Poetry

CRITICISM

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Poetry Criticism

Excerpts from Criticism of the Works of the Most Significant and Widely Studied Poets of World Literature

Volume 95

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Childe Harold's Pilgrimage

Lord Byron

(Full name George Gordon Noel Byron) The following entry presents criticism of Byron's narrative poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-1818). For information on Byron's complete career, see *PC,* Volume 16.

INTRODUCTION

A travel narrative based on Byron's European journeys, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* introduced the Romantic era's most famous literary persona, the Byronic hero—a tortured genius, proud, sensitive, passionate, occasionally cruel, and haunted by guilt for an unspecified transgression. The poem consists of four cantos, written in Spencerian stanzas—eight iambic pentameter lines followed by one twelve-syllable iambic line or alexandrine—inspired by Edmund Spencer's late sixteenth-century allegory *The Faerie Queene,* a copy of which accompanied Byron on his travels. The rhyme scheme is ABABBCBCC. The work is considered autobiographical despite Byron's insistence that Harold was a fictional character.

TEXTUAL HISTORY

Byron's original manuscript was titled *Childe Burun,* combining an early variation of his own surname with the medieval title signifying a youthful nobleman. Before publication, the poet changed the name of the hero to Harold in an apparent attempt to distance himself from his poetic persona. The first canto, which he began writing in Jannina, Greece, at the end of October, 1809, was completed in Athens by the end of the year. In March, 1810, Byron finished the second canto in Smyrna, Turkey. The explanatory notes to the first two cantos were written in early 1811, after which Byron returned to England, and in July of that year, presented the manuscript to R. C. Dallas. Dallas read it with enthusiasm and passed it along to John Murray II, publisher of Scott and Southey, who published Cantos I and II on March 10, 1812, in a run of 500 quarto copies, followed almost immediately by 3,000 copies of an octavo edition. By 1815, the publisher had issued ten editions of the work.

In 1816 Byron embarked on another European tour following the breakup of his marriage and, as he had in the past, turned to the composition of poetry as a cathartic exercise. He completed Canto III of the *Pilgrimage*—based on his journey from Dover to Waterloo, then along the Rhine, and on to Switzerland—in early July. The manuscript was carried back to England by his friends Mary and Percy Shelley in August, and Murray published it in November, 1816. Seven thousand copies were sold within a week of its publication. Canto IV, the longest section of the poem, was composed in Italy and is based on a pilgrimage from Venice to Rome, by way of Arqua, Ferrara, and Florence. It was published by Murray on April 28, 1818; the first edition's five printings consisted of ten thousand copies.

PLOT AND MAJOR CHARACTERS

The eponymous protagonist of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* was a fictional character according to Byron, however, readers habitually identified him with Byron himself. Considering the work's obvious autobiographical elements and the fact that by the fourth canto, Byron replaced third person narration with a first-person narrator who increasingly overshadowed the character of Harold, the assumption was understandable. Ostensibly a travelogue, the poem's first two cantos describe scenes both ordinary and exotic from Byron's 1809-1811 journeys through Spain, Portugal, Albania, Greece, and Turkey. However, the work is less a faithful record of a tourist's experiences abroad than an account of the effect those experiences had on the poem's young sensitive protagonist. Reflections on contemporary political, moral, and social issues are the subject of numerous digressions from the central narrative. In Canto I, the narrator's descriptions of sites associated with Napoleon's military conquests lead to a commentary on the horror and futility of war. Canto II, written while Byron was in Athens, Cape Sounion, and Marathon, surveying the ruins of a once magnificent civilization, contains an angry diatribe against Thomas Bruce, the Earl of Elgin, for his plundering of the antiquities of ancient Greece.

In Canto III, the original protagonist, Harold, begins to fade into the background while the narrator, who more and more closely resembles Byron himself, takes a more central position. He begins and ends the canto with a personal address to his daughter Ada, interrupted by observations on the flawed genius of Napoleon and Rousseau, and on the futility of war. In Canto IV Byron

completely abandons his fictional persona in favor of a first-person narrator; however, he continues his use of the pilgrimage framework to ruminate on the glorious histories of Venice and Rome, whose civilizations have disappeared, but whose art endures.

