V, ii, l. 23) It is this double-poise in their attitudes that makes their language thing-like and scriptural: they are about to die and stop speaking, and yet this very condition (conceived temporally) increases the range and effectiveness of their speech.

We ought to touch on the limitation of writing, which is taken on in these catastrophes, and which is precisely its unlimitedness, its sublimity: that to write or to speak monumentally is to "flatter dust with eternity" and open oneself to those "gulfs" to which "a single deviation from the track/Of human duties leads even those who claim/The homage of mankind," i. e., those whose words are listened to carefully (Sardanapalus is the best critic of Faliero's prophecy). For the statist, the person immured in his or her own culture, this does not present a problem, no more than freedon has appeared in its full, terrifying form. As powerful as he is, Michael Steno does not realize his power; he is, as he thinks of himself, an instance of the "inexorable past": he thinks no more of himself than that; he does not think of himself (see his speech, V, i, 11. 398-406, which is reminiscient of the early Foscari in its self-effacement). James Loredano, throoughly civilized--a writer--allows himself to be thought of as a natural force, would like to be a force of nature (see Barbarigo's remarks, I, i, 11. 56-63). Neither, apparently, feels any conflict between free will and "free" speech.

But for the willful user of language--Sardanapalus and Marina Foscari come immediately to mind--language is a constant threat to existence; to be precise, the context of language is a problem, for the values of words, like the figures of history, seem fixed and independent (and as we noted in Chapter I, it is this fixity of language or context that

destabilizes, "mobilizes," the individual). This is how the protagonists of these plays--including Marina Foscari--are different from the villians. The villians (and we may include the antagonistic--the guilty--portions of the protagonists) are in the grip of language; they feel that the language is older and wiser than they.

It is, accordingly, only the protagonists who can be called "users" of language; it is part of their skepticism that they realize that they use language rather than being used by it; that they come to see themselves as the source of language, and especially language with a suspended meaning, language of and for the future. The final speech of Faliero, his prophecy, is a model of non-contextuality for this monograph; it breaks free from its context in a striking fashion, moving into a history of Venice (of the years subsequent to Faliero's death) so specific, so factually accurate, and so detailed that it departs from the play altogether; it is not a completion of this play; it is not for this play, but for the nineteenth century reader. It is Faliero's success, as well as the compromise of that success, that he moves away from a figural imagination of the past toward an (equally valid) concrete imagination of the future.

Because the future takes shape for these characters, because prophecy is just history from another point of view, and because their final purpose in speaking is to outlive themselves, it is not indiscriminately associative to sense that the words of Foscari, Faliero, and Sardanapalus become substitutes for their lost sons. The words of dying men, Faliero hopes, "long outlive,/And oftentimes avenge them." His biological sons, who might have done this, have all died in the Venetian wars. Jacopo is the last and favored son of Francis Foscari, but at his death Francis begins a period of verbal creativity. Sardanapalus' sons must escape into

exile, and at the moment of loss Sardanapalus mourns that he has never taken much interest in them. Sardanapalus often, of course, and characteristically, has such changes of heart; and in thinking and conversing about his sons, he passes on his sins to them even as he wishes them away for their own good:

> They'll learn
> Too soon the scorn of crowds for crownless princes,
> And find that all their father's sins are theirs.
> My boys!--I could have borne it were I childless.
> (IV, i, ll. 280-83)

Moreover, these characters are all concerned (at least eventually) with destroying their precedent "figures"--with destroying and replacing their fathers, with becoming their own fathers, fathering themselves. This familial coordination squares with their respective attempts to become ego-centric and self-responsive in language, and to find a sustained, permanent present. We may extend this into Byronic convolution (the only system that Byron's poetry yields is a convoluted system) and say that language is their father (the past) and new meanings are their sons (their progeny--the future). And "they themselves"--the "I am"--if not altogether transparent, are at least on the verge of disappearance (as the subject-speakers are on the verge of death). Foscari says, "Our whole being rests on something which is not us." For Foscari, this "something" is the history of precedent figures (inferred from precedent acts). For the city of Venice, in both the Venetian plays, the "something" is the glorious and honorable history of Venice, which is sadly inapplicable to the current condition of the city-state; the same condition, of past as memory remembered (and not as imperative present), describes Foscari (who is a "mystery") and Sardanapalus (who is "inscrutable" /III, i, l. 319/). For these two characters explicitly, and we may certainly include Faliero in this description, history is an internal mystery which must be opposed, overthrown, and demystified.

And in so saying, we have found the unsystematic allegory we predicted we would find; we found it necessarily, because we set out to look for a relation between the traditional and generic contexts of poetry, and its particular manifestations (i. e., language which could be said to be subjective, stylized). And, unsystematically, we have found an allegory which comes to rest on processes and relations rather than on figures; which comprises an evolution and transformation rather than a conflict and resolution. An allegory, in sum, of consciousness becoming radically subjective, and politically radical in its alienation; of consciousness becoming subjective in claiming its will and the product of its will (and so able to disavow the fictional and artistic with the same vehemence as the will itself is denied). The common denominator of these three plays is that each dwells on the struggle of the historically-willful subject, the user of language, to feel, and yet to break free of, the limiting context of rules, conventions, and historical precedents that accompany normal language use--to remember it, and yet to break free of the context of the past, and to create a new context of futurity.

Writing and speech are part of the same field of communication--not as opposites of contraries (that is, they are not distinguishable logically)--but because they exist in an experiential and empirical relation to each other. They do not exist on a continuum of space, however, but of time: both look backward toward a past which is an act of will, as applicable to the future as to the past.

So we have created and completed allegories in the most dangerously deceptive region of literary criticism. But now the dangerous part is over, and I need only, as a final, retrospective transformation of the patterns I have found here, add this qualification to the interpretation of Byron's three classical plays: that where I have said, for instance,

"these conflicts become linguistic," or "this image of language means . . .," we may substitute, "Byron wrote . . . " For to make anything I have said real, we must find the proper locus of the struggle to which I have given such importance: and that struggle is Byron's struggle--the struggle to write, to make plausible, to finish the play. It was not Faliero or Foscari or Sandanapalus who turned those plays into linguistic struggles, but Byron, whose writing always existed around the boundary between the portrayal of a world and the portrayal of a portrayal. As he exercised his classicism, Byron found the means and the motivation to go beyond the weak, the spoken, and the figural, and to find the conditional, the contingent, and the suspensive. In this chapter we have seen how the the narrator may be so validly, negatively established; in the next chapter we will see how narration may continue as a negation, and yet continue.

Notes

[1] I pointed out in the Introduction that Stanley Fish is, paradoxically, the most forceful exponent of this stylistic skepticism, notable in his essay "What Is Stylistics, etc."

[2] Paul West makes this mistake rather blatantly in "The Plays," a chapter of an earlier book reprinted in Byron: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1963), pp. 50-64; Michael G. Cooke makes the same error more convincingly in "The Restoration Ethos of Byron's Plays," PMLA, LXXIX (1964), pp. 569-578.

[3] My primary source for this concept, and the most interesting application I have seen, may be found in Eugenio Donato's "Historical Imagination and the Idioms of Criticism," in Boundary 2, VII, I (Fall, 1979), pp. 39-56. The term "figural history" does not appear in Donato's essay, but I refer the reader to such discussions as the one on pages 40-45.

[4] Richard Ohmann has been the most systematic expositor of the implications of speech-act theory on literary texts. See especially his essay "Speech, Action, and Style," in Literary Style: A Symposium, ed. Seymour Chatman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 241-254.

[5] I refer here to Faliero's superstitions concerning the episode of striking "the sluggish bishop" of Treviso in his youth; see V, ii, ll. 15-41.

[6] The best example of such a reaction in other characters is Angiolina's response to Faliero's long exposition in II, i, which turns upon her question "To what does this conduct?" Angiolina is a foil in this dialogue;

but she is also genuinely unaware of the logic or direction--the "conduct"--of Faliero's narrative; see lines 410-20, especially.

[7] The Freudian or psychoanalytic model seems especially appropriate to the relation of Faliero and Angiolina; it is developed in this regard by Peter J. Manning in Byron and His Fictions (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978), pp. 111-13.

[8] The Giunta expresses its fear that meaning will escape at these prominent points: V, i, ll. 45, 100, 150, and 549; V, iii, l. 24.

[9] I might restate this: the search for defining genres has often been a controlling feature of particular works of criticism. I have already pointed out one important instance of this: William H. Marshall does not include the plays among "Byron's major poems" precisely because, he writes, they were written in the wrong genre; they should have been dramatic monologues. See Structure, p. 25.

[10] Robert F. Gleckner's interpretation of Sardanapalus turns on the repetition of this pair of terms; see Ruins, Chapter Six, passim.

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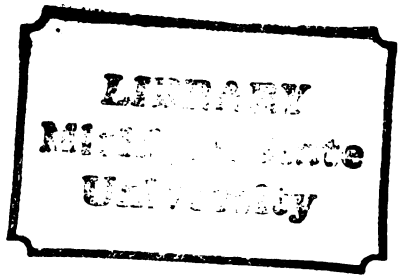

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Chapter V

Part i.

"Churchill's Grave":

Byron and the Monumental Style

Robert F. Gleckner has written, "There has probably been more disagreement over the quality of Byron's lyric poetry than over any other kind of poetry he wrote."[1] This is most true if one takes the long view of the critical literature. The debate over the quality of Byron's poetry has varied in its particulars as well as in its general shape in this century, and controversy enough over the lyrics there has been: over whether they are most profitably read as incomplete romanticism or decadent classicism; whether the best of his lyrics are the result of heightened self-awareness or of the escape from self; whether they accurately portray Byron's motive or state of mind (or any psychologically plausible state of mind).[2] Among recent critics one may discern at least three distinct attitudes toward the lyrics. The predominant developmental approach, urged by Gleckner, treats the lyrics in the context of the persisting themes of Byron's work; the lyrics are valuable, from this point of view, as documents of the evolution of Byron's thought. Less widespread, but with articulate proponents, is the view that Byron's lyrics have a worth independent of their origin, which will appear if they are read within the proper generic system--if read as "romantic" or "experimental" poems for instance, or as love poems or epistles. There are finally important works on Byron's poetry which do not treat of the lyrics

at all, or do so only in passing on to the tales, the plays, or the longer satires. One may therefore agree with Gleckner to this extent, that the lyrics are still alive, still read and studied, still a source of difference among critics.[3]

This much granted, however, I think that the student of Byron criticism over the last twenty or thirty years is more likely to be struck by the uniformity of opinion on the lyrics than by its diversity. There are disagreements as to how one ought to regard the lyrics as a group, but no important debate among readers on individual poems. We find nothing like the wealth of commentary and interaction among critics that surround "Kubla Khan," "Resolution and Independence," or Keats's sonnets. A glance at any bibliography shows how few articles have dealt with individual lyrics at all. Even among the most sympathetic readers of the lyrics it is unusual to find a detailed analysis of a single poem.

The reasons for this lack of enthusiasm are variously expressed, but tend to strike the same notes. "Byron's genius . . . was not lyrical--" explains Andrew Rutherford, "even in his later years his short poems seldom escape . . . metrical banality and sentimentalism."[4] Leslie Marchand is more specific, though he too focuses on Byron's lack of verbal facility and uncomplicated sentiments: "If we demand, as many twentieth century critics do, that poetry embody irony and ambiguity and paradox in a complex and intricate structure of words weighted with symbolic meaning, we shall give short shrift to most other kinds of poetry, and particularly the work of poets . . . like Byron."[5] Again, Northrop Frye's evaluation is very like Marchand's: "Byron's lyrical poetry affords a good exercise in critical catholicity, because it contains nothing that 'modern" critics look for: no texture, no ambiguities, no intellectualized ironies, no intensity, no vividness of phrasing, the words and images

being vague to the point of abstraction."[6] Jerome K. McGann has recently been more blunt: "His interest was not in words but what they stand for . . . He can't write the equivalent of a well-wrought urn."[7]

It is misleading, of course, to see only the isolated remarks of a sophisticated reader; each of these critics has made substantial contributions to our understanding of Byron. And it is not my business here either to dispute the findings of any other reader or to reopen the question of the lyrics' worth. Moreover, any critic ought to remain free to generalize, especially on matters irrelevant to his main argument. And yet this particular generalization has become so vital to the study of Byron, so clear in its outlines from reader to reader, that it deserves recognition as a collective judgment--not a unanimous judgment, perhaps, among contemporary critics, but neither a controversial one.[8] And to treat such judgments with respect entails testing them, finding their limits, determining in what sense they are true. Most of all, I should think, it involves the eventual attempt to elevate the generalization into a theory. For in this case the generalization is too small: to say that Byron could not is a casual way of expressing one's perception that he did not write in the complex style; and therein lies the most interesting question. It is also to imply, without specifying, some difference between "long" poems and lyrics; and this question, too, is vital, though it has been explicitly formulated as a problem only by Michael G. Cooke. Of those poems whose surface simplicity masks an "essentially knowledgeable and complex position," Cooke writes: "It would bear stressing . . . that such lyrics stand in no pat relation to the great body of Byron's work. He articulates no propaedeutic Prelude. He does not, like Wordsworth, have an "Old Cumberland Beggar" to clarify a cryptic line."[9]

It is with some caution, therefore, that I propose here to read a

single lyric, one which does not lack "ambiguities," "intellectualized ironies," or "intensity"; to find that it is a "complex and intricate structure of words weighted with symbolic meaning"; and more, to claim for it the status of a propaedeutic to Byron's other lyric poetry. But I do not intend to disprove the generalization. I would rather supplement it: first, by examining an instance of Byron's monumental style, rare though it may be, and clarifying its relations to other, more familiar aspects of his poetry; and second, by indicating some patterns in the poem which may lead us to broader speculations on Byron's attitude toward the lyric, and toward literary style. My aim, then, is not to impugn the contemporary judgment of Byron's lyrics, but to sharpen and specify it; and not to remake Byron in the image of the craftsman, but to suggest some reasons why he has not appeared to be.

My text is a poem which, curiously, has remained unexamined by all of Byron's major critics for the past twenty years. I find this curious because the poem seems to me to present, even under a cursory reading, so many interesting interpretive problems. I also find it an effective and moving poem, and, failing in my larger theoretical purpose, it would be nough for me to have introduced the reader to some of the emotional intricacies to be found here.

Churchill's Grave
A Fact Literally Rendered

I stood beside the grave of him who blazed
  The comet of a season, and I saw
The humblest of all sepulcres, and gazed
  With not the less of sorrow and of awe
On that neglected turf and quiet stone,
With name no clearer than the names unknown
Which lay unread around it; and I asked
  The Gardener of that ground, why it might be
That for this plant strangers his memory task'd
  Through the think deaths of half a century?
And thus he answer'd--'Well, I do not know
Why frequent travellers turn to pilgrims so;

He died before my day of Sextonship,
  And I had not the digging of this grave.'
And is this all? I thought--and do we rip
  The veil of Immortality, and crave
I know not what of honour and of light
Through unborn ages, to endure this blight,
So soon, and so successless? As I said,
The Architect of all on which we tread,
For Earth is but a tombstone, did essay,
To extricate remembrance from the clay,
Whose minglings might confuse a Newton's thought,
  Were it not that all life must end in one,
Of which we are but dreamers;--as he caught,
  As 'twere the twilight of a former Sun,
Thus spoke he,--'I believe the man of whom
You wot, who lies in this selected tomb,
Was a most famous writer in his day,
And therefore travellers step from out their way
To pay him honour,--and myself whate'er
  Your honour pleases:'--then most pleased I shook
From out my pocket's avaricious nook
Some certain coins of silver, which as 'twere
Perforce I gave this man, though I could spare
So much but inconveniently:--Ye smile,
I see ye, ye profane ones! all the while,
Because my homely phrase the truth would tell.
You are the fools, not I--for I did dwell
With a deep thought, and with a soften'd eye,
On that old Sexton's natural homily,
In which there was Obscurity and Fame--
The Glory and the Nothing of a Name.

Diodati, 1816.

I hope to show that the poem can be divided into various overlapping units, but it seems to me that the predominant principle of organization is the question and answer. The introductory composition of place evolves (in l. 7) into the question put to the Sexton. The Sexton answers with apparent finality in lines 11-14. The narrator[12] resumes his questioning (ll. 15-19) with its attendant meditation on the transience of life, and pursues this train of thought through a pause as the Sexton clears the headstone. Having ascertained the name, the Sexton unexpectedly continues his answer in lines 27-32. The two characters conclude their conversational exchange with a financial exchange (ll. 32-36); and then the narrator addresses the readers of the poem (and this may be thought of as an answer to a question the narrator imagines).

These modification in the basic structure correspond to subtle advances in the narrator's thinking during the moments spent beside the grave, and also to a temporal complication: the moments which pass beside the grave themselves correspond to moments which pass, at a different time, in the composition of the poem. We are well acquainted with this complication from other important Romantic poems: "Ode to a Nightingale," Shelley's "Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills," and especially "Tintern Abbey." These works, in what we might call the lyric-memorial mode, are neither altogether narratives of the past nor rumination in the present; both times become fictional, to a degree, and the only vivid reality--the matter of the poem and of the experience it records--is the coincidence of the past as remembered and the composing present.[13] This interaction will emerge from my reading of "Churchill's Grave" in several ways: from the association of the narrator's questioning with his profound subjectivity through line 36, pointed by the direct discourse of the Sexton, which arises from the past; From the nearly complete arrival in the present in the last eight lines; and from the title, which, in addition to introducing part of the message of the last eight lines ("Fact"/"Truth"), announces the narrator from the complex composing present that puns nearly always represent. The narrator wants to say all three things about his treatment of the "fact" of Churchill's grave: that he will render it truthfully (not metaphorically or allegorically); that he will render it apart, that is, boil it down or analyze it; and that he will analyze it literally, that is, in words. There is perhaps an element of indecision here, but it is one which contributes to characterization and does not obscure the intentions of the title.

From this standpoint in a selfless present (the narrator is unnamed in the passive construction of the subtitle), the lyric begins

by deploying the narrator in the past: "I stood," "and I saw . . . and gazed," "and I asked."[14] The verbs support the familiar meditation on place which traditionally opens the lyric-memorial poem; they lead us to the world: "the grave of him who blazed," "the humblest of all sepulchres," "neglected turf and quiet stone." The attempt to capture, or to assert, the perspective of the narrator may be stronger than we are used to in such poems, however. The repetition of "I," the string of conjunctions, and the (ostensibly) indicative mood of lines 7-10 are ways of establishing the narrator on an equal footing with the place. We make take this as an expression of uncertainty over his own status; and he is made uncertain, we can assume, not only by his desire to write the poem (which might be unsettling in itself), but also by the nature of this memory. For the narration of the past is of the moments following the moment in which a writer looks at the writing which another writer has left behind--Churchill's trace upon the world, his name. Close at hand, then, is the narrator's contemplation of his own death, his personal future, and the future of his writing and reputation. Note the interesting presentation of Churchill's name: "With name no clearer than the names unknown/Which lay unread around it." The negations are a verbal equivalent of the physical obscurity of the tombstone, which has been reclaimed by nature (by vegetation: "neglected turf," "blight" in line 18). It is at least in part in reaction to the obscurity of Churchill's name that he is moved to assert his own existence, though we may question the effectiveness of his simple, conjoined assertions; it may be a sense of their weakness against nature that leads the narrator to repeat them. But it is clear that both he and Churchill are in some danger here--specifically, they are in danger of going "unread." And the crisis in the present is the narrator's recognition that this poem is also a tombstone, with his name on it, and is

subject to the same conditions as Churchill's.

This anxiety extends through much of the poem and guides the course of metaphor and symbol, in the way that the questions and answers structure the narrator's memory of the event; and we can watch the narrator begin to work through the implications of his first perception by enacting a series of transformations of himself, of the graveyard and the figure of the Sexton, and even of his own rhetoric. In lines 7-10, the "I" becomes one of many "strangers" (strangers, I take it, to this natural or vegetative world); and the Sexton (who does not become a Sexton in the narrator's mind until the end of the poem) is here the corresponding figure of "The Gardener," and Churchill's grave is one of the plants he tends; the composition of place and self, framed in conjoined assertions in lines 1-7, becomes a question, though retaining the form of conjoined indicative assertion: "and I asked," which is followed in line 11 by "And thus he answer'd." There are many of these argumentative or proleptic devices in the poem: twelve "ands" in lines 1-19; elsewhere, "thus," "as," "then," "for," "because"--all adding a sequential force to what the narrator must believe is an otherwise discontinuous poem.[15] But notice how the predominant mode of syntactic structure changes from conjunction or coordination in the first nineteen lines to subordination--the use of the relative clause--in the last twenty-four. This shift may be interpreted as an expression of increasing complexity of thought (though I would not equate interconnectedness with comprehension in this case), or, as seems equally likely, an evolution of the rhetorical strategy. In the first nineteen lines, at any rate, the narrator is concerned that he not lose track of the line of transformations that may lead him out of the initially dangerous territory of his own death.

It is from this background of the narrator's anxiety and his attempt

to impose continuity on the course of the meditation that the Sexton's first answer (by means of the strong conjunction "And thus") is made to arise. The Sexton's voice is the most solid element in the first two-thirds of the poem; his speeches are moments of simplicity, if not of complete clarity. But the first answer is unsatisfying, and cast in negation:

> 'Well, I do not know
> Why frequent travellers turn to pilgrims so;
> He died before my day of Sextonship,
> And I had not the digging of this grave.'

The Sexton's answer complicates the problem introduced in "unknown." (The narrator's question is not precisely "Who is he?" but more like "Why is he well known?"--and the answer is that he is not well known to one whose only criterion is the fact of burial.) The response is probably also part of the object of the narrator's next round of questions: "And is this all?" meaning "Is such an answer all?"--the flatness and negativity of the response, again, a verbal equivalent of the "blight" obscuring Churchill's name.

There is more in the Sexton's answer than the inert resistance of nature, though. One may sense an implicit challenge, as if the Sexton were breaking into or interrupting the symbolizing process of the narrator. Certainly he breaks into the memory with a good deal of vigor; the direct quotation of his lines (while the narrator's remain in indirect quotation) emphasizes his presence, as well as suggesting that he has arrived here without help, on the strength of his own remarks. But if he is competitive, if he is an agent of natural obscurity, he is also obliquely cooperative: his answer, though ironic, is cordial and complete; and he will go on, in anticipation of payment, to clear the stone and ascertain the name. More importantly, he furthers the course of the poem: he picks up the negations of the narrator (perhaps reading his mood) and so forms a

transition in the narraotr's thinking from the first to the second meditation. He cooperates too, less obviously at this point, by giving the narrator names and identities: as the narrator has made the Sexton "Gardener," the Sexton makes the narrator one of a number of "travellers" and "pilgrims" (whereas the narrator has named himself to the Sexton only as the less specific "stranger").

The narrator, however, does not recognize the cooperation (and will not till around line 32) and in lines 15-19 he returns to his first thought, to the lyric-memorial mode of writing, and to his description by negation:

> And is this all? I thought--and do we rip
> The veil of Immortality, and crave
> I know not what of honour and of light
> Through unborn ages, to endure this blight,
> So soon, and so successless?

That the Sexton's answer, and perhaps the narrator's question, have not led to any resolution, but to a renewed and somewhat frantic questioning, is evidence that the narrator's projects have gone awry, both in the past and in the present. In the past, the narrator did not find an end in the answer to his question, but only ignorance and indirection: "unknown" and especially "unread" cross the Sexton's "I do not know" and are continued in "I know not what," "unborn ages," and "successless." Through the figure of the Sexton in the narrator's memory, the negations reach forward from the past into the present of composing, in which the lyric-memorial meditation has not escaped from its initial intimation that both poem and poet are close to death. We can begin to see here, though, that the rhetorical stance of that meditation is itself partly to blame for the grave that has opened up before the narrator. He was the stranger who "task'd" the Sexton with a question, and the wrong question, we may suspect, since it required special knowledge to answer. Neither is the "blight" into which the "unborn ages" fall altogether natural; rather,

it emerges from the narrator's activity in transforming the figures of the poem (from "grave" to "plant," from "neglected turf" to "blight"). So while it is not quite fair to blame a genre for a style of utterance, the narrator's return to the lyric-memorial and to the conjoined questions of lines 1-10 is to some degree the source of his confusion through the middle of the poem; and it is to the interaction of that genre with the narrator's anxiety that we may trace the sudden inflation of the poem in lines 15-25, an inflation of both syntax and significance toward their limits.

That inflation is the more remarkable for sticking so closely to the figures already established in lines 1-14; those figures are developed, almost beyond recognition, but nothing new is added to the scene in the graveyard. The narrator--before, member of several groups: strangers, travellers, pilgrims--moves from the ego-centric "I" to the more appropriate "we" in line 15.[16] And we--like Churchill, who is our most immediate exemplar--become Christ-like: our deaths "rip/The veil" from the Holy of Holies in the temple (our poetry, not surprisingly here associated with our deaths, reveals the possibility of immortality--that I take to be the import of the allusion--but this possibility is negated in the narrator's mind; Churchill's poetry has not conducted him into any new life; the future is "unborn"). The graveyard, at first a hoped-for garden (perhaps heaven or Eden), is about to become a Garden of Gethsemane, natural scene of Churchill's betrayal for "coins of silver." But first it passes through a moment in which the narrator imagines it to be the whole world:

> As I said,
> The Architect of all on which we tread,
> For Earth is but a tombstone, did essay
> To extricate remembrance from the clay,
> Whose minglings might confuse a Newton's thought
> Were it not that all life must end in one,
> Of which we are but dreamers;

"As I said" is the first strand of a difficult but very revealing syntactic knot; it appears to function as both a proleptic device and as a relative. As a proleptic device indicating a paraphrase (meaning "as I said before"), it must mean that "The Architect of all on which we tread" is another way of denoting "The Gardener of that ground"; and "For Earth is but a tombstone" is then an explanatory afterthought showing that the narrator has moved from "ground" to "Earth." As a relative, that is, a subordination (which seems at first the more likely reading), indicating the cotemporality of "said" and "did essay," the phrase introduces the less puzzling image of the Sexton acting while the narrator "says"--but also the problematical equation of "said" with "thought" from line 15 (for "said" cannot refer to "asked" from line 7; the Sexton would not have acted before being spoken to). Under either emphasis, then, the ambiguity suggests that the narrator has lost the distinction between past and present: if it is a paraphrase, then the narrator has momentarily lost track of the course of the poem in his revery, and is caught unawares by the necessity of explaining the transformation of the Sexton. If it is a relative, then he's forgotten that he didn't say it in the present, but thought it in the past: his struggle in the composing present briefly eclipses the memory.

Other distinctions begin to break down as well, even distinctions between figures. The Sexton (not yet Judas) is still a kind of gardener, but because the Earth itself is a tombstone (the tombstones of individuals, I assume, becoming the lettering which marks the death of the race), his role is much increased: he is the architect of the tombstone of the earth. And as "The Architect"--that is, the only one--he takes on aspects of the divine, not just the agent but the author of the plan. It is he who tries to coax consciousness (to "extricate remembrance") from the clay, and in

the next moment he who makes time roll back. So from a certain point of view, there is an afterlife here, and a benevolent, if disappointing, deity. At the same time, though, the Sexton's knowledge is secularized, for he can be thought of, not as God, but as Newton, able to distinguish plant from stone, able to untangle the mysteries of Earth.

Like the first phrase, "extricate remembrance from the clay" is perfectly ambiguous. The narrator intuits a correspondence between the Sexton's physical activity in clearing the stone (to "extricate" Churchill's name) and his attempt to remember: this is another sort of "extrication," for the Sexton is another sort of "clay"; and his thought processes, not unlike the narrator's, are as tangled as the weeds obscuring the stone, so much that it would take another Newton to unravel them.[17] This reference to his earthly substance is not only a diminishment or a joke at the Sexton's expense, though; it is also an extension of the association between "Gardener"/"ground" and "Architect"/"tombstone": the Sexton, that is, is part of the very matter of this place. And the narrator's questions (he may be slowly realizing this in lines 19-25) are put not just to a Sexton in a churchyard, but to a spirit representing the whole Earth and all of Earth's laws. The distinction between Sexton and churchyard and Earth has faded: the Sexton tasking his memory is the same as the Sexton clearing the stone; and both of these, again, are images of the Sexton exerting a power of mind and body so arcane, so nearly mystical (as it appears to the narrator), that its intricacies might puzzle Newton. His is ultimately a secular power; but for this moment, the Sexton comprises all the narrator's hopes for a supernatural authority.[18] This moment is at the center of the poem, and is central to it: and the image that preserves it is, to my mind, one of the most important in Byron's poetry: a common reader--the Sexton--trying to clear the monument

left behind by a dead poet, as the contemporary poet looks anxiously on; the poet powerless to help or hinder, and the "common" reader, in fact, evincing extraordinary powers (which all come down to whether he reads or does not read).[19]

It is important, though, not to isolate the image too firmly from its place in the development of the poem; it is part of a little drama of figures and symbols which has been implicit in the lyric-memorial mode all along.[20] The plot of that drama reaches its point of highest complication in this passage--in this independent clause (11. 19-25) whose core ("The Architect . . . did essay,/To extricate remembrance from the clay") is itself difficult to extricate from the subordinate clauses in which it is embedded: "As I said . . .," "For Earth is but a tombstone . . .," "Whose minglings might . . .," "Were it not . . .," "Of which we are but dreamers." It is partly the complexity of the utterance, partly the tangle of its sentiment, that causes the narrator to allow this line of thought to pass away:

> Whose minglings might confuse a Newton's thought,
> Were it not that all life must end in one,
> Of which we are but dreamers;--as he caught . . .

It is hard to say how much farther this syntax might be pressed--not much farther, I think, and remain readable.[21] "Whose minglings might confuse a Newton's thought,/Were it not . ." makes an ambiguous assertion doubly speculative: grammatically speculative, because it turns on "might" and "were," and empirically speculative by way of its reference to Newton (who is no longer around to say if he's confused). But then this already highly qualified assertion in lines 19-23 is simply disclaimed, in "Were it not that all life must end in one," which is a retrospective claim that, no, Newton would not be confused. As a unit, lines 23 and 24 appear to suggest that it is not Newtonian thought that is important, but rather

an intuition common to all, including Newton: that all life must end in one. The "one" here is the "all" of line 15, and Newton is included in the "we" of "do we rip/The veil of Immortality," as well as of "one/ Of which we are but dreamers"; as "all" gives way to "one," so too, in line 25, complexity and discrimination fade in importance before the revelation that not only does life end in the one certain fact of death, but that even of that fact we have only dream-like understanding. The emphasis is shifting, then: first, from the need to discriminate within a great complexity to a simplification of concepts; second, and exactly parallel, from an initially tangled and obscure syntax into a moment or a phase in which the sentence cannot be advanced, and so is allowed to subside (notice here, and elsewhere, the hesitant terminal punctuation: a semicolon followed by a dash). The appearance of Isaac Newton in the poem (reincarnated in the variable figure of the Sexton) turns in the same way: at one instant, he embodies the complexity of the natural world ("Whose minglings might confuse a Newton's thought") and in the next he becomes a way of personalizing the mechanical universe of astronomical time ("Were it not that all life must end in one"): "the comet of a season" becomes the more relevant and intimate "twilight of a former Sun." With the help of the Sexton-as-Newton, the narrator sees that the comet that was Churchill and the light of the day on which he was buried are both reenacted in the light of this evening.[22]

The narrator turns back to the Sexton for help on several counts. The narrator has made his second speech, in lines 15-25 (he has written it--and we have seen that he confuses his "saying" in the present with his thinking in the past), and it is time, in this dialogue, for the Sexton to speak again; the interaction of their voices has been important, and becomes more so in lines 25-36. There is also a sense in which

the narrator is forced back into the past; the repetition of "as" in "As I said" and "as he caught" reveal his nervous attempt to keep himself moving forward, and to correct and constrain himself as the figures in the poem grow less manageable. He has found no resolution in the transformations he has wrought in lines 19-25, and, feeling helpless and unanswered, he looks back again to the Sexton with what is in essence a mute repetition of the question "is this all?" This time the Sexton turns up the proper answer. The narrator introduces it with a return to and completion of the metaphor of the Sexton clearing the stone and thinking: the Sexton "catches," or remembers, a former day as he catches the name of Churchill outlined, as it were, by this twilight sun.

> --as he caught,
> As 'twere the twilight of a former Sun,
> Thus spoke he,--'I believe the man of whom
> You wot, who lies in this selected tomb,
> Was a most famous writer in his day,
> And therefore travellers step from out their way
> To pay him honour,--and myself whate'er
> Your honour pleases:'--then most pleased I shook . . .

The Sexton appears to have this speech prepared; in fact, his whole behavior--his initial doubt, his going to some trouble, and then his careful obsequiousness--seems calculated to this end. At least the narrator remembers it so; his recognition of the Sexton's cleverness is probably one reason he was "pleased." The Sexton's pun's on "pay" and in the shift from the common noun "honour" to the proper pronoun Your honour" are an intricate transference of responsibility back to the narrator. And the narrator in the present, we may sense, is still pleased or is pleased again, for he takes up the Sexton's pun into his own present moment of writing (moving from the Sexton's "whate'er/Your honour pleases," i. e., wills, to his own "most pleased," i. e., gladdened).

It is likely that the Sexton's second speech is meant to represent the point in the past when the narrator learned for certain that he was

looking at the grave of another writer ("writer" forming a kind of contrastive pair with "unread"). It is likely too that it is in part this certainty that begins to turn the poem. It has been a poem about the search for certainty, and this is the first to appear (for even death is only a human dream). Or again, it has been a poem about the narrator's questioning, and the answer he receives here is exact and quotable ("literal" may be the best way of characterizing the narrator's memory of the Sexton's speech). But it is at this point that the poem begins to require a more active interpretation, for it moves, in the next two moments, well away from its established course. Our initial reaction may be that something has been left out; we find ourselves with a narrator who is, and seems to remain, "most pleased"; who lingers for five lines over a detail--the payment--whose importance is not explained; who looks up and pretends to see us, the readers, and accuses us of profanity.

This transformation of the narrator is as puzzling and obscure as any we have encountered in the poem. I am not sure I am able, or even ought to try, to explain it fully, since it seems to me at once so large and yet so familiar a turn--so difficult a problem in the context of this poem and yet perhaps the most familiar "Byronism." I would therefore like to explain it without reducing it to a rhetorical trick; and I will begin by summarizing what we have found so far, from the point of view of the gradual alignment of past and present.

The narrator moves from the sight of the grave, with its unreadable name, to the perception that after writing "all" that's left is the mere inscription itself--the mark that a passing consciousness leaves--subject to natural decay, mortal like the writer. That moment before Churchill's grave precipitates two crises: in the past event, he realizes that the grave might as well be his own, and that the Sexton's flat ignorance is

the fate that awaits him. And in his recollection of the event, in the present of composing, he realizes that the words he writes are the words he will leave behind, equivalent to the name on Churchill's stone, the trace of his passing. In the past the narrator grappled with the common problem of death and decay; in the present, he grapples with that problem made pervasive and immediate, as it exists in the very moment of recollection and recording. Writing (like eating in Don Juan[23]) reminds us of mortality; in this case, the narrator finds himself chipping away at the monument by which the future will know him (and even that is not certain: there may be no one to ask that his name be cleared, or his poem interpreted). The problem in the past, to put it another way, is to find some answer to the fact of death; in the present, to create the kind of monument that will survive one's death. Accordingly, the principle of progress through the events of the past is the interaction of the narrator's questions with the Sexton's answers; in the present, it is the narrator's attempt to establish himself in the poem, first, through repeated assertions of "I," second, by a syntactic and symbolic intricacy that demonstrates the presence of his intellect.

Both projects are well begun in the lyric-memorial mode, which is both ego-centric and deliberately fixed on the past; but that mode does not lead out. It leads forward--moments pass (and that is perhaps a problem in itself)--but the problems and the figures acting out the drama of the problems are simply transformed into larger figures, larger problems. The Sexton, especially, takes on, in his role of reader, various supernatural functions: master of time, keeper of the future state. The narrator's anxieties grow in proportion: not only at stake is his status in general and as a writer, but also his status as a thinker and writer in this very moment; he is in immediate danger. And so more is resting

on the outcome of this poem, which is the vehicle of the past and of the narrator's (so far inadequate) philosophy.

But the increasing importance of the poem also makes some traps in the writing and the reasoning more apparent. In questioning, the narrator has bound himself to the answer and suspended his own speech. In trying to make the scene before him symbolic, he begins to lose track of himself; and manages, likewise, to give away any effective power he might have had. In trying to write forward by transforming the figures of the first ten lines, he sabotages his own project: he holds himself in the past and in the crisis of the past. The figures of nature persist, for the most part, through line 32 (interrupted only by the art implied in "Architect" and the carved letters of the stone, perhaps not yet understood); with these figures of nature and the monument to the past, Churchill's stone, also persists the beginning of the poem--the lyric-memorial opening that led nowhere, but still retards the progress of his thinking; or, to be more psychologically precise, we should say that mode of poetry to which the narrator still clings in the hope of dragging some meaning or order out of it.

It should be clear, however, that the search for order is partly imposed by that mode of writing, which enshrines or fixes the past as the source of meaning, and leaves the narrator in the immediately unstable position of petitioner of the past--and in the difficult grammatical position of having to assert himself in his questions. This distinction between himself and the past is shaky to begin with, and it is one which the narrator is able to support at first only by conjoined, indicative assertions and the repetition of "I," and which he is not able to support for long. It begins to break down seriously with the Sexton's first speech, when it becomes apparent that the knowledge of the past may be withheld,

and, at the same time, that the future, left to nature, is the least certain of fates. Past and present begin to coincide from this point on, one momentarily eclipsing the other. The narrator forgets, in line 19, that his "saying" was not beside Churchill's grave, but in the moment of writing just past. The narrator's questions to the Sexton are answered and reacted to by himself in the present. The Sexton seems to see beyond that moment in the past; his answers are more appropriate to the questions that will occur to the narrator later, at his writing desk. In the moment of writing, the narrator turns back to the Sexton for help on continuing the poem.

We have seen several such points of convergence of past and present, and it is not necessary to make any one of special importance. I read the narrator as becoming gradually aware of himself from line 19 on--aware of his poetic activity and of the Sexton's cooperation with him in writing the poem. But largely because of this last dawning awareness, if any turning point can be singled out, it is, as I suggested before, the word "writer." Several things begin to happen at that word. The Sexton's proud presentation of it is at once levelling--not "Churchill" or "poet," but simply "writer"--and, in the context, an exaltation: this is not the traditional or natural immortality the narrator had looked for--it is a limited life after death--but it is certainly an improvement over the mere vegetative blight of the first part of the poem. The Sexton's style of speech is exalted, too: he presents his belief grandly, and as a revelation (and the narrator is about to go on, using a version of the high style himself, to warn us that there is nothing funny about this rustic at this moment, using the exalted manner of speech[24]). It is not difficult to see in the Sexton's mild pretensions and modest pun his own brief essay into the monumental style; and it is probably not

difficult for the narrator to see in it a representation or caricature of his own pretensions to immortality and to poetry--to both of which the Sexton puts an end here. But as a writer, now aware of his limitations, he can continue; and the next moment of the poem is in many ways an instance of a new style of poetry--an instance, I think, of the "homely phrase" referred to in line 39. Here as throughout the poem, we can see the narrator's mind at work, looking back from the present, giving order to the past. But now, for the first time, he is calm enough to try for a bit of irony.