MAJOR THEMES

The major theme of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* involves the contemporary plight of Western man, mentally and spiritually exhausted by the disruptions engendered by war and revolution, searching for intellectual and spiritual renewal. Like the medieval quest poem on which the work is modeled, wherein a knight embarks on a journey to find or recover a sacred object, Byron's poem deals with a world-weary young man's journey to find meaning and moral certainty in a chaotic, often meaningless world. Other themes of Cantos I and II—addressed in the narrator's many digressions from the main narrative—involve the evils of tyranny and nostalgia for the lost civilization of classical Greece.

Canto III deals with the theme of personal loss as the poet/narrator, having given up the pretense of speaking through the fictional Harold, addresses his daughter Ada, lamenting their separation and his ensuing loneliness. This part of the poem was written immediately following the breakup of Byron's marriage and his separation from his wife and young daughter, and for many critics it represents the poet's belief in the cathartic value of the creative act. Also in Canto III, prompted by Byron's visit to the battlefield of Waterloo, is a commentary on the character of Napoleon, as well as on Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in which the poet offers an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of each man. Byron's thoughts on war also find their way into Canto III, as the poet distinguishes between wars of aggression and wars in defense of freedom. Canto IV's theme is provided by the contrast between the transitory nature of civilizations and the permanent transcendent quality of great art and literature. Another important theme is inherent in the contrast between tyranny—which Byron associates with the dictators of ancient Rome, and in his own time, Napoleon—and freedom, which the poet associates with George Washington.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

In Byron's time, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* was enormously successful as evidenced by the numerous printings that almost immediately followed the appearance of each installment. With some surprise, Byron himself commented on the reception of the first two cantos: "I awoke one morning and found myself famous." He quickly became the most celebrated poet in England. Now, as then, the work was considered highly autobiographical and scholars today continue to explore this aspect of the work. Paul Elledge, for example, has studied Canto III in an attempt to determine the impact of the poet's separation from his wife (or his abandonment by her, as Byron characterized it) on the poet's creativity. The critic finds the poet filled with anxiety and ambivalence, noting that "embedded in Harold's alternating impulses toward separateness and connection lie Byron's own mixed feelings about the biological and textual products of his authorship." Elledge reads Canto III's "opening connective and dividing lines" which "fuse regret and relief, liberating escape and nostalgic pain, fantasized reattachment and willed cleavage" as a reflection of the poet's own ambiguity about his voyage and separation from his wife and child. Brian C. Cooney (see Further Reading) also comments on the ambiguity apparent in Canto III; the critic considers the canto part of an ongoing attempt by Byron to win over his reading public in the aftermath of the breakup of his marriage and the surrounding scandal.

The poet's relationship to history has also been studied by a number of critics, with Stephen Cheeke exploring Byron's treatment of the specific places in Europe that provided the various settings for *Childe Harold,* but which were also sites of composition for the poet. According to Cheeke, Byron was adept at invoking the *genius loci* of various historically significant places and measuring himself against them. Diego Saglia notes that Byron's impressions of various places were informed not only through the experience of visiting them on his pilgrimage, but were also based on his textual knowledge acquired through reading prior to his journey.

Cantos I and II were influenced by James Beattie and James Thomson writing in the Spenserian tradition, according to Byron's Preface; however, Alan Rawes contends that it was also influenced by more contemporary models, in particular the odes of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth. As Rawes sees it, many of the lyrical sequences of the first two cantos "present us with a determinate speaker who is localized at various places in Spain, Greece, Albania, and Turkey, and many begin with description but develop into articulations of 'memory, thought, anticipation, and feeling' in a way similar to Wordsworth's lyrics." The critic compares Cantos I and II with Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" and finds that "both are centered in a sense of alienation and both look to moments of communion with the natural world as a means of transcending that alienation." Reviewers in Byron's time also had problems with the poet's contention that the work was a "romaunt" in the eighteenth-century Spenserian tradition, according to Jane Stabler, who reports that the

introduction of the character Harold was especially problematic for many of them. She contends that the first two cantos have more in common with the work of Laurence Sterne and Jonathan Swift than with the influences cited by Byron in his Preface.

Deborah Lutz has studied Childe Harold as Byron's "quintessential Byronic hero" whose "voyages mark him as a connoisseur of human nature, an idler whose work is to brood." According to Lutz this figure was the model for Rochester in *Jane Eyre* and Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights,* and still shows up in fiction today as "a hero who is attractive because of his outsider status, because of his magnetic melancholy and his way of leading his lover into the dangers of his wasted subjectivity."