> --then most pleased I shook
> From out my pocket's avaricious nook
> Some certain coins of silver, which as 'twere
> Perforce I gave this man, though I could spare
> So much but inconveniently:

This is the lyric-memorial mode again, but with several variations. First, rather than expanding the field of reference by allusion and metaphor, it contracts the field. It is nevertheless a complex passage; but it weights the payment with the same seriousness as the graveside meditation, and for that reason may appear to be mockery (and there is an element of the sardonic here: the narrator is about to accuse himself of foolishness). But this is the calmest narration we have seen from the hand of the narrator (apart from the voice of the Sexton). In the traditional lyric-memorial poem this would be the moment when the narrator learns the lesson of the past and begins to spell it out to the reader; the narrator's ease, his unbroken sentence and enjambed lines, suggest some such coming to terms. The narrator likes this moment; he "dwells" on it, and extends it using the same technique as before of adding subordinate clauses ("Which as 'twere," "though I could spare"). He may be looking for a way out, as he was in lines 19-27. But he is not frantic here (or not as frantic). He is "pleased" to record this moment, and to

catch himself (as he caught the Sexton in lines 20-22) when the details of his physical activity (searching about in his pocket for "some certain coins," though he had few) correspond to the gestures of his mind: pausing, delaying, searching his thoughts--mildly amused at himself and at this bargain he has gotten himself into.

The payment itself is not simply a tip--there is nothing simple about the Sexton's sensitive interpretation of the narrator's desire, his reading or the narrator's mind. But it is first of all a tip, and the other constructions we can put on it proceed from the fact that it is a payment for a service.[25] That there are other constructions is clear: first, why should this apparently trivial detail well up into the poem and occupy five lines? second, why is the payment made "as 'twere perforce"? There are many reasons, I think, and many kinds of payments made in these lines. But I will isolate three as especially important to the progress of the poem.

It a payment for extricating the name, for performing his gnostic function. It would be in the spirit of the poem if the narrator were also thinking of his own grave, and hoping that some kindly member of the Sexton's brotherhood would keep his name clear in the future. Also, in his second speech the Sexton gives the narrator exactly what he has asked for in line 17: that Churchill's name be brought to "light" and that both he and Churchill be given the "honour" that they craved (and the Sexton applies that word specifically to both Churchill and the narrator in lines 31 and 32). That the Sexton is able, as it were, to read the narrator's mind is another aspect of his supernatural presence in the poem. But as the poem subsides into relative simplicity, it tends also toward the secular; the narrator is not denying the power he allowed to the Sexton earlier, but he is seeing it as a manifestation of the human

rather than the mystical--or, as we might say, he is seeing the mystical in the human.

The same applies to the second object of the payment: knowledge. This is the right answer, or rather, answers. (What he has learned has not yet appeared, and, in fact, remains implicit throughout; that he has learned is clear from his conduct and from his language.) This is a garden as well as a graveyard, and the narrator has eaten the fruit of knowledge from "this plant" (forbidden at first by nature) and perhaps the fruit of life as well, though immortality has become a secular and limited concept here. Eden and Gethsemane are the axes along which the graveyard/garden alternately aligns itself in the narrator's mind. And to complicate matters further, it is a blighted Eden that the narrator first sees, and a Gethsemane--scene of the agony of the narrator and the betrayal of Churchill ("the man of whom/You wot")--which becomes a place of renewal for both poets. It reflects the narrator's ambivalence, of course, that he casts the Sexton in the roles of Satan and Judas; he is himself. I think, slightly distressed to find himself in the role of Adam, and of one who unwittingly helps affirm Churchill's death.[26]

In any case, they meet on holy ground (as the narrator makes clear when he accuses the readers of profanity) and they meet in all of their roles. In its largest sense, the payment is a moment of exchange between them, with all that that implies: a meeting of their minds, as the narrator is suddenly aware of the Sexton as a thinking and planning being; an understanding which passes between them in all of their relations to each other, but which turns on the extricated knowledge that Churchill was a writer; and which is therefore preeminently an agreement struck--a transaction completed--between the narrator in his role of contemporary writer and the Sexton in his role as reader.

These several reasons for payment are all sufficient to make the narrator feel "most pleased," and all suggest reasons why he should feel the payment was made "as 'twere perforce." They do not explain the style of the lines. Most of the narration has been synthetic and hierarchical; this is sequential, discrete, and especially, slow. It is like the Sexton's speech, in its surface simplicity and mild irony. The narrator's pleasure at the Sexton's irony and his cooperation in it (at "most pleased") does imply a value placed on the ironic complication of motive in language--as a technique (as against, say, metaphor and allusion; in other words, I think there is some linguistic shadow here of what follows in lines 36-39, some indication that part of the lesson has already, in fact, been absorbed). But because they express that learning they are all the more a summation of what has gone before, and not just a preparation for what ensues. From that point of view, irony is not only or even mainly a deflation of the past, but a means of access to the present, a way of holding himself in this moment. Perhaps he is enjoying the temporal control he has achieved; he is finally able here to write a description of the past without being trapped in it or dragged back to it. His search for details and extended treatment of the episode suggest little anxiety about the past; he is not shying off from it. Rather, the passage seems to me, on the whole, fond or nostalgic. The payment closes one transaction, one sequence; the narrator in the present uses the payment to close that sequence--perhaps in bidding farewell to the past: he creates another blind alley for himself, similar to the ones he created in lines 1-10 and 19-25, and runs himself out of material. He finishes the lyric-memorial part of the poem, which then becomes a kind of poem within a poem.

There is an allied sense in which he is preparing for death. Death

is what threatened him in those earlier passages, too--his personal death in the future and the death of the poem if the memory should run out of details, or lose the detail that might be transformed into a way out. In those passages this fear of silence (which is also the fear of relinquishing control of the details) runs him slightly out of control of the course of the poem (at least he thinks he is out of control, and turns to the Sexton for help); here, the subsiding seems to me deliberate. But in either case he is more comfortable pursuing the sequence than being pursued by it. The mental agony he suffered especially in lines 19-25 is repeated in form here as a preparation for his departure from the natural world.[27] And the turn to the readers in the future is first of all a resurrection of himself, an attempt to cross the boundary of death more effectively that Churchill was able. This is ultimately the trace of himself the narrator would like to leave behind:

> --Ye smile,
> I see ye, ye profane ones! all the while,
> Because my homely phrase the truth would tell.
> You are the fools, not I--for I did dwell
> With a deep thought, and with a soften'd eye,
> On that Old Sexton's natural homily,
> In which there was Obscurity and Fame--
> The Glory and the Nothing of a Name.

The narrator finds in the answers of the Sexton, twice, matter for going on: Churchill's grave is not "all"--what's more is the Sexton's supplement and his own interpretive processes. And what emerges from that, from his own dream-like poetry and the Sexton's dream of a former sun, is an awareness of himself and of his style of writing--an awareness of himself in the act of writing. He and the Sexton cooperate in putting an end to the lyric-memorial mode; they conspire--the Sexton with philosophy, the narrator by instance--in showing its foolishness. For I think it's clear too that to say to the readers "You are the fools, not I" is to admit that there is at least some conventional reason for believing

that the narrator is, or has been, a fool. But the readers are the fools now, and the narrator is a visionary, a prophet of his own fame. He looks up from the grave (or from the page) and sees the readers gathered around, smiling (the readers watch the interaction of the Sexton and the narrator as the narrator had watched the interaction of the Sexton and Churchill); but he can see them smile--he can see them at all--because of his recognition of his own earlier foolishness; he infers outward from himself; he imagines his own experience in others so vividly that it is as if he sees them. In this odd, adversarial was he establishes his sense of community with them. A recognition of his own earlier foolishness leads him to predict the same misunderstanding in the readers: he too had "misread"--or not read--Churchill's stone, and miswritten the poem; and the reader who does not approach the poem with proper reverence will make a similar mistake and misunderstand the significance of the payment and the style of the passage (they will smile, as the narrator says, "Because my homely phrase the truth would tell"). Specifically, they will think that lines 32-36 are a trivialization, and that lines 1-27 are of greater value. This the narrator warns against; he rejects his own sentimentalism and melancholy in the very gesture of turning to the readers and affecting the didactic.

As before, the narrator turns away from a syntactic structure that cannot be easily advanced. But now he turns not toward the world (not "I asked") but toward an interpretive moment of his own synthesis. And that movement is not, in "Churchill's Grave," a turn away from art, but from nature. It is a realization that art, specifically verbal art, leads to the border of the known; that language can cross boundaries that people cannot; that language is not altogether natural, and that therefore neither are people altogether natural, but have it within their power

to overcome the limits of nature to a degree. This, I take it, is the reason they're profane: they overlook the seriousness--the holiness--of their own implication in this interaction.

Language precedes the narrator into the unknown and draws the narrator after it; it enables the narrator to follow it in his imagination. He passes through a moment of "pure" writing (in lines 32-36)--the search for and struggle to articulate details. He holds himself there, in that present, by writing; he holds on to the train of thought that keeps him there. He presses the grammatical structure of the moment into exhaustion; and he breaks into the future of unrealized possibilities; he realizes some of them.

By moving in close to the mystery of death, and by becoming aware of the directions of the poem, the narrator surpasses two limits: the limits of his act of writing in the present and the limits of the genre of his writing. Both of these domains have, with the other terms of the poem, assumed a much larger dimension than we are used to: the genre has become emblematic of the narrator's whole relation to history and history's lessons; the act of writing has become his only means of asserting himself against those lessons. But in the moment of understanding both the lesson and his act he is able to do away with the entanglements of both. He takes up a new style of writing; as he lets the other run out, history loses its hold on him. It makes no difference here that he is pretending or imagining in writing to surpass the limits of time, because the poem show that those limits are themselves part of the created or pretended: the "blight" on Churchill's name was the product of his writing style, and so was the "light" to which he rhymed it. The turn away from the past, then, is at the same moment a turn from the lyric-memorial mode of writing and from memory, the dead past, to which the abandoned mode

is bound. And the turn to the future is a will to a new sort of language.

These last lines distinguish themselves from the narrator's foregoing discourse in several ways. They are certain in their exclamation, and though not marked as quotations they are set off from their context by their use of the present tense and by their immediately dramatic, or vocal, force. The address to the readers signals the presence of the narrator more surely than we have seen before; we may sense that, partly as a result of that new presence, the narrator is able to take back a measure of the power he had given away. The statement is confident, and its implications bold: though it is the first term of a transaction (the second term will take place in the future), it does not depend on the second term for completion; it is not a question but an assertion. Instead of looking to the past for an answer, the narrator puts a proposition to the future. The use of "ye," and the accusation itself, suggest a deliberate assumption of the role of prophet; and further, that, on the example of the homily of the Sexton, he is here beginning to teach his own lesson to the future. The definiteness with which he lays out the framework of that lesson is a measure of the control he feels:[28]

> In which there was Obscurity and Fame,
> The Glory and the Nothing of a Name.

In this final passive subordination--"In which there was"--the narrator is letting his new voice die away; I think he is passing into the realm of abstractions, leaving abstractions behind him.

We can see in retrospect that the last seven lines as a whole are a canny preparation for this departure; a preparation for stopping the poem (since, I assume, he knows he must stop sometime); and hence, a preparation, in this special Gethsemane, for a special kind of death. He has accepted his alliance to the dead Churchill (and underscores that alliance by stopping on the word "Name"), and he has understood

a "natural" characteristic of writing: the understanding leads to acceptance of the fact that writing becomes a mere natural monument unless it is part of an interaction, or a transaction, like the one described in the poem; and that the lyric-memorial mode is, precisely, writing which lets nature win--writing which is already, through memory, bound to the forms and conditions of nature. I would go so far as to say that the writing which lives is the writing which creates an interpretive problem for the future. But at least it must try to turn away from the past, to pivot on the present of composition, and come round to face the ages yet "unborn"; it must try to give birth to itself in the future, since nature will not. In the natural world only his writing will remain; but he has arranged for himself an escape into the future, a bit of resurrection, that depends not on nature, but on human consciousness, human curiosity, and on reading.

This reliance on human consciousness seems to me characteristic of the poem; like the payment, it gives a social, recognizably Byronic flavor to the work. It does not, it should be noted, altogether dispose of nature, nor of the past. The Sexton's homily is "natural" (both about nature, I take it, and naturally, unaffectedly produced); and the narrator's last thought is of himself at graveside, though that moment has been abstracted and controlled by his understanding in the present. "I see ye, ye profane ones!" is the culmination of the series of his acts of composing; the end of his experience at Churchill's grave--as he remembers it now, enhanced, glowing--is "I did dwell with a deep thought and with a soften'd eye." It is tempting to read "soften'd eye" as "'relaxed 'I'"; but in either case the line indicates a new-found accomodation to perception--to perception, perhaps, softened by the presence of a deep thought. Moreover, the narrator's initial revelation that

the past represented by Churchill's grave is his future evolves into the technique of these last seven lines: what happened in the past between him and the Sexton is recreated--he recreates it--in the present with his readers; his voice ought to stay with the readers, as the Sexton's stayed with him. He speaks out to the future (he assumes his posteriority before it overtakes him; again, he predicts his death), and tries to write an effective epitaph. He tries at once to act according to inescapeable natural law and to outdistance that law; rather than struggle against it, he recognizes, it seems, the border between his own power (which is in part the power of his new mode of expression) and the power of nature (which had infiltrated the first twenty-seven lines of the poem); he tries to make both work to his advantage. He moves, as is common enough in the traditional lyric-memorial poem, from complete despair, to relative despair, to relative resolution; from a longing for the divine in the natural world to a recreation of the divine in the human.

But despite this use of nature, it is not nature humanizing the writer that we have here, but human consciousness becoming aware of itself in the act of writing, becoming aware of its "holiness," and extending its grace to nature. When the "blight" is recognized as our own creation, then nature is free to be just nature again--as the Sexton, finally in line 40, becomes just a Sexton; and the reader, not the supernatural or omniscient figure of lines 19-27, but just a fool like the narrator. The critical moments of the poem are moments of heightened interaction between human minds: the narrator's sudden awareness of the Sexton as a thinking being; his recognition of the similarity of their thinking and of their cooperation in the evocation of Churchill; his glimpse of Churchill's name, and the certainty that he existed and passed this way; his attempt, however abrupt (perhaps it is necessarily abrupt, or would

be missed) to contact his readers; and the ground of that attempt, which is his inference outward from himself--he knows his readers because he knows himself better.

Being absorbed by nature and obsessed with the past is a stage the narrator passes through; nature is something to build away from. The lyric-memorial mode stands in the same relation to the new style of writing: the lyric-memorial is perhaps the mirror in which the narrator sees his distinction from nature; he watches himself use language and realizes that he has been, but needn't be, controlled by it. His rejection of the mode, then, as representing entrapment, death, and silence is not merely a rejection, but a liberation. Liberation is, in a sense, what he was looking for in lines 1-10 and 19-27; in the end he finds it, he feels free. He eludes death, sort of, by anticipating it. He does not fade noiselessly, but leaves behind words which are as loud as he can make them: he leaves behind writing which has the presentness of speech, and which is not likely to be reclaimed by nature because it exists so firmly to begin with in the realm of human consciousness and human communication.

This is the style that displaces the lyric-memorial manner of writing in Byron. We have only a brief instance of it in "Churchill's Grave," and I will not try to deal with it at length.[29] But we are in a position now to define some features of the other, abandoned mode, and "Churchill's Grave" is an interesting document for what it shows of the associations Byron made between styles and significances. We have already examined it throughout for its tacit rejection of what Byron probably perceived to be its Wordsworthian sentiment[30]: the hegemony of nature over the imagination, the tyranny of the past, and the ego-centricity of the rhetoric. There are other derivative or imitative aspects of the poem; we have not mentioned, for instance, the long tradition of the graveyard meditation,

the specific branch of the lyric-memorial to which "Churchill's Grave" belongs. The most important advance Byron makes in the tradition is that his composition of place and search for the lesson it contains are from the outset a dramatic interrogation of the past; his narrator is that much more outgoing, and anxious, about what he feels to be his entrapment in the past.

The search for the past is, of course, Byron's special theme in many of his best known poems. In "Churchill's Grave," the conflict of past and present is captured in the form of questions and answers: a question is put to the natural world, specifically, to the world of mortality and to a figure who is thought to hold some key (or we could say that, at the same time, the question is put to himself and the answer arises, or is expected to arise, from his memory of the world). Even so complicated a pattern ought to remind us of a large group of Byron's lyrics, especially from his earlier years. The Harrow poems, as well as poems addressed to his departed acquaintances (whether "really" or imaginatively departed or dead). In "Childish Recollections," the lyric-memorial impulse is described in terms very like those we have been using here:

> 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 unbounding sway,
> The past confounding with the present day.
>
> (11. 21-26)

He continues to search out the place of his schooling, and does so through the figures of that time, questioning each; they appear under various classical names and guises. Many of these early poems are incipient dramas. In "To Thyrza," the narrator asks several questions of that figure (now more accurately called a character than a figure); some are rhetorical, but most--like "Ah! where art thou?" in line 42--lack answers; he ends

by requesting that the character "Teach me" (l. 53). In the second Thyrza poem, "Away, Away, Ye Notes Of Woe," the voice of Thyrza is just short of dramatization; the narrator speaks of the voice, and rather ambivalently:

> 'Tis silent all!--but on my ear
> The well remember'd echoes thrill;
> I hear a voice I would not hear,
> A voice that now might well be still:
> Yet oft my doubting soul will shake;
>
> (11. 17-21)

And in "Lachin Y Gair": "Shades of the dead! have I not heard your voices?" (l. 17) The later evolution of Byron into a poet who spoke "directly" to readers is foreshadowed, to a degree, by his frequent use apostrophes and salutations (which, in Hours of Idleness, for instance, are barely distinguishable from each other). The interaction of past and present takes on a markedly dramatic appearance in several of the Hebrew Melodies, too: in "A Spirit Pass'd Before Me," Job dreams of "The face of immortality unveil'd," which asks him questions and teaches him a lesson in its own voice.

The division of experience into past and present is replicated, in "Churchill's Grave," in a transformation of the initial tactic of conjoining terms (which is a marshalling of the world, its recollection) into a subordination of terms one to another, as the memories are reworked in the present. That pattern is fundamental, not only to Byron, but to most writers of any sort. Equally interesting in Byron's poetry, from this point of view, are works which reflect one extreme or the other. We find many poems, for instance, in which the past is not yet absorbed or controlled, and in which the recollection of the past is represented by a conjunction of undiscriminated alternatives. The "Farewell to Malta" is obviously of this sort, with its sixteen "Adieus" and seven initial "Ands" in the following three stanzas. "Lines On Hearing That

Lady Byron Was Ill" is predominently a poem of conjunctions ("And thou wert sad--yet I was not with thee;/And thou wert sick, and yet I was not near") and, though much more complicated, so is "The Dream":

> Sleep hath its own world,
> And a wide realm of wild reality.
> And dreams in their development have breath,
> And tears, and tortures, and the touch of joy;
> (11. 3-6)

At the other extreme from "Farewell to Malta" and passages like these, we have "So, We'll Go No More A-Roving," which tricks itself out as altogether a subordinate clause to some unexpressed main clause.

Still, it is more common for the first term to grow into the second, and for the attempt to ring changes on the material (as in the passage from "The Dream") to result in a straining of grammatical form. This happens overall in "Roving" and to a lesser degree in the "Stanzas for Music: There Be None of Beauty's Daughters." But I am reminded of Childe Harold III and IV also; the much slower and more circuitous progress of that poem is nevertheless marked by a rhythm of complication and departure: moments of stress on the thought and on the sentence, followed by the arrival of a new direction and a different style:

> Ye elements!--in whose ennobling stir
> I feel myself exalted--Can ye not
> Accord me such a being? Do I err
> In deeming such inhabit many a spot?
> Though with them to converse can rarely be our lot.

In the last line he complicates a difficult question even further, perhaps beyond any satisfactory answer. He continues in a different vein.

> There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
> There is a rapture by the lonely shore,
> There is society, where none intrudes,
> By the deep Sea, and music in its roar:
> I love not man the less, but Nature more,
> From these our interviews, in which I steal
> From all I may be, or have been before,
> To mingle with the Universe, and feel
> What I can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal.

Once again the subordination gets slightly out of control and results in a syntactic structure too complex to be maintained; and so, as before, it is let go:

> Roll on, thou dee and dark blue Ocean--roll!
> Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;
>
> (Childe Harold IV, Sts. 177-79)

This departure from the old is not the same gesture that we find in "Churchill's Grave," but it is like enough to merit notice; and both exemplify another set of changes in Byron's lyric imagination. First, the work Byron put into poems to people in his early years seems generally shifted toward poems addressed to places in the later years. The "Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte" of 1814 becomes the "Ode from the French: 'We do not curse thee, Waterloo!'" a year later.[31] In the "Stanzas to the Po" we can see elements of the structure and the desires of the "Stanzas" and the "Epistle to Augusta."[32] A second change, also to be seen in the "Stanzas to the Po" and in the "Ode to Venice"--and coeval with Byron's increasing interest in international politics--is that the questions put to the past and to the place tend to give way to speculation on current conditions and future prospects; the Po is not only an emblem of his passing life but also, at the moment, "A mirror of my heart." (l. 6) The implied question to a decaying Venice is whether it can overthrow the various tyrannies that oppress it; the narrator answers this one: no,

> The ebb and flow of each recurring age,
> The everlasting to be which hath been,
> Hath taught us naught, or little: still we lean
> On things that rot beneath our weight . . .
>
> (ll. 58-61)

One is led to speculate, looking over the course of Byron's lyrics, that less and less did he expect to hear an answer form the past; that those dialogues he started or wanted to start in the early poems had been

recognized as monologues after all. An answer from the past comes here and there; and there are several small encounters with books and their absent authors, as with gravestones and their messages.[33] But on the whole, as Byron grew older, his tendency was to cut short such interrogations--or to break off with a flippancy, or, more often, to answer his own questions and move on to something new (as in the "Ode to Venice," "Sonnet to George the Fourth," and the "Stanzas Written On The Road Between Florence and Pisa," which begins by rejecting, with some exasperation, a voice that would speak of the past: "Oh, talk to me not of a name great in story;").

The old themes persist in these poems, but they are joined by new concerns and new expressions; as in Manfred, to name one transitional work, the desire to forget is most firmly linked with the need for freedom. I would not claim to know Byron's thought; but in his poetry, it seems, he is increasingly able to forget and turn his attention to the present (the end of this line of development, as we have it, is the recurrent motif in Don Juan of the narrator's forgetting what he has just written[34]). And in the lyrics of his later years, as also in Manfred, the search for forgetfulness and for liberty, political and emotional, comprises a pursuit of the future, and of experiences in, around, and beyond death: his own or others', imagined, supposed, or proven. Several may be seen as play with concepts more seriously pursued in Manfred.

Epigram

In digging up you bones, Tom Paine,
  Will. Cobbett has done well:
You visit him on earth again,
  He'll visit you in hell.

Impromptu

Beneath Blessington's eyes
The reclaimed Paradise
Should be free as the former from evil;

But if the new Eve
For an Apple should grieve,
What mortal would not play the Devil?

Martial, Lib. I, Epig. I

'Hic est, quem legis, ille, quem requiris,
Tota notus in orbe Martialis,' &c.
He unto whom thou art so partial,
Oh, reader! is the well-known Martial,
The Epigrammatist: while living,
Give him the fame thou wouldst be giving;
So he shall hear, and feel, and know it--
Post-obits rarely reach a poet.

The initially unremarkable "Impromptu" looks more interesting, framed, as here, by poems of unusual illocutionary force--the one a message to a dead man, the other an epigram from the point of view of a dead man, or rather, from a man who is predicting his death.[35] The range of roles available to the writer, even in these three poems, suggests a further development toward the creation of complex personas, part of the complex of ideas we have been tracing. He becomes a character himself so that he can assume the voice and answer his own question: he is the questioned figure in the Martial translation; he is even able to skip the question, because, of course, he knows it. So while these poems may still be called conversational, they are liberated (as many from this period are) from the need for response or immediate confirmation; they extend into the future. Once that boundary is crossed, it is a short stylistic leap to the much stranger, publicly generalized voice of "Bowles and Campbell" and "John Keats." The logic or argument of these poems, and among them, is liberated too, in the way we associate liberty in writing with freedom from the restraints of a single character or consciousness, with ease, or at least speed, of transition, and with the refusal to be trapped in any particular place or time. There is something of this spirit in "Impromptu," in the imagined or predicted transformation of the mortal narrator into immortal tempter.

This fluency of transition and topic has served, I think, to divert attention from Byron's monumental style; that style is often compromised and rendered less accessible by its context. In "Churchill's Grave," among others I have mentioned, we find a large measure of conventional irony, texture, symbology, and so forth; but on the whole the poem seems to speak more loudly of how unconventional Byron could be in his handling of such devices. It is not unusual, since the Romantic period, to find poems whose arguments come to reside in the transformations of figures (or metaphors) or even in verbal transformations (from question to assertion, for instance).[36] Less familiar critical problems are created by a poem whose symbolic structure is so quickly and intricately built, and so abruptly apparently abandoned; it is rare too to find a narrator as completely transfigured by his poem as the narrator of "Churchill's Grave"--whose style is so changed, and who is so willing to foreclose the sequences on which he has depended. But I think we can now see that that foreclosure is not wholly a gesture of repudiation, but also a positive assertion of control. Likewise, the tendency of the imagery toward "the point of abstraction" is not the result of lack of attention to the natural world, but of the increasing diffusion of memory throughout; the poem may start somewhere in the natural world (or of sense-memory) but it moves quickly into the world projected by thought, the world signified in "Churchill's Grave" by the phrase "as 'twere"--and that is a world in which figures do not keep to their places, where conceptions compete with voices, and where--"The past confounding with the present day"--the struggle to free oneself from the anxieties of the world of sense becomes in the composing present a struggle with language. Imagery, symbol, metaphor--the narrator reaches a temporary accord with them; but they are potentially his adversaries, equally with nature.

These, briefly, are the components of Byron's monumental style, as it appears in "Churchill's Grave." As to the rarity of this manner of writing, I think I have implied that it is rare indeed for the components to be brought together at once and made into so elegant a sequence as we have in "Churchill's Grave"; the rarity and, as I see it, the clarity of the poem are reasons I find it valuable. And what I find in the argument of the poem suggests a new way of conceiving of Byron's relation to the monumental style: not that he couldn't do it, certainly, and not only that he feared it (though we ought to remember that the dangers of silence and death do not disappear), but rather that it wasn't enough for him--that, to speculate, it either seemed to him incomplete or else he wanted to go ahead to the next thought. To simplify a bit, the sought-for moment, in "Churchill's Grave," and many other lyrics, is not the moment just before the completion of the monument (as in Keats), but the next moment, when the fixity of the composition can be eluded, when something new can be started. We have described a variable sequence, then: a system of metaphors and transformations which appears in different stages of elaboration, protracted or compressed, through a substantial portion of Byron's poetry. Not always, but often, when a portion of that sequence surfaces in Byron, the rest of it is nearby: when, for instance, Byron turns to the reader, or when he suddenly veers from an established course, we may look back into the poem for the failure of the natural world or a limitation in the style; we may sense a boundary crossed.

The point to close on is not the rarity of "well-wrought" lyrics in Byron's canon, but the familiarity of his gesture of turning away from complex positions. That gesture is near the center of nearly all recent critical appraisals of Byron--that turn, and (particularly as it appears in the longer satires) the apparently clarified, perspicuous, straight-

forward, "natural," and transactive voice that emerges from the turn. One occasionally sees it called "Byron's own voice"; and though I don't know it to be more genuine or sincere, I do recognize an affinity among many passages of Don Juan, the last seven lines of "Churchill's Grave," the epigram from Martial, "When A Man Hath No Freedom To Fight For At Home," and the whole group of poems usually known as jeux d'esprit. When I read those voices, voices at play, as the last term suggests, I think of liberations achieved; but the struggle is there too, in the same poems and in poems which depict other moments of the sequence: in the self-imposed agony of the narrator of Childe Harold III and IV: "Yet I must think less wildly:" (III, st. 7); in Marino Faliero's last bid for control: "true words are things,/And dying men's are things which long outlive,/ And oftentimes avenge them;" (V, i, ll. 289-91).

The same sense of danger, of living or writing close to the edge of silence, lingers through most of Don Juan, which is at least the largest monument Byron left behind, if not the most intricately carved. And whether from a belief that it was his most important poem or just because it was on his mind during those years, it is in Don Juan that the nature of monuments is most explicitly treated; and also there that Byron's statement of the facts of disembodied writing is closest to the way I've put it here: on monuments in general:

> What are the hopes of man? Old Egypt's King
> Cheops erected the first pyramid
> And largest, thinking it was just the thing
> To keep his memory whole, and mummy hid:
> But somebody or other rummaging,
> Burglariously broke his coffin's lid:
> Let not a monument give you or me hopes,
> Since not a pinch of dust remains of Cheops.
>
> (I, st. 219)

And specifically on the slim chance of the survival of one's name in writing, in a passage that rings of "Churchill's Grave" in several ways:

> The very generations of the dead
> Are swept away, and tomb inherits tomb,
> Until the memory of an age is fled,
> And, buried, sinks beneath its offspring's doom:
> Where are the epitaphs our fathers read?
> Save a few glean'd from the sepulchral gloom
> Which once-named myriads lie beneath,
> And lose their own in universal death.
>
> (IV, st. 102)

It is an interesting postscript to the intertextual relation between Churchill's grave and Byron's poem that Churchill had, in his way, tried to reach beyond the grave toward Byron some fifty years before. What Byron saw, in "fact," when Churchill's stone was cleared, was the legend: "Here lie the remains of the celebrated C. Churvhill," and an epitaph from Churchill's "The Candidate": "Life to the last enjoy'd, here Churchill lies." Byron tells us in the poem that he fixed on the name, and we have no reason not to believe him. But it is likely that in writing the poem he had in mind the passage from which the epitaph is drawn, and was pleased to fulfill Churchill's prophecy, and keep alive the memory of an age.

> Let one poor sprig of Bay around my head
> Bloom whilst I live, and point me out when dead;
> Let It (may Heav'n grant that pray'r)
> Be planted on my grave, nor wither there;
> And when, on travel bound, some riming guest
> Roams thro' the Churchyard, whilst his dinner's dress'd.
> Let It hold up this Comment to his eyes;
> Life to the last enjoy'd, here Churchill lies;
> Whilst (O, what joy that pleasing flatt'ry gives)
> Reading my Works, he cries--here Churchill lives.
>
> (11. 145-54)

Notes

[1] Robert F. Gleckner, Byron and the Ruins of Paradise, p. 203.

[2] These questions have not so much been resolved as replace by other questions, more interesting to the contemporary critic. For a sense of a time when they were more active, the reader may refer, on the subject of the Romantic versus the Classical Byron, to William J Calvert, who staked out this subject as his own in 1935, giving equal time to both Byrons in Byron: Romantic Paradox (New York: Russell and Russell, 1967), especially pp. 18-19); criticism that Byron's satires has, generally speaking, focused attention on the classical elements of his poetry--see for instance F. R. Leavis' essay "Byron's Satire" in Revaluations (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1936), pp. 148-53; full-length studies from this period, the thirties, tended to dewll on the Romantic Byron, the one who appears in The Romantic Agony by Mario Praz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1933), though that work is not, strictly speaking, about Byron, but about Byron's traditions. For an argument that Byron's best lyrics are the result of heightened self-awareness, see Charles du Bos, Byron and the Need of Fatality, trans Ethel Colburn Mayne (London: Putnam, 1933), p. 17; a nearly opposite opinion can be found in L. C. Martin's Byron Foundation Lecture, "Byron's Lyrics" (Nottingham: University of Nottingham Press, 1948), pp. 7, 9. The last question I mention, of the relation of Byron's poetry to his "state of mind," has of course been at the center of the hottest debates over the poet since he was alive. In this century, one may oppose Lord Lovelace's Astarte (London: Christophers, 1921), which

takes the position throughout that Byron's poetry is a large-scale whitewash of the truth of his life, to any of Byron's biographers from 1900 to 1950--to Andre Maurois, for instance, who is wont to take poems as a record of facts: see his discussion of "Churchill's Grave" (which reproduces the Sexton's lines exactly from the poem, representing them as what the man actually said to Byron), in Byron, trans. Hamish Miles (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1930), p. 331.

[3] Gleckner writes "Byron's lyric poetry is an integral part of his developing vision and must be examined, to do it full justice, in the evolving context of his total canon." (Ruins, p. 204) A similar view, rather on the negative side, is expressed by Leslie Marchand of some of the Hebrew Melodies: "The themes and attitudes are nothing new but only varying adaptations of moods and feelings already observed in the early poems and in Childe Harold." (Byron's Poetry: A Critical Introduction /Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1965/, p. 117). Michael G. Cooke's reading of the lyrics is more specific; he writes that "a number of Byron's lyrics would take a place in the romantic category. They do so not only in terms of philosophy, but also in terms of rhetoric, with an ostensibly naive surface of form and language manifesting an essentially knowledgeable and complex position." (Blind Man, p. 34). In the last group of works, those which are not concerned with the lyrics, I would place Marshall's The Structure of Byron's Major Poems and M. K. Joseph's Byron the Poet (London: Victor Gollancz, 1964); neither of these works is less significant for its exclusion of the lyrics; in fact, it is interesting that their arguments proceed so easily without reference to the short poems. Equally interesting is Ridenour's The Style of "Don Juan": though of recent critical works Ridenour's is the most focused and the most firmly turned away the lyric to the long poem, it contains the longest commentary on a single

lyric that I have found anywhere in the secondary literature on Byron--of "Ode to a Lady Whose Lover Was Killed," pp. 51-66. This is the only precedent I have found for the lengthy analysis I attamept here.

It may be unnecessary to say that none of these approaches seems to me fundamentally misguided or incorrect. But they do suggest how Byron's lyrics have seemed to critics to reauire special treatment; that the study of Byron's lyrics is either passed over or specially justified.

[4] Andrew Rutherford, Byron: A Critical Study (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), p. 15.

[5] Marchand, Poetry, p. 1.

[6] Northrop Frye, Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology (New York: Harcourrt Brace, 1963), p. 74.

[7] Interview by Richard Eder in The New York Times, 27 March, 1980, p. 18. I would point out that, despite his remark on that occasion, McGann is the author of a very sensitive and intelligent commentary on Byron's lyrics in Chapter I of Fiery Dust: Byron's Poetic Development (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 3-28.

[8] I think G. Wilson Knight may be the sole modern dissenter to the view that Byron's lyrics need some special apology; see especially Lord Byron: Christian Virtues (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953).

[9] Cooke, Blind Man, p. 34.

[10] Only Marchand mentions the poems in any of the books touched on by my essay; he makes of it part of a line of development rather than analyzing it, as such; see Poetry, p.128. Churchill's name comes up with a degree of regularity as an influence on Byron's early satires; see also note 33.

[11] Charles Churchill (1731-64), author notable of The Apology and The Candidate, satires on contemporary life and letters. Marchand, in

Byron: A Biography (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), reports that on the night before he left England for the last time, April 23, 1816, Byron and some friends visited the grave of Churchill in Dover. (The visit is recorded by other biographers in variously elaborated accounts all taken from Hobhouse's journal; as usual, Marchand's version seems the most reliable.) Whether the poem corresponds to the events of that evening is, of course, beside the point. As I say in the text, it is the coincidence of the past-as-remembered and the composing present that is of real interest; also, as I hope to show, it is a highly subjective and ambiguous "fact" that Byron here renders literally.

But it is not damaging to a more esthetic reading of the poem to imagine Byron walking out to the graveyard at twilight, believing he had found Churchill's grave, and asking the nearby Sexton for confirmation.

[12] "Narrator" seems a rather limited term here: we might more accurately say "the writer in the present moment." That narrator is going through his own crises in the present of composing, and his problems are to be distinguished from those of the figure in the graveyard who spoke to the Sexton. If we can bear this distinction in mind, then "narrator" can be used for simplicity's sake.

[13] The lyric-memorial poem, as I understand it, is one sort of "greater romantic lyric" as M. H. Abrams described such poems in "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric" in From Sensibility to Romanticism (New York: Oxfor University Press, 1965), pp. 527-560. Writing of a group of poems which seem to him allied, he says: "Some of the poems are called odes, while the others approach the ode in having lyric magnitude and a serious subject, feelingfully meditated. They present a determinate speaker in a particularized, and usually a localized, outdoor setting, whom we overhear as he carries on, in a fluent vernacular

which rises easily to a more formal speech, a sustained colloquy, sometimes with himself or with the outer scene, but more frequently with a silent human auditor, present or absent. The speaker begins with a description of the landscape; an aspect or change of aspect in the landscape evokes a varied but integral process of memory, thought, anticipation, and feeling which remains closely intervolved with the outer scene. In the course of this meditation the lyric speaker achieves an insight, faces up to a tragic loss, comes to a moral decision, or resolves an emotional problem. Often the poem comes round upon itself to end where it began, at the outer scene, but with an altered mood and deepened understanding which is the result of the intervening meditation." This seems to me rather precise in its applicability to "Churchill's Grave," though Abrams writes, "Only Byron, among the major poets, did not write in this form at all." (Sensibility, pp. 527-28)

[14] The importance of naming and names for Byron is probably too well-known to require any documentation; it is a theme which pervades the plays and early lyrics, as for instance in "A Fragment" in Hours of Idleness:

[15] Cooke writes that Byron is "given to the use of qualifying connectives such as 'but,' 'still,' and 'yet' . . . It is, however, virtually never a sign of sheer instability, but rather a measure of reluctance to settle prematurely in an intricate field." (Blind Man, p. 44n).

[16] Two other formulations of romantic poetry are suggested by Byron's terminology in "Chruchill's Grave": Bernard Blackstone makes of that group of poets "travellers and Pilgrims" in The Lost Travellers: A Romantic Theme with Variations (London: 1962); Geoffrey Hartman finds the figure of "the Halted traveller" in Wordsworth important enough to use it as the introductory theme to Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814, pp, 3-25, especially.

[17] I think a similar instance of the narrator at once reading the

thought of another and projecting his own thought upon that other can be found in "She Walks in Beauty."

[18] Byron is excluded on principle from the recent work that would seem most relevant to the secularization of spiritual concepts I have been describing here--M. H. Abrams' Natural Supernaturalism (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1971), p. 13. But as I will suggest later in the essay, this is not the only poem that achieves a degree of secularization of the divine in the manner described by Abrams.

[19] It is difficult to know what to do, or whether to do anything, with the fact that the passage I examine here, lines 18-25 is the mathematical center of the poem, as well as the thematic center (as I would have it)--that is, with exactly eighteen lines on either side of it. I know of no other instance, other than standard adherence to stanza forms, in which Byron "shapes" a lyric in the manner of Donne or Herbert. But this is, as I've said, an unusual poem on several counts.

[20] I find in Byron's lyrics a tendency for generic boundaries to blur--for one genre to shade off into another. Others have found something of this, though usually make less of it than I would. See, for instance, Marchand, Poetry, p. 117: "By far the greater number of Byron's shorter romantic poems are direct expressions of his feelings for individuals" and McGann, Fiery Dust, p. 20, who speaks of the "different forms in which the conflicted aspects of Byron's personality are dramatized in Hours of Idleness." With some modifications, I could accept either formulation; but the introduction of drama in the lyrics seems to me to complicate rather than to simplify in any way.