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Poetry

Fugitive Pieces 1807; revised and reprinted as *Hours of Idleness: A Series of Poems, Original and Translated* 1807
English Bards and Scotch Reviewers 1809
Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: A Romaunt [Cantos I and II] 1812
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The Deformed Transformed: A Drama (verse drama) 1824
Don Juan. Cantos XV and XVI 1824
Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works. 7 vols. 1980-1993

Other Major Works

The Parliamentary Speeches of Lord Byron (speeches) 1824
Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, with Notices of His Life. 2 vols. (correspondence and journals) 1830
The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals. 6 vols. (correspondence and journals) 1898-1901
Byron's Letters & Journals. 12 vols. (correspondence and journals) 1975-1982

CRITICISM

Paul Elledge (essay date fall 1994)

SOURCE: Elledge, Paul. "Talking Through the Grate: Interdict and Mediation in Byron's *Pilgrimage,* Canto 3." *Essays in Literature* 21, no. 2 (fall 1994): 200-17.

[*In the following essay, Elledge discusses the autobiographical elements of Canto III of* Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, *in which Byron addressed the breakup of his marriage to Annabella Millbank and his subsequent separation from his daughter Ada.*]

Writing from Ouchy on 17 September 1816, five months after leaving England on the tide of his wife's desertion, and two weeks after dispatching to his publisher the third canto of ***Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,*** Lord Byron ends a letter to his half-sister Augusta Leigh with this warm declaration:

> I shall never find any one like you—nor you (vain as it may seem) like me. We are just formed to pass our lives together, and therefore—we—at least I—am by a crowd of circumstances removed from the only being who could ever have loved me, or whom I can unmixedly feel attached to. Had you been a Nun—and I a Monk—that we might have talked through a grate instead of across the sea—no matter—my voice and my heart are ever thine—[1]

Earlier portions of the letter cite the "wretchedness," "mental torture," and "destruction" of the poet at Lady Byron's hand and oppose her to the more compatible Augusta, herself implicated in the breakup of Byron's London household. Disclaiming vengefulness, the poet nevertheless foresees the "recoil upon her own head" of his wife's conduct toward him. And as a balancing counter to the charge that "She has . . . separated me from my child—& from you," Byron invites Augusta to join him for a spring tour, only to identify his dependent and self-absorbed brother-in-law as "the great obstacle" to any such "scheme of recreation or relaxation" for his sister. Regretting Augusta's marriage and his own, Byron concludes the letter with a profession subverted by the monastic hypothesis quoted above: Augusta uniquely qualifies as his object of "unmixed" emotion, but between them he figuratively erects a barrier as evocative of imprisonment as of conventual discipline, and, perhaps guiltily, exposes a retroactive wish for chaste association. At least twice in this letter Byron reaches out affectionately to his sister and withdraws from her, declares her proximity desirable and imagines it impeded. And although claiming a constitutional fitness to live with her, he returns for the love Augusta is capable of extending him not reciprocal love but a cooler if avowedly unalloyed "attachment." One might assume that Byron's subtle checks against the expression and enactment of stronger passion respond to the social abuse he and his sister sustained as suspicions of their sexual intimacy sizzled through London salons in the days just before his embarkation. But the rhythms of advance and retreat, of affective approach and withdrawal in the letter typify both Byron's relational history and his textualized alliances.[2] Paradigmatic of affiliations sought and denied, established and ruptured in his canon, they prove peculiarly compelling in ***Childe Harold's Pilgrimage 3*** for the immediacy of their autobiographical provenance.

Jerome J. McGann calls Canto 3 of the ***Pilgrimage*** "Byron's personal self-examination and a public justification . . . [his] expressed attempt to come to terms with the collapse of his marriage and the public response to that event in England."[3] I will argue that the poem graphically inscribes separation—rewrites ***The Separation***—along with an anxiety about relationship and its absence that structures Byron's approach to re-engagement with an audience from whom he felt and feared alienating betrayal through a process attributable and analogous to Lady Byron's abandonment of him. Mapped across Canto 3, the dissociative trope defines the impact of his wife's estrangement on Byron's creative consciousness, and shapes a radical relational indeterminateness registered in the valedictory occasions intrinsic to pilgrimage but here framed by farewells to the poet's daughter, Augusta Ada. Embedded in Harold's alternating impulses toward separateness and connection lie Byron's own mixed feelings about the biological and textual products of his authorship. Such associational ambivalence particularly informs his closural protocol, where he uses the child to facilitate reception of the ***Childe*** by readers courted and critiqued, and to negotiate severance from both text and daughter. "Attachment" in the third canto of the Pilgrimage is no more "unmixed" than the brother's epistolary longing for the sister, but it is textured of a resistance—the interdictive fretwork, the conventual grille—that also enables it.