[21] Gleckner notes a "crabbed and obscure" syntax in "If That High World" in Hebrew Melodies; it may be traceable to the conflict of ideas Gleckner finds in that poem; and if so, it may be illuminating to compare

it in other ways to "Churchill's Grave."

[22] This sentiment, too, is reminiscient of "She Walks," where a similar "mellowing" of light occurs.

[23] See, for instance, Don Juan, V, st. 32.

[24] Writing of the Dedication to Don Juan, Ridenour calls the Biblical diction part of Byron's use of the "heroic invective of Juvenal." (Style, p. 12) Ridenour's discussion of Byron's "voice" throughout his first chapter is relevant to the style of "Churchill's Grave." See also Style, pp. 1-18.

[25] Hobhouse recorded that Byron "gave the man a crown to fresh turf" the grave. Cited in Marchand, Biography, p. 608.

[26] This state of affairs suggests to me a point made by both Gleckner and Ridenour: That the means of grace, in Byron's poetry, implicitly contain the danger of falling, of personal destruction. See Ruins, pp. 233, 259; Style, pp. 49-50.

[27] Byron's is an interesting interpretation of Christ's sacrifice, then: Christ's desire to depart from the natural world makes of his death a kind of suicide.

[28] The terms of the poem enter a number of new relations in these last two lines: among themselves, "Obscurity" and "Nothing" are natural negations; "Glory" and "Fame" are civilized, or socialized, values; they are remixed in these lines, perhaps to show that no final victor has appeared, either natural or human.

[29] M. K. Joseph's discussion of the "presentness" of the narration of Don Juan is relevant here; many of his remarks apply exactly to the narrator and the style of "Churchill's Grave." See Byron the Poet, pp. 197-202.

[30] One of the most interesting aspects of "Churchill's Grave" is that

Byron wrote a little Preface for it, though it was never published. It may be found in the E. H. Coleridge edition of The Works of Lord Byron. Poetry, 2nd ed., 1904-5, IV, p. 315:

> The following poem (as most that I have endeavored to write) is founded on a fact; and this detail is an attempt at a serious imitation of the style of a great poet--its beauties and its defects: I say the style; for the thoughts I claim for my own. In this, if there be anything ridiculous, let it be attributed to me, at least as much as to Mr. Wordsworth: of whom there can exist few greater admirers than myself . . .

There are several Wordsworthian characteristics in "Churchill's Grave," though I would not limit them to Wordsworth's or to Byron's use; see note 13. I don't expecially wish to enter into a debate on Byron's "Wordsworthian period"; and I'm not sure, in any case, what Byron means by the distinction of his thought from Wordsworth's style. He is certainly not letting Wordsworth off the hook in the passage above; but we should remember too that Byron can be ironic without departing from psychological truth.

In any case, "Churchill's Grave" may be pastiche or parody or imitation or may, in its composing, have had nothing to do with Wordsworth at all; none of this would change any part of the reading set forth here.

[31] "Napoleon's Farewell" forms a third part to this sequence, a logical third part, in the argument I am making here, for in that poem Byron takes Napoleon's voice, amkes Napoleon a character.

[32] The "Epistle to Augusta" is one of four lyrics from the summer of "Churchill's Grave" analyzed by Ridenour in "Byron in 1816: Four Poems from Diodati" in From Sensibility to Romanticism, pp. 453-65. The most striking aspect of this essay is that it has almost no bearing on my reading of "Churchill's Grave."

[33] The most interesting of these for me are "Lines Written in a Travellers' Book at Orchomenus," "Lines Written on a Blank Leaf of 'The

Pleasures of Memory'," and the imagined "Epitaph on John Adams" and "Epitaph" on Castlereagh.

[34] See, for instance, some points in Don Juan, at which the narrator appears to look up to find his place: II, st. 181; III, st. 81.

[35] Further comparisons to "Churchill's Grave" are probably unnecessary at this point; I would just point out the significance of the debt owed in the Martial epigram, the debt implied by "post-obit"; a similar transaction is carried out in our poem.

[36] These transformations may be allied to the multiple similes in Don Juan discussed by Joseph in Byron the Poet, pp. 212-22.

Chapter V

Part ii.

The Mysteries

What is it, really, to turn toward the future? How is this turn in Byron's poetry to be described in literary, psychological and linguistic terms?

We have seen in Marino Faliero and Sardanapalus that it is a version of the personal apocalyptic--an intuition of not-being (of one's not being in the world or of the world after one's disappearance). It may be assimilated, then, in terms which are familiar to the student or critic of Romantic poetry, as an attempt to humanize, even to personalize, the future: the future, like nature, is immanent, all potential, and all hidden; it does not become the future until the addition of human will (or some version of self-consciousness). If this is an acceptable statement of the case, then Byron's experiments with control of the future illuminate the Wordsworthian project of natural ethics: wedding of mind and nature it may be, but it is one in which the human partner seeks control.

The turn toward the future is an image (called a vision or a prophecy) of what the world will be like after one's death--an image strung out into a suppressed narrative (barely suppressed in the case of Faliero) of one's continued influence upon the world. Thus it may be expressed as a family romance: the parent becomes a sacred place which is to be violated inevitably by the child-writer: Faliero profanes the resting place of his ancestors; the conflict of "sons and fathers" is Francis

Foscari's final explanation of his own drama; the subject/writer of "Churchill's Grave" pays for his trespass upon the holy ground of the past poet.

The parent hides from the child, in this sequence, unwilling to assume the parental voice because it is the voice of mortality. From the perspective of the writer, "Churchill's Grave" represents the transition to maturity; maturity is the beginning of remembrance, which in Byron is always linked to a concrete, documented history. In the symbolic rendition of "Churchill's Grave," the nostalgia for the parental past is intensified into the ripping of "the veil of immortality," i. e., a violent uncovering of the past. Protagonists are defined by this situation, that they are forced to kill their parents symbolically, and prematurely; they are thus forced into premature responsibility themselves: and the responsibility to become the parent becomes the responsibility to profess, to proclaim, to speak a language as forceful and self-involved as that of Isaiah. This is the language of one's remembrance of the parent.

Another question that ought to occupy us is whether there is a compositional equivalent to the "leap through fire into the future," as Sardanapalus describes it. And on this matter, we ought first to note the thematic association between the appearance of the future in Byron's poetry and the various manifestations of the mysterious, the obscure, and the mortal--an association we saw grouped in "A Fragment" as a vision of the death barrier. This appearance, and most of the other appearances of this short sequence, represent a fragment of the same larger circle of thinking--a circle which comprises the personal future of the writer, the writer's death (and abandonment of or divergence from his or her writing), the post-mortem, mutual recuperation of reader and writer

(both reader and writer are dead in this construction), and into the personal future of the subject/writer. That is one arc of the circle. This chapter is intended to mark out the rest of the circle.

And finally, the turn toward the future is in some vital way, we are led to speculate, associated with the act of writing, or of articulation; articulation is the environment of the turn toward the future. And articulation is, as we saw in the plays and in "Churchill's Grave," an environment which Byron built with some of his densest and most stylistically identifiable poetry.

Density may be regarded as a defense of the poet's idea; indeed, in the plays density serves the function of partially hiding the idea from interpretation, and of protecting the speaker from the recriminations of the future. In the three plays examined (and to a lesser extent in Werner), certain experiences and desires demand an articulation surpassing the immediacy of conversation. Now we will examine a group of poems in which the imperative to articulate is set in relief against a defining silence. Specifically, we will consider how it is, in Byron's poetics, that to speak is to disturb the silence of space; to write, to disturb the silence of time.

This will become clearer by the end of the chapter. For now, I will note only that it is moderately surprising that no modern reader of Byron has associated his developing philosophy of language with his favorite, specifcally literary structure, which is precisely the family romance. This set of plot devices and archetypes has remained in the background of the last two chapters, slighted by my emphasis on the use of language in the tales and plays. Now we will allow that complex more space in our deliberation; we will try to remember that, among their other thematic roles, Marino Faliero, Sardanapalus, Hassan, and Hugo are also patricides.

It is as a figure caught in the dynamics of family that Cain, I think, is best considered--not as the first killer, but as the first character caught in a history not of his own making. He is a character whose acts we come to see as primarily temporal in effect, rather than spatial--this, a strange distinction perhaps, but one borne out by the play's philosophical dialogue. In fact, if we consider the remarks made about him by some of his spiritual and racial descendants--Aholibamah, Manfred, Conrad--it becomes possible to call Cain the discoverer of time. There is an important temporal component in the rhetoric of the play. The prominently displayed dialogue of Cain and Lucifer is, of course, centrally about time--about the past of the Earth, the future of the human race, and the advance of Cain's own personal death. But the structure of the interaction of the two characters is also, and more interestingly, a dynamics of time--both the concrete time of reading and the pretended time of the conversation in the play.

It is crucial, I think, to chart the variety of responses associated with Lucifer--to see that Lucifer's contributions to the dialogue are of three sorts. His first, and deceptively frequent, contribution is a willing confirmation of the facts of the past. "Pass on," Lucifer says, and gaze upon the past."

> Cain. And must I be like them?
> Lucifer. Let Him who made thee answer that.
> I show thee what thy predecessors are,
> And what they were thou feelest,
>
> (II, ii, ll. 87-90)

This deflection of the question is one of Lucifer's commonest devices, and he uses it against questions about the future generally, as well as against questions that require some interpretation, that is, some commitment or involvement.

> Cain. --what are ye?

> Live ye, or have ye lived?
> Luc. Somewhat of both.
> Cain. Then what is death?
> Luc. What! Hath not he who made thee
> Said 'tis another life?
> Cain. Till now he hath
> Said nothing, save that all shall die.
> Luc. Perhaps
> He one day will unfold that happy secret . . .
>
> (II, ii, ll. 34-38)

and on the older Earth:

> Cain. And wherefore did it fall?
> Luc. Ask him who fells.
>
> (II, ii, ll. 33-38)

Even when Lucifer appears to be most definitely asserting, his words are protected by their conditional tilt:

> Luc. It may be death leads to the highest knowledge;
> And being of all things the sole thing certain,
> At least leads to surest science: therefore
> The tree was true, though deadly.
>
> (II, ii, ll. 164-67)

Note again, in Lucifer's speech, the appearance of the word "true." It occurs in all three of his characteristic responses: the assertion of the past, the subjunctive as to Cain's future, and the conditional as to the absolute (as above) or the race.

Cain is not altogether duped into believing he understands clearly; "all/Seems dim and shadowy" he says (II, ii, ll 175-76). But, as has been pointed out in thematic studies of the plays, Cain does participate in his own indictment. He accuses himself of limited conceptions, and he wants to believe that his constant questioning is a gesture toward truth. But the metaphorical structure of the drama indicates that while Cain has a "thirst to know," he is wont to become "intoxicated with eternity" (I, i, l. 245; II, i, l. 109)--these last, his own words. It has been the mainstream interpretation of Cain to regard these questions as an expression of Cain's curiousity. This interpretation is not incorrect; but it must be joined to Cain's part in the rhetoric: as a part of his environment

(rhetorical and narrative), Cain's questions are metaphorical of his desire to escape his own knowledge.

The brackets of the important Act II dialogue are the agons of Act I and Act III, and they are equivalent: in Act I, Cain is called on to break his contemplative silence. Adam, the parental and traditional, calls on Cain to repeat Adam's action, more precisely, his articulation:

> Adam. Son Cain, my first-born, wherefore art
> Thou silent?
> Cain. Why should I speak?
> Adam. To pray.
> Cain. Have ye not pray'd?
> Adam. We have, most fervently.
> Cain. And loudly: I
> Have heard you . . .
> Adam. But thou, my eldest born, art silent still.
> Cain. 'Tis better I should be so.
> Adam. Wherefore so?
> Cain. I have nought to ask.
> Adam. Nor aught to thank for!
> Cain. No.
> Adam. Dost thou not live?
> Cain. Must I not die?
> Eve. Alas!
> The fruit of our forbidden tree begins
> To fall.
>
> (I, i, ll. 22-25 26-31)

Exchanges like these have led some critics to believe that Cain and Lucifer are similar characters. But Lucifer represents the voice of initiative in Act II; in Acts I and III Cain is dragged into participation. In the scene just cited, Cain unwillingly becomes the antithetical or rebellious part of the incantation. In Act III, Abel, more gently, forces obeisance on his brother:

> Brother, I should ill
> Deserve the name of our great father's son,
> If, as my elder, I revered thee not,
> And in the worship of our God, call'd not
> On thee to join me, and precede me in
> Our priesthood--'tis thy place.
>
> (III, i, ll. 195-200)

Both in Act I and Act III the central dialogues focus on a ritual and

are therefore mutually illuminating, as William Marshall has noted.[2] In neither context is Cain comfortable with responding; to Abel, as to Adam, Cain fixes on the language of the encounter:

> 'tis thy place.
> Cain. But I have ne'er
> Asserted it.
>
> (III, i, ll. 200-201)

This argumentative and heuristic response is equivalent to Cain's ironic questioning of Adam, and both suggest that Cain is trying to avoid responsibility, or authority, altogether. In the first instance, he rejects his duty as a child; in the second, he evades the fact of his majority. both cases, he interrupts the ritual use of language, suggesting again that his resistance is caused by a feeling of being trapped in the past: the fixity of the ritual represents for him the repetition of a past moment. Cain is fixed on that moment, though he is not sure what it was. He knows only, and unclearly, that it points him toward the future.

In his conversation with the humble members of his family, his questioning separates Cain from their society, makes him the first skeptic, perhaps. But against Lucifer, in Act II, Cain appears not as a skeptical ironist, but as a petitioner.

> Cain. Spirit, who art thou?
> Luc. Master of Spirits.
> Cain. And being so, canst thou
> Leave them, and walk with dust?
> Luc. I know the thoughts
> Of dust, and feel for it, and with you.
> Cain. How!
> You know my thoughts?
> Luc. They are the thoughts of all
> Worthy of thought;--'tis your immortal part
> Which speaks within you.
> Cain. What immortal part?
>
> (I, ii, ll. 98-104)

These questions seem to me quite receptive and linear; Cain asks Lucifer to take the role of informant, and Lucifer's first answers, likewise, are not seriously evasive of the point. Cain is drawn into (tempted by) these perspicuous answers (as, of course, startled that the questions

were answered as they were--with an affirmation of his life, his "immortal part"). Both characters recover, as it were, their characteristic voices in the ensuing conversation--Lucifer becomes skillfully evasive,[1] Cain becomes ironic--but the basic pattern of their interaction remains the same.

> Luc. thou wilt be
> No less than thou art now.
> Cain. No less! and why
> No more?
> Luc. It may be thou shalt be as we.
> Cain. And ye?
> Luc. Are everlasting.
> Cain. Are ye happy?
> Luc. We are mighty.
> Cain. Are ye happy?
> Luc. No: art thou?
>
> (I, i, ll. 118-22)

Cain is already a wanderer here, looking for a place to rest his argument, but expecting exile, expecting no resolution. Whenever he asks a question throughout Act II he is letting himself in for belittlement--allowing Lucifer the superior position of respondent, of repository of knowledge, and taking for himself the inferior position of interlocutor, the one who makes himself dependent on the other.

Cain's story in Act II is thus an extended scene of instruction, and Lucifer is a limited teacher--limited to showing the past and limited, both characters assert, to Cain's inferior intellect. Though Lucifer promises to reveal "the history/Of past, and present, and of future worlds" (II, i, ll. 24-25), the history of the future turns out to be mere evasion and subjunction of the sort noted earlier. Lucifer seldom does predict the future; he is a being of space rather than time (prince of the air [II, ii, l. 37], whose dwelling is "o'er all space" [II, ii, l. 378], but whose acts are "exempt from time . . . But that's a mystery" [I, i, ll. 531, 535]); as such, his teachings are only half relevant to Cain, as it seems God's teachings were only half relevant to Adam

and Eve. Moreover, Lucifer may be eccentric or deceitful or imperfect himself; his language is certainly tangled in complicating moods and tenses. His appearance (again, he may be compared to God in this) is immediately problematical: there is something he knows that Cain does not, and, even more significantly, he is something that Cain cannot quite compass. Lucifer is a skilled teacher and never does allow himself to be identified in any helpful way. He says of himself "I am what I seem" and he is, or is the agent of, one of the two great "Principles" (II, ii, 11. 404-405); but the first self-disclosure of only a restatement of Cain's question of him, and the second leaves Cain still with the question of the future, which is the question of motive: "And to what end have I beheld these things/Which thou hast shown me?" (II, ii, 11. 417-18)

Because of Lucifer's refusal (or, we might speculate, his inability) to respond in kind to Cain's questions, Cain the student or interlocutor is slightly displaced from the conversation. He cannot assume any transparency or immediacy of language, but must interpret truth out of the other's hints. At the same time he must continue to make himself vulnerable and to show his vulnerabilities in his questions. He is always at this disadvantage through Act II, always one step behind Lucifer, always trying to catch up to the utterance (or exchange) of the moment just past.

Many readers have noted that Cain's conversation in Act II contains a measure of imitation of Lucifer. But this is not a challenge to the hypothesis that Cain takes the adolescent role; it is rather support, for the discourse of the child must take one of two directions: it may imitate the discourse of the parent figure (as Adam's here replicates the narrator of Milton's Paradise Lost) or it may attempt to block or obliterate the foregoing speech. In this light, all the talk about Cain's

inferior conceptions breaks down into two components of his and Lucifer's discourse: first, Ludifer's mystification--his revealing of the future by oblique reference to the past and his refusal to use the indicative mood; and second, Cain's own belief that he ought to be able to understand. Cain's rebellion, then, may be seen as a rebellion against himself (against his own inferior conceptions), but second, and more importantly, against the complex of Lucifer/knowledge/mystery. This is the complex of the parent, the complex that is worked our in Act I, especially in the first scene. It is important to see that the rejection of Adam and Eve is a rejection of knowledge (connected as this is to Adam and Eve's primal sin through the Tree of Knowledge).

Now, the structure of this relationship continues. As Cain finds his future in the past of the world, and as his parents' past becomes his present, the notion that there is some center to life's mystery tends to dissolve. Cain has thought himself not only spatially the center but temporally the origin of creation; Leslie Brisman has pointed out that Act II serves largely to disabuse Cain of this vanity[3]; other and superior beings came before him. This collapse of time, while it appears to put the desired knowledge before Cain, yet deprives this knowledge of the significance Cain desired. All is still "dim and shadowy" to him. His inspection of creation leads only to a vague hope for unity (II, ii, ll. 380-92), yoked to an intuition of fragmentation. Cain can only reason his way to the strange notion of universal wretchedness; even God must be wretched, who created such unhappines and disorder. It is partly by means of such paradoxes that Lucifer renders Cain's questions irrelevant: Cain's language is obsolete rather than unintelligent; Cain's past is now his present--that is what he believes and how he acts, and even how he explains his situation at times: "I never could/Reconcile what

I saw with what I heard." (I, i, ll. 165-66) Language is inherently problematical for him because it clashes with the evidence of the immediate moment.

That evidence, as discussed in Chapter I, tends always to one conclusion: the attenuation of the self. In Cain, the attenuation proceeds in this fashion: as Cain is deprived of the material and moral points of reference that were viable only on Earth, he increasingly relies on the only measurement he has left--himself. This makes his judgments temporal, i. e., related to his own condition, and isolated. To the degree that Lucifer has been a tempter to relativism, he succeeds. One prominent lesson that Cain learns is that "The mind then hath capacity of time,/ And measures it by that which it beholds" (III, i, ll. 60-61); this view, which Cain believes himself to have discovered, is the direct consequence of Lucifer's teaching that "Nothing can/Quench the mind, if the mind will be itself/And centre of surrounding things--" and that Cain ought to "form an inner world/In your own bosom--where the outward fails." (I, i, ll. 210-12; II, ii, ll. 463-64) But Lucifer's instruction has wrought no essential change in Cain, whose very first words in the play refer the world to himself, his perceptions, and his condition. The most ambiguous feature of Lucifer's role in the play, the release from responsibility that is arranged for Lucifer, is that his temptation serves only to make Cain more like Cain has been. By the end of his journey through the cosmos, Cain is clinging to the only standard for judging he has left: himself: the only standard of beauty ("The loveliest thing I know is loveliest nearest" [II, ii, l.251]), of love ("I'm sorry for [the passing of Beauty]; but/Cannot conceive my love . . . the less" [II, ii, ll. 332-33]), and, with Lucifer's encouragement, the only standard of truth:

Cain. And to what end have I beheld these things

> Which thou hast shown me?
> Luc. Didst thou not require
> Knowledge? And have I not, in what I show'd
> Taught thee to know thyself?
> Cain. Alas! I seem
> Nothing.
> Luc. And this should be the human sum
> Of knowledge, to know mortal nature's nothingness . . .
> (II, ii, 11. 417-22)

There is nothing relevant to Cain at the heart of the mystery, no key, in fact, no center at all; the mystery is preserved by its steady inhumanity, its irrelevance to human concerns. There is no heart at the center of the mystery, only Cain's perception that there ought to be a center--that, and his "capacity of time," i. e., his awareness of time.

So although the lesson Cain learns is that he is nothing, he is genuinely present in his exercise of the faculties of reason, comparison, and temporality; and although Cain travels among scenes that make nothing of him, he is able, out of nothing, to assert himself. He may not be able to understand, but he can articulate the points of his ignorance. In this way, Cain's subservience is transformed into an investigation; his questions press against the boundary of the known. In the last exchange cited, Lucifer unwillingly gives Cain a standpoint for rebellion, a kind of Cartesian ground. Cain's instruction leads to self-knowledge, or, more precisely (since the mind is not substantial), the instruction leads to concentration on the workings of the mind; "moments only and the space/Have been and must be all unchangeable," Lucifer instructs. (II, i, 161-62) Thus the human mystery and the cosmological mirror each other, as being activity without a center, a flow of time with no origin, and purpose without sufficient motive. All these perceptions, we may speculate, arise in Cain initially in regard to his parents; but Lucifer is able to help transform them into a perception of the universe.

There are, then, two relevant ways to describe the argument of Cain. We may see the play as the story of an adolescent rite of passage in which Cain is bracketed by Adam and Abel. Cain rejects the language (especially the ritual use of language) of his precursor and his descendant, and clings instead to his own method of questioning. Lucifer appears to take the role of ideal father, the father who will not fail; he responds to Cain's language, is willing to take the responsibility of answering. Cain opens himself to Lucifer by saying "Let me but/Be taught the mystery of my being." (I, i, ll. 318-19) Lucifer's answers never quite move out of the realm of mystery; but he nevertheless responds to Cain's "immortal part"--he encourages Cain to feel that spiritual or immortal part of his own questions--and Lucifer is willing, unlike Adam or Abel, to take the role of moral exemplar; we have already noted Cain's imitation of Lucifer's attitudes and arguments.

It is fairly clear, then, that Cain's rebellion against God is equally a rebellion against Lucifer, the teacher. It is part of Cain's tragedy that he is caught in reaction against eternity, in striking out at these two equivalent figures. But it is also tragic, that, unable to escape his instruction, Cain's rebellion is crucially self-constitutive. We may say that Cain strikes out against his knowledge (though that knowledge is twisted) that he is nothing. This is not to deny altogether the mainstream view that Cain strikes a well-meaning but misplaced blow against a bloody Jehovah; I would rather supplement that view with the understanding that for Cain to have symbolized in this fashion he must have already formed that "inner world" that Lucifer advises. He must have already become complexly subjective, so that Jehovah becomes the law of death and Abel the agent. In other words, the argument of the family romance is resolved in Cain's definition of himself as the

rebellious son. In a very important exchange between Cain and Lucifer this internalization of the past is the crux of their interest in each other:

> Luc. /The angels/ love your brother:
> His sacrifices are acceptable.
> Cain. So be they! wherefore speak to me of this?
> Luc. Because thou hast thought of this ere now.
> Cain. And if
> I have thought, why recall a thought that--(he pauses, as agitated)--Spirit!
> Here we are in thy world; speak not of mine.
>
> (II, ii, ll. 352-57)

The mention of Abel's sacrifice disturbs Cain as nothing else in the play does; this is evidence, in one view, that Cain cannot stand sibling competition for the attention of the Almighty; in my view, it shows that he rejects a past that would force him into responsibility for what is to come; psychologically, it would force him to admit what he wishes would happen.

Second, Cain's story can also be seen as touching other of Byron's poems which have to do with forced instruction: Mazeppa, The Prisoner of Chillon, The Lament of Tasso. Cain is most importantly like "Churchill's Grave": the instruction is tangled, mystifying, in need of interpretation; the instruction provides a glimpse of the future by way of an increased concentration on the past; the teacher is rebelled against; and the relationship of teacher and student is brought up to the limit of transcendence--the questioner is almost ready to dispense with the one who answers questions.

For the purposes of my study, it is the tragedy of Cain that he rebels literally rather than symbolically; he strikes out in space rather than in time (whereas his being, and the consequences of his acts, are temporal). Cain doesn't pay for his knowledge like the narrator of "Churchill's Grave"; he doesn't sublimate like Faliero or evade, by

pretending ignorance, like Sardanapalus. He stumbles over the first obstacles to his freedom--the altars, symbols of self-sacrifice and subservience. His belated claim of the higher altar (III, i, ll. 213-14) may be seen as at once a self-aggrandizement and as an attempt to appease whatever immortal father may still be listening. But the "Catastrophe," as Byron called it, is already upon Cain[4]; when his sacrifice is rejected he moves, in misplaced fury, to destroy the altar. He is not even fully conscious during the killing of Abel; it is as if the event were in control, as though Cain is part of a stage tragedy. Both Cain and Abel become figures in the event: Abel dies at the moment of his forgiveness, and becomes a precursor of Christ (III, i, ll. 319-20); Cain is frozen in the opposing attitude; his attempt to remove mystery has resulted in his becoming a kind of priest who evokes and ministers to it. Whether this makes Cain the agent of God or of Lucifer, or of something independent of supernatural authority, is not made clear.

Overall, the mysteries given various mythologized birth in Cain and Heaven and Earth--often seen as fleshed out in the story of Manfred and in the mind of the narrator of Childe Harold--set a pattern of finding that as knowledge increases, it becomes knowledge of limitation, and that absolute knowledge approaches mere unity and inarticulateness. As Cain imagines it or reasons his way to it, the end is death and nothingness (silence); for Japhet, the end is a remingling of heaven and earth into their original chaos. Both stories are apocalyptic, then, mental and cosmological; and, as I have suggested, the discourse of each is guided by apocalyptic arguments: trains of thinking and symbolizing that indicate, in the case of Cain, the nothingness of the arguer, in Heaven and Earth, the end of distinctions.

Cain and Heaven and Earth are allied too in the tradition and genre

to which Byron joined them: the medieval mystery play. Byron's choice of topics is perhaps enough to make such a connection valid (there was a medieval Cain and a medieval Noah). The disputatious and academic preface to Cain suggests that that play, at least, is didactic like its medieval forerunner. Byron's plays are, of course, meant to upset faith rather than renew it, but Byron's contemporaries were incorrect in charging atheism, as our contemporaries are incorrect in charging Manicheanism. Byron's plays are didactic (or instructive) of no such particular dogmatic end, but rather of movement and argument as universal principles which find a special manifestation in the human condition. That the plays are dramatizations of paradoxes is true also, in the same sense that they are dramatizations of mysteries, though neither of these observations is enough to determine the logic of any particular passage. And the plays do not outline the same mystery, but related ones. Heaven and Earth is about the divine and the human interfering with each other. Cain is a skeptical theodicy (though in the attempt to justify the ways of the immortal ideas to man, the ideas are usually rendered somewhat beside the point).

It is usually thought that Manfred is most fully the heir of Cain and Aholibamah, and it is true that Manfred's talk is full of mystery and paradox. But two other works are as relevant as exempla or further "dramatization" of that arc of ideas that passes through the mysteries. The Prisoner of Chillon and Mazeppa are slow, careful expositions of the approach of death and, at the same time, attempts to infuse language into that boundary territory.. The poems exert pressure against the border by continuing to describe it. These poems are also relevant on account of their protagonists: if Cain is proto-human and Manfred, in many ways, ultra-human, the protagonists of these two middle-period poems are not

at first special representatives of the race (although both come to see themselves as singled out). They are not prepared for their ordeals, and their bearing under them is not traditionally heroic, but rather, as Cooke describes it, counter-heroic[5]: the prisoner is largely broken by his experience; Mazeppa's tale puts the king to sleep. The two characters have been thought of before as test cases or experiments; perhaps it is more to the point that they represent two ways in which typical people encounter prototypical mysteries.

The Prisoner of Chillon moves from an indefinite present in the first stanza ("My hair is grey, but not with years" /1. 17/: "My limbs are bow'd, etc. " /1. 5/) into a lengthy image which comprises the second stanza: this first description of the dungeon has an incantatory, recitative quality, reminiscient of folk-tale devices:

> There are seven pillars of Gothic mould
> In Chillon's dungeons deep and old,
> There are seven columns, massy and grey . . .
>
> And in each pillar there is a ring,
> And in each ring there is a chain . . .
>
> (11. 27-29; 36-7)

The narrative proper--that is, the record of events in order--begins in Stanza III, with the prisoner's recounting of the imprisonment of him and his brothers:

> They chain'd us each to a column stone,
> And we were three--yet, each alone;
>
> (11. 48-9)

The next four stanzas repeat this pattern. Four and Five are unfixed recollections from the prisoner's unspecified present, with only some six lines (70-72, 98-101) contributing to the chronological narrative of their time in the dungeon. Stanza VI returns to the image of the dungeon, and the tone of meditative description:

> Lake Leman lies by Chillon's walls:
> A thousand feet in depth below

Its massy waters meet and flow . . .
(11. 107-09)

Stanza VIII, with greater force and deliberation than Stanza III, returns to the core narrative:

I said my nearer brother pined,
I said his mighty heart declined . . .
(11. 126-27)

Midway through this stanza, the prisoner must correct his tendency to drift back into recollection: "But why delay the truth?--He died." (l. 144)

The first half of the poem is thus a narrative embellished in two ways: first, by temporally unbound recollections from an unspecified present; and second, by a spatially bound--and binding--group of images that establish the tone and terms of the descriptions (the recitation of the features of the dungeon). We will see these three components, these orienting points, again in Mazeppa and other of Byron's dramatic poems; in fact, we have already seen them in "Churchill's Grave" in so spare and stark a form that they may have escaped notice. And though there is no very satisfying answer, it is not irrelevant to ask, at any point, which component is most genuinely Bonnivard (as some critics have asked which of the "voices" of Don Juan are most genuinely Byron's), given the competition of recollection, imagery, and narration in Bonnivard's mind.

The interaction of the three components becomes clearer through the second half of the poem, though their appearance is not stanzaically distinct. Stanza VIII moves through each of the three modes (through passages which are generally recollective, generally imagistic, and generally narrative, in that order), and it presents, again with obvious energy, the prisoner's need to force himself back into the story. As in Stanza VII, he begins with some simple declaration intended, but gets immediately side-tracked:

> But he, the favorite and the flower,
> Most cherish'd since his natal hour,
> His mother's image in fair face,
> The infant love of all his race,
> His martyr'd father's dearest thought,
> My latest care, for whom I sought
> To hoard my life, that his might be
> Less wretched now, and one day free;
> He too, who yet had held untired
> A spirit natural or inspired--
> He, too, was struck, and day by day
> Was wither'd on the stalk away.
>
> (11. 164-75)

The lapse into recollection here may be a way of "delaying" the truth, which the prisoner has accused himself of in the preceding stanza; it has at least become, by this passage, a characteristic of his thinking that he names his brothers by his memory of them. Similarly, when he goes on to describe his second brother's death, his phrasing becomes recitative and imagistic:

> Oh God! it is a fearful thing
> To see the human soul take wing
> In any shape, in any mood:
> I've seen it rushing forth in blood,
> I've seen it on the breaking ocean
> Strive with a swoln convulsive motion,
> I've seen the sick and ghastly bed
> Of Sin delerious in its dread;
> But these were horrors--this was woe
> Unmix'd with such--but sure and slow . . .
>
> (11. 176-85)

Along with such turns to and more often away from the narrative in Stanza VIII, and preparatory to the prisoner's symbolic death in Stanza IX, the poem gradually withdraws from the world outside the cell. References to the time preceding captivity drop away, the action slows, and the prisoner dwells longer on each detail. Byron is recreating Bonnivard's forgetting of that other world and completing Bonnivard's transformation into an essential prisoner. Earlier, Bonnivard has claimed that he lost count of his years when his "last brother droop'd and died" (l. 46); here, as he narrates that crucial episode, we see him for the first time entirely a prisoner of the imagery provided by the dungeon, and understanding

his brother as altogether a remnant of the past:

> The last, the sole, the dearest link
> Between me and the eternal brink,
> Which bound me to my failing race,
> Was broken in this fatal place.
>
> (11. 215-18)

The source of the terms "link" and "bound" is clear.

That the "eternal brink" is a boundary of space and time is also clear in Stanza IX, where the prisoner describes the reduced state of consciousness of a person no longer bound to the categories of the human race. It is an experience of loss, as he recalls it, primarily described by what was no longer there. And note the difficulty he has resuming the narrative; he has the form correct--that is, he knows he must now go on to what came "next"--but it is as if he has only the negations to fill it with.

> What next befell me then and there
> I know not well--I never knew--
> First came the loss of light, and air,
> And then of darkness too:
> I had no thought, no feeling . . .
>
> It was not night, it was not day;
> It was not even the dungeon-light,
> So hateful to my heavy sight,
> But vacancy absorbing space,
> And fixedness without a place;
> There were no stars, no earth, no time,
> No check, no change, no good, no crime . . .
>
> (11. 231-35; 240-46)

Prominent among his losses here are "space" (with "air," "light," "earth") and "time" ("night," "day," and "change"), as well as the usual social freight of ethics and law.

Because Bonnivard has lost both the sense of time required for recollection and the spatial coordinates required for positive description, it is tempting to regard this stanza (in the categories I have established) as a "pure" narration--a skeletal narrative line moving on

of itself--and to take the point that in this reduced, primitive state there is only the inhuman form of progress, devoid of human knowledge. And it is probably profitable to think of the passage as an experiment in describing the absence of sense: Bonnivard is without any conventional human apparatus and so is paradoxically absent: fixedness without a place. Alternatively, we could think of the passage as a description of what eternity would be like if we could "be" there. From this point of view, the passage is allied to poems like "A Fragment," in which the subject eludes criticism by slipping into the realm of assertion by negation. So it is not precise to say that the stanza presents form without content. It is rather the case that content is denied or rejected. The emptiness is an impression left by the form of Bonnivard's declarations, his denial of time and space (particularly in a poem that has relied so heavily on recollection and imagery). The stanza is calculated. It is Bonnivard's memory of having no memory; therefore, it is his creation of a recollection. It is, in part, incantatory and repetitive; therefore, it enumerates without specifically indicating. To be precise, we must say that when Bonnivard, from his unspecified present, recalls this time, his recollection takes the form of composing. Otherwise, lines 233-250 would not be there (and no reader, I think, would miss them).

So there is merit to the suggestion that the narrative line is in some way purer here; it is at least uncluttered with the objects of Bonnivard's past. But it is not inhuman. The narration draws Bonnivard after it (as the rest of the poem also suggests); and whether Stanza IX is a figment of Bonnivard's imagination or Bonnivard, in this case, a by-product of the narration, is an undecideable and probably misplaced question. Bonnivard and the narration establish each other's presence, apart from memory and apart from the objects of sense.

No one would have thought the poem incomplete without Stanza IX, but with it, Bonnivard's resignation in the remainder begins to take on aspects of a partial victory; it begins in Stanza X, with the return of time and space, now no longer isolated from the narration:

> A light broke in upon my brain,--
> It was the carol of a bird;
> It ceased, and then it came again,
> The sweetest song ear ever heard . . .
>
> (11. 251-54)

Stanza X outlines a critique of natural religion as philosophically full as any to be found in the Romantic poets, and, as is often the case, Byron's ideas bear comparison with Wordsworth's: the danger of depending too much on natural phenomena for the range of one's conceptions is that it can lead to believing oneself singled out for special treatment by the universe

> A lovely bird with azure wings,
> And song that said a thousand things,
> And seem'd to say them all for me!
>
> (11. 268-70)

But it is only a comforting delusion for the prisoner that the bird is a messenger from heaven, perhaps his brother's soul come down to him (11. 287-88). The prisoner is able to understand that the bird was mortal like himself, its appearance an accident, and the significance he attached to it supplied by his own imagination (in part by his memory--he has earlier imagined: "Oh God! it is a fearful thing/To see the human soul take wing"). But though a delusion, his initial experience with the bird has taken on an importance in the narrative: he was, in fact, drawn back from the "brink" by a perception, and he can see the bird, precisely because it is mortal, as related to himself. So while the philosophy was vain, it returned the prisoner to himself and to the symbolizing process; this is the starting point for a new sort of revery:

> And then 'twas mortal well I knew,

For he would never thus have flown,
And left me twice so doubly lone,
Lone as a corse within its shroud,
Lone as a solitary cloud,--

(11. 291-94)

It is not unlikely that it is the word "me" that sets the prisoner off onto the search for metaphors to describe his aloneness, even though the metaphors tend to minimize him:

A single cloud on a sunny day,
While all the rest of heaven is clear,
A frown upon the atmosphere,
That hath no business to appear
When skies are blue, and earth is gay.

(11. 295-99)

Although it is not human, the bird in its mortality is allied to Bonnivard, and its appearance leads for the first time to Bonnivard's composition of poetry upon himself; he is thrown back upon himself, upon his loneliness and despair, and the result is that the poem is now about him.

The denouement begins with Stanza XI--"A kind of change came in my fate"--and at least part of the change is Bonnivard's own reconciled attitude, his ego-centrism in the end of the poem. When he climbs the wall to look out the window, it is as if he is turning his attention toward the world, looking out through his own eyes from the darkness of his subjectivity, his dungeon. The landscape he sees is painfully full, but it is not divine or revelatory, as the bird had been. It is instead familiar and unsurprising: "I saw /the mountains/ and they were the same." (l. 332) The island he sees--"Scarce broader than my dungeon floor,/But in it there were three tall trees" (l. 345-46)--is little more than a projection of his thought: "the whole earth would henceforth be/A wider prison unto me." (11. 322-23) The dungeon is his own place now, with its own little mythologies and minimally sublime moments--all now thoroughly human, all familiar and conventional from this, the

prisoner's perspective:

> With spiders I had friendship made,
> And watched them in their sullen trade,
> Had seen the mice by moonlight play . . .
>
> We were all inmates of one place,
> And I, the monarch of each race,
> Had power to kill--yet, strange to tell!
> In quiet we had learned to dwell;
>
> (ll. 381-83; 385-88)

The spiders and mice, I assume, represent a kind of minimal, but exquisite and delicate mental activity. And to the mainstream interpretation that Bonnivard "shrinks" to fit his cell, I would add the corresponding observation that Bonnivard's essential humanity, his thought, swells up to fill, to completely humanize, to appropriate, this previously inhuman environment. So at home has Bonnivard become among his limited but human conceptions that he is complete with nothing else. His experience is completely human, a quintessence or distillation of the normal or commonplace world that he no longer remembers distinctly. Bonnivard is special in this way, that he is an especially clear example of a human mystery:

> So much a long communion tends
> To make us what we are:--even I
> Regain'd my freedom with a sigh.
>
> (ll. 390-92)

After Stanza IX, the prisoner's discourse is liberated from the recollection of his brothers and from the obsessive imagery of the dungeon, and the narrative line is for the first time continuous from stanza to stanza. But image and recollection have not disappeared; they have been sublimated. They are subservient to the narration now, or at least integrated into it to a much higher degree than before. The narration is a thin line in Stanzas I-VII, stretched exceedingly thin in Stanza IX; it leads the prisoner past his painful memories of his brothers and

his imprisonment, and toward the symbolic death of Stanza IX. The narrative line is a desire for oblivion, then, a death wish.

For one of Bonnivard's most important motivations is guilt: like Cain, he is secretly pleased by his brothers' deaths. His repeated recollections of their features in the first eight stanzas are an attempt to keep them alive in the poem, as, he felt at the time, it was his duty to keep them alive in the dungeon. His sense of parental duty is clear in each recollection:

> But this was for my father's faith
> I suffer'd chains and courted death;
>
> (11. 11-12)

> The youngest, whom my father loved
> Because our mother's brow was given
> To him, with eyes as blue as heaven--
> For him my soul was sorely moved;
>
> (11. 73-76)

> But he, the favorite and the flower,
> Most cherish'd since his natal hour,
> His mother's image in fair face,
> The infant love of all his race,
> His martyr'd father's dearest thought,
> My latest care, for whom I sought
> To hoard my life . . .
>
> (11. 164-70)

It is not surprising, again, that Bonnivard equates his last brother to a chain (the "dearest link"), for these are the words of one oppressed by a sense of responsibility. Bonnivard clearly does not want to die, but rather to "hoard" his life. But his survival is at odds with the guilt he feels at failing to become a proper parent to his brothers; and not only does he let his brothers die, but also the image of his mother and the thought of his father. All of this, in his own mind, has served to keep him alive. No wonder, then, that,

> No partner, no sire, no kin had I,
> No partner in my misery;
> I thought of this, and I was glad,
> For thought of them had made me mad.
>
> (11. 324-27)

In many ways, of course, he is already mad; he must avoid in his thinking the memory of his brothers as in the dungeon he must avoid their graves:

> For if I thought with heedless tread
> My step profaned their lowly bed,
> My breath came gaspingly and thick,
> And my crush'd heart felt blind and sick.
>
> (11. 314-17)

We may say that, within the poem, it is by following the line of the core narrative that Bonnivard avoids the graves of his brothers and those self-destructive symptoms that accompany any profanation. But in an interesting and complex way, Bonnivard's psychosis, his death wish, which may be thought to precipitate the suicidal crisis of StanzaIX, is also the means by which Bonnivard is able to hold himself in a steady, relatively painless state. For in holding himself to the narrative, by returning to the story, Bonnivard moves slowly beyond his brothers; he is able to transform or sublimate them into aspects of his dungeon, and then to forget both family and dungeon; they are literally part of his environment, and metaphorically part of his figuration of the world. When he looks out the window, he fixes on the island with its three trees, but he has no fully conscious thought that he has found an analogue for the cell. He simply records. Bonnivard passes through his crisis; he lets himself be carried through by his desire to forget, which is the desire to survive, which is the compelling need to narrate. At the most sublimed level, we may view The Prisoner of Chillon as a ritual narrative (formed--composed—by long self-communion) by which the prisoner is able to expunge, over and over again, his own crimes and the crimes against him.

There is a strong element of sublimation in Mazeppa, too, evident in the relations among the major components of his story and captured, as in The Prisoner, in a formally distinct narrative structure. It is a highly organized, nearly mathematical poem built of three parts, each

subdivided into groups of three. The tradition or genre to which the poem belongs is the largest and most familiar structure: the instructive tale (Mazeppa's ride), framed by an original present as exposition and a return to a now-changed present as resolution. The original present comprises three parts: the description of the preceding events (King Charles' retreat after battle; Stanzas I and II); the making of camp and introduction of Mazeppa (Stanza III); and Charles' request (itself having three parts: 11. 97-124) that Mazeppa tell his story. That story told in full, has three parts: an exposition--the events of Mazeppa's youth (Stanza IV, 1. 125 through Stanza IX); the central action of Mazeppa's ride (Stanzas X-XVIII); and his rescue and return to civilization (Stanza XIX). In Stanza XX, the last stanza of the poem, Mazeppa's epilogue has three parts: a return to the present and resolve to end the story (11. 840-43); a summation of subsequent events (11. 844-52); and a quick moral, to make the tale relevant to the present (11. 853-60). Then Mazeppa gives way to Byron's narrator, who, in the last ten lines of the poem reestablishes for himself the meaning of the resolved present and adds his own implicit moral.

At the center of all this is Mazeppa's ride, which can be divided into three parts on some five or ten accounts: the ride takes three days, passes through three landscapes, comprises three stages of decreasing movement, and so forth. The intricacy of its construction as well as the density of its protective layers demonstrate Mazeppa's care for his memory, his desire to defend and cherish it. The nested structure also seems to imply some inward significance, some core of meaning apart from, or behind, the bare sequence of events. Like the Sexton in "Churchill's Grave," Mazeppa hints that he knows more than he tells; he lures his comrades into participation by piquing their interest (in Stanza IV).

Mazeppa looks, in other words, like it contains a secret. We may be skeptical of this at first--there was nothing at the center of the mystery that Cain pursued. Yet I think there is something hidden in Mazeppa: not a secret, perhaps, but perhaps the form of a secret or of having secrets.

At any rate, it is not something Mazeppa shooses to keep altogether to himself, and it seems to prompt Mazeppa to retail not only his punishment at the hands of Count Palatine, but the broader story of his whole life, from birth to "the last":

> . . . such as I am, love indeed
> In fierce extremes--in good and ill.
> But still we love even in our rage,
> And haunted to our very age
> With the vain shadow of the past,
> As is Mazeppa to the last.
>
> (11. 226-31)

If this, Mazeppa's claim that he is haunted by the form of the past, suggests that his narrative is a ritual expiation like Bonnivard's, there is reason to believe that Mazeppa thinks of it as a kind of deal or trade: his first night with Theresa is prominent because that time recalls:

> In the long lapse from youth to age,
> No other like itself: I'd give
> The Ukraine back again to live
> It o'er once more . . .
>
> (11. 303-6)

This is, of course, exactly what he does: he "gives back" the Ukraine (as it appears during his ride) in order to regain his youth. Nor is the night with Theresa and the punishment for it the whole bargain:

> I would have given
> My life but to have call'd her mine
> In the full view of earth and heaven;
>
> (11. 313-15)

He may already call her his own--she is his memory of her, and she is already caught firmly in the strands of his narrative. It may be that repeating the story renews his sense of her.

As to giving his life, it is clear that the price Mazeppa pays for this reward is not just his memory of the three days of pain: his story goes well beyond Theresa and his punishment and does, in fact, compass the whole of his life. He begins:

> Well, Sire, with such a hope I'll track
> My seventy years of memory back:
> I think 'twas in my twentieth spring,--
>
> (11. 125-27)

Mazeppa is seventy, and he goes back the full span to make a state; the story really begins at his birth. The first part of Mazeppa's narrative (Stanzas IV-IX) is filled with references to his youth: "a goodly stripling" (l. 181) he calls himself, and a "stripling of a page" (l. 354); though nearly a third of his life had passed, he remembers it as his "dawning time of day" (l. 354). And most interestingly, when set against other of Byron's allusions to instruction, Mazeppa refers to his punishment atop the horse as "the school wherein I learn'd to ride" (l. 108). It is exactly the point that Mazeppa exaggerates his youth; he was not a boy--he was twenty. But the memory of Theresa is bound in his mind to a sense of extreme youth, and both are allied to the resignation he often says he felt.

> My moments seem'd reduced to few;
> And with one prayer to Mary Mother,
> And, it may be, a saint or two,
> As I resign'd me to my fate,
> They led me to the castle gate;
> Theresa's doom I never knew,
> Our lot was henceforth separate.
>
> (11. 335-41)

From the thought of Mother to resignation (he thinks the rest of his life is in sight) to the castle gate and the irrevocable separation from Theresa: this sequence implies again that Mazeppa's life to this point has been in gestation, and that this narrative, as he composes it, includes his birth at this moment.

The bargain with himself that Mazeppa enters into, then, not only enables him to regain his youth, but compels him to relive his life. This much is perhaps implicit in the mainstream interpretation of Mazeppa's ride as a metaphor of the human life time. When that metaphor is seen in the psychological context of Mazeppa's narrative--i. e., the context of a composed memory in which Mazeppa has invested himself--it becomes clear why, even in the midst of his happiest memories, Mazeppa turns to thoughts of death. Of the light in Theresa's face, which perhaps reminds him of his own sacrifice, he says:

> All love, half languor, and half fire,
> Like saints that at the stake expire,
> And lift their raptured looks on high,
> As though it were a joy to die.
>
> (11. 216-19)

From his vantage point in the future--the present of his composing--Mazeppa understands that death waits for him at the end of the story. As his liason with Theresa leads to punishment, the narrative of his symbolic birth leads to symbolic death; "a happy doom," he calls love, "But yet where happiest ends in pain." (11. 296-97)

This double perspective (similar to that in "The Prisoner" and "Churchill's Grave") of composing present and composed past leads to a peculiar variety of fatalism in Mazeppa. On the one hand, he remembers (composes) himself as resigned to his death, and even eager for the end:

> When first my courser's race begun,
> I wish'd the goal already won;
>
> (11. 507-8)

He was:

> In hopeless certainty of mind,
> That makes us feel at length resign'd
> To that which our foreboding years
> Present the worst and last of fears:
> Inevitable--even a boon . . .
>
> (11. 722-26)

The certainty of death forces an accomodation to it. But on the other

hand, Mazeppa still seems, in the present, to find it surprising that event followed event in the way it did.

> They little thought that day of pain . . .
> That one day I should come again,
> With twice five thousand horse, to thank
> The Count for his uncourteous ride . . .
>
> (11. 407, 410-12)

> For time at last sets all things even--
> And if we do but watch the hour,
> There never yet was human power
> Which could evade, if unforgiven,
> The patient search and vigil long
> Of him who treasures up a wrong.
>
> (11. 417-22)

The moral of his story expresses a similar sentiment: "What mortal may his own doom guess?" (1. 853) There is more here than irony of circumstance and more than the revenge of a displaced son. Mazeppa is trying to make his experience axiomatic, or rather, searching for the axioms with which to comprehend it. We may conclude that one reason Mazeppa relives his life is to look for--at times, to impose--some continuity or ordering principle in it.

We can assimilate these two characteristics--the split into past and present perspectives and the search for continuity--at points at which we can catch Mazeppa composing: when he stops, corrects himself, and goes on with the story. And though Mazeppa's need to narrate is not the same as the suicidal impulse of Bonnivard, it is similar to it in some important respects: the narrative does lead on to death; and it is the imagery of the past that Mazeppa finds distressing, and which he must press on through in order to come to what is more important. These minor crises in his narration come when Mazeppa notices that the past is in obvious conflict with the present.

> . . .time, and care, and war, have plough'd
> My very soul from out my brow;
> And thus I should be disavow'd

By all my kind and kin, could they
Compare my day and yesterday;
This change was wrought, too, long ere age
Had ta'en my features for his page;
With years, ye know, have not declined
My strength, my courage, or my mind,
Or at this hour I should not be
Telling old tales beneath a tree,
With starless skies my canopy.
But let me on: Theresa's form . . . (11. 190-202)

Mazeppa cannot quite fix on what has caused so profound a change in his features that his family might disavow him; he feels no different, and the passage of time seems no more than that of a day. He goes on with his description of Theresa:

A brow like a midsummer lake,
Transparent with the sun therein,
When waves no murmur dare to make,
And heaven beholds her face within.
A cheek and lip--but why proceed?
I loved her then, I love her still; (11. 220-25)

He goes on from this point to speak of how such people as himself are "haunted to our very age/With the vain shadow of the past"--a response, one supposes, to his too-clear memory of the vanished Theresa. A third memory of loss occurs in the ensuing discussion of love:

I loved, and was beloved again--
They tell me, Sire, you never knew
Those gentle frailties; if 'tis true,
I shorten all my joy or pain;
To you 'twould seem absurd as vain;
But all men are not born to reign,
Or o'er their passions, or as you
Thus o'er themselves and nations too.
I am--or rather <u>was</u>--a prince,
A chief of thousands, and could lead
Them on where each would foremost bleed;
But could not o'er myself evince
The like control--But to resume:
I loved, and was beloved again; (11. 282-95)

Mazeppa must remind himself that his story is set in the past ("I am--or rather <u>was</u>"), and his specific puzzlement that his present is discontinuous with his past--that he's no longer a prince, just as he's no longer a youth--merges with the more general perception that he cannot control

himself. There are two important revelations here. First, we have an explicit admission that Mazeppa's story of the past is in some way support for his sense of himself in the present. Second, that his belief that he can't control himself has become in part his explanation of the story; his punishment at the Count's hands has become allegorical of his own lack of control.

Others have made the point that the horse may be thought to form a body to Mazeppa's mind during the ride, and this is an arguable position: the horse is "a Tartar of the Ukraine breed" (l. 36)--just like Mazeppa himself; his description later of himself bound to the dead horse is suggestive of an attitude toward one's body (ll. 710-11, 715). But both as a metaphor of lack of control over the past and as a reference to his own condition (and if we are to allow--as I think we must--this metaphor to govern some large part of the story), the most profitable distinction is somewhat finer: not between mind and body, nor even between reason and passions (though this too can be argued), but rather between two senses of self: the first, which Mazeppa remembers as "I," may be thought of as a spatial or embodied sense of self, for it images Mazeppa as a place at any instant. The sense of self from which this is to be distinguished is *temporal*, extended across locations. It is as a being through whom time has passed that Mazeppa cannot yet feel himself; he must think it, reason that it must be true that he is the same person as the youth who figures in his narrative. It is this aspect of himself that Mazeppa cannot control, and which his narrative is trying to assert control over; more precisely, it is that which his narrative is trying to become (i. e., the passage of time itself).

This formulation is not needlessly complex if we consider the problem of sufficient motivation. His ride is the story Mazeppa gives himself, the story which is at least in part the prop of his present existence.

It is the way he takes the attention of his fellows, and reinforces his own legendary quality; it is the story of his passage from child to adult, that is, how he got to be who he is. At the same time it is a troublesome story; it puzzles and eludes Mazeppa. It is both him and not yet him, and it expresses, if not a divided self, at least a divided attention.

The two senses of self may be likened to forces in Mazeppa's narration (and allied to its double sources in the past and present). The sense or feeling of himself in the present--as a spatial being--is conservative; it holds back, would like to stop, in fact, because the flow of time is destabilizing. Meanwhile, the sense that he ought to be (must be, his reason tells him) a temporal being prompts him to look this way and that for ways out of the obsessive imagery of the past. This desire to feel his temporality is the predominant mover of the conflict in Mazeppa; and the search for continuity is his motive for pressing ahead with the narration, even though the temporal aspect of human existence leads toward death.

The two impulses are portrayed in competition when Mazeppa pauses near the end of his story for a forty-line analysis of the paradoxes of this condition--a discussion in which his own situation is sublimated into universal experience. (11. 722-62)

> The wretch still hopes his woes must end,
> And Death, whom he should deem his friend,
> Appears, to his distemper'd eyes,
> Arrived to rob him of his prize,
> The tree of his new Paradise.
> Tomorrow would have given him all,
> Repaid his pangs, repair'd his fall;
> Tomorrow would have been the first
> Of days no more deplored or curst,
> But bright, and long, and beckoning years,
> Seen dazzling through the mist of tears,
> Guerdon of many a painful hour;
> To-morrow would have given him power
> To rule, to shine, to smite, to save--
> And must it dawn upon his grave? (11. 748-62)

Death is to be welcomed except that tomorrow might be different; reason

counsels the wretch to suicide, but the truth of the imagination is "What mortal his own doom may guess?" And this passage is not only abstract philosophy, for it represents also Mazeppa's situation in the composing present: faced here with the moment of his symbolic death in the story, he tries already to look beyond it.

Still operative in this passage, and in others near the end of the poem, is Mazeppa's belief that he is engaging in a bargain--a belief which we have seen is a kind of living metaphor for him (a sublimation) of his motivation. That belief is one of three components of the poem that I would isolate, by way of conclusion, as especially important in my reading.

The first component and the one we have examined most closely is Mazeppa's style of narration, especially the episodes he chooses to include. The telling of his story, as we have seen, takes Mazeppa back to his birth and brings him up to the present of his composing and beyond. The narration itself, then, is an assertion both of Mazeppa's existence (he does exist because he has existed) and, implicitly, of the continuity of his life (he hopes that his life is continuous; he tries to assert that it is). This is one source of my sense that there is a secret center in Mazeppa's story; Mazeppa composes the tale to allow for hidden meanings in the hope that he'll find one.

Second, the story itself--its plot or argument--suggests that center: in its nested structure, in its double source in the past as remembered and the composing present, and also in having a double object or intention: the stabilization or support of Mazeppa's sense of self in the present and the risky search for continuity with the past. As I have implied, while the story is ostensibly about Mazeppa's life, it is not yet the true story--or at least, not the story Mazeppa wants it to be, since it has not healed the breach between past and present.

Thus between the nature of Mazeppa's story and the style of his narration, we come upon the third important component of the poem: Mazeppa's motivation. And I think if we have a sufficiently imterwoven understanding of the first two components--if we can see how they imply each other--then we can see how they emerge from Mazeppa's existential anxiety, and also why Mazeppa thinks of his story as part of a trade. In the first place, if he fails to tell the story of the past properly, his present becomes less substantial (the story will be less about him, his comrades will be less interested). But in the second place, on the positive side, if he is able to establish that continuity, then he may have done with the past, for a while at least. We may here associate Mazeppa's motivation with Bonnivard's: both are attempting to wrench free from the past by compressing and summarizing it, by composing it. Hence also, for Mazeppa, the story must comprise his birth; he must take responsibility for all of it, especially for his lack of control. He must assert control. By narrating his life, he takes it over: he becomes self-born, the source in the here and now of his own past.

Out of this motivation, as it is realized in the structure and style of the story, we can construe a secret to fill the place that Mazeppa leaves for one (that is, we can explicate the meaning of the ride apart from Mazeppa's understanding of it). And our first reaction may be to say that, like Oeidpus, Mazeppa is himself the solution to his own riddle. Human life--Mazeppa's life--exists; it progresses through time. But this is the same as to say that life passes--that in fact life exists in its passing. The present moment of life is ephemeral; we're carried beyond it too fast for it to form any solid ground or substratum:

> Away!--away!--and on we dash!
> Torrents less rapid and less rash. (11. 373-74)

> Away!--away! My breath was gone,
> I saw not where he hurried on: (ll. 375-76)
>
> Away, away, my steed and I,
> Upon the pinions of the wind,
> All human dwellings left behind; (ll. 423-25)

As Mazeppa composes it, his ride carries him in the first instants beyon "human dewllings," that is, beyond the conventional social points of reference that establish self and community. It may be that the metaphor of the horse suggests he is carried slightly ahead of the present; we know at least that he feels carried rapidly away from his past life, from Theresa, and from himself as a young man. But it is significant that, after the horse has died and as Mazeppa himself sinks toward death, his narration shifts into the present tense to portray a little drama of sensations.

> I know no more--my latest dream
> Is something of a lovely star
> Which Fix'd my dull eyes from afar,
> And went and came with wandering beam,
> And all the cold, dull, swimming, dense
> Sensation of recurring sense,
> And then subsiding back to death,
> And then again a little breath,
> A little thrill, a short suspense,
> An icy sickness curdling o'er
> My heart, and sparks that cross'd my brain--
> A gasp, a throb, a start of pain,
> A sigh, and nothing more. (ll. 783-95)

If this is the nature of the present--barely a memory, more a meditation upon a lack of memory--then it is not surprising that Mazeppa feels a lack of continuity, that he cannot associate his "day and yesterday." At least he cannot do it without the mediation of an instructive proverb or maxim. It is finally the most interesting aspect of the character of Mazeppa that he will not rest from philosophizing, and that he is so consistently his own subject matter, always the first term of any maxim. "Such as I am," he says, are "haunted to our very age/With the vain shadow of the past." (ll. 226, 229-30)

I do suppose we must
Feel far more ere we turn to dust:
No matter; I have bared my brow
Full in Death's face--before--and now.

(11. 565-68)

he who hath in turn run through
All that was beautiful and new,
  Hath nought to hope, and nought to leave;
And, save the future . . .
  With nought perhaps to grieve:

(11. 741-44, 747)

Mazeppa is that person who can grieve for the future (as he is every other general or unnamed figure in the poem), who can grieve because he can imagine time going on and leading to different circumstances. Mazeppa's thought returns again and again to the future: here, to a final maxim as he concludes his tale:

  What mortal may his own doom guess?
  Let none despond, let none despair!
To-morrow the Borysthenes
May see our sourses graze at ease
Upon his Turkish bank, and never
Had I such welcome for a river
  As I shall yield when safely there.
Comrades, good night!

(11. 853-60)

The full pattern of Mazeppa, then, is comparable to that of The Prisoner of Chillon and "Churchill's Grave." All three move from a relatively conventional human context, and a similarly conventional poetry, into an inhuman realm--a realm in which the approach of death is paralleled by the extinction one by one of the usual supporting features of human culture and contact. The climactic experience can then be used as a lens for examining the mind for innate qualities; the inhuman sheds light on what humanness means. But it is not as if the non-human must be retrospectively compared to the familiar, for, as Byron arranges it, by the time the mystery is made articulate, the familiar is already close at hand. Language only is left during the crucial experience, but it is a more promising and effective language that radiates out

from that center once the borders of the human are glimpsed. Those borders are expanded in the process, so that the definition of the human is never substantive or final; we see again that resolution in Byron is never fixed or final, but procedural. Human and non-human are momentarily indistinct, and then the latter is taken over, assimilated. The mystery of death becomes part of a larger human reality, correlative in each of its aspects to recognizable human conceptions, as well as to an appropriate language. Thus it is not arbitrary that the prisoner and Mazeppa return to conventional human behavior and attach rather commonplace morals to their stories; the proverbializing is a gesture of claiming, knowing (even if, as readers, we are in some doubt that they understand as well as we do); after exploring, they appropriate. The mystery may be thereby in some ways demystified; but it is equally true that the resumed conventional state is in large part defamiliarized or deepened by its proximity to the moment of articulation.

While the narrative structures swell and subside, leaning less or more against image and recollection, the intention of the argument alternates among a disclosure of the world (which emanates from the memory), an imagistic system (which represents the human apprehension: how long communion with objects tends to make us what we are), and a series of asides from an indefinite present. All three "voices" ultimately appear close to the heart of the mystery, but on the whole it is the first and third that explore, and the third that claims; and it is the third into which both poems subside. In Mazeppa, the main character wins through to this sort of utterance, exhibiting it in a steadier state in the bracketing time present; in The Prisoner, the three voices rotate into prominence throughout. But in both the manifest direction is away from image and recollection and toward declaration--and more, toward

declarative sentences, with a minimum of imagistic drapery. Both poems want to break into the present tense, and both do: the prisoner, as he recreates the dungeon which has come to form the substance of his imagination; Mazeppa, as he reaches up from the past into the night he tells his tale. Without judging of their relative success--and certainly not of their happiness--we may say that both protagonists make a previously inhuman mystery yield a bit before the power of their narration. They pass through an experience of death and a resurrection, and attain a new, transfigured state.

To be precise: Bonnivard and Mazeppa remember a symbolic death; they make themselves remember it and the history that surrounds it in detail. They compose a story of their pasts to comprise the important details; they encase their crucial experiences in a strong repetitive structure and equip them with a complex symbolic system. The climactic episode is thus softened, rendered abstract, and surrounded with reminders of the existence of the protagonists. The expositions are preparations for the death they know will come; the preparations complete, they appear to relinquish control and allow themselves to be drawn through; and they do survive, though barely, as they remember it. As they remember and compose it--as it must be remembered--only a remnant of their preparation sustains them through their deaths, only a thread of language, the least spark across the brain. But they emerge from their retelling with some authority, some feeling for their independent existence in the present. They emerge with a sense of the equilibrium of past and present, neither permanent nor unambiguous, but stabilizing for the moment. Mazeppa will remain haunted by the past, one supposes; Bonnivard has only momentarily sublimated his guilt. But their stories take a step past the tragedies of Faliero, Foscari, and Sardanapalus. Bonnivard

and Mazeppa don't die, but move past and beyond their deaths; they sneak out from under the burden of history--that is, they compose a different ending for themselves. Having been made human by human participation, the mystery is mythologized in the retelling. The prisoner and Mazeppa return to a context in which their stories can be told and retold--embroidered into intelligible narration.

It is a context too, this tenuous present, which compels the retelling, and for this reason plot loses its traditional function as the carrier of motive. These plots are rather parts of a larger strategy by which the narrator may free himself from the tyranny of the past; they are retold so that they may be more completely discarded. Both plots, in this respect, are part of a bargain; they are sequences which must be undergone in order for the third type of clarified or unbound utterance to have value. Both characters trade a narrative for a less anxious, though delicately metaphorical existence. The psychological and the grammatical touch here once again: the subject/composer (Mazeppa or Bonnivard) must have a past for his present to have any substance or strength; likewise, the present tense--the assertion of present reality--must have some ground in discourse; the present declaration must be as if the final term or conclusion in an argument.

This is why I've tried to emphasize the argumentative aspects of "Churchill's Grave," Mazeppa and especially of Cain--though of course it is nothing new to approach Cain by way of logic and argument; since the very first review of the play, it has been customary for critics to map out the eschatology of Cain as part of their treatment, as also of Heaven and Earth and The Deformed Transformed, and other of Byron's speculative poems. What I would like to add to this tradition is a sense or these works as organic structures, as structures of inference rather

than deduction; that is, whose intention is to comprise possibilities, to include rather than exclude. These are arguments whose premises are past conclusions, and whose conclusions are always tentative and unstable. This much, also, I think, most commentators allow. But it has always been tempting to try to discover what Byron believed; and in building arguments Byron has always seemed at his most sincere and serious. And so he was. Nevertheless, we ought to see how intricately skeptical, how delicate, these conclusions are; to see that they do not necessarily follow of themselves, but must be won, achieved, and that once achieved, they must be sustained.

The plots are limited in value then, and they are the least dynamic component of these arguments, but they are not altogether fixed; in fact, they appear actively antagonistic at times in the struggles of Mazeppa and Bonnivard to establish themselves in the present. The past is authority and especially punishment; it is the Count Palatine and the nameless jailers of Bonnivard. We have found an equivalent restraint in both poems at points at which the past seems to "delay the truth," i. e., to hold the protagonists back from the future which is their freedom. Nor are these plots more privileged that those we examined in Chapter III. Those sequences, we found, existed finally as a soil from which Byron could cultivate characters. The tales told by Bonnivard and Mazeppa are not unrelated: the intention of the narrative structure is still the creation and sustaining of character; the stories are still told so that they may be surpassed by the characters they halped to establish. Narrative in all these poems is ultimately aimed at the creation of an effective and independent language; the struggle of character is to pull free of the narrative sequences and attain the status of metaphor. For characters like Mazeppa and the narrator of "Churchill's Grave," the stakes

are high; the metaphors they create are indicative of themselves; they are the source in the composing present of their own independence. It is as if (this is the metaphor of their existence) they exist more fully now because they have claimed the past and are no longer governed by it. A similar force is at work in The Corsair, as we saw. Conrad holds together because he has so few ties to the plot; he is almost unmotivated by the events of the plot; he is almost unmotivated altogether, but acts rather from some self-contained essence. Conrad in this way comprises the source of his actions as Mazeppa takes over the source of his life. We will turn to Cain presently and recall how an inability to comprise his origin leads to his downfall.

It is their desire for a broader range of choices, their inclusivity, that makes it possible to speak, after all, of the death wish in Byron's characters. They seek, not death itself, but proximity to death; not silence, but the suppression of the irrelevant and distracting noise of mortality: guilt for Bonnivard, the imagery of the past for Mazeppa. For both characters the existence of the past threatens to empty the present of significance. Therefore both characters become dependent on the stories by which they arrange a release for themselves; death is expiation of guilt for Bonnivard; for Mazeppa, it offers the promise of continuity, for he has faced death "before--and now." Proximity to death is exhilirating to the narrator of "Churchill's Grave"; he dwells "with a deep thought," lofty and confident with respect to the reader. But we ought to see too that in that moment he finds that he has become addicted to writing: the name is "all" that's left, but the more so, for this reason, must the inscription be sought. For to stand before the grave which is symbolically his own and feel the inessential baggage of human nature drop away is to feel at once powerful, purposeful, and utterly anxious

about the future. The void of the past is self-evidently the void of the future, for the narrator of "Churchill's Grave," and is no less threatening because it was summoned into being by the imagination of the narrator himself.

For Byron's mystery poems, it should now be clear, are not only or even mainly about death, but about survival. More precisely, they are about what it feels like to have survived, to be, in Mazeppa's terms, one who has bared his brow "Full in Death's face." And what it feels like is that the survival continues moment by moment, sustained as a metaphor or trade or, as we could say, a sublimation within a constantly revised narrative of life. What survival means for Mazeppa and Bonnivard is to tell and retell their stories, to reach some accomodation between past and present in which their voices are authoritative and complete.

We are in a better position now to make some more interesting suggestions as to why Byron's argument on the human condition moves in and out of the figures of the family romance. And we may return to Cain for these conclusions, for Cain too is faced with a past that threatens to become his future.

Cain's rebellion is often attributed to an undefined spirit of defiance, but I think we found ample evidence that he is, in fact, a traditionally motivated character--that is, that he responds to the situation and events of the plot. And in the most general terms, we may say that Cain's motication follows the pattern of conflict and resolution. The conflict is the burden of his parents' sin, which will end his life. The potential resolution offered by Lucifer--to affirm his nothingness, to establish or define himself by negation--is a form of expiation for that original sin. This sequence is traditionally packaged: in Act I the conflict is arranged; in Act II the resolution is offered; and in Act III

Cain makes a kind of resolution, which is not Lucifer's but his own, but which is not quite appropriate to his desires. He tries to alter the world, to justify or balance it, but he makes the mistake of acting in terms of the world as he perceives it, that is, violently; as I wrote before, he strikes out in space rather than in time, and so recreates the paradoxes of the world; he tries to kill death, as it were.

Clearly though, this sequence may be assimilated to a second reading of the poem as an extended scene of instruction. Cain begins in Act I as an innocent; his understanding of the world is exactly that of his community, that the world is a paradoxical but nevertheless highly structured place, and, most important, both a place and a condition which is not of their making. Cain's initial repulsion from the world is complicated by the instruction of Lucifer, who shows Cain that the universe is just like Cain himself, a mirror of Cain's alienation--centerless, without origin or aim--and that it <u>is</u>, in that sense, of Cain's making. In Act II, Lucifer offers Cain the pride of knowledge, which is a universal egotism. In Act III, in this formulation, Cain rebels against that knowledge, against his responsibility for the state of the world; but he makes the mistake of nostalgia for childhood: the innocence he possessed at the outset was painful, but it was at least irresponsible. In abhoring the evidence of his maturity (God's refusal of his sacrifice), in refusing to be free, Cain binds himself to the world again, and to a senseless repetition of the past.

Finally, a layer deeper, as I would have it, we find a sequence with less definite figures--a sequence of movement and argument which supports the first two. In this layer, I would like to think, we are close to the drama of Byron's instruction of himself, when he surprised himself in the moments of composing. And it is a structure which ought

to be described in terms of composition or discourse, as we described The Prisoner of Chillon--in terms of questions and answers, affirmations and denials--not only because this is the level at which arguments evolve, but also because the characters are in large part distinguished by their mode of utterance within this structure.

Here we find a speaker named Cain, an unattached voice wandering in a discourse--a question trying to become a declaration (a skeptic trying to become a beleiver). He is a voice which refuses to join a chorus, a speaker who rejects an apostrophe (for the opening prayer of the family in lines 1-21 is barely a petition; only Adah and Zillah add "Let me love" and Keep us from further evil" /11. 17 and 21/ to the names and the list of attributes of God) with a question: "Why should I speak?" This Cain defends himself against the past and separates himself from his community by his questioning, but when a correspondent, Lucifer, appears, the questioning becomes a trap, for Cain has bound himself to a dependent and inferior position. Since the universe is the same as himself, he must continue questioning, but any anwwer, like those of Lucifer (whom, we agreed with Marshall, exists primarily as another reflection of Cain's mind) leads always back to Cain himself. This is the relativism that most commentators find in the play: that questions lead only to more questions, because they are answerable only within the framework the questioner has proposed.

Act I, in this reconstruction, is governed by a recollection of the world--the past, the realm of Adam and Eve, of unredeemed, burdensome time, which is history; this is also the realm of sin and guilt, which are urged on Cain by Adam and Eve (and which they say is urged by God). Act II presents the realm of space, that is, the imagery which becomes the substance of Cain's thinking, and, in this act, consumes him entirely:

the "space" of Cain's mind is infinite, as Lucifer shows him, but it is for that very reason a mind too closely bound to the measurements and coordinates of earth. The attitude Lucifer urges on Cain is not much different from that urged by Adam and Eve: that the present is a mechanical continuation of the past; that sin and guilt are to be sought (though in defiance of God instead of contrition).

Adam and Eve, Lucifer, God, Abel, and Adah all offer to Cain, in their various ways, an accomodation with the past, accomodations Cain cannot make because each leads to the depletion of self and the loss of present value. One solution to these dilemmas, suggested by our reading of Mazeppa and The Prisoner of Chillon, would be to impose some new significance upon his present. But instead of ignoring the demands of the past, Cain's choice is to answer them. He has not found his origin in the universe, and rather than make one, he stumbles into complicity with the other characters, and reacts to the world. The killing of Abel is a response to the past; moreover, it is an action, not a thought or a belief--an especially thoughtless action, as Byron draws it. Cain responds to the accusation of the Almighty, implicitly accepting responsibility for the centerless universe and affirming his own nothingness in regard to it. Cain becomes in this way the agent of God or of Lucifer--the agent of space, of earth, of the mysteries of mortality; he becomes, as I wrote, a priest of mystery, who, on the ruins of the altar of another, calls death into being; he evokes the universal future of humanity. He becomes an embodiment of mystery for that future, as we see in the surrounding works: he's a yet unfallen titan to Aholibamah, a model of detachment for Lara, a memory of greatness to Manfred. He is father to all, the father who condemns the child to death--which is exactly what he didn't want to become. Even as a compassionate father he finds himself

contemplating the murder of his son:

> Little deems our young blooming sleeper, there,
> The germs of an eternal misery
> To myriads is within him! better 'twere
> I snatch'd him in his sleep, and dash'd him 'gainst
> These rocks, than let him live . . .
>
> (III, i, ll. 122-26)

The killing of Abel is the same in effect; both represent the death of possibilities, the destruction of the yet unrealized future.

Cain tries to force an independence for himself, but ends up very much the son of Adam and Eve, and the student of Lucifer. Thus for Cain the moment of rebellion is functionally equivalent to the moment of resignation for Bonnivard; the distinction between rebellion and resignation fades in all these poems, since survival and sanity lie beyond death, not on this side of it. But where Mazeppa, Bonnivard, and the narrator of "Churchill's Grave" are able to arrange for themselves an imaginative transition, Cain is literal to the end; his "way out," his escape, is physical and spatial: he kills Abel in the flesh instead of ignoring him (instead of leaving Abel in silence); he leaves his community on foot. The killing of Abel has left him almost altogether earthly. Only at the end of the poem does he prefigure the resolution found by Bonnivard and Mazeppa: he recites the first line of a narrative, which, one supposes, will evolve into his story of himself:

> Cain. I
> Have dried the fountain of a gentle race,
> Which might have graced his recent marriage couch,
> And might have temper'd this stern blood of mine,
> Uniting with our children Abel's offspring!
> O Abel!
> Adah. Peace be with him!
> Cain. But with me!--
>
> (III, i, ll 556-62)

The use of a conclusion to suggest a new beginning should by now be a familiar tactic. Such blurrings of structural and generic boundaries are one reason I've said that this group of poems is about borders--

about the finding, testing, and the imagined crossing of them. We could have come to the same conclusions on the basis of several other poems; in fact, nearly the same analysis might have appeared for Heaven and Earth, The Deformed Transformed, "To Romance," "The Devil's Drive," and even for Marino Faliero. And in the next section we will address a group of poems that are so nearly allied to the mysteries that a separate consideration is a convenience only. But in order to pursue the next step in my argument, I ought here to give a temporary summation.

Partly because of their ritualistic use of language (most explicit in Mazeppa) it is misleading to thisnk of Byron's mysteries as entirely closed sequences which are merely repeated through the several works. They can all be seen as elements of a larger pattern and a longer sequence--as elements of that arc of ideas mentioned at the outset of this section. Cain and Heaven and Earth are forward-looking in an obvious way: they rely on the reader's knowledge of subsequent history. Mazeppa's tale has been told before, and will be used again when the moral can be made appropriate. The prisoner's story, one concludes, is his ongoing reality; he has truly made the mind its own place, and that place is Chillon. So while these poems are in no sense incomplete as works of art, neither do they provide the surety of self-containment. As sequences, they suggest further steps: to solve the mystery, to find the secret, to realize the future. Most important, they suggest that one survives the crises of life by telling or testifying--by imagining and by composing one's imaginings moment by moment.

As the author of these fictions, Byron was akin (as Blake seems to have seen[6]) to the figure of the Old Testament prophet, whose mission was partly to have visions--predictive and otherwise--but primarily to correct and instruct. We get a glimpse of mystery leading to prophecy

in Mazeppa's exhortation of his comrades (which is a prophecy of uncertainty: "What mortal may his own doom guess?"). We have already noted a similar phenomenon in the last speeches of Faliero and Sardanapalus, after they are cut from the body of society. And we can find a paradigm, as before, in "Churchill's Grave," in which the narrator abandons the lyric-memorial mode for a less mediated bargaining with future readers.

Mystery prepares for prophecy, then, in several ways. As expressed in a ritual narrative, it invites the participation of others, under the guidance of a narrator who is both priest and sacrifice. By seeking, and momentarily subsiding into, the contemplative (which is not quite silence), at the moment when the mythology is complete but not yet closed, the narrator is made capable of statements of broader scope. More, in stripping consciousness of its irrelevant equippage, the experience of mystery compels those statements: when the past is revealed as a figment or a by-product of human thought, and the present as wholly unrealized and inarticulate, then there is only language left--language which may draw the subject/writer into a new configuration and a new beginning. This use of language is a tenuous and dangerous substratum of existence--it is the "prying into the abyss" that the narrator of Childe Harold writes of--but it is the only use which has not been "rendered" vain and illusory by proximity to the inhuman.

The scene of instruction is reconstituted. Mazeppa leaves the school wherein he learned to ride and teaches others of the uncertainty of the future. The prisoner, from long communion with his own mind, becomes the source of his own imprisonment. The narrator of "Churchill's Grave" turns from the Sexton's homily to his own instruction of the readers--from lyric to a version of the didactic.