> Is thy face like thy mother's, my fair child?
> Ada! sole daughter of my house and heart?
> When last I saw thy young blue eyes they smiled,
> And then we parted,—not as now we part,
> But with a hope.—

Thus Byron began his third canto of ***Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*** upon departing Dover for the Continent (25 April 1816), having formally separated from his wife three days earlier, just over four years after Cantos 1 and 2 had rocketed him on a trajectory now collapsed in freefall. These years of astonishing literary fame, social eminence, financial extravagance, and amorous intrigue were but lately tarnished by rumors of sexual misconduct that moved a lubricious Regency London to eject him as swiftly as it had exalted him. Perhaps within minutes of an embarkation Byron welcomed as escape from gossips, creditors, and the stigmas of domestic disaster and social banishment, he set down the above parting reflection on the infant daughter, his acknowledgment of an emotional tie surpassing in candor and equivocation that of the departing pilgrim in Canto 1. The risk posed by such candor may split the stanza where my quotation of it ends, a rupture visibly reproducing the disjunctive action already staggered by caesurae as consciousness of his withdrawal from Ada dawns on the poet. For the moment, however, entranced absorption admits enough separative awareness to inspire a denial of it in Byron's imaginative reconstruction of the recently shattered triad.[4]

But is it denial? Does the reverie lean shoreward in a fantasized reconnection of self with separated other? Signification proves as elusive in this hybridized interrogative/exclamation as is its affective content. Charitably construed, the query fondly searches the child for signs of the spouse, expecting solace from the doubling of a beloved countenance. Or does it push beyond physical resemblance? Is "face" synecdochic, and the question about a broader similarity between mother and daughter exclusive of himself? Does Byron ask whether the child's face like the mother's is set against him? Does he dissolve the triadic family unit of line 1 ("thy face," "thy mother's," "my") into the binary unit of the second line—a subtle realignment aided by the quietly insistent possessive of line 2—and thus elide the mother from valedictory regrets?[5] Supposing his inquiry not merely rhetorical, does the poet desire

paternal resemblance in the child, as Byron had done in the poem to his wife five weeks earlier (**"Fare Thee Well"** 41-44)? Or does the inquiry doubt the mother's beauty and punningly suspect her justice toward him? Should we focus formally upon the paradox of the father mourning the family he abandons, or biographically explore the effects of fresh privation upon a psyche already seared by loss?[6]

However we answer these questions from an incomplete series of interpretive possibilities, we must adjust our response a word or phrase further along in an unstable text continuously revising itself under the intense emotional pressures it inscribes. An apt reflection of Byron's complex attitudes toward the current voyage and toward leave-taking in principle, these opening connective and dividing lines fuse regret and relief, liberating escape and nostalgic pain, fantasized reattachment and willed cleavage. And if Ada as biological creation substitutes for the poem as imaginative product of the same father, Byron's lines also express the anxiety of the authorizing agent over the attractiveness, acceptability, and measurable filial kinship with its ancestry of the issue—the text—now in preparation as coupling instrument between himself and the audience he forsakes in the voyage.

Mnemonic bridging is an instinctive departure reflex. If Byron's opening lines arch the parent/child gap and console separative sorrow, remembrance of his last sight of Ada might accomplish the same end. But the prior sighting recalled in lines 3-4 as itself a rupture short-circuits the presumably desired effect of imagined attachment otherwise achieved by memory, particularly in its pointed emotional difference from the present parting. Recollection of a hopeful separation superimposed upon the disjunctive moment only quickens the departure sorrow of one seeking in it relief from its antithesis. The disappointment of painfully remembered hope explodes the reverie, and, supplemented by the suspected hopelessness of the present division, judges further fantasizing upon reunion a pointless, self-punishing exercise.

The abrupt termination of his reverie represents Byron's nearest (if still reserved) approximation to expression of regret over his alienated status. The unusual constraint on speech, on protest, in the dissociative event signals an attitude toward disunion—or the disunion here referenced—as definitive as the textual strategies that disguise, conceal, or divert attention from it. In Byron's silence rests at least passing accession to removal, a resignation compatible with the surrender to wend and wave of 3.2 and with the disclaimer of separative affect in the concluding clause of stanza 1:

> but the hour's gone by,
> When Albion's lessening shore could grieve or glad
> mine eye.

The second half of this stanza refutes the denying energies of the first, verbalizing acceptance by vividly fashioning the divisive action.[7] And that action (lines 5-9) develops from lines 2-4 in a typically Byronic sequence: if the ache of remembered hope compels the mind to redirect its focus, so too Byron's acknowledgments of intimacy often spell its end. The farewell moment here follows close upon the bestowal of affection by smiling infant eyes.[8]

II

Accompanied by "the wandering outlaw of his own dark mind"—an alien yet retrieved as companion[9] (3.3)—seeking in forgetfulness the mental equivalent of separation, the poet resumes the pilgrimage only to halt it almost immediately on the empiric dust of Waterloo field, site of spectacular devastation, now an atomistic "place of skulls" (3.17-20).[10] The field inspires Byron's recreation of the ball hosted by the Duchess of Richmond on 15 June (shifted to the eve of the decisive battle, two nights later), the third canto's domesticated version of the Suliote's war song of Canto 2, another martial celebration of the carnage to follow it, similarly constructed of disjunctive moments (see 3.26 for a more exact and succinct parallel).[11] Canonry arrests the festivities:

> And there were sudden partings, such as press
> The life from out young hearts, and choking sighs
> Which ne'er might be repeated; who could guess
> If ever more should meet those mutual eyes,
> Since upon nights so sweet such awful morn could
> rise?
>
> (3.24)

Whether or not Byron fearfully remembers here other eyes remembered at departure, memory of his own frenzied preparations for precipitate flight under invasive social shelling may inform this representation. If the dreaded proximity of the dramatized partings to the final one which they prefigure invests them with a nearly fatal terror, another destabilizing horror of the episode emerges from the contiguity of antithetical states of being and feeling,[12] in the dizzying rapidity with which the benign can turn malignant, as, for example, in the epistolary transformation of a wife's sojourn at the parental home into the abandonment of her spouse—a change in Lady Byron's travel plans that stunned and bewildered the poet. His adjoining of festivity and catastrophe rests on historical (and probably on personal domestic) foundation, of course, but his fascination with the idea expresses a Calvinistic sense of the punishment all pleasure earns. His characteristic denial of relational longevity exploits the intensity exhausted by extension and familiarity, and witnesses the principle of human fickleness, itself, for Byron, proof enough of the will of union to self-

destruct. In the present case, however, if sunderance falls from a terrible swift sword, it retroactively enhances the rapture it chills; the alarm of the dawn gilds the bliss it terminates, for Byronic expectation of reversal always refines contingent joy. But it is hard to exercise such foresight from the social pinnacle so recently vacated by the poet here imagining the "awful," sudden defeat of other pride.

III

Concluding the third canto's famous meditation on Napoleon (and other "madmen" [3.36-45] similarly doomed by their extraordinary gifts), Byron reads in "chiefless castles breathing stern farewells" emblems of a "lofty mind, / Worn, but unstooping" (3.46-47)—i.e., correlatives of the identity interpreting them whose own "castles," recent objects of his farewell, also stand effectively "chiefless" if not "tenantless" (Newstead is formally leased, and Piccadilly Terrace has become a bailiffs' haunt [3.47]). The ostensible focus of 3.46 is "Maternal Nature" along the "majestic Rhine," but for four stanzas these crumbling structures dominate Byron's imagination as figures partly of the observer's reclusive pride, partly, and perhaps less consciously, of his felt deficiency.[13] Forlorn shrines to robber barons, the castles memorialize absence, their valedictory austerity a brooding testimonial to vitality and personae passed away. Whether as tropes of haughty desuetude they morally impact upon the poet is problematic, but perception of them through the memory screen of an involuntarily abandoned Newstead Abbey, through a psyche bruised in the evacuation of London property by wife, self, and law, and through the humiliation of a social ejection that stigmatized him a ruined man—such perception drives Byron's refashioning of the Rhine castles in a metaphor which is the signature not only of his relational identity but also replicative of his recent victimization: it defines a creative faculty gripped by divisive distress. But the mind remembering absence by disavowal remedially dissolves into the mind remembering faithful presence, in this instance the loyal sister Augusta, to whom Byron shortly turns.