Cain accepts all responsibility and becomes an embodiment of mystery;

he absorbs the family romance into the tragedy. And if we examine the sequence of thinking implied by all these poems, then such blurring of generic boundaries is to be expected: it's inherent in the argument. In a sequence in which the acceptance of responsibility is the same as becoming one's own parent--the same as giving birth to oneself--it is not surprising that romance and tragedy are indistinct, that Mazeppa and Bonnivard are both winter and summer, snow and flame. In Mazeppa, this blurring proceeds from the double perspective we found: Mazeppa is the father who is sure he exists because of the memory of the son he was. The father in the present exists because he gives birth to himself in the narration of the past. And this is obviously not something that can be achieved once for all, but a process to which the unstable subject must continually rededicate himself. Existence in the present cannot simply be found; it must be created and sustained.

For again, the mysteries are not all about death, nor yet all about survival, though these are the matter of the instruction. They are about the puzzling ephemerality of human consciousness, and about the two ways we constitute ourselves in our perception of time. Time may be perceived as the passage of present moments into the past; this is the perception which in the historical tragedies creates history, and in Cain brings death into the world. It is the perception which looks back on the parent as model, and makes independence a form of murder. But the mysteries introduce a second possibility, and a perception of time as the clarification of the unwieldy past as we move ourselves beyond it toward a realization of the future. The crisis of the mysteries, as I finally understand them, is between these two perceptions of time; and the struggle of the protagonists is to release their hold on the spatial and earthly and assume their full, true status as beings in time--not complete,

not yet fully realized, byt not bound to the past except by a longing for certainty. The mystery poems focus on the moment when the unknown and inhuman becomes humanized, and partly formed by human activity. And they ground a style of utterance or articulation--which will be our study from this point on--which signals the emergence of the second sort of perception of time.

Notes

[1] Michael G, Cooke has taken special note of how "evasive" the answers of Lucifer are; see Blind Man, p. 75ff.

[2] Marshall, Structure, p. 137.

[3] Leslie Brisman, Romantic Origins (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 106-7.

[4] Byron uses this term in the well-known letter to Murray of November 3, 1821, in which he also claims that the object of Lucifer is to depress Cain "still further in his own estimation than he was before, by showing him infinite things and his own abasement, till he falls into the frame of mind which leads to the Catastrophe, from mere internal irritation, not premeditation, or envy of Abel . . . but from the rage and fury against the inadequacy of his state to his conceptions . . ."

[5] The concept is developed in Blind Man, Chapter Six, passim.

[6] I refer, of course, to Blake's dedication of "The Ghost of Abel" to "Lord Byron, In the Wilderness."

Chapter V

Part iii.

The Monologues

We saw in the last section how some modes of narration and stylistic devices are associated with modes and styles of thought; and how the use of and attitudes toward using language reflect the motivation of some characters (that is, how certain uses of language are part of the projects that Byron sets these characters to work on): the prisoner uses language to hold himself in a steady relation to the past--to keep intact the chain that connects him to his story without being drawn back and overcome by it. Mazeppa, in a similar way but with a more defininte goal, uses his narration to build up a deeper sense of himself in the moment of the telling: his articulation and sharpening of details is ritualistic, like Bonnivard's, but it commemorates Bonnivard's hopes, not his perpetual defeat. Mazeppa's tale is a little celebration he holds for himself.) In the language of Cain we can see some of the same aspects, developed more slowly and in greater detail; Cain demonstrates the imagined beginning of a style of language that occurs in the other two poems and may be found throughout Byron's work, especially whenever there is some matter to be overcome, some argument to be pursued: it is the style of a materialist trying to break out of materailism--questioning the world, binding himself to the need for answers. Cain first, the rest of us later, face the temptation of believing that the voices answer from the outside. Bonnivard barely survives his struggle with the imagery of the cell; Mazeppa does

better controlling the significance of the passage of his life into the stroy of his three-day ride.

Considered from this point of view, as uses of languge, the styles associated with these characters and their experiences are analytical styles: they proceed by way of problem and solution (that is, from the narration of a problem toward a formal or structural solution; that is the sort of narration they are--suspense narration). An answer is promised and pursued, though the revelation at the end of each, and of "Churchill's Grave," is not varying degrees unsatisfactory, and in none of the four is it the promised or expected answer. The working out of the plot involves the assertion and modification of identities, the identities of figures and between mental and material processes. The poems tend toward such assertions: Cain's analytical question of the form "What is death?" open the way for any number of self-evident and unhelpful propositions from Lucifer. The answers all four protagonists seek are in the vicinity of death--at times, for all practical purposes, identical to death; and so plot structures are, as we may say, allegorical of analysis. The poems each tell a story about a mind's approach of the unknown, about the characters' growing awareness that their answers are bound up with theer ends, and about their resolve to press forward anyway, the need for answers momentarily overcoming the fear of being answered.

I referred briefly to the sense in which each of these poems is nevertheless inconclusive--that is, how each suggests that it is part of a larger cycle of mystery and demystification, one sequence in a longer sequence. I want to continue that thought in this section, and turn gradually to focus on a cluster of stylistic and transitional devices that seem to me to come next in this sequence, and to form a reconstructive counterpart to the analytical mysteries. I want to make an association between these

two groups of poems, if I can, without suggesting any broader generic unity among them than has been noted by many readers. Marchand, for instance, outlines similarities among works he calls the "speculative dramas": Cain, Heaven and Earth, Manfred, The Deformed Transformed. To these plays I would add some narrations and monologues, as lacking only formally distinct voices of being speculative drama. And I would not altogether exclude any of Byron's historical plays, which, as we saw in Chapter IV, move into similar cycles of language use and language failure. In fact, I think the arc of ideas first noted in "Churchill's Grave" is illuminating for all of Byron's poetry; and the mysteries or speculative works become more pointedly intellectual (and less isolated in Byron's canon) when looked back at through some poems and styles which evolve out of the same concerns, but set out in a new direction.

In the argument of "Churchill's Grave," that new direction was signalled by the arrival of a new style of writing, a style liberated from the necessity of re-imaging the past. Of the mysteries I wrote that an analogous step for some characters, involving an experience (or a composed memory) of symbolic death, is a preparation for a more controlled apprehension of the world, and in some ways a more ego-centric apprehension. Now we will move into a group of poems in which the new styles and the new control are let a larger space and a freer hand--poems in which the arguments assume or work out their independence, and poems which set themselves the task of reconstructing a world broken dowm by analysis.

Some passages of "The Dream" suggest that the degree of ego-centrism required for independence is neither easy nor especially desirable, and that it is not an end in itself but rather a defense against the illusions of perception. The narrator argues himself closer to this position in the first stanza. But he begins uncertain of the status of dreams, and of

his dream in particular; note his attempt to set out what he knows about dreams in simple, conjoined assertions:

> Our life is two-fold: Sleep hath its own world,
> A boundary between the things misnamed
> Death and existence: Sleep hath its own world,
> And a wide realm of wild reality.
> And dreams in their development have breath,
> And tears, and tortures, and the touch of joy;
> They leave a weight upon our waking thoughts,
> They take a weight from off our waking toils,
> They do divide our being; they become
> A portion of ourselves as of our time,
> And look like heralds of eternity;
> The pass like spirits of the past,--they speak
> Like Siblys of the future:
>
> (11. 1-13)

Dreams begin in the sleeping mind, but they come to have an effect on the substance, the weight, of our waking thoughts and toils. In their elaboration (their "development") they take on aspects of our familiar reality--breath, tears, etc.--to that we become uncertain of the boundary between them and ourselves, and even of whether they are a memory of the past or a portent of the future: they become "A portion of ourselves as of our time."

The narrator tries to reach at least a temporary conclusion, a premise. He poses a series of questions deriving from the opening assertions, and his indirect answer forms an introduction to the dream which is the immediate object of his speculation:

> They make us what we were not--what they will,
> And shake us with the vision that's gone by,
> The dread of vanish'd shadows--Are they so?
> Is not the past all shadow?--What are they?
> Creations of the mind?--The mind can make
> Substance, and people planets of its own
> With beings brighter that have been, and give
> A breath to forms which can outlive all flesh.
> I would recall a vision which I dream'd
> Perchance in sleep--for in itself a thought,
> A slumbering thought, is capable of years,
> And curdles a long life into one hour.
>
> (11. 15-26)

This sequence of doubt and indirect assertion is repeated in varying lengths at several points in the poem. The narrator stops at times to question the meaning of what he sees, as if he were quite outside the events he narrates; of the Boy: "He sate him down, and seized a pen, and traced/ Words I could not guess of;" (ll. 81-82); of the Lady: "What could her grief be?" (l. 136). But these apparent expressions of surprise or wonder at the dream are joined by other, more obviously rhetorical questions; of the memories that crowd in upon the Boy "And thrust themselves between him and the light:/What business had they there at such a time?" (ll. 165-66); and by a question that leads him to what he senses, perhaps hopes, can be said of the dream:

> the wise
> Have a far deeper madness, and the glance
> Of melancholy is a fearful gift;
> What is it but the telescope of truth?
> Which strips the distance of its fancies,
> And brings life near in utter nakedness,
> Making cold reality too real!
>
> (ll. 177-83)

This is a notion that we have seen elsewhere applied to poetry--that it is more real than commonsense reality because it outlives the present moment and extends into the future. Here it is linked rather to wisdom, and especially, as in ll. 25-26, with the concept of condensation--the selection of essential features, illustrated by the dream itself (the "beings brighter than have been" of line 21 and the "Two beings in the hues of youth" with which Stanza II opens).

But the answer given in lines 177-83 to the question of the reality of dream visions is held in abeyance through most of that story--a story especially relevant to the narrator because it describes the departure from commonsense reality of the two characters, as the narrator's own doubt is analyzed and argued through, and as the distinction between recollection and creation becomes more difficult to maintain.

> A change came over the spirit of my dream.
> The Boy was grown to manhood: in the wilds
> Of fiery climes he made himself a home,
> And his soul drank their sunbeams: he was girt
> With strange and dusky aspects; he was not
> Himself like what he had been; on the sea
> And on the shore he was a wanderer.
> There was a mass of many images
> Crowded like waves upon me, but he was
> A part of all;
>
> (11. 1-5-14)

This passage seems to me part of the general cycle of the poem from passivity (giving way before the vision) into activity (trying to sort or make sense of it), as also of answers and questions, a cycle announced more strongly than is usual in Byron, in the repeated opening line "A change came o'er the spirit of my dream" (in which he claims the dream but denies control over it in the passive predicate). That refrain makes a new and abrupt beginning for each of the scenes, and, serving as a purely formalized transition, does away with the necessity of specifying any further logic or motive among them: the narrator is signalling that he, too, is not what he had been. It is in part that loss that puts the narrator ill at ease with his dream, that makes him question whether it is a true memory (of the past) or a creation of the mind (in the present). Loss has the same effect on the characters. At the marriage of the Boy (now called the "Wanderer"),

> all things reel'd around him; he could see
> Not that which was, not that which should have been--
> But the old mansion, the accustom'd hall,
> And the remembered chambers . . .
>
> (11. 158-61)

and other images from Stanzas I and II. The Lady's fate is substantially the same--to be preyed on by "a spectre of the past" (1. 143)--though in her case the world calls it madness, and eventually it does look like madness:

> Had wander'd far from its dwelling, and her eyes
> They had not their own lustre, but the look
> Which is not of this earth; she was become
> The queen of a fantastic realm; her thoughts
> Were combinations of disjointed things;
>
> (11. 169-74)

The Boy wanders in person; the Lady mentally. The narrator sympathizes with both: the "combinations of disjointed things" are like the mass of images that crowd upon the narrator in line 112. And,

> this the world calls frenzy; but the wise
> Have a far deeper madness, and the glance
> Of melancholy is a fearful gift;
>
> (11. 177-79)

and so on. The end of wandering is contact with a deeper or nearer reality, invisible to others. Concluding the metaphor of wandering, the narrator returns to the Boy in the penultimate stanza.

> A change came o'er the spirit of my dream.
> The Wanderer was alone as heretofore,
> The beings which surrounded him were gone,
> Or were at war with him; he was a mark
> For blight and desolation, compass'd round
> With Hatred and Contention; Pain was mix'd
> In all which was served up to him, until,
> Like to the Pontic monarch of old days,
> He fed on poisons, and they had no power,
> But were a kind of nutriment; he lived
> Through that which had been death to many men,
> And made him friends of mountains: with the stars
> He held his dialogues; and they did teach
> To him the magic of their mysteries;
> To him the book of Night was open'd wide,
> And voices from the deep abyss reveal'd
> A marvel and a secret--Be it so.
>
> (11. 184-201)

This character becomes part of that group of Byronic heroes and narrators who pass through the reduced state of consciousness-in-the-presence-of-mystery--"which had been death to many men"--and enter into participation with the mysterious. This involves for him, as for the narrator of "Churchill's Grave," the closing off of old dialogues and the initiation of new. Like Cain's and Mazeppa's, his is an experience of instruction ("they did teach/To him," above, an echo of the earlier "Time taught him a deep

answer" of line 70). As for all of the characters treated in the previous section, the characters we meet in "The Dream" and the narrator of "The Dream" survive death or some similarly clarifying, death-like experience; and this is followed by a revelation of an invisible reality or an invisible structure of commonsense reality.

Byron closes the poem quickly after this.

> My dream was past; it had no further change.
> It was of a strange order, that the doom
> Of these two creatures should be thus traced out
> Almost like a reality--the one
> To end in madness--both in misery.
>
> (11. 202-206)

This sketchy ending suggests, I think, that the main motives of the poem have been concluded, and that no final pronouncement is necessary as an end frame. If the narrator is in fact the Boy in the vision (if this is truly a memory of the past), then the significance of this present recital has already been explained (at the ends ot Stanzas VII and VIII: he is recounting the essential or naked truth of his past, reforming it from a commonsense set of facts into a set of mysterious voices--that is, he is watching himself in a detached or dramatized past). Some affinity, at least, exists between the narrator and the Boy. But the last stanza serves to pull away from the characters, to establish the narrator in some new present, consigning the dream to the "past" of line 202. And the phrase "strange order" in Stanza IX sets off the unexpected use of "Be it so" in the preceding stanza, both suggesting that the narrator has come forward to participate in his own mystery, the mystery of his dream. If we follow the sentence out of which it arises, "Be it so" applies to the marvel and the secret revealed by the voices from the abyss--an existential affirmation of the mystery by the participant. Also, obviously, it is a variant of "Amen," and so suggests that the vision is prayer-like or ritualistic, or becomes so at this point. At any rate, it is the

strongest indication in the poem that the narrator, whoever he is, lays claim to the vision as his own; and not only claims it as his creation (he rests, perhaps still tentatively, with the decision that his characters are two "creatures"), but also wills it to happen; "Be it so" wills the vision retrospectively from that present tense moment in the poem.

We are left, then, with the idea that though a dream may begin as something which happens to one, it becomes in the end an action, something one does (or, in this poem, claims for oneself; it may be that the dream seems more real to the dreamer as he elaborates it, lending it his perceptions and moods). This assertion of activity is correlative to, in several poems we have discussed, and coeval with the subject's penetration of mystery: mysteries may begin or originally exist apart from the ndividual; but in most of Byron's poems a crucial turn in the character's experience of mystery is the eventual attempt of the subject to take it over for his or her own. We can look back and see the prisoner doing this--or rather, watch it happening to him: Bonnivard is overwhelmed by and passive before (we might say, unconscious of) this psychological process; the attempt to know death becomes in Bonnivard a morbid fascination with death. Mazeppa is more deliberate and controlled: he approaches what he doesn't understand (his own passing away); he tries to get next to the nystery, or to pretend he's gotten beyond it. That next step is associated, too, I will try to show, with the blurring of the border between character (both characters, in "The Dream") and narrator, which may also be seen in "The Curse of Miverva" and Childe Harold.

"The Dream" proceeds by way of proposition and affirmation, in parallel with question and answer. It is argumentative in this sense, that it posits scenes and then tacitly affirms them by elaborating them. Several poems written in 1816 are of this sort. "Darkness," I think,

is much the same, though the vision is claimed explicitly only once, and disclaimed at the same moment: "I had a dream, which was not all a dream" (a line which functions much like "A change came o'er the spirit of my dream"). The famous passages from the "Epistle to Augusta" are also claims of ownership--"I have been cunning in mine overthrow,/The careful pilot of my proper woe"; "Mine were the faults, mine be their reward." (Sts. III, IV) But none of the confessions to his sister is as clear or unambiguous as is usually thought. There is some overlapping of past and present, in the manner of "Childish Recollections" (as the Swiss landscape reminds Byron of Newstead):

> 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.
>
> (St. VII)

Such images come upon him without his will. But there are also reminders that his imagination is powerful and can trick him:

> Oh that thou wert but with me!--but I grow
> The fool of my own wishes, and forget
> The solitude which I have vaunted so
> Has lost its praise in this but one regret;
> There may be others which I less may show;--
> I am not of the plaintive mood, and yet
> I feel an ebb in my philosophy,
> And the tide rising in my alter'd eye.
>
> (St. IX)

There is eventually a measure of control over his imagination; along with taking responsibility for what has happened, he is able to exert his will over most of memory:

> I can reduce all tfeelings but this one;
> And that I would not;--for at length I see
> Such scenes as those wherein my life begun.
>
> (St. XII)

The past is generally under the control of his "alter'd eye."

> And for the future, this world's future may
> From me demand by little of my care;
> I have outlived myself by many a day;
> Having survived so many things that were;
>
> (St. XIV)

As elsewhere, survival is a key concept. Here his having survived releases him from worry about "this world"; earlier he has decided that he will not punish himself with the past:

> And I at times have found the struggle hard,
> And thought of shaking off my bonds of clay:
> But now I would fain for a time survive,
> If but to see what next can well arrive.
>
> (St. IV)

And later, more positively, "The world is all before me."

In the "Epistle," as in many of Byron's late lyrics, the past is "reduced" to a proposition in an argument on his own feelings. I think that, for reasons given throughout this chapter, that reduction is more characteristically Byronic than the elaboration of scenes in "The Dream." It is also characteristic that such propositions, arranged in sequences, lead to admissions of responsibility, and often, in the late works, to claims of authorship. Where the choice is between believing that the vision is a true memory of the past or a "creation of the mind," Byron comes to tend toward the latter. I have already cited the "Lines On Hearing That Lady Byron Was Ill" as an instance of Byron's use of conjoined assertions to establish himself at the center of the material. In the present context we can see too that the answer he makes to his own rhetorical question is a quite extensive claim on the whole property.

> And thou wert sad--yet I was not with thee;
> And thou wert sick, and yet I was not near;
> Methought that joy and health alone could be
> Where I was <u>not</u>--and pain and sorrow here!
> And is it thus?--it is as I foretold . . .
>
> (ll. 1-5)

Here, perhaps too quick to be otherwise noticeable, he begins to think inferentially ("Methought, etc.") then moves immediately to claim complete

knowledge, though a knowledge in general propositions, not of concrete, detailed scenes.

There is also an interesting example from three years later, the "Ode on Venice," showing some development of his use of the imagination to realize the unknown in a personalized way--that is, to infer the external from the internal. First, compare this opening to the first of the "Lines On Hearing That Lady Byron Was Ill":

> Oh Venice! Venice! when thy marble walls
> Are level with the waters, there shall be
> A cry of nations o'er thy sunken halls,
> A loud lament along the sweeping sea!
> If I, a northern wanderer, weep for thee,
> What should thy sons do?--anything but weep:
>
> (11. 1-6)

He begins in his first inference of the future here, foretelling his material rather than first building, then claiming it (this may be one sense in which he is a wanderer--that is, in time--as in "The Dream"). And he poses his rhetorical question, not from a base of conjoined assertions, but from a complex sentence specifying a time (the first four lines). I will cite another complete assertion from the "Ode," also a temporal specification, nine-tenths of which is an elaborated relative clause. Note the turn inward which begins at the question of time, after "in their last decay,/When . . .":

> But these are better than the gloomy errors,
> The weeds of nations in their last decay,
> When Vice walks forth with her unsoften'd terrors,
> And Mirth is madness, and smiles but to slay;
> And Hope is nothing but a false delay,
> The sick man's lightning half an hour ere death,
> When Faintness, the last mortal birth of Pain,
> And apathy of limb, the dull beginning
> Of the cold staggering race which Death is winning,
> Steals vein by vein and pulse by pulse away;
> Yet so relieving the o'er-tortured clay,
> To him appears renewal of his breath,
> And freedom the mere numbness of his chain;
> And then he talks of life, and how again
> He feels his spirit soaring--albeit weak,

> And of the fresher air, which he would seek:
> And as he whispers knows not that he gasps,
> That his thin finger knows not what it clasps,
> And so the film comes o'er him, and the dizzy
> Chamber swims round and round, and shadows busy,
> At which he vainly catches, flit and gleam,
> Till the last rattle chokes the strangled scream,
> And all is ice and blackness,--and the earth
> That which is was the moment ere our birth.
>
> (11. 33-55)

By the end of the sentence he is no longer saying much that has to do with Venice or history; or rather, what he says he knows of Venice in history, he knows by way of imagining his own sensations at the moment of death. We have no reason not to take his word that Venice is the inspiration of the poem; at some point (though that point need not be explicitly represented in the poem) he began with Venice, the city in Italy; but he comes round to Venice the mood, or Venice the metaphor of the individual.

"The Lament of Tasso" is another of these recognizably Byronic monologues, working more with ideas than with images, imagery becoming subservient or secondary to the argument by propositions--a poem whose continuity is not primarily temporal or spatial (as in Mazeppa and The Prisoner of Chillon) but is of a slightly different order, an order applicable to several of Byron's poems. This particular logic, or principle of structure, is encapsulated in the variable phrase "The world is all before me." In the "Epistle to Augusta," the phrase suggests a turning away from memories of the past toward unrealized possibilities. In Don Juan,

> The world is all before me--or behind;
> For I have seen a portion of that same,
> And quite enough for me to keep in mind;
>
> (XIV, st. 9)

the phrase has evolved into specific reference to the power of the mind to "keep" the world. In the "Lament" we can see a transition between the two, in the recognition that a recreated world shares much in common

with commonsense reality.

> Perchance in such a cell we suffer more
> Than the wreck'd sailor on his desert shore;
> The world is all before him--mine is here,
> Scarce twice the space they must accord my bier.
>
> (ll. 181-84)

The stage on which the "Lament" is played out is inward, and to the degree that its "actions" or "events" are psychological events, the poem dispenses with scenes and imagery drawn from the past, the world prior to the vision, and moves toward a recreation of that world--but with the difference, of course, that this composed memory of the world is the world as Tasso would have it, a world which revolves around his idea of himself or his idealized self. Tasso shows many of Bonnivard's symptoms. But Bonnivard's guilt compels him to recreate the death of his family so as to include his own death; Bonnivard feels pushed along by his recollections. Tasso, though perhaps nonetheless obsessive, is aware as artists are aware that his recollections are within his control, and that he is the source of his visions. The "Lament" is more in the spirit of the "Sonnet on Chillon," and Tasso is a character who uses his imagination to break the chains of the mind.

> All this hath somewhat worn me, and may wear,
> But must be borne. 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 . . .
>
> (ll. 19-22)

This he has done in two ways: by employing his time writing Jerusalem Delivered:

> My long-sustaining friend of many years!
> If I do blot thy final page with tears,
> Know, that my sorrows have wrung from me none.
> But thou, my young creation! my soul's child!
> Which ever playing round me came and smiled,
> And woo'd me from myself with thy sweet sight,
> Thou too art gone--and so is my delight:
>
> (ll. 34-40)

and by recreating Leonora, in another sight of his own making, and as we shall see, another creation which takes him from himself:

> But let them go or torture as they will,
> My heart can multiply thine image still;
> Successful love can sate itself away;
> The wretched are the faithful; 'tis their fate
> To have all feeling, save the one, decay,
> And every passion save the one dilate,
> As rapid rivers into oceans pour;
>
> (11. 57-63)

The last three lines are reminiscient of the "Epistle to Augusta," and the passage beginning "I can reduce all feelings but this one"--and that one feeling (whatever else it is; Byron calls it love with regularity) is not ungovernable. Rather the reverse, it is something he and Tasso take control of; in both poems it is a result of the narrator's activity, and is allied to the power of writing poetry (though the control is less strongly emphasized in the "Epistle," in which the narrator claims to be bound to certain images surrounding the memory of Augusta; in "The Dream," through most of which he claims to be passive before the imagery, control is only ambiguously hinted).

This relative freedom from constraints is so even though the poem employs a variant of the question and answer format. But that format is more fully rhetorical or discursive here than in "The Dream": and the difficulty The narrator of "Churchill's Grave" had--that asking a question may suspend or interrupt the course of the poem: if complex questions go unanswered, they divert attention to themselves--is not a problem for Tasso, in the following statement of the injustices do to him, for instance (the sequence of questions actually begins earlier in Stanza IV, at line 82):

> Feel not I wroth with those who placed me here?
> Who have debased me in the minds of men,
> Debarring me the usage of my own,
> Blighting my life in best of my career,

> Branding my thoughts as things to shun and fear?
> Would I not pay them back these pangs again,
> And teach them inward Sorrow's stifled groan?
> The struggle to be calm, and cold distress,
> Which undermines our Stoical success?
> No! still too proud to be vindictive--I
> Have pardon'd princes' insults, and would die.
>
> (11. 95-105)

This statement is the easier for Tasso to answer, to stamp in this fashion, because his rendition of the facts all proceeds from his own feelings; it is, as we might say, a biased rendering of the facts; it has not much to do with the world outside himself. With equal efficiency he goes on to stamp another set of propositions, implicit in the first, making an answer to Leonora (since she never does answer for herself):

> Yes, Sister of my Sovereign! for thy sake
> I weed all bitterness from out my breast,
> It hath no business where <u>thou</u> art a guest:
>
> (11. 106-8)

The "No" and "Yes" in this passage are not entirely interchangeable, but they are used for the same purpose: to fix, we could even say, to affirm, as set of propositions about the world he has recreated in the cell of his mind. For he has forgotten or is trying to forget most of that old world--"I had forgotten half I would forget,/But it revives." (11. 79-80) In lines which are, like 6-61, part of a cycle of returning to the multiplied image of Leonora as the object of love and devotion, he repeats his sense of himself as condensed to a single emotion, and, implicating Leonora, blames this need to love for his depature from earthly things--his profound rejection of the physical world:

> the whole heart exhaled into One Want,
> But undefined and wandering, till the day
> I found the thing I sought--and that was thee;
> And then I lost my being, all to be
> Absorbed in thine; the world was past away;
> <u>Thou</u> didst annililate the world to me!
>
> (11. 168-73)

Tasso is another character who "wanders" away from commonsense reality

As I implied at the outset of this section, what I find most interesting about such personalist, ego-centric discourse as we see in the "Lament" and the "Ode on Venice" is its evolution into language used for a definite and almost tangible purpose: language which has an immediate purpose, an effect on the narrator's present condition. It is one thing to recognize, as many readers have, that in "The Lament of Tasso" and "The Prophecy of Dante" Byron is trying to give a poetic rendition of thinking. The Prisoner of Chillon is often interpreted this way too, and the same could be said of many lyrics. But to this skill at portraying the mind in action, we can add a motive and and end, for the "Lament," the "Ode on Venice," and "The Prophecy of Dante"; for parts of Childe Harold and, as I will argue in the next chapter, for parts of Don Juan; we can add a positive and a negative motive (a fear and a goal) and a principle of progress that underlies the pattern of questions and answers: first, to realize the subject in the material--to realize himself, where the world has not been an adequate setting for that realization (the world requires compromises; visions do not), and which realizations are structured into poems in sequences which ask if a number of conditions are the case, and then in sweeping claims affirm that all that and more is the case, or none of it; and second, in that discourse to embellish and elaborate the single feeling of the subject/writer until that feeling, in its many aspects and colors, takes on aspects of the forgotten world, and even takes on spatial and temporal aspects. And this recreated world is like enough to the world as it exists in memory that there is the danger of confounding them. The prisoner is an example of this process gone awry, toward madness, a confounding of past and present. The same happens to the Lady in "The Dream," though her madness is described from without, Bonnivard's from within. The Boy in "The Dream" outdistances madness by generalizing

his thinking (speaking to mountains is a way of projecting his pain away from him). Tasso and Dante particularize, though Byron suggests that Tasso may be going down the same road as the Lady:

> Yet do I feel at times my mind decline,
> But with a sense of its decay: I see
> Unwonted lights along my prison shine
> And a strange demon, who is vexing me
> With pilfering pranks and petty pains below
> The feeling of the healthful and the free;
>
> (11. 189-94)

The symptom of madness is the inability to know the demon, or to feel himself as the source of the demon. But all that on which he is still able to fix his attention, Tasso claims: So let it be." (l. 77) And of the effectiveness of his language, his writing in particular, he has no doubt at all; he ends his monologue with another mark of ownership, another "Yes" to Leonora:

> But Thou--when all that Birth and Beauty throws
> Of magic round thee is extinct--shalt have
> One half the laurel which o'ershades my grave.
> No power in death can tear our names apart,
> As none in life could rend thee from my heart.
> Yes, Leonora! it shall be our fate
> To be entwined for ever--but too late!
>
> (11. 241-47)

The two ideas cross over and over in the "Lament": that what he proposes can be made true, or is true if proposed in the right way; and that he is therefore (especially in the careful propositions of his writing) the source of a truer or a more permanent reality.

"The Prophecy of Dante" is probably the most complete expression of the set of uses of language we have been finding in these monologues: of confession which does away with the need for expiation; of the imposition of the subject on the memory of the world; of arguing forward, that is, proposing conditions which are immediately affirmed. In the "Prophecy" this visionary style of discourse is expanded to a large number of purposes, motives, and desires, From the very beginning, Dante uses language

to propose and solve problems: at "My earthly sorrows," here, be begins to lift himself up again:

> Once more in man's frail world! which I had left
> So long that 'twas forgotten; and I feel
> The weight of clay again,--too soon bereft
> Of the immortal vision which could heal
> My earthly sorrows, and to God's own skies
> Lift me from that deep gulf without repeal,
> Where late my ears rung with the damned cries
> Of souls in hopeless bale; and from that place
> Of lesser torment, whence men may arise
> Pure from the fire to join the angelic race;
> Midst whom my own bright Beatrice bless'd
> My spirit with her light; and to the base
> Of the eternal Triad! first, last, best,
> Mysterious, three, sole, infinite, great God!
>
> (11. 1014)

Whatever the nature of the Divine Comedy, this "vision" of the immortal is of Dante's own device, built up by him clause by clause as he contemplates his own creative power. The emphasis here and throughout the "Prophecy" is on Dante's complete self-sufficeincy, his ability to support and pursue his thinking without renewal from any external source. Like Tasso, he can multiply the one beloved image: Beatrice, "bright/Still in these dim old eyes." (I, 11. 3031) Like Marino Faliero and the narrator of "Churchill's Grave," proximity to death enables him, as Faliero puts is, to "stand within eternity, and see/Into eternity." For all three characters, this recognition causes a certain amount of detachment and generalization in thought; in Faliero and Dante, assertions of detachment from Venice and from Florence may be laid partly to the fact the neither character has any choice left in the matter: as with death, exile may be claimed because it cannot be avoided. The visionary monologues of each arise from a similar context of separation from the body of society. But Faliero's remains for the most part the last efforts of a dying man; the truth he speaks is a kind of deathbed confession: "true words are things,/ And dying men's are things which long outlive,/And oftentimes avenge them."

Dante is a dying man too: "I but foretell thy fortunes--then expire." (III, l. 30) But his exile is broader than Faliero's: "I am not of this people, nor this age," (I, l. 143) And his more general detachment enables him to achieve a much greater range:

> The Spirit of the fervent days of Old,
> When words were things which came to pass, and thought
> Flash'd o'er the future, bidding men behold
> Their children's children's doom already brought
> Forth from the abyss of time which is to be
> The chaos of events, where lie half-wrought
> Shapes that must undergo mortality;
> What the great Seers of Israel wore within,
> That spirit was on them, and is on me . . .
>
> (II, ll. 1-9)

As I have noted, however, that spirit is of a more secular and poetical sort than a true enthusiasm. For all Dante's professed devotion (though there is no reason to think it ungenuine) his God does not figure prominently in the poem beyond the opening eighteen lines--or rather, God becomes an accompanying figure in Dante's thinking, as in the following moment of temporary loss of control:

> And yet being mortal still have no repose
> But on the pillow of Revenge--Revenge,
> Who sleeps to dream of blood, and waking glows
> With the oft-baffled slakeless thirst of change,
> When we shall mount again, and they that trod
> Be trampled on, while Death and Ate range
> O'er humbled heads and sever'd necks--Great God!
> Take these thoughts from me--
>
> (I, ll. 112-19)

Or as in the following opening of Canto II, in which Dante follows his customary pattern of glimpsing the future, thinking the divine, but coming round to his humble self:

> I cannot all record
> That crowds on my prophetic eye: the earth
> And ocean written o'er would not afford
> Space for the annal, yet it shall go forth;
> Yes, all, though not by human pen, is graven,
> There where the farthest suns and stars have birth,
> Spread like a banner at the gate of heaven,
> The bloody scroll of our millenial wrongs
> Waves, and the echo of our groans is driven

Athwart the sound of archangelic songs,
  And Italy, the martyr'd nation's gore,
  Will not in vain arise to where belongs
Omnipotence and mercy evermore:
  Like to the harp-string stricken by the wind,
  The sound of her lament shall, rising o'er
The seraph voices, touch the Almighty Mind.
  Meantime.I, humblest of thy sons, and of
  Earth's dust by immortality refined
To sense and suffering, though the vain may scoff,
  And tyrants threat, and meeker victims bow
  Before the storm because its breath is rough,
To thee, my country! whom before, as now,
  I loved and love, devote the mournful lyre
  And melancholy gift high powers allow
To read the future;

(III, 11. 5-28)

It's clear enough here that Dante is claiming to recreate the writing of heaven (that writing in which the "suns and stars" have their origin) and that likewise the sounds of his own "lyre" are those of the "harp-string" of martyred Italy. Less obvious, until we can see this discourse as part of an implicit pattern of proposition and affirmation, is that his claim of divine inspiration is stylistically continuous with the creation or building up of the material throughout. That material becomes as if outside him; and it is not surprising in this context of thought that in the passage just cited the concept of the "Almighty Mind" leads Dante directly to himself, "humblest of thy sons."

Some of Dante's sense of himself as creative or originary can be read into such indirect commentaries on his activity: some, as above, are less direct, and must be traced to him or followed in the plot of the poem, as when he writes, for instance,

The storms yet sleep, the clouds still keep their station,
  The unborn earthquake yet is in the womb,
  The bloody chaos still expects creation,
But all things are disposing for thy doom;
  The elements await but for the word . . .

(II, 11. 40-44)

and then goes on to give some hundred lines of words on the decline of Italy. Elsewhere he is more explicit about his identity with the creative

power of language; and proceeding from that, in the following passage, he is confident that his language, his articulation of the European scene, will grow to comprise Europe as Rome did:

> my bones shall be within thy breast,
> My soul within thy language, which once set
> With our old Roman sway in the wide West;
> But I will make another tongue arise
> As lofty and more sweet, in which express'd
> The hero's ardour, or the lover's sighs,
> Shall find alike such sounds for every theme
> That every word, as brilliant as thy skies,
> Shall realise a poet's proudest dream,
> And make thee Europe's nightingale of song;
>
> (II, ii. 20-29)

The language which he here makes arise, the language which contains his soul, is protected in part by its futurity; or we could say that Byron protects Dante by putting him within a series of prophecies which Byron knew to be undeniable (and Dante is the more interesting character because he did, in a sense, pass into the vernacular language of Italy).

"My soul within thy language," Dante writes: the characterization of Dante as an arguing, a discursive being, makes it almost impossible to quote briefly from the poem: there are few brief assertions. Dante is rather extended at almost every point: in almost every sentence, as in those already cited, we can watch the argument moving from a proposition to Dante's recognition of his own implication in that proposition. And it is not only that Dante works to make his prophecies plausible; Faliero does that too. But Dante does not wait for death or a realization of death; instead, he tries to argue forward, to fulfill before his death some part of the prophecy he makes; as in this prophecy of Tasso: after Ariosto:

> The second, of a tenderer, sadder mood,
> Shall pour his soul out o'er Jerusalem;
> He, too, shall sing of arms, and Christian blood
> Shed where Christ bled for man; and his high harp
> Shall, by the willow over Jordan's flood,
> Revive a song of Sion, and the sharp

Conflict, and the final triumph of the brave,
And pious, and the strife of hell to warp
Their hearts from their great purpose, until wave
The red-cross banners where the first red Cross
Was crimson'd from his veins who died to save,
Shall be his sacred argument; the loss
Of years, of favour, freedom, even of fame
Contested for a time, while the smooth gloss
Of courts would slide o'er his forgotten name
And call captivity a kindness, meant
To shield him from insanity or shame,
Such shall be his meet guerdon! who was sent
To be Christ's Laureate--they reward him well!
Florence dooms me but death or banishment,
Ferrara him a pittance and a cell,
Harder to bear and less deserved, for I
Had stung the factions which I strove to quell;

(III. 11. 119-41)

The turn to himself and his conditions here should indicate that Dante has never been far from a prophecy of Tasso, that Tasso is a set of conditions that Dante lets emerge from himself. This again, though more recognizable now, is the pattern of Dante's prophecies: he names and elaborates his subject matter until it shares in the complexity and depth of his own personality and sense of himself. His prophecies are self-expression: monologues in which he projects himself on the future and transforms himself into another figure. In the last two citations he fulfills the conditions he sets out; he fulfills his own prophecies. That this prophetic spirit is one with the spirit of the argument as a whole is most clearly seen in the most famous passage in the poem; another long quote is necessary to see the full logic with which Dante puts his soul within the language, the confidence with which he joins himself to his material.

Many are poets but without the name,
For what is poesy but to create
From overfeeling good or ill; and aim
At an external life beyond our fate,

/here he begins to turn/

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 lavish'd his high gift in vain,
Lies chain'd to his lone rock by the seashore?
So be it: we can bear.

(IV, ll. 10-20)

Dante becomes an instance of his own generalizations, in just the way that he becomes Tasso, and in the same way that he argues himself into sympathy with ideas, places, and ages throughout the poem: by proposing or questioning, and then going on, not only to answer--in fact, seldom to answer directly--but to exemplify.