At the canto's mid-point, he addresses an "exulting and abounding river" (3.50):

> Adieu to thee, fair Rhine! How long delighted
> The stranger fair would linger on his way!
> Thine is a scene alike where souls united
> Or lonely Contemplation thus might stray;
> And could the ceaseless vultures cease to prey
> On self-condemning bosoms, it were here,
> Where Nature, nor too sombre nor too gay,
> Wild but not rude, awful yet not austere,
> Is to the mellow Earth as Autumn to the year.
>
> (3.59)

Stanzas 52-55, meanwhile, have mapped a mellowing in ***Harold,*** claimed development of his love for "blooming infancy," and twice cited his bonding, by "mortal enmities / Still undivided," to "one fond . . . soft breast." To the beloved Augusta, then, Byron sends his lyric, "The castled crag of Drachenfels," these "absent greetings" (3.55), a phrase voiding its own salutation in relational indecision. Constructed like earlier stanzas on the proximity of contraries, they situate the castle ruins amid the verdure of Rhine banks empty of the one presence necessary for their perfectibility. Lamented division inspires the song and is explicit in the repair it attempts, just as extinction controls the next three stanzas on fallen heroes and blasted estates (Marceau and Ehrenbreitstein). Thus to stanza 59, where Byron's adieu is less valedictory than directive as an excuse for cataloguing constituents of the natural landscape. It amounts to a feint by the experiencing poet and the composing author, and a rhetorical hoax on the reader, beneficial to all parties, whereby the threat of departure forces the mind into appreciative notice of what it will momentarily lose: a conditioned imagination by faking farewell urges itself to record (for future restoration?) the scene that pilgrimage requires it to surrender (3.60). Even so, relinquishment comes hard, given the valley's defining attractions. Moderation its feature, this precinct provides nondiscriminating refuge and solace for the solitary wanderer no less than for "souls united," the two modes in which the speaker alternately operates. Rhine valley nature illustrates a via media absolutely contrary to the constitutional and behavioral extremes realized in Napoleon and Rousseau. It figures integration and equilibrium over against the pilgrim's solitude, restiveness, and fevered gloom; and it smoothly consolidates those neighboring antithetical ontological conditions set throughout the canto in a tension normally pitched toward their darker member. Stretching in counterpoint to them, the temperate terrain of the valley proves sufficiently inviting to be accepted in the process of bidding it farewell. Byron's withdrawal, his verbal back-pedaling away from the seductive landscape, both affirms the allure and admits the hazard of delaying among such potentially instructive influences to the alien mind now scanning them en route somewhere else. Harmony invites conversion, reminds the outcast of his estrangement. If rhetorically formulaic, and necessary to pilgrimatic mobility, the precautionary promises/threats of travel resumption in 59 and 60 pledge a relatively safe experience of the valley's attractions. The poet loves the scene because he can leave it.

But his surer protection, his fall-back retreat, slashes across the midsection of stanza 59 in a Promethean allusion that extinguishes the possibility of therapeutic benefit and claims responsibility for resisting it. The valley must and does fail at this moment for the victimized rebel, willfully alone but for demonic visitation, in self-incriminating torment, predator on his own dark soul. The adopted Promethean identity rises as interdict between speaker and natural ministry, aroused by the

availability of succor to refuse it. The poet leaves the scene because unwilling to want it.

This destabilizing ambivalence spills over into the tensions opening 3.60:

> Adieu to thee again! a vain adieu!
> There can be no farewell to scene like thine;
> The mind is coloured by thy every hue;
> And if reluctantly the eyes resign
> Their cherish'd gaze upon thee, lovely Rhine!
> 'Tis with the thankful glance of parting praise;
> More mighty spots may rise—more glaring shine,
> But none unite in one attaching maze
> The brilliant, fair, and soft,—the glories of old days
> . . .

And so on, across stanzaic enjambment, continues the list of constituents in that unity. But here is not merely recapitulation of the gesture opening 3.59 but enabling transformation of it, a compromise permitting the separation desired and regretted. For the narrator's "Adieu . . . vain adieu" is a verbal construction distinct from the actions it signifies. There can be no saying farewell, no semantic ritual to mark the imminent departure, for in the sense now developed separation cannot occur between the mind and the object it has absorbed. Tinctured by the scene, the mind shares its identity; forever altered by exposure, it cannot unknow what it has read. Imaginative union thus transcends although it does not defeat material disunion. The scene overpowers the word that would abandon it, insists upon its own retention; but the valedictory word retains its power in the mobility released by its suppression. The pilgrim can slip away with unarticulated notice, the Rhine bank landscape mnemonically assimilated, and so remain, in the absence of an acknowledging speech act, indivisibly attached. If denied acknowledgment in the usual utterance, however, division demands it in another, so that by distortion the spoken becomes the visual valedictory, "the thankful glance of parting praise" (my emphasis), which as glance disables articulation and yet sanctions the act under verbal constraint. The caginess of Byron's maneuvering in this stanza, by which he has his vista and leaves it too, is particularly provocative because of the valley's representation in lover-like guise, as though at some psychological stratum the admired prospect substitutes for a beloved person. Without pressing that point, I do propose that the stanza's enactment of the farewell so far avoided in (or missing from) the canto allows for—although it is still disposed to repress—the harmless discharge of parting passion against an object insensible to it. The event amounts to a practice run in the strenuous business of letting-go, where holding-on is yet permitted—a rehearsal that retroacts upon similar dilemmas whose options were less desirable. For imaginative retention, now named and valorized, mediates without impeding rupture. But the strategy also fails, or at least yields, as though defective, to a more potent verbal expedient: in triumphant validation of the self-stationing implied by Byron's withheld adieux, stanza 61 observes of the Rhine banks, "But these recede." Mobile terrain transfixes the poet, and exonerates him of separative responsibility.

But I have anticipated ending without duly emphasizing Byron's sharpened definition of Rhine bank nature as he and it detach from each other. In two particulars the valley surpasses grander, more luminous prospects: it moderates and unifies, tempers as it assimilates its constituents, and so earns the poet's complimentary glance. The "one attaching maze" holds together through the itemization of 3.61, a catalogue compatible with the expanding perspective of the withdrawing poet. As it stretches on, the inventory challenges, pushes at, the outer boundaries of the comprehending totality, continuance determining its spacious volume. But if this list results from the perspectival enlargement shaped by the poet's retreat, it also interrogates the affirmation of fusion. Replicating the relationship experienced in its narrower section, the coherence of the widening prospect survives the retiring poet. Its incremental amplitude (over)compensates for the subtraction it suffers with his exit. The indelible vision of the singularity of multiplicity, the perception of particled but indivisible unity to which Byron cannot bid farewell, is nevertheless vitiated by awareness that it retains nothing at all of him. Paradigmatic, permanent relatedness shuts him out, just as the ambivalently withdrawing, self-condemning psyche declines binding ties.

And yet this self-divided and dissociated mind has positively responded to a scene of harmonic union. Whether presented or recognized as an ideal of integrated autonomy, of relational integrity to which that mind might aspire, the landscape functionally as embracing unity and departure point figures a presiding bipolarity of the identity engaging it—the pilgrim's conflicted impulses toward separateness and relationship. Associational pressure builds from 3.5, undergoes negative qualification in the attempted adieux of stanzas 59 and 60, and then peaks in the sweeping elaborations of lines 579-89, where permanent scenic incorporation through exodus substitutes for prior distress over human divisiveness and conceivably forecasts resocialization. The Rhine valley achieves its impact under threat of observational desertion: anticipated loss enhances its value and enriches association following literal disjunction. And pleasurable alliance, therapeutically reinvented to satisfy other psychic imperatives, proportionately rewards the separative anxiety it succeeds. Dissociations, in short, define all quests; letting-go always partners union even if the breach must be patched through the astonishing resources of denial. But more

subtly Byron may also submit that every adieu is ultimately vain, and every experienced scene, every read text, portion of every other.[14]

The Rhine prospect finds its converse in a stormy Swiss valley:

> . . . where the swift Rhone cleaves his way between
> Heights which appear as lovers who have parted
> In hate, hose mining depths so intervene,
> That they can meet no more, though broken-hearted;[15]
> . . . Love was the very root of the fond rape,
> Which blighted their life's bloom, and then departed:—Itself expired. . . .
>
> (3.94)