These sequences are drawn out in "The Prophecy of Dante" into long sentences, similar to those we've seen in "The Lanent of Tasso" and the "Ode on Venice." The slow evocation of the matter is also reminiscient of Childe Harold: elaborate noun clauses are allowed to stand independently, as predication is postponed. The following nineteen line noun clause is typical of Dante's discourse; and we can perhaps read a distant relation to the early apostrophic poems in this instance of the later Byron's creation of place:

Thou, Italy! whose ever golden fields,
Plough'd by the sunbeams solely, would suffice
For the world's granary; thou, whose sky heaven gilds
With brighter stars, and robes with deeper blue;
Thou, in whose pleasant places Summer builds
Her palace, in whose cradle, Empire grew,
And form'd the Eternal City's ornaments
From spoils of kings whom freemen overthrew;
Birthplace of heroes, sanctuary of saints,
Where earthly first, then heavenly glory made
Her home; thou, all which fondest fancy paints,
And finds her prior vision but portray'd
In feeble colours, when the eye--from the Alp
Of horrid snow, and rock, and shaggy shade
Of desert-loving pine, whose emerald scalp
Nods to the storm--dilates and dotes o'er thee,
And wistfully implores, as 'twere for help
To see thy sunny fields, my Italy,
Nearer and nearer yet, and dearer still
The more approach'd, and dearest were they free,
Thou--thou must wither to each tyrant's will:

(II, ll. 50-70)

The postponing, sometimes the obscuring, of predication in the "Prophecy"

serves two functions: it allows the recreation of the world the foremost position in the discourse, enabling the plausibility of the recreation to draw the subject/writer after it; and at the same time it postpones Dante's commitment to any single proposition comprising the vision--the predication which completes the noun clause in the last line indirectly affirms it all. And the claim that the picture fancy paints is feeble before the actual sight (which is in any case belied to the degree that Dante's rendering is vivid or convincing) is by the same postponement made to contribute to the depth of the evocation of Italy: for this is not a portrait or a description of what Italy looks like, but a set of conditions imposed on the idea of Italy, and traceable to a single consciousness which is aware that this ideal or essential Italy is not the same as Italy experienced. The "horrid snow, and rock, and shaggy shade" and so forth are not descriptions of nature, but of memory, and of the same order as the abstractions of "Summer," "Empire," and the "Eternal City."

Dante does not usually propose scenes, but conditions; his prophecies are of that sort. He becomes the places he writes of, as above he becomes Tasso or one of "the poets." The inference on Italy last cited is not unlike the comparison of Venice to a dying man in the "Ode on Venice" or Dante's prophecy of Tasso. All three passages, and others we have looked at in this section, arrange a long series of dependent noun phrases which become the elements in a larger proposal of subject matter--hypotheses summarily affirmed in a predication which treats the subject of the sentence as established beyond doubt: which cannot be doubted because it is never directly affirmed. And this structure, I think, reflects a recurrent sequence of thinking in which a central idea is held in the background of thought, without being specifically put into action (or predicated), while in the foreground the subject/writer elaborates various

of the idea--drawing on himself, his desires, and his inferences until the idea is sufficiently elaborated as to seem independent of the writer and his assertions (independent, that is, of any particular predication of affirmation). The constant implication of this sequence of thinking and the mutability of the narrator it enforces in the several poems under consideration is that neither poems nor prophecies happen to the subject or come at the subject from outside; they are rather activities, and they are born within, having only the most distant, memorial connection to nature; they begin after nature. Parallelling the structure of multiple hypothesis and affirmation we can see in each of these poems a purely subjective structure of motivation: a cycle which motivates both subject and discourse, and which moves first through a period of helplessness or lack of control (a very short period for Dante--Oh God! take these thoughts from me"; longer periods in "The Dream"); and then into a recognition of the presence of self in language (a recognition that one's visions proceed from the mind in action); and into an attempt to assert control, which is at the same time an admission of responsibility (and which impels Dante and Tasso and the narrator of "The Dream" to will what they have written: "So be it").

We have another way, then, of conceiving of the ego-centricity of some of Byron's characters and narrators: the closing off of the mind from externals is not just a detachment from the pain of the past (though it is that too), but also, as in "The Dream," a means of avoiding the illusions of perception, and to eliminate the interference of natural or temporal restraints upon the created world. In one important sense, such narrators are already their own material: when the writing begins they have already withdrawn to themselves; they don't start with nature but with memory; and the action of the poem is not action in the natural

world, but a step forward from that toward the action of the mind in understanding. In the poems I have been discussing here the action is even a step forward from that: it is the action of the mind in realizing its responsibility and its isolation in composing its own world. This strikes me also as an appropriate description of the discourse of Childe Harold. The following passage is often cited as a description of Byron's beliefs about the nature of poetry; if we read it also as an instance of poetry, as Byron encourages us to in "even as I do now," we can see that Childe Harold, here at least, moves in a cycle of varying control like the one I have been outlining:

> He, who grown aged in this world of woe,
> In deeds, not years, piercing the depths of life,
> So that no wonder waits him; nor below
> Can love or sorrow, fame, ambition, strife,
> Cut to his heart again with the keen knife
> Of silent, sharp endurance: 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.
>
> (III, st. 7)

Here is the crucial imagery of The Prisoner of Chillon, "The Lament of Tasso," "The Prophecy of Dante," and, less obviously, of Manfred and Don Juan, made explicitly allegorical: the body, a cave or cell; the mind in darkness, "seeing" only the airy images (the "beings brighter" of "The Dream"). The following stanza, though perhaps more skeptical than Dante will allow himself to be, nevertheless is reminiscient of Dante's belief that poetry issues from a need to "create/From overfeeling good or ill; and aim/At an external life beyond our fate." Note also how, as for Dante, the postponement of the predication of "He" in Stanza 5 allows the arrangement of conditions that the narrator can catch up with and fulfill:

> '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
Mix'd with thy spirit, blended with thy birth,
And feeling still with thee in my crush'd feelings' dearth.
(III, st. 6)

Gaining as they give the life they image is just what Dante and the narrator of the "Ode on Venice" do; and the narrator of Childe Harold here, like others we have seen, recognizes himself fundamentally in his poem: it is as if he is blended with the birth of the discourse. That recognition, in the next stanza, passes into a crisis of control. Compare this to Dante's "Great God!/Take these thoughts from me."

Yet I must 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:
And thus, untaught in youth my heart to tame,
My springs of life were poison'd. 'Tis too late!
Yet I am changed; though still enough the same
In strength to bear what time cannot abate,
And feed on bitter fruits without accusing Fate.

Something too much of this:--but now 'tis past,
And the spell closes with its silent seal.
(III, sts. 7-8)

He doesn't accuse fate, I presume, because he recognizes his own responsibility in all things, even in what's left of his memory of the past; he recognizes the activity of his brain, which is the cause of the crisis and the means of strength to subdue it--by pressing forward, by elaborating, by continuing to write about his thought until he's taken it over again. We dont know if God intervenes in Dante's thinking, but there is evidence enough that Dante can take care of himself--that like the narrator of Childe Harold in the passage just cited, he can wait out the period of uncontrol.

Another familiar motif running through these stanzas is the association of a certain kind of thinking with the consumption of poison.

Long and dark thought is bitter fruit for the narrator of Childe Harold above; two stanzas on, the dregs of life are wormwood for Harold himself; and for all of us, in Canto III, st. 34: "There is a very life in our despair,/Vitality of poison." And of the Wanderer of "The Dream," we recall:

> Like to the Pontic monarchs of old days,
> He fed on poisons, and they had no power,
> But were a kind of nutriment;
>
> (ll. 191-3)

To feed on poisons is to introspect, specifically to remember and recreate pain. In the larger context of Byron's poetry, it expresses a deep ambivalence about imaginative projects generally, an ambivalence we have seen in various forms throughout the canon. But we can also see now, in regard to these several narrators and characters (and I would include the Prisoner and Mazeppa), and more strongly than elsewhere, the sense in which this apparent pursuit of annihilation is necessary, and willed, to provide a constant setting of temporal control. For the point of the poisonous introspection is not to reach death, but just beyond it--to think or write as if death had been lived through. In the stanzas from Childe Harold above, the motive is to feel again after a dearth of feelings; to go through some period of partial self-extinction, thence to live a being more intense: an existence clarified of the irrelevant debris of memory, a being essentially human--not only close to the present, but a little bit ahead of it, ready for it, trying to take control of it. Or, in a slightly different expression of the same attempt, when Manfred regains control of himself in the Hall of Arimanes, a spirit says of him:

> see, he mastereth himself, and makes
> His torture tributary to his will.
>
> (II, iv. ll. 160-61)

This is very much in the spirit of the visionary monologues, as of some of the confessional monologues of Byron's middle years: to take control of that which can be mastered, or to find a way of willing that which cannot be

controlled. The mind is the setting; all thoughts are the actors, or the principles of action. Manfred describes his own state as a

> deep despair,
> Which is remorse without the fear of hell,
> But all in all sufficient to itself
>
> (III, i. ll. 70-2)

The monologues take on, if I may revive an obsolete term, aspects of the psychodramatic. The monologue is, latently, an interaction of voices or characters or characteristics, but it is one projected outward from a single origin--by a subject who has worked inferences upon memory or the fragments of memory until the inferences themselves are like the remembered world; until these airy images are seen as if bright against the surrounding darkness (which darkness is the unremembered or rejected background of the commonsense world). And the monologist is characterized by a cluster of features proceeding from his position along the line of his reconstructive argument (that is, in relation to his own inferential power): he takes on all the roles of the inference--he has already claimed them when the monologue begins--and becomes the voices which are as if outside; the monologist needs no further response from outside himself (and hence though the use of questions in Byron's poems remains a constant feature, the necessity of pausing over them fades); he is self-born, because born into his new, clarified existence in the articulation of his own thought. And finally, the monologist is one who takes Lucifer's advice to Cain, and forms an inner world in his own bosom, where the outward fails.

These shared characteristics lead me again to a sense of the monologues as instances of a particular use of language--or to a belief that language <u>can</u> be used in a creative, constructive, effective way. For the inner and outward worlds do not remain exclusive; to the degree that the prophecy of Dante is effective, it rejoins the commonsense world. (Byron's own visions in poetry lean toward the predication of conditions and interpretations

rather than specific scenes for just this reason, that they are more easily overlaid upon the commonsense world: new interpretations can be said to become a part of what is real. Thus also comes about the very sense that they are prophetic: they are about to become real.) Dante's longing for a time "When words were things that came to pass" has a broad theological significance, an association with the Fall from grace--the general decline of the human from the giant forms of the race of Cain. It is interesting that, within the epic of Byron's biblical writings, we know that Cain was not a giant, though everybody who followed him--Aholibamah, for instance--thought he was; there is this amount of acuity in Byron's psychology, that he realized that nostalgia for the past is likely to extend to all aspects of thought. But Dante fixes on the fall of language, and makes it coeval with the fall from grace, and so implicitly associates spiritual resurrection or regeneration of self with the regeneration of language: "But I will make another tongue arise/As lofty and more sweet." That regenrated language not only rescues the writer, but makes him "the new Prometheus of new men," bestowing the fire of thought, animating, wherever he turns his poetry--gaining as he gives the life he images. Byron found and translated a similar sentiment in the first stanza of Pulci's Morgante Maggiore, expressing the blended birth of subject and matter, the Logos of which all writing is an echo:

> In the beginning was the Word next God;
> God was the Word, the Word no less was he:
> This was in the beginning, to my mode
> Of thinking, and without him nought could be:

If we have the broader conception of the monologue suggested by this passage--a conception of it not only as a particular genre, but as a set of stylistic and transitional devices; and not just those devices but the sequences of ideas they facilitate--we can see that the monological consciousness is not limited to the single, brief period of the dramatic monologues,

though it took that special form for three or four years. That form, again, is usually thought to be characterized by the presence of a distinct voice. But in Byron's dramatic monologues we see something specifically different: an indistinctness of narrator and material (the ebb and flow of which forms the main action of the work), caused by the repeated attempt to infer outward which is the characteristic gesture of the mind freed, however momentarily, from the retarding imagery of earth and devotion to the past. And along with this freedom to rearrange comes a general loosening of the traditional restraints on the integrity of narrators. I mentioned at the end of 6i a few lyric poems which seem to me to participate in this use of language to impose a psychological continuity on topics. Consider the remarkable manner Byron moves toward the story of the death of "John Keats."

> Who kill'd John Keats?
> "I," says the Quarterly,
> So savage and Tartarly;
> "'Twas one of my feats."
>
> Who shot the arrow?
> "The poet-priest Milman
> (So ready to kill man),
> Or Southey, or Barrow."

Like many of the late, short lyrics, "John Keats" is deceptively simple: there is no syntactic complexity to slow the reading; the general sentiment of the poem--that reviews can kill and reviewers are sometimes killers--is familiar. The problem is not in understanding the sense of the poem, but elsewhere in the interaction of reader and text--namely, in comprehending the source of the words, or in giving the poem an epistemological center. There are voices here, and a rudimentary dialogue; there is even a sort of characterization. But how are we to understand the voice of the Quarterly Review? Even more puzzling, how are we to account for the "Quarterly's" doubt in the second stanza? Only, I think, by tracing the answers to the questioner, to a subject for whom the Quarterly is not a real institution

(or at least for this moment is not real), composed of writers and publishers and pressmen; but has rather come to reside in a single idea or voice. Similarly, when we look at a volume of Byron's poetry and see clustered near the end of the collected lyrics the Murray poems (poems and letters to, from, and about John Murray), the epigrams for Castlereagh and Queen Caroline and for himself, all the apparently perspicuous addresses to those who are not, and often could not be anywhere within reading distance--when we read these as a group it is hard not to conceive of them as the daydreams of an Englishman in exile: the detached thoughts of a consciousness quite removed from the object of his thought, but pretending to be there, participating in the currency of ideas he imagines (or, often, elaborating the rumors he has heard). I think we are but a short step away from "The Prophecy of Dante" here, separated from it mainly by the ambivalent levity of the late, fragmentary lyrics. But even that levity, like Dante's serious proclamations, are at first epistemologically imponderable; we cannot discuss the functioning of this language in any of the locutionary contexts it claims--as prophecy, epitaph, quotation, etc.) unless we tend toward some general characterization of its source as freed from a concern with regularities of time and space, and more interested in the action of language--a writer who portrays unknown events by taking on inaccessible roles; and who, though betraying, in the Murray poems, for instance, a nearly desparate need for response, has arranged to do without--to make the response himself, to take on Murray's voice, even to recreate the England Murray lives in to make the response more satisfying to himself.

Once alerted to the presence of a central creative or constitutive project some poems, we can read backwards and forwards from the period of the dramatic monologues, finding alliances to other poems or groups of poems. And I am genuinely surprised by my own conclusion that the nearest living

relative of the dramatic monologue in Byron's poetry is not the drama, but the satire. I have already mentioned "The Curse of Minerva," which begins as a kind of meditation (or daydream) on the ruins of Athens; becomes, by way of a debate with the animated Minerva, a struggle between narrator and material; and ends without any final appearance of the original thinker--he merges with (is argued into) Minerva's voice, and chooses to stay there. A similar freedom is obtained in a traditional form in English Bards and Scotch Reviewers. That form--the catalog of famous men--is not Byron's invention, of course (in fact, this poem is probably inspired by the work of Charles Churchill); but to the degree that it sets the writer at liberty to move among the objects of his thought and arrange the current scene just as it occurs to him, English Bards is related to the Murray lyrics and to the late satire "The Age of Bronze," which is a catalog of countries rather than of writers. "The Blues" is noteworthy among the early poems for its suggestion that some of the voices or characters it uses--Tracy, Inkel, Miss Bluebottle--have leaped directly from the inkwell, without nature intervening at all between pen and page. The subtitle of "The Waltz"--"An Apostrophic Hymn"--reveals a similar project: like "John Keats," it animates an abstraction; like some of the Murray poems, it creates (dramatizes, lays out, proposes) its object, and then addresses it.

My object in pointing out these similarities is not to reshape the usual classification of Byron's poems, but to simplify it--to make that classification nominal or convenient, and not a classification of ideas or strategies. The relation between poetic idiom or genre and general sentiment is, however, as I've pointed out often in this dissertation, a difficult problem. What can be said of the relation of meaning to style? I have bern generally skeptical on this question, more often claiming that certain traditional associations cannot be made than establishing more particular

relations of my own. But I think my skepticism is justified among these poems. In this chapter I've tried to indicate that as narrators are blended with the birth of their poetry, other borders are penetrated as well--specifically between the dramatic and non-dramatic monologues. The borders of satire are made irregular too, so that while we may continue to speak of Byron's satires or the nature of Byronic satire, it becomes less profitable to think of the satirical as if it were a readily distinguishable project or intention, or easily distinguished in style. At least we need to see that M. K. Joseph is in error in identifying Byron's late satiric mode as the "ottava rima style." We ought to remain fairly strict on this point, and say that the octave is a stanza, not a style; and that it cannot be conclusively proven that stanza form bends meaning one way or another. The most we can say is that rhythms and rhymes can be used to make a semantic point; we can't say that some verse forms are more suited to satire than others. It is not often noted in discussions of the "Epistle to Augusta"--usually classed among the "poems of separation," as an instance of the confessional--that it too is in ottava rima. This certainly does not ally the sentiments of the "Epistle" to any of those other poems of the same form. It ought rather to suggest the difficulty of bordering Byron's poems either by sentiment or by verse structure or genre. The styles--the "voices," the characteristics, the sequences of thinking--infiltrate all the poems, often in unexpected ways. I have made a surprising alignment in this chapter, but it seems to me as supportable as any other: visionary monologue, satiric monologue, confessional monologue. Let me repeat here that we need not see any greater programmatic sequence than I have indicated, or to see this as the main track of Byron's development; it's not important to claim so much. It is important, however, to see that the visionary poems, the lyrics I've mentioned, and the satires

are associated by their common confidence in the constructive power of language. And we can make this a developmental point by adding that this confidence increases in Byron's poetry from the middle period of his writing through the end of Don Juan.

I don't mean to suggest that Byron was confident in the power of human understanding or wisdom; nor that he himself grew more self-assured. It is not self-confidence that I mean, not in any usual sense of that term; but rather confidence or trust in language to function in a certain way: confidence not in an end but in a process. In this respect, Byron grew more confident of his style. It is true too that for most readers, the most stylistically distinct Byron is the late Byron; and that's the Byron who has been on my mind since the discussion of "Churchill's Grave"--the famous Byron of the late satires; a subject whose subjectivity seems to be altogether laid out before us; who is honest, direct, forthright, etc.; and whose subjectivity becomes something like a style itself. But if I have shown that that subjectivity, that style, was the result of particular argumentative sequences, rather than an initial standpoint or position, this ought not to compromise the traditional view that Byron is at his best (most honest, etc.) in that mode of writing. On the contrary, I think (though I have not tried to prove it here) that the pain, the struggle, the anxiety are all quite genuine. But we know them through the poetry; Byron "expressed" them in the poetry; they are concentered and preserved there. Indeed, we can call Byron "honest" or "forthright" at all precisely because his emotions are preserved for us in plausible sequences of discourse. I do believe it was painful for Byron to write--however quickly or voluminously he wrote--for all the reasons touched on by this chapter: because it felt to him like feeding on poisons, it was risky, it robbed the mind of a natural sense of itself, it involved an engagement

with death. And for what it's worth as speculation, I believe that the progression or sequence of ideas that moves in many poems and among poems from mystery to prophecy (mediated by detachment from nature and natural systems of imagery) is the story of that pain: that the arc of ideas I've followed in this chapter was matched in Byron's mind by a cycle of pain and release.

It is not so strange, then, to place some of Byron's best known and most characteristic poetry--the satires--in this proximity to the more metaphysical and serious visions. And that the satires are themselves serious at bottom, no one, I think, would care to deny. Most readers would be willing to admit also that Don Juan is a kind of catalogue too: a recital of all the sad things that may be found in Europe. I am about to discuss that poem at some length; we will see more clearly in the next chapter how, when Byron writes, "And if I laugh at any mortal thing,/'Tis that I may not weep," the co-existence of the two alternative reactions is one of the marks of his presence, one aspect of his control. We will see that the cycle of matter and narrator, of inference and affirmation, passes into Don Juan--stretched, and playfully formularized--as the structure of narration and digression.

We will also take up the inferential structure of Don Juan--its functioning as psychodramatic, or projected from its single source. I would like to close the present portion of the argument with two brief quotes from The Vision of Judgment. This is a poem which, like "The Prophecy of Dante," is a near apotheosis of the human, visionary, imaginative and reconstructive power. But like the "Prophecy," it is not quite an apotheosis. There is a notable exclusion, to which Byron draws attention in the preface: "The reader is requested to observe, that no doctrinal tenets are insisted upon or discussed; that the person of the

Deity is carefully withheld from sight . . ." The full import of this exclusion will become apparent in the ensuing discussion. But we have already seen enough to conclude that God is not really needed to write this poem, nor "The Prophecy of Dante," nor Cain, nor Heaven and Earth. Near as we are to the narrator, we are in the presence of the Word; and so "next God." The human is sufficient.

> And this is not a theological tract,
> To prove with Hebrew and with Arabic,
> If Job be allegory of fact,
> But a true narrative; and thus I pick
> From out the whole but such and such an act
> As sets aside the slightest thought of trick.
> 'Tis every tittle true, beyond suspicion,
> And accurate as any other vision.
>
> (St. 34)

Chapter VI

Don Juan and Futurity

Mazeppa uses an interesting metaphor at the outset of his tale. He says he will "track" his "seventy years of memory back" to recover the events of his youth. This use of "track" is the result of "long communion" with horses, of course, and of one experience in particular. Byron is having a little joke at Mazeppa's expense: Mazeppa thinks in terms of horses, as Bonnivard thinks in terms of chains. Still, that word, and the suggestion that Mazeppa's story is part of a trail he has left through his life (a trail that begins not just in his youth, but at his birth), ought to remind us of the frequency with which Byron tries to capture the spatial and the temporal in the same image: of Cain's search through the universe for the origin of human life and for the center of his own mysterious being; of Dante's search through the history of Italian literature for writers like himself; of Faliero's defiance of the statues of his ancestors; of Foscari's inability to sign his name.

It ought to remind us of the trail of writing that Byron left behind him throughout his life: of lines written in books he'd found or borrowed, inscribed on cups, in hotel registers and travellers' books; actually or in his imagination written on trees and walls, beneath pictures; several epitaphs, one followed by a "Substitute for an Epitaph"; an epitaph imagined under the epitaph of Castlereagh encouraging the passer-by to leave his own track. The following is a typically Byronic poem in several ways:

Lines Written in the Travellers' Book At Orchomenus

In this book a traveller had written:--

'Fair Albion, smiling, sees her son depart
To trace the birth and nursery of art:
Noble his object, glorious is his aim;
He comes to Athens, and he writes his name.'

Beneath which Lord Byron inserted the following:--

The modest bard, like many a bard unknown,
Rhymes on our names, but wisely hides his own;
But yet, whoe'er he be, to say no worse,
His name would bring more credit than his verse.
1810.

This sensitivity to tracks and traces ought to remind us, finally, of the many moments in Don Juan when the forms and figures of the natural world are suddenly, often briefly, contracted to the "natural" act of writing:

I once had great alacrity in wielding
My pen . . .
But at this hour I wish to part in peace,
Leaving such to the literary rabble,
Whether my verse's fame be doomed to cease
While the right hand which wrote it is still able . . .
(IV, st. 98-9)

What is the end of fame? 'tis but to fill
A certain portion of uncertain paper;
(I, st. 218)

And wherefore this exordium?--Why, just now,
In taking up this paltry sheet of paper,
My bosom underwent a curious glow,
And my internal spirit cut a caper:
(IX, st. 3)

But let me change this theme, which grows too sad,
And lay this sheet of sorrows on the shelf;
I don't much like describing people mad,
For fear of seeming rather touched myself--
(IX, st. 74)

So let us back to Lilliput, and guide
Our hero through the labyrinth of love
In which we left him several lines above.
(VI, st. 28)

Nothing so difficult as a beginning
In poesy, unless perhaps the end;
(IV, st. 1)

Two themes associate these fragments. The first is an implicit

premise that written words do not vanish when writing stops; that though thing-like--of nature, if we choose to view them that way--they nevertheless mark the passage of a mind that way. "Poesy," he writes elsewhere in Don Juan, is the shadow that the onward soul behind throws." Poetry is the trace of the passage of a mind through a place, but also through a moment of time on the journey into the future. The second theme derives from the same imagery, and I would make it simultaneous with the first: that since poetry, even as a shadow, is evidence of the soul's passing, we can track the soul, backward and forward in time. The passages cited all reflect a concern for origins and sources--for imagining the future in the way we have discussed before, but also for following the track in the other direction, back to a variety of beginnings.

If I have been right that Byron's poetry throughout his career is characterized by a special sensitivity to the representation of time, then we ought to be alert to beginnings and endings--if we can find them: they are obscure in Don Juan, and beginnings are complicated by Byron's insistence that they are right before us:

> My way is to begin with the beginning;
>
> (I, st. 7)

> But now I will begin my poem. 'Tis
> Perhaps a little strange, if not quite new,
> That from the first of Cantos up to this
> I've not begun what we have to go through.
> These first twelve books are merely flourishes,
> Preludios . . .
>
> (XII, st. 54)

To the reader:

> there must go
> Virtues of which both you and I have need.
> Firstly, begin with the beginning--(though
> That clause is hard); and secondly, proceed:
> Thirdly, commence not with the end--or, sinning
> In this sort, end at least with the beginning.
>
> (IV, st. 1)

And another expression of this difficulty:

> Nothing so difficult as a beginning
> In poesy, unless perhaps the end;
>
> (IV, st. 1)

And as an expression of desire:

> I want a hero: an uncommon want,
> When every year and month sends forth a new one,
> Till, after cloying the gazettes with cant,
> The age discovers he is not the true one:
> Of such as these I should not care to vaunt,
> I'll therefore take our ancient friend Don Juan--
> We have all seen him, in the pantomime,
> Sent to the devil somewhat ere his time.
>
> (I, st. 1)

"New one/true one/Juan"--here is a beginning in a moment of writing: a flash of inspiration; not the most brilliant in Byron's canon, but who can say that the rhyme that changes the pronunciation of "Juan" to make him true and new is not a controlling idea in the genesis of the poem? It is certainly a rhyme to which Byron often recurs through the course of the work.[1] To the reader of a certain sensibility, like my own, "new one/true one/Juan" becomes a trace of a moment in the writing of Don Juan--a little monument that marks the passage of the writer through a point, like "name/fame" (in fact, it is like that rhyme on several counts).

Is that the beginning of the poem? or just the first stanza of Canto I? When Byron writes of beginnings in Stanzas 1-10 he means most immediately the origins in European history of Juan's family and race. All the important characters in Don Juan have geneologies, except the narrator, who is given a geneology of sorts in the unpublished preface to the poem. Ought that preface be considered a part of the poem, as a discarded beginning? Or is it the Dedication (also unpublished during Byron's life), which Ridenour has shown to be clearly introductory to the philosophy of styles that runs through the sixteen cantos and five years of the composition of the poem?[2] It could be argued that the beginning is the single stanza Murray found on the back of the first page, or one

or both of the epigraphs, from Horace and Shakespeare. It is probably not the title; among these more forceful beginnings the title seems too small. But it might be a combination of the title and the first stanza of Canto I, in their formal establishment of the main character; the name leaps over the intervening material, as it were, and comes to rest in poetry in Stanza 1.

The point I am making is probably clear enough. Critics have often speculated on the course Don Juan might have taken had Byron lived. They are intrigued by the endlessness of the poem (and perhaps also by Byron's admonitions not to guess what will happen). But the beginning is a critical problem too, and not because we can't find one, but because, like endings, we can imagine so many. Beginnings proliferate in Don Juan, like writing itself, each beginning having its own claim to priority. And yet, like prefaces, each beginning has something in it of the afterthought (as though it were not the "true one" but just the "new one"). The beginning of Don Juan is like the end of Childe Harold, where Byron spends several stanzas preparing us for his "Farewell," which never quite comes--it was happening during the preparation.

We are in a peculiar realm here, in reading Don Juan, a realm which seems to emerge from a certain set of illocutionary complications; or from, Byron might have argued, the complexity of the material. Either explanation is adequate because of the nature of the pattern they describe: something is asserted to be the case; and then asserted to be not altogether true because of slight exceptions; but then the exception has become the rule, and the writer tries again. Statement A is an absolute; statement B is a relative; statement C is a new beginning, with a new truth to tell:

I hate inconstancy--I loath, detest,

Abhor, condemn, abjure the mortal made
Of such quicksilver clay that in his breast
No permanent foundations can be laid;
Love, constant love, has been my constant guest,
And yet last night, being at a masquerade,
I saw the prettiest creature, fresh from Milan.
Which gave me some sensations like a villian.

But soon Philosophy came to my aid,
And whisper'd, 'Think of every sacred tie!'
'I will, my dear Philosophy!' I said,
'But then her teeth, and then, oh, Heaven! her eye!
I'll just inquire if she be wife or maid,
Or neither--out of curiosity.'
'Stop!' cried Philosophy, with air so Grecian
(Though she was masqued then as a fair Venetian);

'Stop!' so I stopp'd. But to return . . .

(II, sts. 209-11)

Here the surpassive structure I found in Childe Harold and some lyrics is accelerated, so much that it is really a different structure; in the earlier poem, waves of syntax and association well up toward the reader, break past, and are replicated by the next; at the breaking point the narrator dissociates himself from the past (as here, in "And yet" and "But to return"). But pushing forward, here and elsewhere in Don Juan, are constructions which stretch the breaking point a second into the future: "But soon . . .," "'But then her teeth, and then , , ,,'" "I'll just inquire . . .'"

Nothing so difficult as a beginning
In poesy, unless perhaps the end;

However difficult it may be for the reader (and it is a little difficult) there is nothing so difficult in writing poetry as a beginning, unless it is the end. The structure of the statement reveals the difficulty is notes: there is always an "unless perhaps," an afterthought which betrays the absolute; beginnings are compromised by the necessity of endings; the absolute is undermined--relativized--in advance. "The future cheats us from afar," Byron wrote in one of his "Stanzas for Music." I think that sentiment is part of the poetic of Don Juan; the proliferation of beginnings

at least, may be explained as an attempt to elude the cheating of the future. I might point out here that at the end of Canto III Byron announces that the beginning of Canto IV--"Nothing so difficult . . ."--was "originally" part of the second half of Canto II; so this beginning, whatever else it may begin, is not to be read as a beginning of a canto--unless, of course, we take it as an afterthought; which, of course, we do.

Byron encourages us to look for origins; at almost every point, on every subject in Don Juan, he starts the search himself. But the inextricability of sources in the world and sources in the writing leads me, as it has other readers, back to the figure of a man at a writing desk--to a hand, which, described objectively, appears to be scribbling (and often precisely that appears: the hand, the pen, the page). It is to somewhere around that figure (who becomes a character only occasionally, as the hand is not consistently the signal of one mind) that I trace the beginning of the poem. The search for sources seems to lead Byron back as well; of the many ways his digressions to the present of composing have been interpreted over the years, all contain some sense that in returning to himself and referring to himself Byron is acknowledging that he is in some way the controlling feature of the poem. So, rather than locate the source of Don Juan in Byron's belief in endless repetitions of the Fall, I find the theme of the Fall from grace to be one of many themes coordinate to the origin of Don Juan in the moments of its writing; rather than treat the digressive style as a means of detachment from the material, I think of it as an engagement exactly equal to any part of the narration; I don't think of digression as a style at all, but as one sort of variation in a surface structure comprising many new beginnings, and as evidence of a more fundamental pattern or style. Like Michael Cooke, I think of Don Juan as an instance of poetry rather than a type[6]; but not a particular

instance, rather an instance generalized.

> Some truths are better kept behind a screen,
> Especially when they would look like lies;
> Therefore I deal in generalities.
>
> (XIV, st. 80)

> The difficulty lies in colouring
> (Keeping the due proportions still in sight)
> With nature manners which are artificial,
> And rend'ring general that which is especial.
>
> (XV, st. 25)

These and other moments of "difficulty" we have seen so far may be brought into various alignments. One obvious association is to the epigraph from Horace: 'Difficile est propie communia dicere.' It is difficult to speak of common things; and, we remember, there is nothing so difficult in poetry as a beginning, unless perhaps the end. This complex of ideas about the difficulty of beginnings can be found often in Don Juan, and elsewhere among the late poems of Byron. At least he writes that it is difficult; in practice he often appears to be making it look easy, even like a game:

> In the beginning was the Word next God;
> God was the Word, the Word no less was he:
> This was in the beginning, to my mode
> Of thinking, and without him nought could be:
>
> (MM I, st. 1)

The emphasis in Don Juan, as in The Morgante Maggiore and "Churchill's Grave," is not so much that we bring the divine into the world by writing, but rather that our idea of the divine is coeval with the articulation of our "mode/Of thinking"--simultaneous in time and "next" to it in space; that creation is all one act, and that all important acts are creations, beginnings. Even the least act of composition, the smallest beginning, is equal to the others in form and potentially in energy; and that therefore writing is the trace not just of a particular human presence, but of what is most human, "originally" human. Each act of composition--each recreation of oneself in the present--is a recapturing of a primordial

act. This is one reason why new beginnings are both difficult and familiar: why "begin at the beginning" is a "hard clause," and why the fact that he's not yet begun in Canto XII is "a little strange, if not quite new."

It may seem strange to find in Don Juan a recapitulation of the original script: in the urbane, socialized, Regency English voice, to claim to find a mythology of origins, and more, a ritual of return. And it is strange. It is remarkable that in the midst of his most celebrated satirical passages Byron should disclaim the premises that support an ironic interpretation; that by way of representing the world he should reveal the world of Don Juan to be a linguistic trick; that he should with great frequency appear to play the same trick on himself--to look, like Cain, for his own origins and find that he is not on solid ground, but is rather holding himself, by habit and imagination, on the surface of a field of origins, none of which can he make himself fast to.

I ought to take notice, as I have before, of the dangers of this sort of criticism: the attempt to make epistemological sense of writing by adducing relevant passages. This is how Don Juan is usually approached, but charting relations between theme and style often turns imperceptibly into the reduction of the discourse to a key source--a person or a narrator who can comprise all the styles and ideas, or a concept or idea thematically arranged. This seems to me in general a fruitless end, because we can always do it: we can always draw analytical equations if we set ourselves on identifying or naming the voice.[4] The danger of this is the same--and partly proceeds from--the danger of simplifying origins: that we can trick ourselves into thinking we've found the true one. Our question ought not to be, Is Don Juan self-explanatory? are there literary critical precepts hidden within that will explain the course of the poem? The answer

is surely yes, and surely trivial. At best, we can demonstrate by this that Byron was self-aware enough to generalize about his process of writing.

The dangers are, first, that we may oversimplify, and second, that we will end up not describing Byron so much as out own mode of thinking. Of simplicity I cannot accuse myself in the analyses that follow (though I take no responsibility for erring on the side of complexity). Nor, since Byron does not set himself firmly in the work, am I sure where Byron's philosophy leaves off and mine begins. But bearing in mind that these are and may remain problems in reading the poem, I would like to examine three passages in which Byron's statement of the case is similar to my own.

The singer of "The Isles of Greece" in Canto III is in some ways like Robert Southey:

> He praised the present, and abused the past,
> Reversing the good custom of old days,
> An Eastern anti-Jacobin at last
> He turned, preferring pudding to no praise--
> For some few years his lot had been o'ercast
> By his seeming independent in his lays,
> But now he sung the Sultan and the Pacha,
> With truth like Southey, and with verse like Crashaw.
>
> (III, st. 69)

But withal he is only gently criticized; he is rather "mobile" like Lady Adeline than "renegado" like Southey. Byron finds him at an important moment in his life, when,

> He deem'd, being on a lone isle, among friends,
> That without any danger of a riot, he
> Might for long lying make himself amends;
> And singing as he sung in his warm youth,
> Agreed to a short armistice with truth.
>
> (III, st. 83)

That armistice is to reverse himself again--to praise the past and, in a way, to direct some abuse at the present. I will cite from the song at length for the sake of its relevance to the stanzas of commentary which follow it; the most important elements in the song, for my purposes, are

degeneration and loss of voice, the decline of music, and of bleeding into blushing, and the silence of the audience.

5

And where are they? and where art thou,
  My country? On thy voiceless shore
The heroic lay is tuneless now--
  The heroic bosom beats no more!
And must thy lyre, so long divine,
Degenerate into hands like mine?

7

Must we but weep o'er days more blest?
  Must we but blush?--Our fathers bled.
Earth! render back from out thy breast
  A remnant of our Spartan dead!
Of the three hundred grant but three,
To make a new Thermopylae!

8

What, silent still? and silent all?
  Ah! no;--the voices of the dead
Sound like a distant trumpet's fall
  And answer, 'Let one living head,
But one arise,--we come, we come!'
'Tis but the living who are dumb.

In Stanza 10 he appears to be saying, if you won't speak, at least write:

10

You have the Pyrrhic cance as yet;
 Where is the Pyrrhic phalanx gone?
Of two such lessons, why forget
 The nobler and the manlier one?
You have the letters Cadmus gave--
Think you he meant them for a slave?

11

Fill high the bowl with Samian Wine!
 We will not think of themes like these!

And so forth through the last five stanzas, expressing various hopes and encouragements, but also more calls for wine and increasing detachment from his audience. It is on the whole a very pretty bit of characterization on Byron's part. The singer becomes disgusted with the silence, tries to accomodate himself to it, but ends by singing himself away:

16

Place me on Sunium's marbled steep,
  Where nothing, save the waves and I,
May hear our mutual murmurs sweep;
  There, swan-like, let me sing and die:
A land of slaves shall ne'er be mine--
Dash down yon cup of Samian wine!

The writer who returns at this point generally approves of the song; of the attempt, if not the execution.

Thus sung, or would, or could, or should have sung,
  The modern Greek, in tolerable verse;
If not like Orpheus quite, when Greece was young,
  Yet in these times he might have done much worse:
His strain display'd some feeling--right or wrong;
  And feeling, in a poet, is the source
Of others' feeling; but they are such liars,
And take all colours, like the hands of dyers.
(III, st. 87)

It is illuminating, in all of Byron's work, when he praises or blames poets, historians, philosophers, to turn his criticism on itself: often he can be caught, like Sardanapalus, already trying to avoid the consequences of what he has asserted. Here one can see, if not lying, a susceptibility to colors in "Thus sung, or would, or could, or should have sung"--this is part of the pattern I described some pages back of an absolute increasingly relativized: first a claim to describe what is, then steps into greater subjectivity--like the steps of the singer, in that respect. Byron allies himself to the singer in several ways: by his generous criticism, by turning to himself (in the first line, and generally throughout the stanza), and by beginning his own meditation on the past. He associates himself with other writers in the stanzas which follow; in writing about them, he shows himself one of them, and begins to show that all of them, as readers and writers, are able to touch each other in a particular way.

Stanza 88 expands the literary criticism begun in 87, and fixes on a principle which will support much of what follows. He presents it

as a relative to Stanza 87--as an exception to the rule that poets take all colors and are liars; and by pursuing the imagery of coloring and dyeing:

> But words are things, and a small drop of ink,
> Falling like dew, upon a thought, produces
> That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think;
> 'Tis strange, the smallest letter man uses
> Instead of speech, may form a lasting link
> Of ages; to what straits old Time reduces
> Frail man, when paper--even a rag like this,
> Survives himself, his tomb, and all that's his!
>
> (III, st. 87)

This description of the generation of writing, following upon the singer's recommendation of "the letters Cadmus gave," may suggest some "modern Greek" correlatives to myths in which thought is given form (Cadmus is also the man who brought forth warriors from a dragon's teeth; Orpheus sang himself in and out of Hades). Certainly it represents a new development in Byron's thinking about words and things. Dante had feared that the language had declined since the days of the Old Testament prophets: that the spoken word was no longer prophetic, and, more simply, that it no longer adequately matched or signified the world. The trustworthiness of individuals comes into Dante's speculations too: lies are one sign of the decline of language, as of spiritual and mental decline. In this later world, Byron and the singer of "The Isles of Greece" appear to claim, written letters have assumed or should assume the position that the vital, spoken word used to hold. It is the written word that is effective in the world--that awakens thinking in others (or, as in St. 87: "feeling, in a poet, is the source/Of others' feeling"). We can remember, in this regard, that the singer's problem is precisely that his exhortation met with silence. Writing is silent (as silent as dew falling or a pen scratching), and the response to writing is silent too--reading and thinking. But script and print are effective, and prophetic to the degree that their

action is delayed till some point in the future. It is writing here that comes to pass, becomes thing-like, and which survives the writer's death.

There is a revision worked on Marino Faliero, too, on his "true words are things,/And dying men's are things which long outlive,/And oftentimes avenge them." The singer of "The Isle of Greece" made that poem his "swan-song": "There, swan-like, let me sing and die." To this, in Stanza 87, Byron adds the homonym "dye" (which, as I said, is also a preparation for the introduction of "ink" in the next stanza); and together these reverse the emphasis of Faliero's conception: not that dying men's words are things, but that thing-like, inked language--writing--is the language of a dying man (because it is already independent of him, and he knows it will outlive him).. Also, as we shall see, a portion of immortality is allowed not only selectively, to our true words, but to all writing, indiscriminately; this is in large part, for Byron, the source of problems of history and of literary interpretation.

It may be the thought of the dyer's hand, equally with the idea of coloration and Cadmus' letters, that leads him here to his own hand, his inkstand, his paper (in fact, "all that's his"--he may be looking around his room); and leads him, as in "Churchill's Grave," to the "strange" thought that his writing, even on "a rag like this," will outlive him, and that he will live on, but in the manner of writing, as writing. The writer is a dying man, one who recognizes in his own verbal fluency an admission of and an attempt to elude death (this is one reason why he must remain mobile, I think, ans what he's jumping away from). That is one part of the transition Byron makes through Stanzas 87-90. Another is the three-part answer he makes--in 88, 89, and 90--to his own observation that poets are liars: he makes his absolute charge--"they are such liars"--and then relativizes it--"But words are things"--and then goes on to show

one way in which they are not liars (that their words assume a special reality). And then (using "And" to begin each stanza) goes on in 89 and 90 to show, first, that not only are written words true in one sense, but that they are the ultimate truth, and second, that they make true everything that is written down in them. They are the only reality left as time passes. "All that's his" passes into writing, in Stanza 89; all things become thing-like, preserved in writing:

> And when his bones are dust, his grave a blank,
> His station, generation, even his nation,
> Become a thing, or nothing, save to rank
> In chronological commemoration,
> Some dull MS. oblivion long has sank,
> Or graven stone found in a barracks station
> In digging the foundation of a closet,
> May turn his name up, as a rare deposit.

These are the ways "things" exist into the future in writing, in their least state: as written history (part of a "chronological commemoration"), in forgotten manuscripts, on tombstones covered over (so that only a "blank," as on a page, is left). These three types of writing are reduced to just writing, here, made trivially alike: all may be misplaced at the bottom of a closet. But when the natural existence of the represented objects is obliterated, still the buried writing survives; even dull manuscripts may be turned up, as precious metal. The reader sensitive to scatalogical poetry may hear something else happening in the rhyme of "closet" and "deposit"--a variation in this train of thought that Byron takes up again in Stanza 94. For now he pursues, through the second "And," the passage into history mediated by writing, and by the transformation of the individual into character and events into fiction:

> And glory long hath made the sages smile;
> 'Tis something, nothing, words, illusion, wind--
> Depending more upon the historian's style
> Than on the name a person leaves behind:
> Troy owes to Homer what whist owes to Hoyle:
> The present century was growing blind

To the great Marlborough's skill in giving knocks,
Until his late Life by Archdeacon Coxe.

Words are not just the source of a certain kind of truth; they are eventually all the truth we have; the "things" of which he has spoken fade here along with the concept of glory--"'Tis something, nothing, words . . ." Our reputation after death depends not on what we do but on other writers who come after us with more words. What we know of Troy is really more an effect of Homer's style than of contact with history; that's what happens to events: they are set down like rules; they lose their depth. What happens to statesmen, like Marlborough, is that they get a "Life" written of them, which "turns up" exactly what the living person might have wished would stay buried. Writers themselves are subject to the same conditions; and not just obscure writers:

Milton's the prince of poets--so we say;
  A little heavy, but no less divine:
An independent being in his day--
  Learn'd, pious, temperate in love and wine;
But his life falling into Johnson's way,
  We're told this great high priest of all the Nine
Was whipt at college--a harsh sire--odd spouse,
For the first Mrs. Milton left his house.

All these are, certes, entertaining facts,
  Like Shakespeare's stealing deer, Lord Bacon's bribes;
Like Titus' youth, and Caesar's earliest acts;
  Like Burns (whom Dr. Currie well describes);
Like Cromwell's pranks;--but although truth exacts
  These amiable descriptions from the scribes,
As most essential to their hero's story,
They do not much contribute to his glory.

There is more though, in this unearthing of names, than embarrassments to divine poets. Milton's life fell into Johnson's way, and Johnson wrote it, as the singer's life fell into Byron's way, and he wrote it (that is, claimed it as his property, his matter); and the life is no longer lived by its origin (Milton's life no longer contributes to Milton's glory; Dr. Currie lives on Burns). The argument of the passage so far, then, has moved from a meditation on poetry through the strange survival of the writer with

it into further transformations created in the writing of others that overlay and to a degree obscure the original. Life passes into a story, and not only in the style of one historian, but of whomever can get hold of a pen; and our whole knowledge of the progress of history is of "something, nothing, words, illusion, wind."

For a slightly different perspective on this passage and some support for my reading of it I would like to refer briefly to a passage of similar import in Canto IV (sts. 97-107), one which seems to me to display the same sequence of thought and some of the same imagery (from both nature and the natural act of writing), but contracts certain portions of the argument and expands others, especially this question of the interaction of writing and life.

I begin with his discussion of his publisher's belief that Cantos I and II might contain too much truth to be salable (lines notable for the ironic heaven they posit for those Cantos):

> Therefore I'll make Don Juan leave the ship soon,
> Because the publisher declares, in sooth,
> Through needles' eyes it easier for the camel is
> To pass, then those two cantos into families.
>
> 'Tis all the same to me; I'm fond of yielding,
> And therefore leave them to the purer page
> Of Smollet, Prior, Ariosto, Fielding,
> Who say strange things for so correct an age;
> I once had great alacrity in wielding
> My pen, and liked poetic war to wage,
> And recollect the time when all this cant
> Would have provoked remarks which now it shan't.
>
> (IV, sts. 97-98)

Then, from Smollett, Prior, Ariosto, and Fielding, through his pen and his hand, to himself and his grave, he joins the dead writers briefly, and then moves into a meditation on how they've changed through time. This is the most important stanza for my purposes.

> Of poets who come down to us through distance
> Of time and tongues, the foster-babes of Fame,
> Life seems the smallest portion of existence;

> Where twenty ages gather o'er a name,
> 'Tis as a snowball which derives assistance
> From every snowflake, and yet rolls on the same,
> Even till an iceberg it may chance to grow;
> But, after all, 'tis nothing but cold snow.
>
> (IV, st. 100)

Natural life--the life, one supposes, Byron felt himself to be living most of the time while writing--is, through time and tongues (that is, in commentary through time) the smallest portion of existence. We don't find the life itself when we try to look back through writing and reputation; there is "nothing" but layers of snow surrounding more layers of snow. If we can find the name at all, at the center of the snowball, we find it only a name:

> And so great names are nothing more than nominal,
> And love of glory's an airy lust,
> Too often in its fury overcoming all
> Who would as 'twere identify their dust
> From out the wide destruction, which, entombing all,
> Leaves nothing till "the coming of the just"--
> Save change: I've stood upon Achilles' tomb,
> And heard Troy doubted; time will doubt of Rome.
>
> (IV, st. 101)

Troy can be doubted because, in fact, a tomb proves nothing; and because in the Iliad we have, not Troy itself, but Homer's stylization of Troy. All we have of anything so far in the past is a name, and someone else's story. The attempt to preserve for the future one's own story--to prolong the lived existence--is an "airy lust"--the pursuit, as in III, 10, of "something, nothing, words." Love of glory overcomes the writer, who is here anyone who writes (as the act of composition is reduced to epitaphic inscription). The best we can (usually) do, in seeking to preserve ourselves in writing, is to pass on our names, simple identification. Even so forceful a person as Achilles passed into writing, and was changed.

He follows the thought of the writer's personal death a step further, into the death of the ages (as he had in III, 98-99) repeating, as before, the imagery of obscuring layers:

> The very generations of the dead
> Are swept away, and tomb inherits tomb,
> Until the memory of an age is fled,
> And, buried, sinks beneath its offspring's doom:
> Where are the epitaphs our fathers read?
> Save a few glean'd from the sepulchral gloom
> Which once-named myriads nameless lie beneath,
> And lose their own in universal death.
>
> (IV, st. 102)

He varies these themes, in familiar ways, through three stanzas on De Foix and Dante, warrior and poet, and their monuments:

> The time must come, when both alike decay'd,
> The chieftan's trophy, and the poet's volume,
> Will sink where lies the songs and wars of earth,
> Before Pelides' death, or Homer's birth.
>
> With human blood that column was cemented,
> With human filth that column is defiled,
> As if the peasant's coarse, contempt were vented
> To show his loathing of the spot he soil'd:
> Thus is the trophy used, and thus lamented
> Should ever be those blood-hounds, from whose wild
> Instinct of gore and glory earth has known
> Those sufferings Dante saw in hell alone.
>
> (IV, sts. 104-5)

This, then, is hell; and the poet's special hell is to have his writing covered over or effaced. But that fear is not enough to keep people from writing, or identifying themselves in writing; writing is not altogether something one can stop doing:

> Yet still there 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 extreme verge the passions brought
> Dash into poetry, which is but passion,
> Or at least was so ere it grew a fashion.
>
> (IV, st. 106)

Interestingly, it is the passions here that are noisy, or at least "unquiet," not their expression; it may be part of Byron's ambivalence toward writing that it breaks the passions into silence: this too seems a function of the lesser, latter-day conditions of language use noted in "The Prophecy of Dante." Considered in their psychological dimension, the last four lines

of the stanza make of poetry the articulation of emotion (the sound of waves breaking against a beach in the imagination--the "silent shore" of IV, 12 and the "voiceless shore" of the singer of "The Isles of Greece"). That breaking point is passion, and poetry too; poetry is the imagined noise the emotions make when they enter the world. The psychological moves toward the natural or physical, and breaks across it. At the same time, we see in this stanza, more strongly expressed than elsewhere, the association between the origin of poetry in history and in the individual: we have already learned that writing survives and changes us in history--that it captures us in its own way regardless of our plans for reputation. Here we find that it also captures us now, in the present, when our "unquiet feelings" break into expression. In both passages, it is an important feature of writing that each individual act recaptures in structure the super-individual origin of poetry; and that set against so profound a force as history, our own natural lives seem thin and small.

I would note finally of the passage in Canto IV that in the next stanza the argument passes again to the subject of life moving into poetry (which is one aspect of the historical process). Here, more obviously, he has joined that group of people who have acquired the "deep and bitter power" of representing themselves (and their lives) in writing: here too, the search for glory, to preserve oneself in writing, is given a rather more heroic face:

> 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 that they seem to live;
> You may do right forbidding them to show 'em,
> But spoil (I think) a very pretty poem.
>
> (IV, st. 107)

Now back to III, 92ff., where we see some examples of writing being used in the world;

All these are, certes, entertaining facts,
  Like Shakespeare's stealing deer, Lord Bacon's bribes;
Like Titus' youth, and Caesar's earliest acts;
  Like Burns (whom Dr. Currie well describes);
Like Cromwell's pranks;--but although truth exacts
  These amiable descriptions from the scribes,
As most essential to their hero's story,
They do not much contribute to his glory.

From the thought that certain facts of life do not contribute much to the glory of the story, he turns to the interactions of life and writing in three contemporaries, finding even greater anomalies. Life and writing are especially distinct here, and we can see the better how they draw apart.

All are not moralists, like Southey, when
  He prated to the world of "Pantisocracy";
Or Wordsworth, unexcised, unhired, who then
  Seasoned his pedlar poems with democracy;
Or Coleridge, long before his flighty pen
  Let to the Morning Post its aristocracy;
When he and Southey, following the same path,
Espoused two partners (milliners of Bath).

(III, st. 93)

Such names at present cut a convict figure,
  The very Botany Bay in moral geography;
Their loyal treason, renegado rigour,
  Are good manure for their more bare biography,
Wordsworth's last quarto, by the way, is bigger
  Then any since the birthday of typography;
A drowsy, frowsy poem, call'd the "Excursion,"
Writ in a manner which is my aversion.

(III, sts. 93-4)

In the first stanza, the betrayals of Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge are like manure they've inadvertently left behind, and which Byron is turning up as he turns up their names. Their lives fall into Byron's way, briefly here--their live, their names, their writing--and Byron hopes, in St. 94, to begin to grow a story about them. Speaking of manure, he writes, Wordsworth's Excursion is something else he's left behind him, unmistakeably--the biggest quarto since the birthday of typography. Wordsworth's natural existence is reduced to this one biological function, and his biology equated to his poetry. And by extension from earlier stanzas, what he hopes for is that Wordsworth's poetry would sink to the bottom of whichever sort

of closet is appropriate.

This is both a rather nasty fate to wish on Wordsworth and a literary critical admission that poems like the Excursion (and of Wordsworthian orientation generally) are likely to survive; for they have not sunk yet--not at least in Byron's imagination of the current poetic scene. Five stanzas on, in 100, he writes:

> "Pedlars," "Boats," and "Waggons!" 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"!
>
> (III, st. 100)

Here the excremental and oceanic imagery are merged: the noise of Wordsworth's breaking wave (or "floating scum," in this case) is a hiss over the graves of Pope and Dryden. This is one practical or worldly achievement of Wordsworth's writing; and Byron tries, to a degree, to counter that writing, to rescue the reputations of Pope and Dryden. On the whole, though, here and throughout Don Juan, Byron seems less inclined to try to undo the mischief of others than to do some mischief of his own. This attack on Wordsworth, like others throughout, is larger than a refutation: it is an attempt to influence Wordsworth's own entry into history by overlaying Wordsworth's writing with some facts, some storytelling of Byron's arrangement, adding some snow or whatever to Wordsworth's name.

Back in St. 95 he has some specific charges to make against Wordsworth's poetry, using consonant imagery:

> He there builds up a formidable dyke
> Between his own and others' intellect:
> But Wordsworth's poem, and his followers, like
> Joanna Southcote's Shiloh, and her sect,
> Are things which, in this century don't strike
> The public mind--so few are the elect;
> And the new births of both their stale virginities
> Have proved but dropsies, taken for divinities
>
> (III, st. 95)

This is all explicable in the terms I've been developing. Wordsworth's poem, like Southcote's Shiloh, are "things" they've built out of their imaginations to put into the natural world (or not quite put, in the case of Southcote). Wordsworth uses words to build up a dyke, presumably to keep the waves of his intellect from directly touching the reader. Luckily, the age is not taking much notice anyway (he says not because he hopes that Wordsworth's writing is not making "thousands, perhaps millions, think"), because neither Southcote's nor Wordsworth's is a true birth, a real beginning; but both are biological symptoms; Wordsworth's writing of the Excursion was like Southcote's false pregnancy: both a kind of collection of body fluids, dropsies, not part of the ocean at all.

This is also a nasty remark, of the same order as before. But as we shall see, Byron by no means exempts himself from pathology; the assoication of imagination and biology is part of the theme of written lives that passes through these two portion of Don Juan and others we shall consider. Neither does he exempt himself from attacks by other writers on his work and name. he assumes the attack, tries to counter contemporary writers as he attempts to elude, where he can, the natural, historical fate of writers. He fights back, anticipating sometimes, recollecting at others. These are some of the most familiar gestures in Don Juan:

> They accuse me--Me--the present writer of the present
> The present poem--of--I know not what--
> A tendency to under-rate and scoff
> At human power and virtue, and all that;
>
> (VII, st. 3)

> Some have accused me of a strange design
> Against the creed and morals of the land,
> And trace it in this poem every line;
>
> (IV, st. 5)

These "responses" can in large part be explained by the sequence of thinking outlined in III, 88-100. Some stanzas after those, he makes the same turn to the anonymous critic (or to any reader, sharing that anonymity, who

would try to trace him through his poem) and

> a less mediated competition:
> Some kinder casuists are pleased to say,
> In nameless print--that I have no devotion;
> But set those persons down with me to pray,
> And you shall see who has the properest notion
> Of getting into heaven the shortest way;
> My altars are the mountains and the ocean,
> Earth, air, stars,--all that springs from the great Whole,
> Who hath produced, and will receive the soul.
>
> (III, st. 104)

As in IV, 97, the thought of anonymous criticism leads directly to metaphysical questions: first, as to getting into heaven, second, as to the rhythm of existence of rising and subsiding--the turning of the universe on the principles of production and reception, of the future becoming the past.

The "birthday of typography" strikes me as a similarly metaphysical construct, in this regard--ironic, perhaps, but arising from a concern throughout both passages with origins and sources:

> feeling, in a poet, is the source
> Of others' feeling . . .
>
> Troy owes to Homer what whist owes to Hoyle;
>
> the new births of both their stale virginities . . .
>
> All that springs from the great Whole,
> Who hath produced, and will receive the soul.

and especially:

> a small drop of ink,
> Falling like dew, upon a thought, produces
> That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think.

Clearly, there are two kinds of birthdays in III, 88, and throughout that passage: the historical "birthday of typography" (whenever that was) and the intimate, personalized birth achieved (or not truly or reverently achieved in the case of Wordsworth) at the writing desk. These two births, in history and in the individual--expressed as one in IV, 106: "the unquiet feelings, which first woke/Song in the world"--seem to me the crucial

origins with which Don Juan has to do; and the implications of them are valuable for the new territory they open up in Byron's philosophy of language.

The first implication is the reduction of natural life to a turning point between two larger principles, generally corresponding to the past and the future. We address the future in writing; this is, as it were, the predominant illocution of Don Juan. We plan for the future; and then it's gone in a moment, passed into the past.[6] "Here we are,/And there we go" is Byron's conjugation of that moment in another passage (V, st. 31--that whole episode, the death of the Italian commandant, is an attempt to read the moment through its evidence; but "it was all a mystery.") I think too that the intersection of past and future is the "angle" he claims to encounter more often as the poem proceeds:

> But here again, why will I thus entangle
> Myself with metaphysics? None can hate
> So much as I do any kind of wrangle;
> And yet, such is my folly, or my fate,
> I always knock my head against some angle
> About the present, past, or future state;
>
> (XV, st. 91)

Often, at least, he knocks his head against that angle; sometimes in the trivial affairs of life--for instance, in the conversation of the English gentry who meet,

> And, as the isthmus of the grand connexion,
> Talk o'er themselves the past and next election.
>
> (XVI, st. 69)

oftener in more exalted or aspiring trains of thought:

> Between two worlds life hovers like a star,
> 'Twixt night and morn, upon the horizon's verge.
> How little do we know that which we are!
> How less what we may be!
>
> (XVI, st. 99)

I don't mean to make Byron any more dualistic than his poetry would seem to make him at points like these (and the strongest antithetical logic is

in Cantos XIV-XVII). I would rather emphasize, first, that what there is of dualism is not primarily spatial or co-extensive, but temporal and sequential; and second, that it is not a rigorous or comprehensive dualism, but adds a third term, which is both a minimal thesis and, in a way we have not fully described yet, a source: the individual life--the "star," the "lurking thought." (Neither would I make Byron a covert dialectician, but his dualism is not without this teleological complication; it is not perfectly consonant with, for instance, Manicheanism or Cartesian or Lockean dualism.) It is in that angle, and because of the passing of the future into the past, that the writing of others is dangerous to the individual, and Byron's own is dangerous to others; this is the intertextual domain, the domain of immortality, and the plane on which poetic war is waged, by Smollett, Prior, Wordsworth, Byron, and the others. And all this activity is enabled by the fact, or the hope, that with the right sort of writing we can have an impact on the memory of an age; that by not waiting for time to pass, by anticipating it, we can try to make the present moment deliberate, and deliberately change the future into the past, to turn it in the way we want. We can stay on top of the change.

Added to the dangers from other writers and from the natural force of history--the dangers of "time and tongues"--is a difficulty associated with the "birthday of typography" in the individual, implicit throughout, but compressed in the allusion of "the hands of dyers" to Shakespeare's Sonnet 111:

> O, for my sake do you Fortune chide,
> The guilty goddess of my former deeds,
> That did not better for my life provide,
> Than public means, which public manners breed.
> Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
> And thence almost my nature is subdued
> To what it works in, like the dyer's hand:

The danger to Byron is like this--not only that he won't create an effective

language, one that can surpass his deeds, that expresses what he feels to be his true life; but also that he will be subdued by the medium itself: that at the very moment of the breaking wave, when ink falls on thought, when the unquiet feelings break into poetry; that in the moment of composing he has already lost control; that passing into writing is losing control, or is most always so. In the act of writing, then, as through history, life can seem "the smallest portion of existence."

These circumstances--no longer just the facts of writing, as in "Churchill's Grave," but replicated in all our relations to and beliefs about the world--put certain conditions on the writing of Don Juan: they make it necessary for Byron to skip around, to stay ahead of the reader where possible, to look for matter in the interstices of past and future; most important, and characteristic, they suggest to him that he prolong the moment of transition as much as he can, and to identify himself most strongly with those moments. This sometimes means prolonging the moment for the reader as well--prolonging interpretation, creating difficulties for the reader equivalent to those of the writer.

An abstract or philosophical recognition of the dangers of writing and some stylistic strategies for coping with them appear in the second passage I would like to examine, the opening stanzas of Canto XV. This is one sort of beginning he uses elsewhere in the poem, though not always at the beginning of a canto:

> Ah!--What should follow slips from my reflection;
> Whatever follows ne'ertheless may be
> As a-propos of hope or retrospection,
> As though the lurking thought had follow'd free.
> All present life is but an interjection,
> An "Oh!" or "Ah!" of joy or misery,
> Or a "Ha! ha!" or "Bah!'--a yawn, or "Pooh!"
> Of which perhaps the latter is most true.

This is one of the faster beginnings he tries for in the poem: not a statement to be qualified, but already, as he puts pen to paper, something

forgotten (the "Ah!" representing the moment of his awareness that he's forgotten)--already past the dangerous moment (though never finally past the moment when he might overcommit himself, or write something that might be attacked or misinterpreted or worse, pass uninterpreted). He seems to be implying that it might have had something to do with hope or retrospection; but at least that's on his mind now--future and past and especially the "Ah!" that's just gone by, which was a present moment. Such moments become the new matter, and he plays, in lines 5-8, with the effect of the passions' expression in a part of speech.

The first "Ah!" was an interjection--he was in the present there, forgetting; and the series of interjections that follow can be thought of as both a demonstration for the reader (as if he were lining up a few present moments for an experiment, and letting the reader watch them pass) and as a serious attempt to prolong or recapture his moment of greatest control: when he has begun to write but has not yet revealed what his position is, or even in regard to what.[7] For both purposes, interpretation is suspended through both the complex sentences of Stanza 1: first, through the complication of their tenses, which is primarily a complication toward the future and subjunctive ("What should follow," "What follows . . . may be"); and second, by the elision or postponement of the subject matter (notably skipped between lines four and five of Stanza 1 and between Stanzas One and Two). And so both stanzas seem to hold off from assertion, each of the interjections only hinting at a complete "lurking thought." The assertion is there implicitly, though, as he suggests in talking about it; it is there, as it were, formally, still causing ripples in the context, still having a place in the sequence. This in part explains the train of thought: the flow of writing (let us say, of sentences) goes on more or less as if nothing were amiss; the purely formal aspect of writing is emphasized by

the postponement of the matter or the name of the matter through the pronouns, "What," "Whatever." And having made the association in lines 1-4 between the simply formal or structural presence of assertions (which are as if forgotten anyway--immediately past, matter for qualification) to their packaging or compression into the present as it passes, he goes on in the second half of the stanza to make--or not make--a series of these newly discovered minimal assertions: the interjections, each of which has a philosophy lurking within it, and each requiring, in some less hectic world, its own complete interpretation. Even the elided assertions, however (maybe especially the elided matter--this being part of the point, that their formal presence requires as much attention as their actual inscription) are qualified in advance: "Whatever follows . . . may be." And what does follow, in lines 5-8, is the various suppression (I think this is the right word; it's the one Byron uses in Stanza 3) of thoughts under rhetoric. This is an attempt to take control of the discourse at some fundamental epistemological level: to take over a larger portion than is usually accessible to the artist of the moment when passion is expressed in language, when the future turns into the past. Stanza One is about that moment; it recreates such moments in the interjections, in what I take to be a little tour de force of poetic control.

Stanza One contains qualifications of both the initial suppressed thought and of the new matter he surreptitiously introduces (which is the moment of the reduction of future possibility into rhetoric or parts of speech). In a pattern we have seen in other canto beginnings, Stanza Two is a conventional, philosophical qualification. Byron is trying to continue his thought without the danger of continuing (which is letting himself fall into uncomplicated, natural, and naturally fading, assertions) and to keep control--to hold off from assertion, to keep talking about a theme which

has not yet fully appeared, still a step ahead of the reader.

> But, more or less, the whole's a syncope
> Or a singultus--emblems of emotion,
> That grand antithesis to great ennui,
> Wherewith we break our bubbles on the ocean,
> That watery outline of eternity,
> Or miniature at least, as is my notion,
> Which ministers unto the soul's delight,
> In seeing matters which are out of sight.

Note how he continues to avoid direct assertion or to complicate it by elaborating it through coordinations--the use of "or" to unfold alternative notions. There are thoughts lurking here, and they are not altogether hidden. But as the coordination of philosophical interjections in Stanza One functioned to compress meanings to forms (and therein to complicate our interpretation of them), here the lengthier coordination of metaphors provides a noncommittal frame for descriptions of emotions and the ocean--not quite irrelevant, but still not the promised message.

That message, such as it is, appears somewhere the elided assertions of Stanza One and the equivocal reflections on that missing meaning in Stanza Two. It appears formally, as I suggested, and the argument continues as though some more conventional proposition had been forwarded (though the sequence never quite settles into a straight line before passing into narration in Stanza Six); and as Stanza Two argues the point, it continues to demonstrate the point that the whole of present life--even this passage as it passes--is like a bubble breaking on the ocean: specifically, and as before, such moments may be reduced to either a biological accident or a rhetorical device: a "syncope" (biologically, a skipped heartbeat; rhetorically, a poetical contraction, such as the empty space in "ne'ertheless") or a "singultus" (biologically, a sob; rhetorically, a speech broken by sobs).

There are several points to Don Juan at which the animate or intellectual is reduced to the specifically rhetorical; they may be a subcategory

of symbolism drawn from the act of writing. Considered in their philosophical dimensions, as expressing a broad conception of the relation of writing and life, most of them take on, like XV, 2 and 3, aspects of a demonstration; though some go by so fast they are liable to be missed, as in XV, st. 59, where Byron names "Scott, the superlative of my comparative." We can see this now as serious play with the formal presence of assertions: he names the adjectives instead of commiting himself to them; he opens a space to write something but leaves it only partially filled.[8] Or, to choose an example from another canto beginning:

> Of all the barbarous middle ages, that
> Which is most barbarous is the middle age
> Of man! it is--I really scarcely 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;--
>
> (XII, st. 1)

What it is to be in middle age or on a printed page are both difficult to begin to describe; with characteristic cleverness, he only begins to describe: he arranges several beginnings. But it is like hovering between foolishness and sagacity (which "hovering" I take to mean the simultaneous presence of both interpretations of middle age behavior). It is like not knowing what we're at (losing a sense of ourselves as engaged in any deliberate project). And it is like seeing the letters on a page we have written and recognizing there a self we no longer are.

Here in the beginning of Canto XII the recognition of the occasional identity of life and writing--of biological life passing into ink--shades off into the pattern of imagery drawn from the natural act of writing. That pattern begins to look more like a kind of signature the more often we can discern it behind the works of the discourse; I do, in fact, think it a version of what Byron called and others have called the "recoil into the

self." In Don Juan, though, in this phrasing of the problem, we find a reason for him to pursue that recoil (reason, too, perhaps, why at points like these Byron signs himself rather than, as he is wont to do elsewhere, name and describe his narrating self elaborately). We can trace the full sequence in XV, 1-6, through which there is a similar shading off into the hand and the pen even as Byron continues the new discourse on biology into a second stanza of qualification. Now we read of the danger of suppressing sobs:

> But all are better than the sigh suppressed,
> Corroding in the cavern of the heart,
> Making the countenance a masque of rest,
> And turning human nature to an art.
> Few men dare show their thoughts of worst or best;
> Dissimulation always sets apart
> A corner for herself; and therefore fiction
> Is that which passes with least contradiction.
>
> (XV, st. 3)

Fiction is taken for truth (as by most of the characters through the English Cantos) when the noise of passion is too firmly controlled--the very danger Byron is playing with here--and the present moment passes unnoticed. And all that's left without the actuality, the presence, of that moment is artifice or fiction: a "factitious state," as he has it elsewhere, "an opium dream of too much youth and reading" (IV, st. 19). He comes around to another demonstration, another "Ah!" but this time of remembering (though perhaps no less of misery):

> Ah! who can tell? Or rather, who cannot
> Remember, without telling, passion's errors?
> The drainer of oblivion, even the sot,
> Hath got blue devils for his morning mirrors:
> What though on Lethe's stream he seem to float,
> He cannot sink his tremors or his terrors;
> The ruby glass that shakes within his hand
> Leaves a sad sediment of Time's worst sand.
>
> (XV, st. 4)
>
> And as for love--O love!
>
> (XV, st. 4-5)

He is on to his hand already, thinking about his own sedimenting activity,

and still thinking about the recognition of oneself in passing moments. In Stanzas 5-7 he continues to make intermittent beginnings at the material of the narrative, holding off from it as he has so far held off; but enjoying it, I think: enjoying moments of activity, prolonging the moments when he is aware of the sound of his writing. I will cite the whole of this protracted assertion about Lady Adeline; but I am especially interested in the adjoining sentiments in Stanza Six:

> And as for love--O love!--We will proceed.
> The Lady Adeline Amundeville,
> A pretty name as one would wish to read,
> Must perch harmonious on my tuneful quill.
> There's music in the sighing of a reed;
> There's music in the gushing of a rill;
> There's music in all things, if men had ears,
> Their earth is but an echo of their spheres.
>
> The Lady Adeline, right honourable,
> And honour'd, ran a risk of growing less so;
>
> (XV, sts. 5-6)

A few lurking thoughts follow free here in the form of strong, existential assertions: thoughts mediated by the focus in the scratching of the pen on the paper; thoughts from a man lurking behind the writing; a man who senses--hears in the pen--himself writing; writing a name which connects him to a reader (in the third line of Stanza Six); writing a name, creating a "thing," which, like all things, has a music, makes a noise (a noise which is, in the way we've discussed, the noise of its origin, however suppressed or distorted); which noise can be heard in the momentary noises of writing (and ought to be heard too by the reader); and which is an echo of the true and first origin of all motion.

Once again, I am coming to some surprising conclusions about Byron and about Don Juan--often thought to be a document, or even a prototype, in the history of realism. And I have no special argument with those who would call the poem "realistic," as long as that term remains a general judgment of worth, and does not masquerade as a stylistic description. We call

some works "realistic" when they move us in a certain way; to say that Don Juan is psychologically realistic is a way of expressing a recognition of certain sequences of thought, or of claiming for it some plausibility or consistency. I would reject the term, however, to the degree that it implies an epistemology or a poetics, or suggests that, as Jerome McGann said, Byron was concerned "not with words but what they stand for."[9] We ought to allow that McGann may have been exaggerating to make a point; for clearly, any poet is concerned both with words and what they stand for. But my analysis has made Byron's late poetry a veil over the natural world; my analysis makes the referents of Byron's language hazy, uncertain, and ideal. It may even seem that I have reworked the ontology of Byron's poem to replace the ground of Being with a ground of discourse. What I think I have done, or begun to do, is to show that Don Juan is one sort of Byron's visionary monologue, in which the world has already passed away when the writing begins, or which is caught in the act of rejecting the world; and that one of the persisting projects of the poetry is to recreate a more orderly world to replace the rejected chaos. I think the commonsense world is dim in Don Juan, that it can barely be seen through a dense layer of rhetorical imposition. Some support for this will follow.

In any case, the passages we have examined so far establish a philosophy or epistemology in which words and things are not altogether distinguishable; it is a philosophy which is, if I may broadly categorize it, Romantic rather than realistic. I would even say that it is High Romanticism, and not without affinities to the systems of his more philosophically-minded contemporaries. Both Byron and Coleridge, I think, would have agreed with the proposition that language (Byron would probably have restricted it to written language) is real in a way not immediately apparent; and that certain kinds of language (certain functions or sequences of language) partake

of the hidden structure of the natural world. Perhaps with Shelley, though deemphasizing their millenial power, he could have agreed that writers are unacknowledged legislators; at least Byron came to believe that writing could be equal in effect to action; he came to believe that writing was a kind of action (the kind which makes "thousands, perhaps millions, think"). Harold Bloom has written that Byron's conception of "mobility" is a "social version of the Romantic term 'Imagination.'"[10] There is a problem, of course, in suggesting that the romantic poets as a group shared specific beliefs about the imagination. But I would not care to dispute Bloom's point; indeed, I could applaud almost any attempt to dispel the vast illusion that Byron was not concerned with the action of language. It has been forgotten, since the time of Calvert and Dubos, that for most of the nineteenth century Byron was thought to stand with Wordsworth right at the center of the Romantic esthetic, and to have been an innovator in what M. H. Abrams was to call later the "expressive theory" of poetry.[11] It has been said most recently by Paul West and Northrop Frye that Byron's primary influence on literary history was the force of his personality.[12] To such remarks one can only respond that Byron died in 1824; that after his death there was only his writing.

Comparisons to Shelley and the others are available, and they have this heuristic value of complicating Byron's "realism." But beyond that they are not germane to my argument. I don't want to compromise or underestimate what seems to me a quite original and interesting philosophy of language. Nor is it important to me to find a name for it. No very accurate name occurs to me; and I am not finished showing the philosophy in action, and to understand its functioning is very important, for there is still the danger I wrote of earlier, that in finding epistemological principles we may believe ourselves to have discovered Byron's hidden meaning

or the source of the poetry in some deep belief. I will spend some time in the ensuing trying to show that, for Byron, poetry did not seem to proceed, through philosophy, out of some deeper belief; that often, philosophy and belief are by-products of poetic activity.

Let me retrieve from the discussion of XV, Sts. 1-6 a revised or reemphasized formulation of the commonsense world in Don Juan--that one implication of those lines is precisely that the world does, or can exist for us, but, as it were, against all odds; it is difficult. This is not an isolated question in Don Juan; it is addressed as a substantial problem at several points. When Byron writes "The present vouches for the past" or that he has "heard Troy doubted; Time will doubt of Rome" (IV, st. 101) he is admitting his recognition that the past is in need of proof, that there is important evidence that the past is a dream or a myth. He writes in The Age of Bronze "all times when old are good" and in Don Juan "Ancestors are history's game," a game which leads to the apparently surprising conclusion "Why, I'm posterity--and so are you." (XII, st. 19) The stanzas on Berkeley reflect the same concern with proving the world against the strong idealist argument:

> When Bishop Berkeley said 'there was no matter,'
> And proved it--'twas no matter what he said:
> They say his system 'tis in vain to batter,
> Too subtle for the airiest human head;
> And yet who can believe it? I would shatter
> Gladly all matters down to stone or lead,
> Or adamant, to find the world a spirit,
> And wear my head, denying that I wear it.
>
> What a sublime discovery 'twas to make the
> Universe universal egotism,
> That all's ideal--all ourselves! I'll stake the
> World (be it what you will) that that's no schism:
> Oh Doubt!--if thou be'st Doubt, for which some take thee,
> But which I doubt extremely--thou sole prism
> Of the Truth's rays, spoil not my draught or spirit!
> Heaven's brandy, though our brain can hardly bear it.
>
> (XI, sts. 1-2)

The general sense of these remarks is that we must work through our

egocentricity, or egotism, in order to find the universe; that it is a struggle not to reduce the world to some monistic scheme. Rather, truth or the world must be passed through a prism of doubt, which, I take it, breaks or analyzes the simple perception into its component colors. The world is complex and multifaceted; fiction and idealism are simplifications:

> Besides, my Muse by no means deals in fiction:
> She gathers a repertory of facts,
> Of course with some reserve and slight restriction,
> But mostly sings of human things and acts--
> And that's one cause she meets with contradiction;
> For too much truth, at first sight, ne'er attracts;
> And were her object only what's called glory,
> With more ease too she'd tell a different story.
>
> (XIV, st. 13)

As in XV, St. 3, "fiction/Is that which passes with least contradiction." It is too easy to believe in a world of our own (or some poet's) idealization. And the antidote is to pass through a recognition of ourselves in the world we see into an analyzed or reconstructed or argued world--a world of doubt, and not so much a world of nature as one of "human things and acts." The readers are warned again and again of their delusions in Don Juan, warned that though reality and truth exist, they are not close at hand; the easy or attractive explanation of the world is likely to be the comforting, egocentric, incorrect one.

> Between two worlds life hovers like a star,
> 'Twixt night and morn, upon the horizon's verge.
> How little do we know that which we are!
> How less what we may be!
>
> (XV, st. 99)

So there are at least two worlds for our choosing. In claiming truth for Don Juan, in claiming to describe life as it really is, might Byron be suggesting that his aim is to describe the star in the middle? Likewise, in perching "upon life's humbler promontory" is he trying to hold to some mediating position between past and future? I think so, with the qualifications, first, that real life, the hovering star, is not the sort of thing that can

be described very easily. Once it's described, it's past--regularized and fictionalized. In trying to see the world (be it what you will) we run the risk of being trapped in places, bound in our conceptions to nature. And the attempt to hold oneself in the present (to add a second qualification) is complicated by the fact that the present, fleshed out and narratable, as we usually conceive of it, is partly memory (partly ourselves). The true present is ephemeral. In Don Juan it is the moment when thought breaks into writing; but it flies by us, passing into history. In both cases, for both attempts to exert control or govern the objects of the poetry, description is more a hindrance than a help; argument and complex assertions are what's required. Therefore:

> I won't describe,--that is, if I can help
> Description; And I won't reflect,--that is,
> If I can stave off thought . . .
>
> (X, st. 28)

And one particular locus of past and present, the vagina, he addresses as "Thou gate of life and death--thou non-descript!" (IX, st. 55) It may be in a similar mood of restraint that he writes, "Some truths are better kept behind a screen."