With each regretful line of this stanza naming a form of division, the poet's projection of personal circumstance onto geological phenomena obviously reflects fixation by fracture, almost certainly by the fracture recently legalized, for the poetic inscription of which (in **"Fare Thee Well"**) the same intertext from Christabel served as epigraph (see ***CPW*** [***Complete Poetical Works***] 2. 311). More interesting, and unlike the Coleridge passage, these lines represent love organically rooted in lethal rage. If the poet works out of the cliche nearly allying love and hate, he darkens and stamps it Byronic: the loving embrace breeds the rage that breaks it. Affectionate, foolish "rage" fatally attacks its generating agent and, burned out, itself departs, the garden of its operation a desolate waste. Of the two departures cited in the stanza, the psychological one is as lamentable as the physical division of the lovers, for the loss of a vitalizing, outer-directed anger leaves behind minds enervated, self-destructively embattled, frozen in seasonless time.

Stanza 109 announces abandonment of "man's works" (Rousseau's, Voltaire's, Gibbon's) for reconsideration of "his Maker's" texts, and begins Byron's closural procedure for the third canto:

> But let me quit man's works. again to read
> His Maker's, spread around me, and suspend
> This page, which from my reveries I feed,
> Until it seems prolonging without end.
> The clouds above me to the white Alps tend,
> And I must pierce them, and survey whate'er
> May be permitted, as my steps I bend
> To their most great and growing region, where
> The earth to her embrace compels the powers of air.

This preparation for the "suspension" of Byron's own "page" rehearses the maneuver by which he will shortly be victimized: closing one book to open another, he prefiguratively enacts the poet/audience disengagement he will force by ending the canto. Initiating the abandonment, he preempts abandoning prerogative in the only tactic that can establish relationship with a purchasing public rather than with the imagined readership entertained during composition: he can achieve affiliation only by inscribing its end. Meanwhile, however, Byron provides as precedent for abandonment a virtually unassailable rationale: his substitution of divine for human discourse dares us to close his book for a less than similarly sublime text. Moreover, the implication that only divine utterance competitively compels suspension valorizes the text thus closed by claiming its rivalry. And all of these measures embolden the poet for whom, despite a half-apology for prolixity echoing the endings of Cantos 1 and 2, separation from audience has become a weightier matter than in 1812, chiefly by economic reason of his best-seller status.[16] Particularly from an author-reader relationship almost certainly affected by his recent personal history, Byron does not wish—and cannot afford—to take reckless leave.

Hence the invitation in signing-off to stay tuned: he "suspends" a communication intended though not scheduled for resumption beyond his reading of the "Maker's" lines. Neither permanently replaceable nor static, his discourse may eventually benefit, intertexually, from "reveries" generated by the Alpine text he now scans. That is, his reading of the "Maker's" book literally involves aspiration toward new heights, demands unaccustomed exertion, opens vertical and extends horizontal pilgrimatic planes, and so implants expectations that adventures there experienced will be recycled in the resumed narrative, on the model of Canto 3. It is another advertisement, but a trailer with a difference: to "pierce" "The clouds above me . . . and survey whate'er / May be permitted . . ." is to separate not principally for solitary self-recrimination but for achievement, less for escape than conquest; and it demands the affirmative expenditure of focused energy on a sharply-defined enterprise. Byron's proposed "reading," in other words, critiques his customary departure protocol as well as the pilgrim's resigned embarkations. It is purposive, freer of anxiety, despite the concluding "embrace" trope which reassuringly displaces onto nature the unshakable alliance Byron wants to ensure between author and audience.

And yet that embrace and the activity it climaxes prove suspect. The tract that Byron proposes to read may at first appear a loose recapitulation at higher altitudes of the Rhine valley, a rarefied, precipitous expanse of earth, cloud and sky indissolubly fused. But in that region "earth to her embrace compels the powers of air . . . ," the forced embrace balancing the poet's enforced ascent and matching the censorship imposed on his reading. Although the stanza's second half invites a Freudian gloss, I merely suggest that its strong resistance to the transactions it foresees—the sense of coercion and constraint faintly augured by the permission asked in line one of the stanza—subverts at conception the proposed initiative and identifies Byron's