What is the relation between the rejection of egotism (or idealism) on the one hand and the constant ambivalence toward simple description on the other? Is there some middle position between extreme Berkelian idealism and the naive realism Byron rejects with equal passion? These are not easy questions to answer. Byron himself seems to hold either view when it suits his immediate moral (and it may be true that teaching a lesson with confidence is more important than philosophical consistency in Don Juan); and claiming extreme positions remains part of Byron's repertoire of devices for holding off from more exact or detailed commitments. Thus when he writes "therefore what I throw off is ideal" or, following the stanzas on Berkeley, "If I agree that what is, is; then this I call/Being quite perspicuous and

extremely fair" (XI, st. 5) it is tempting to put either statement off as a temporary quibble; and perhaps to concentrate on the classically skeptical sentiments:

> Nothing more true than not to trust your senses;
> And yet what are your other evidences?
>
> (XIV, st. 2)

It has also been tempting to many readers to subsume the relation of the creative imagination to the world of perception under the interaction, in Don Juan, of narration and digression. And before making any final conclusions I would like to address that interaction.

Most of the passages we've examined so far have been taken from the so-called digressions of Don Juan. I would guess that the great bulk of the work done on that poem over the last thirty or forty years has been aimed at these portions. This is not surprising, given the reasons outlined in the last chapter: it is in the digressions that Byron has appeared to most readers to be most direct, forthright, and serious of purpose: "these are my addresses from the throne," he writes. (III, st. 96) If we consider some surrounding poems--"The Prophecy of Dante," Cain, The Vision of Judgment--the motive or object of the monologist is clear enough too: there are few digressions which do not eventually come round to touch on the philosophy of language we've seen in this chapter. The digression are for the most part reflections on and anticipations of the interaction of mind and language--the action of the mind in language. And this is only a more specific formulation of something many readers have felt, what Hazlitt felt, for instance, in called Don Juan "a poem written about itself." Byron's self-consciousness in writing is a complex force; but its presence is not mysterious; the structure and content of the digressions are not impenetrable.

The puzzle, from my point of view, is that Don Juan is not altogether about itself; the mystery is the presence of the story of Juan. As

mysterious, and an explicit theme in the poem, is the very origin of the narrative; for Byron is, like Sardanapalus, quick to avoid responsibility for the discourse that seems to issue from himself. He is ready with a dozen or more other texts that are to blame for the story. So in one sense the question of the origin of the story of Juan is too easy: it comes from other stories--the Don Juan cycle, histories, the Gazettes, Byron's "grand-dad's diary." The enumeration of these sources is not to be denied, of course. Nor need these small displays of scholarship conflict with Byron's claim of uncensored improvisation: "I write what's uppermost, without delay." Most readers have believed that; I see no reason to doubt it, if we interprer the ramark cautiously and use it sparingly. It does not simplify anything; Byron has shown us that no matter how fast we write what gets down on paper is not life itself, but writing: thought plus ink. We have (if we choose to believe him) Byron's uppermost thoughts <u>in</u> writing. Or again, I think, like most readers, that Byron was honestly engaged in a project of great importance to him, but neither is this of much help: "I'm serious--so are all men upon paper." (XIII, st 2) I am not entirely sure how this works, but it would seem to suggest that, as elsewhere, there is a kind of truth, or seriousness, in writing not found in life or which is not directly related to lived experience; so that even written lies take on aspects of the truth. That is, the remark has to do with the nature of writing. But it is also a comment on human nature, on what happens to people <u>when</u> they write.

> And, after all, what is a lie? 'Tis but
> The truth in masquerade; and I defy
> Historians, heores, lawyers, priests, to put
> A fact without some leaven of a lie.
> The very shadow of Truth would shut
> Up annals, revelations, poesy,
> And prophecy--except it should be dated
> Some years before the incidents related.
>
> (XI, st. 37)

As we saw in the last chapter, prophecy avoids the problem of truth by being a kind os statement of potential truth; no matter how elaborate it may be, it can avoid accusation as long as it does not claim to have happened yet. But truth and lying are not normally within out control, this stanza says; their boundary is indistinct in most uses of language--our attempt to state the truth, especially, is likely to be infiltrated by lies. The question for me, then, is why does he subject himself to this danger? Why unbalance himself? Why go, like Dante, back "Once more in man's frail world?"

I would like to prepare to answer these question by looking through a long passage of narration--the last for which I will offer extended remarks. I have selected a passage from the Siege of Ismail cantos for two reasons: first, because thess cantos are often thought to show Byron at the peak of his story-telling power; and second, because it seemed to me that in the midst of such an active narration we migh see more clearly how Byron separated his hero from the story. We need to find the sort of reality Juan takes part in (as well as the sort of reality Byron says he takes part in), for Juan seems to me the crux of several important trains of thought. Juan is a pretended obsession, the pattern of narration and digression representing, at its highest level, the alternating search of the mind though the world and through itself for principles and explanations. The narrator of Don Juan is like the prisoner of Chillon in this respect: he unbalances himself out of his unspecified present to go back once more through the details of his past; any question we might ask of Bonnivard's mentality could be asked of the story Bonnivard tells. Similarly, any question we can ask of the world of Don Juan could as well be asked of the character of Juan. As to our present question, for instance:

> Don Juan, who was real, or ideal,--

For both are much the same, since what men think
Exists when once the thinkers are less real
Than what they thought, for the mind can never sink,
And 'gainst the body makes a strong appeal;
And yet 'tis very puzzling on the brink
Of what is call'd eternity, to state,
And know no more of what is here, than there;--

(X, st. 20)

This is the stanza in which Juan is rejoined in Canto X. It is with a similar tactic of reintroduction, two cantos earlier, that Byron begins the passage I am interested in.

But here I leave the general concern,
To trank our hero on his path of fame:
He must his laurels separately earn;
For fifty thousand heroes, name by name,
Though all deserving equally to turn
A couplet, or an elegy to claim,
Would form a lengthy lexicon of glory,
And what is worse still, a much longer story:

And therefore we must give the greater number
To the Gazette--which doubtless fairly dealt
By the deceased, who lie in famous slumber
In ditches, fields, or wheresoe'er they felt
Their clay for the last time their souls encumber;--
Thrice happy he whose name has been well spelt
In the despatch: I knew a man whose loss
Was printed Grove, although his name was Grose

(VIII, sts. 17-18)

There are usually formal announcements of this sort that Byron is just about to rejoin the main thread of his story. In the opening stanzas of Canto XV we examined earlier, he does the same for Lady Adeline--holding her on the tip of his pen for one and a half stanzas, letting her linger near the beginning of a long assertion which has to do with her only indirectly. For Juan, he almost always prolongs the reintroduction for a stanza or two, as here and in X, st. 20, above. Partly because of the formaility, partly because of the delay, Juan often seems to me most real at these points of rejoining; like Conrad and Lara, it is in his first appearances that Juan is most firmly separated from the context. And here that separation is explicitly proposed as a project--to make Juan's name

appear out of the "fifty thousand heroes" who would be the "general concern" of this battle. If these passages are an instance of "rendering general that which is especial," as I think, then to begin with Juan, the specific, suggests that we may reason or imagine outward from him into the rest of the participants; that is, the battle will be described in terms of Juan. The other, the general concern, he leaves to another text, the Gazette--a "lexicon of glory"--to which he contribute only one emendation: the correct spelling of Grose's name. When the name is all that's left behind, "Thrice happy he whose name has been well spelt."

He leaves the general concern to "track" the specific, Juan. The use of that word may suggest as elsewhere that Byron is inferring something which is in some way not immediately knowable, but must be reasoned out. In any case, it puts Byron in a frequently assumed position in regard to Juan--following him, letting Juan go first: language precedes the user of language into the unknown. In the ensuing stanzas (note the emphasis on their track along the ground), the fundamental uncertainty of the author is echoed in the uncertainty of the characters:

> Juan and Johnson join'd a certain copps,
> And fought away with might and main, not knowing
> The way which they had never trod before,
> And still less guessing where they might be going:
> But on they march'd, dead bodies trampling o'er,
> Firing, and thrusting, slashing, sweating, glowing,
> But fighting thoughtlessly enough to win,
> To their <u>two</u> selves, <u>one</u> whole bright bulletin.
>
> Thus on they wallow'd in the bloody mire
> Of dead and dying thousands,--sometimes gaining
> A yard or two of ground, which brought them nigher
> To some odd angle for which all were straining;
> At other times, repusled by the close fire,
> Which really pour'd as if all hell were raining
> Instead of heaven, they stumbled backwards o'er
> A wounded comrade, sprawling in the gore.
>
> (VIII, sts. 1920)

One can sense the several symbolic struggles working here, as Juan

and Johnson try to hold themselves above the dying thousands--to distinguish themselves, literally, from history or in history: to survive, but also to push forward, as the author holds them in the forefront of the narration. The narrator follows Juan fairly closely through this passage. He does not always in the rest of the poem. The distance between author and character is variable (and there is always some distance between them). These scenes are characteristic though; Byron seldom comes closer than an indirect rendition of Juan's thought, as in the ensuing stanzas, or as here, a description of what Juan was like. We will see throughout the passage an unusual attitude toward Juan--a stance of both knowing and not knowing, notable here in the characterization to Juan and Johnson as "fighting thoughtlessly enough to win,/To their two selves, one whole bright bulletin"--Byron is sometimes at pains to put himself outside his characters, as here, describing them using his own terms from the preceidng stanzas.

We will also see throughout the passage the difficulty of firmly separating "narration" and "digression," as they are susally called. And it will be my point that they are not so separate as is usually supposed. Ridenour and others have mapped the styles of Don Juan in this manner, counting stanzas of digression and of narration, and setting them in proportions to each other. Some interesting results can be thus obtained, but again, they must be used cautiously. The stanza is not the unit of illocution in Don Juan (though it is often the unit of locution: the unit of statement or sentence or independent clause). It is not finally an interesting question, whether the last two lines of Stanza 19 are part of the narration or a digression from it. And as there is a sense in which during the digressions the characters are going their own way alone, ready to be rejoined at any moment--always available when the narrator turns

his attention to them--just so there is a sense in which during the passages of apparently pure narration, such as St. 20 above, the arguments and sequences of thought introduced in the stanzas of commentary persist, slightly in the background. In the following stanzas, both narration and digression proceed apace, the commentary meant to help evoke a Juan Byron claims not to know perfectly, but rather to know bits and pieces of: he only knows tha Juan looked as if he thought a certain thought; but he knows that Juan could not have acted in one way:

> Though 'twas Don Juan's first of fields, and though
> he nightly muster and the silent march
> In the chill dark, when courage does not glow
> So much as under a triumphal arch,
> Perhaps might make him shiver, yawn, or throw
> A glance on the dull clouds (as thick as starch,
> Which stiffen'd heaven) as if he wished for day;--
> Yet for all this he did not run away.
>
> Indeed he could not. But what if he had?
> There have been and are heroes who begun
> With something not much better, or as bad:
> Frederick the Great from Molwitz deign'd to run,
> For the first and last time; for like a pad,
> Or hawk, or bride, most mortals after one
> Warm bout are broken in to their new tricks,
> And fight like fiends for pay or politics.
>
> (VIII, sts. 21-22)

There is one obvious reason Juan could not run away: he's on the tip of Byron's pen and has no choice in the matter. In this respect, "But what if he had?" is a brief glimpse of a path not taken in the poem, or in Byron's mind, and is similar to others we have seen (the "much longer story" he chooses not to tell in Stanza 17; or the story of the "thousand perils" of their escape from the seraglio, which Johnson chooses not to bother Suwarrow with earlier in VII, st. 72). The not-quite rhetorical question "But what if he had?' is not far distant from the claims of ignorance here--"Perhaps," "as if."

The more immediate reason Juan can't run away is about to be explained

in the next three stanzas: Juan is caught up in the excitement of battle; and as is true of many passages of sustained narration in the poem, in which the actions of Juan are kept in the forefront, these stanzas describe a first experience for Juan: his "first of fields." It is therefore comparable to other first experiences, both in history (the first battle of Frederick the Great) and in other individuals and organisms: pads, hawks, brides. Byron appears to be inferring in the other direction here, from the external world and history toward Juan, to find some means of explaining his behavior; it may be that Juan is fading here slightly. The next stanzas begin to build him up again. And notice how Byron wanders through several manifestations of the theme of sources and origins, a theme which pulls with it, as almost everywhere in Don Juan, a search through language. Note too that this "digression" through philological matters is perfectly coextensive with the long predication of Juan: "He was . . . Juan was."

He was what Erin calls in her sublime
  Old Erse or Irish, or it may be Punic;--
(The antiquarians who can settle time,
  Which settles all things, Roman, Greek, or Runic,
Swear that Pat's language sprung from the same clime
  With Hannibal, and wears the Tyrian tunic
Of Dido's alphabet; and this is rational
As any other notion, and not national:)--

But Juan was quite 'a broth of a boy,'
  A thing of impulse and a child of song:
Now swimming in the sentiment of joy,
  Or the sensation (if that phrase seem wrong),
And afterward, if he must needs destroy,
  In such good company as always throng
To battles, sieges, and that kind of pleasure,
No less delighted to employ his leisure;

But always without malice: if he warr'd
  Or loved, it was always with what we call 'the best
Intentions,' which form all mankind's trump card,
  To be produced when brought up to the test,
The statesman, hero, harlot, lawyet--ward
  Off each attack, when people are in quest
Of their designs, by saying that they meant well;

'Tis pity 'that such meaning should pave hell.'
(VIII, sts. 23-25)

The discussion of the source of Old Irish leads to the phrase "broth of a boy," but it doesn't rest there; it leads farther forward into the attempt to characterize Juan in some contemporary phrases. The lack of terminal punctuation at the ends of Stanzas 23-24 further suggests some difficulty in making Juan appear in the right way here, of finding the proper phrase to tack onto the formal beginning "Juan was." The three stanzas work as one unit to make some of Juan appear; to suggest that Juan is somehow caught in traditional phrases or cliches; and it turns the reasoning outward again from Juan (in Stanza 25 and through the next several) toward mankind at lange.

Now we can read this long assertion about Juan ironically or not; it is not uncommon for two interpretations to co-exist in Don Juan (this was true of middle-age behavior, for instance). But we ought to recognize that any irony here is not much more distinct than commentary is distinct from narration. And the sentence (the three stanzas) functions in exactly the same way no matter what construction of belief we put upon it. We can describe it simply like this: the writer moves from a brief dispute about the sources in history of a particular predication which is about to be made, into that predication (and four others) in Stanza 24, which is at the center of the assertion and comprises the clauses in which "Juan" or "he" most often appears; and in which that appearance is tied to finding the right cliches to describe Juan. That stanza turns exactly (after four lines) from the present--Juan's first battle--to the future--"And afterward." And in the next stanza we find a final subordinate clause that pursues the generality (of mankind) into the future, at the same time as it continues to use the future tense and subjunctive mood begun in Stanza 24; and which leads the writer by this circuitous route to a temporarily

ultimate end in hell. He stays there for a stanza:

> I almost lately have begun to doubt
> Whether hell's pavement--if it be so paved--
> Must not have latterly been quite worn out,
> Not by the numbers good intent hath saved,
> But by the mass who go below without
> Those ancient good intentions, which once shaved
> And smooth'd the brimstone of that street of hell
> Which bears the greatest likeness to Pall Mall.
>
> (VIII, st. 26)

This can be read ironically too; perhaps it cannot be read otherwise. But neither here does the irony efface any part of the message that both Juan and the narrator are hell-bound. And Juan, under either interpretation, is involved in an initiation, a passage from past to future, in which he comes to be expressed in ancient phrases, in which his birth is blended with those phrases. Juan is a "thing" produced by this language and a "child" of this song; and the irony of these two sentences (Sts. 23-26) becomes an ambiguity which is not separable from the new birth of Juan into battle. In both interpretations, Juan and the cliches surrounding him enable or empower each other. The phrases (none of which is complete or precise in itself; their cooperation is necessary) bring Juan out of history and place him in the present, and in Sts. 25 and 26, they replace him in the generality of mankind. This is one of several scenes in the poem in which a first experience is concocted for Juan, each of which consumes him entirely and into each of which it is as if he is reborn. Juan, in turn, renews and redeem the phrases; the ancient ideals, the good intentions, are reborn in Juan and with Huan.

These four stanzas are another example of how digression and narration are on the whole indistinguishable--of how commentary extends through narration (or of how commentary is sometimes left to proceed by itself while the narration is on). The actions of the characters and the action of the language merge. Even the passages of hottest action in

Don Juan are like this (as I would also say that the digressions are seldom entirely without action; they further the plot, often in abscure ways). Byron begins again in the same mode, narrating of the battle by posing one of his characteristic, elaborate mysteries for himself--here elaborating his ignorance for two stanzas. Watch again how Juan and Byron are coordinate in their reactions to the "circumstance"--that is, how language and action are coordinate:

> Juan, by some strange chance, which oft divides
> Warrior from warrior in their grim career,
> Like chastest wives from constant husbands' sides
> Just at the close of the first bridal year,
> By one of those odd turns of Fortune's tides,
> Was on a sudden rather puzzled here,
> When after a good deal of heavy firing,
> He found himself alone, and friends retiring.
>
> I don't know how the thing occurr'd--it night
> Be that the greater part were kill'd or wounded,
> And that the rest had faced unto the right
> About; a circumstance which has confounded
> Caesar himself, who, in the very sight
> Of his own army, which so much abounded
> In courage, was obliged to snatch a shield,
> And rally back his Romans to the field.
>
> (VIII, sts. 2728)

"By some strange chance," "I don't know how the thing occurr'd." From almost every page of Don Juan one can extract several of these claims of ignorance on certain points. It is a quite "Juanesque" device. It is found sparingly in Beppo and The Vision of Judgment; I've suggested its affinities to denials of responsibility found elsewhere in Byron's poetry, in Sardanapalus, for instance. But in Don Juan it is used so often and so freely, to turn the course of the verse this way and that, that it takes on a thematic character, part of the explicit epistemology of the work. We can see in this passage though that the effect of this strange limitation of his omniscience is not to distance the writer from the material; rather, it continues to push them closer together. The governing principle is not that he doesn't write what he doesn't know, but the other way round:

he is ignorant of what he hasn't written, because he hasn't been there yet. This explains both his admonitions to the reader not to guess what will come and his own limitations in narrating.

He is attending fairly closely to Juan in this passage; but it is a "thoughtless" Juan, and this may in part account for Juan's apparent lack of an inner life, here and in other of his first experiences. He is described from without; specifically, and as before, Juan is given a long predication, one which turns on finding the proper phrase to describe him, and in which what Juan did is assimilated to what he was--to what can be said of him: Juan was not . . . but rather he was . . . Juan was like.

> Juan, who had no shield to snatch, and was
> No Caesar, but a fine young lad, who fought
> He know not why, arriving at this pass,
> Stopp'd for a minute, as perhaps he ought
> For a much longer time; then, like an ass
> (Start not, kind reader, since great Homer thought
> This simile enough for Ajax, Juan
> Perhaps may find it better than a new one):
>
> Then, like an ass, he went upon his way,
> And what was stranger, never look'd behind;
> But seeing, flashing forward, like the day
> Over the hills, a fire enough to blind
> Those who dislike to look upon a fray,
> He stumbled on, to try if he could find
> A path, to add his own slight arm and forces
> To corps, the greater part of which were corses.
>
> (VIII, sts. 29-30)

There are at least two paths here for our choosing. There is Juan's path (in the second of the two stanzas) to glory and story; and there is Byron's path through the complex assertions toward distinguishing Juan from all the forces--in the plot and in the writing of an epic--that tend to draw the character down, to efface him or diminish his importance. As is often the case, history and literature are the greatest dangers to Juan. Byron steers Juan through Homer (near Ajax, another type or precursor), trying to counter objections, to anticipate the dangers that arise from comparisons--trying to go forward, capturing as much as he can of what he feels

ought to be true of the scene, without falling into simple repetition of the heroic type. The statements cast themselves forward, past Caesar and Homer above, and then again in Sts. 29-32: in 29, "then, like an ass"; in 30, "then, like an ass"; in 31, "Perceiving then"; in 32, "Perceiving nor commander nor commanded." And through this long single, complex, temporal sequence, Juan appears, independent, even lonely in this distinctness, like a young heir, a traveller, a castaway--and pulling away from history, ahead of earthly knowledge:

> Perceiving then no more the commandant
> Of his own corps, nor even the corps, which had
> Quite disappear'd--the gods know how! (I cant
> Account for everything which may look bad
> In history; but at least we may grant
> It was not marvellous that a mere lad,
> In search of glory, should look on before,
> Nor care a pinch of snuff about his corps:)--
>
> Perceiving nor commander nor commanded,
> And left at large, like a young heir, to make
> His way to--where he knew not--single-handed;
> As travellers follow over bog and brake
> An 'ignis fatuus'; or as sailors stranded
> Unto the nearest hut themselves betake;
> So Juan, following honour and his nose,
> Rushed where the thickest fire announced most foes.
>
> (VIII, sts. 31-32)

The point I would like to make about this passage as a whole is in part a perception I share with many readers of Don Juan: that is, that the reality of Juan is a qualified and hesitant reality; it takes on aspects of an argumentative inference that Byron makes. Juan is always either fading or sharpening before us with the course of the rhetoric, He sometimes appears at first glance--as in the stanzas last cited--to be made to do or feel for the sake of the rhetoric, or even the rhyme. I would not go as far as some readers; I think Juan is more than a versified puppet. In fact, I think that Byron is careful on the whole to keep Juan psychologically plausible. And though Juan does often seem to act out of linguistic pressure, it is true too that the plot of the poem exists largely

to provide Juan with new experiences. My point is simply that our perception that Juan is a puppet is a by-product of the system of language at work in the poem. Juan is not a puppet except to the degree that all of us are: "As far as rhyme and criticism combine/To make such puppets of us things below." (X, st. 16)

It is not quite that the action of the writer is all that there is; the writing itself is evidence otherwise. It is rather that in writing all is reduced--clarified and distilled by the writer's presence. The action of the writer has priority here because without his attention everything fades; and this is also an aspect of the poem most readers are familiar with: Juan fades at times; Julia and Haidee fade; Leila is "dispensed with"; Haidee becomes Aurora; the plot fades. By the same token, the writer is tied in various ways to the progress of the poem. It is in composing that he is most surely himself and most in control of himself (in the present moment and in history). And--though again this is speculative--it is not out of the spirit of Don Juan to feel in the narrative of Juan an echo of the thrill that was Byron's: not a vicarious thrill in the imagined battles of Juan, but an excitement in tying his narration to the life and death struggles of his character: a thrill in narrating; a thrill in giving expression in the narrative to the same momentary struggles and achievements we find in the digressions: the struggle at once with language and with time, and the achievement, as I think it felt to him, of going forward at all.

It is not controversial--in fact, I believe it's the norm--to find some area of overlapping, some points of identity, between Juan and Byron. This may be an unimportant truism, fo course, a general recognition that writers draw on what they understand of life to create the circumstances of their fiction. The problem is to establish valid relations between

writer and text, and different critical approaches yield different standards of validity. A biographical approach could interpret several characterizations of Juan--as a young heir, for instance--as a veiled reference to Byron's sense of himself. A psychological critic could feel justified in finding the comparison of soldiers to bride symbolic of fear of sexuality. It is perhaps not out of line, then, in an analysis of style, to find some symmetries between the course of the narration (and that is the most linguistic way of putting my point: that the narrative of Juan shares many points of stylistic contact with the digressive passages, the poetry about himself. This does not quite make of the story of Juan an allegory of the act of writing; but it at least alerts us to the presence in the narrative of a set of characteristic strategies, which may also be found in the explicitly philosophical passages. The least we can say is that narration and digression are not at odds with each other, but would rather seem to instance each other: the digressions an attempt to recover the world, the story of Juan a part of Byron's trace upon that world; and that both narration and digression may be regarded as one constructive project which is most active, most constructive, in those momentary turns of device and syntax with which we have become familiar. Even a reader unacquainted with Byron's symbology and epistemology would have little difficulty seeing in the following stanza that the joy of the character in battle is matched by the author's own joy in the moments of his writing:

> He knew not where he was, not greatly cared,
> For he was dizzy, busy, and his veins
> Fill'd as with lightning--for his spirit shared
> The hour, as is the case with liveliest brains;
> And where the hottest fire was seen and heard,
> And the loud cannon peal'd his hoarsest strains,
> He rush'd . . .
>
> (VIII, st. 33)

Once again, these may seem like extravagant claims to make for Don Juan. But I think they are consistent for a writer who believed abstractly or

philosophically that writing was in several way more real than thinking; and who, all the evidence suggests, felt himself composing, and felt himself to be performing an act with real (though sometimes delayed) consequences. Byron has been called a self conscious writer; I have been showing one sense in which that is true.

And while the passages of narration are not so centrally about the prolongation of the present moment, still they aim at that prolongation; and they are often about it. The passage we examined is, like many, a first experience for Juan, one in which he becomes "thoughtless," loses himself in the present moment. And because Byron keeps him "dizzy, busy," Juan never has much time to think; there are always new experiences to lose himself in. Indeed, it is one of Byron's most important romanticisms that he tries in the character of Juan to show a person whose subjectivity overlaps his objective reality, one who is a portion of that around him. Considered in this way, as an attempt at a Romantic ideal, Juan ceases to be a puppet with no internal life, and becomes one whose most inportant thinking is more like figuration of the world, or even like Coleridge's primary imagination. One can read Juan by reading his environment, verbal and represented; the two sorts of reading are, I take it, supposed to be the same: Juan is never distinct from the world he acts in. Juan thinks his experiences, and his experiences constitute his subjectivity. By providing a continuous supply of new experiences for Juan, Byron keeps himself in control of the poem.

> He had been toss'd, he scarce knew whither:
> Though this might ruin others, it did not him,
> At least entirely--for he had seen too many
> Changes in youth, to be surprised at any.
>
> And these vicissitudes tell best in youth;
> For when the happen at a riper age,
> People are apt to blame the Fates, forsooth,
> And wonder Providence is not more sage.

Adversity is the first path to truth:

(XII, sts. 49-50)

The adventure itself is one of Byron's paths to the truth of the present moment. Juan and Byron keep each other in the present. Byron holds himself in the present.

By now we have a more complete understanding of what that means and what it entails: it is not only the recurrence to the present tense or the fictional present, nor only the references to pen and paper nor the ability to look forward from the writing and intuit the reader--though all these are important and persist through the poem. But we have also in Don Juan what Peter Manning has called "the priority of language over events."[13] I think we can apply Manning's remark quite liberally here. First, as Manning explains, Don Juan is a world in which "gazettes and bulletins impart significance equally with Homer."[14] Everything in Don Juan is writing--thing-like, inked, typographical--and this indicates that Don Juan is not only a world of literature and high culture, but of significance at large; and, as we have been claiming, Byron's struggle therein is not primarily with the great artists of the West, but more precisely with the writing of the West.

Writing is prior to events; not only more real and more important (as history, for instance), but precedent to events. Words are things which come to pass, and not only because ink persists into the future (though the pattern of writing aimed at the future reading may be near the heart of this idea). Writing precedes events in Don Juan in the way that form precedes content. We may disagree with Byron; but I think that this belief is implicit in much of what we've read in this chapter: in the intertextuality of history and literature, for instance, and in the strangely verbal existence of Juan. The reader may wish to take my word

for it that there are dozens of examples in the poem of events, reality--the world--waiting in unformed possibility for some word from Byron or one of his characters. Language is effective; it works into what we call the world. It caused the death of Keats:

> 'Tis strange, the mind, that very fiery particle,
> Should let itself be snuffed out by an article.

Too much description captures the writer himself:

> I don't much like describing people mad,
> For fear of seeming rather touched myself--

and, suggesting in himself what I found in Juan--an overlapping of mind and apparently objective reality: "I write the world." (XV, st. 60) He does also disclaim responsibility--"Nor sought /I/ of foolscap subject to be king"--and this is not altogether true: he wrote, and so sought. But it is incidental to any deliberate or conscious goal of his that in the act of writing he discovers, every time, his own control over the world he claims to write; he recognizes himself there. Admitting the constructive project of the poem, putting his poem before the world, he writes:

> This narrative is not meant for narration;
> But a mere airy and fantastical basis,
> To build up common things with common places.

He builds up things with commonplaces (as in the cliches that constitute Juan in battle) and not the other way around. As before, words are the truer things because their existence is, or can be, liberated from the irrelevant distractions of history and past existence. But the common things, though in some sense secondary, are nevertheless enhanced or humanized by human participation, and by language. They are the subject matter of Don Juan. Difficile est proprie communia dicere." "Nothing so difficult as a beginning/In poesy, unless perhaps the end." We might want to object at first that Don Juan is not at all about common things, but is rather "airy and fantastical"--the narrative of Juan a most uncommon

romance. But as a group, we recent critics have not thought so; we have tended to write about the simple or universal aspects of Juan's story, not his "fierce loves and faithless wars." This is implicit testimony to Byron's success in making the story of Juan appear a common tale, enhance by the poetical presence of Byron. And this tends, I should think, to bring the story of Juan up equal to the digressions in importance.

Language is prior to the recognition of the world; and so is a means or ordering it. We may say then that the narrative of Juan is part of that ritual of return I wrote of earlier; and that one reason Byron goes back again and again into the "frail world" is the unified project of rescuing the world and reconstructing himself within it. The point has been variously made over the last hundred and fifty years that Byron was not always a person with a strong sense of himself--that his description of "mobility" was of homself:

> 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.

There is, as we might have expected, evidence to the contrary, that Byron had a strong sense of himself. It may be true that personalities, or descriptions of personalities, are always paradoxical. And I am not crucially concerned with this issue. I'd be willing to strike some compromise position, and say that Byron had moments of recognizing the ephemerality of personality, of recognizing the existential association of freedom and nothingness. We could say too that Don Juan, like any number of compositions we could name, represents an alternation between the world and the perceiving subject. As I mentioned before, this general description of the workings of the mind is not in competition with my own rendering of it. But I would want at least to claim that Don Juan is not a philosophical departure from Byron's earlier poetry; but that it is rather

an extension of the theories of concrete, effective language use expressed in the historical tragedies and with the philosophy of world-self construction we found in "The Prophecy of Dante" and the other monologues. Fortifying himself against the world--"steeling his breast" as Gleckner has it--is only one motion in a larger epistemological activity. There are, in fact, many passages in Byron's work in which his heroes close themselves off from the world; "The Prisoner of Chillon" is almost entirely about this one slight motion. But we nearly always find that this gesture corresponds in some way to a re-inference of the world: it prepares for the inference, it clears the mind, or anesthetizes it. And in Don Juan the closing off and the inference out are not finally separable: he writes the world. We might recall that making the mind its own place is Satanic advice (or worse, it is Berkelian or Wordsworthian advice), and that it might be possible for a creature of pure space. But those of us who exist also within the flow of time need to argue ourselves into existence. We must be skeptical rather than detached; we must be very skeptical, even to forgetting part of the world, like Dante; but doing so with the aim of a clearer percpetion of the passing present, a perception uncluttered with the trappings of our own past existence.

Those of us who exist in time, who are aware of ourselves at an axis of future becoming past, already have the faculty of "mobility"; we are all already excessively susceptible to immediate impressions, at the same time as we remember the past. So, to varying degrees, we are all making new beginnings all the time, in each articulation. We recreate ourselves and our relation to the past--and often we do so most characteristically when planning for the future. The difference between Byron and other people is that he is aware of this process; the difference between Don Juan and most other poems is that it tries to hold onto that passing moment for as long as

possible. Don Juan prolongs the present; it makes its poetical forays out from that moment; it tries to stay at the point of utterance, within the angle of "the present, past, or future state."

Writing from within that angle leads to a measure of self-involvement, or the feeling of egocentricity; it leads Byron to write of the dangers of idealism, for instance; he admits the attractiveness of Berkeley's philosophy. But this is a temptation to a false, superficial explanation of his experience. Likewise, the commonsense external world fails to sustain the author who is no longer naive because that life is simply a repetition of another form, usually a linguistic, or codified or abstract, form, as is true of the English, for whom:

> manners now make men--
> Pinn'd like a flock, and fleeced too in their fold,
> At least nine, and a ninth beside of ten.
> Now this at all events must render cold
> Your writers, who must either draw again
> Days better drawn before, or else assume
> The present, with their common-place costume.
>
> (XV, st. 26)

Nothing much proceeds from such an existence; the English malaise, as well as their politics, results from their purely formal or mannered perception of the world.

Becoming an individual--becoming real for oneself--is something one does, achieves, very like the mental processes examined under the umbrella term "prophetic monologue." And the action of the mind in constituting itself, in the three passages we have read in this chapter, is recurrently the search for origins--a search often and vigorously proclaimed in Don Juan, because, though look for them he must, the origins are obscure; they proliferate, on the order of texts. he can never be completely certain because wherever he finds an origin he finds himself (or else an echo of the imaginative activity of some other writer). Yet for this very reason the search is desireable; Byron finds something essentially himself in his work--

something, as we may say, that he can identify with. But it is never an easy task. As in XV, sts. 1-5, it requires mental agility; it requires forgetting some part of the commonsense idea of self. It is often a fearsome search; it is almost always sad:

> 'Tis sad to hack into the roots of things,
> They are so much intertwisted with the earth;
> So that the branch a goodly verdure flings,
> I reck not if an acorn gave it birth.
> To trace all actions to their secret springs
> Would make indeed some melancholy mirth;
> But this is not at present my concern,
> And I refer you to wise Oxenenstiern.
>
> (XIV, st. 59)

This ambivalent dwelling on the moment of origin, in all the passages we've read, is at one with Byron's attempt to hold himself in a clarified and knowledgeable present. It can be seen from the stanza above that he is confident of his ability to analyze, to hack into the roots of things, though he leaves that for the moment to Oxenstiern. Byron footnotes his allusion:

> The famous Chancellor Oxenstiern said to his son, on the latter expressing his surprise upon the great effects arising from petty causes in the presumed mystery of politics: "You see by this, my son, with how little wisdom the kingdoms of the world are governed."

The anecdote makes the same point as the stanza: at the center of the mystery one finds not wisdom, but more earthy or earthly impulses: empty behaviors, manners, repetitions of the past.

And finally, the prolongation of the present and the project therein of distinguishing the self from the forces of its context are also at one with Byron's use of language as a tool, a means of defining the individual against its contraries. We began here, several chapters ago, finding what is perhaps the first principle of Byron's philosophy of language: that writing is evidence of the passage of the mind, the most conclusive evidence there is that consciousness exists. This is quite complexly evolved in Don Juan; as I suggested earlier, it is finally an epistemological principle:

"the present vouches for the past." (IV, st. 46) Of course, we need to acknowledge and to leave room here for Byron's skepticism. But more important, we need to see that skepticism itself as subject to temporal conditions, and to the conditions of writing which are always of first importance to Byron (regardless of the degree to which he was aware of them). We have already read the apostrophe to doubt: "Oh Doubt! if that thou be'st doubt--but which I doubt extremely." But in an even more thorough-going rejection of formal systems or codes, we find once again that there are two pleasures for our choosing:

> If from great nature's, or our own abyss
> Of thought we could but snatch a certainty,
> Perhaps mankind might find the path they miss--
> But then 'twould spoil much good philosophy.
> One system eats another up, and this
> Much as old Saturn ate his progeny;
> For when his pious consort gave him stones
> In lieu of sons, of these he made no bones.
>
> (XIV, st. 1)

The abyss of nature is again the same as the abyss of our own thought four stanzas later. And as we read this, we can remember the several kinds of courage we have seen elsewhere: the courage of facing a blank page; the courage of Byron's "war with words"; the courage of facing, at the center of all things, an image of oneself--a lurking thought, a "lurking bias"; the courage of Juan in battle:

> And there's a courage which grows out of fear,
> Perhaps of all the most desperate, which will dare
> The worst to <u>know</u> it:--when the mountains rear
> Their peaks beneath your human foot, and there
> You look down o'er the precepice, and drear
> The gulf of rock yawns,--you can't gaze a minute,
> Without an awful wish to plunge within it.
>
> 'Tis true, you don't--but, pale and struck with terror,
> Retire: but look into your past impression!
> And you will find, though shuddering at the mirror
> Of your own thoughts, in all their self-confession,
> The lurking bias, be it truth or error,
> To the <u>unknown</u>; a secret prepossession,
> To plunge with all your fears--but where? You know not,
> And that's the reason why you do--or do not.
>
> (XIV, sts. 5-6)

We find ourselves in this sublime moment, when we are just ready to step off into the unknown; and in any beginning, if we are true to our experience, there is an echo of this sublime of possibility. For the same reason, we are, as it were, permanently stuck at some distance from any natural or independently substantial sense of self; we are essentially neither nature nor the abyss of thought (though by some act of bad faith we may deceive ourselves into thinking that we are one or the other); rather, in truth, we are ourselves a possibility, a kind of point between real and ideal, a point of activity between past and future which never perfectly (or substantially) realizes itself, nor can establish itself once for all; but which can be felt evanescently in the passing moment; and which, in writing that is courageous enough to face the future and try to seize the possibilities--to step off into the abyss--can be strengthened, prolonged, and controlled to a degree.

Here I conclude. But I would like to end by adducing one last instance of what seems to me a vital point of contact between the narrative of Juan and Byron's sense of himself as the producer of a text. This is in a different mood that we have seen, though--another sublime moment, but "without its terrors." It occurs during a description of Haidee watching over Juan as he sleeps; the passage broadens in this stanza to touch on the universal experience--the joy that we all feel when watching the beloved asleep. That beloved is "it" here, and this is some clue to the overlapping of person and thing; this is another inference, though without the usual argumentative trappings. But before I noticed the pronoun I felt that this stanza was drawn, like so many others, directly from Byron at his writing desk; and I remembered that one prominent love relationship in Don Juan is between Byron and his manuscript:

> For there it lies so tranquil, so beloved,
> All that it hath of life with us is living;
> So gentle, stirless, helpless, and unmoved,

And all unconscious of the joy 'tis giving;
All it hath felt, inflicted, pass'd, and proved,
Hush'd into depths beyond the watcher's diving;
There lies the thing we love with all its errors
And all its charms, like death without its terrors.
(II, st. 197)

Notes

[1] I count five additional occurrences of the "Juan/new one" rhyme: VII, 60; VIII, 29; XII, 23; XIV, 91.

[2] Ridenour, Style, Chapter One: "The Philosophy of Styles."

[3] Cooke, Blind Man, p. 163.

[4] I have already mentioned that M. K. Joseph calles the narrator of Don Juan "Byron himself."

[5] In Romantic Origins, Leslie Brisman writes of Byron that his "sense of present fallenness suggested anteriority." I have something of this sort in mind here; p. 220.

[6] I must say that the whole process reminds me of nothing so much as Chinese cooking: hours spent in preparation, the cooking over in a moment.

[7] I would just say that most canto beginnings in Don Juan are of the more formal and fuller sequence: a general assertion followed by specific qualifications. See especially Canto XVII, sts. 1-6

[8] The device Byron uses here is the same that John Barth uses to rather greater effect in his story "Title."

[9] McGann, cited in note 7 to Chapter Vi.

[10] Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961), p. 271.

[11] M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp (New York: W. W. Norton, 1958), pp. 21-26.

[12] Paul West, Byron: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood

Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), ed. Paul West, "Introduction," p. 2: "It is Byron and Byron's idea of himself which hold his work together, just as that idea enthralled Europe and summed up under the heading of Byronism a variety of European obsessions." West cites Northrop Frye in the same essay, p. 4: "The main appeal of Byron's poetry is that it is Byron's."

[13] Peter Manning, Byron and His Fictions, p. 66.

[14] Manning, Fictions, p. 66.

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