

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
THE OPERATIONAL MODE OF BYRON'S DON JUAN

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Thank you, Dr. Ogden, for giving me time to work.

A B S T R A C T

The Operational Mode of Byron's Don Juan

The purpose of this thesis is to establish the unique nature of the narrative consciousness in Byron's Don Juan. Basically the distinguishing quality of this mind is its self-conscious manner of searching for meaning, order, and certainty while at the same time revealing a fundamental propensity for changeableness, uncertainty and even self-contradiction. Although rife with possibilities for error, this mode of behavior has two advantages. First it provides the author with a creative flexibility whereby he can repeatedly define himself in relationship to the changing stimuli of his environment. And, secondly, by this act of continued self-definition he becomes more highly motivated to put his conscious actions in line with his most basic perceptions of human reality.¹

The organizational structure of this thesis is based on Byron's analysis of the revolutionary situation in Italy:

We are all looking at one another, like wolves on their prey in pursuit, only waiting for the first faller on, to do unutterable things. They are a great world in Chaos, or Angels in Hell, which you please; but out of Chaos came Paradise, and out of Hell-- I don't know what: but the Devil went in there, and he was a fine fellow once, you know.

(Letter to John Murray, 8 October 1820)

The narrator of Don Juan, like the revolutionary, dares to enter a world that looks like chaos and hell. He attempts an exploratory analysis of

¹ As Jerome McGann has observed, this kind of poetic strategy "does not reveal Byron, the man, but the poetic personality into which he mythologized himself in his work." (Fiery Dust: Byron's Poetic Development (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 25.) Yet while making this distinction, McGann also recognizes that such a linguistic fabrication of personality is meant to bear a direct relationship to an historically existent person, Lord Byron. Hence, in the context of Don Juan the traditional twentieth-century concept of persona is not really a useful tool. For a fuller discussion of the complexities of this problem see Chapter II, pp. 40-42, 59-65, and Chapter III, pp. 107-108.

this domain--a process that reveals a mobile consciousness capable of reacting and re-adjusting in direct response to a new, complex situation. And in turn the reader is provoked to take up an active role and evaluate each separate episode according to the latest reading of his reactions to the changeable events of the poem.

Consistent with this general outline, then, the aim of Chapter One is to show how the poet casts doubt on conventional notions of order and meaning in the universe: how he startles the reader into a fresh awareness of the disorder and dynamism of human experience. Basically, his strategy is to confront the reader with many plausible hypotheses which men have abstracted from experience in order to exert a self-sustaining control upon themselves and the external forces of their environment. And then he demonstrates how each of these interpretations can be rendered obsolete and ineffectual by the influx of new, unpredicted data. In particular, the poet analyzes the just barely successful survival techniques of Juan as he encounters a multitude of natural and social frustrations of his desire. The poet depicts the generally unsatisfying attitudes of the supporting characters. And he reveals some of the problems he himself has had to face in trying to abstract some new forms of personally expedient meaning from out the vast and changing data of his personal history.

Chapter Two examines the poet's ad lib strategy in detail. As most clearly revealed in his extended digressions, his typical procedure is one of self-indulged curiosity which allows him to loosen the bonds of past formulations of order, to confront directly the novel, unstructured data of his present experience, to attempt an imaginative reformulation of this data according to his most recent emotional response, and finally

to evaluate the practical merit of his latest formulation by considering the long term consequences of the actions which should follow naturally from such a free and self-conscious interpretation of experience. As a result of this kind of flexibly alert, mental strategy, then, the narrator is able to incorporate new data fully into his understanding, gain a modest increase in self-confidence and assume new, more relevant modes of behavior to procure his satisfaction. Indeed, by writing an introspective and self-educating form of poetry, Byron is able to alter both his personal attitudes towards the changing data of his environment and possibly those of his readers, too, as they follow his changing categories of thought. Hence, he might just be able to bring about concrete changes in the external world of human society that would cause it to function more in accord with his most essential desires. Then, too, in mutual interaction with his technique of intimate, psychological digressions, the poet improvises the tale of Juan's adventures. By this means both he and his reader can again come to recognize and understand more fully and concretely the physical and social consequences which are likely to ensue from adhering to particular modes of perception. Thus, both he and his reader are further empowered to make ever more self-conscious judgments about the types of behavior it would be well for them to pursue or avoid.

Finally, Chapter Three considers the question of how the audience itself is made to participate in the fictive world of vast, perplexing change. In particular, the last chapter investigates how Byron creates a linguistic environment which is expressive of his personal point of view but which simultaneously calls into question the imaginatively fabricated perspectives which the poet repeatedly creates for our inspection. It is a complex strategy which makes the reader grant approval to

the deeply ironic self-consistency of the poet's unpredictable mode,
but which concurrently makes the reader aware of his own need to formu-
late an account of the events of the poem as they have most recently entered
into his awareness and disturbed his habitual forms of thought.

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Chapter I

THE NARRATIVE POINT OF VIEW: A WORLD OF CHAOS OR HELL

The environment that the narrator of Don Juan has perceived from his personal experience and conveys in his poem is one containing a changeable and inscrutable plenitude of data. It is a world that most often fails to conform to man's traditional wishes for security, control, order, and meaning. On a large scale the poet recognizes the pervasive instability and indifference of the inanimate forces of the universe. On a smaller scale he recognizes the complex motivations that govern people's behavior in society. And at the personal level he recognizes a passionate temperament that in a large part determines his own unpredictable actions. His perspective is one with which he finds most people ill-equipped to cope. It is also a perspective which he finds many people are fearful to consider even though their failure to do so repeatedly results in disasters for themselves as individuals and for society at large. Yet Byron contends that it is precisely this kind of awareness of the prolific variability of life and one's material limitations within this environment that one must confront if one is to have the slightest chance of adapting to life's vicissitudes with some measure of uniquely personal understanding, freedom, and grace. Thus, true to his own potentially unsettling perception of the world, he sets out to cast doubt upon the conventional notions of order, system and control held by himself and his audience which would tend to impose any too facile and artificially restrictive limit on this richly protean environment.

In Man's Rage for Chaos, Morse Peckham argues that it is periodically the task of the artist to break down old structures of meaning so

that one might take into account more data and possibly establish a new order for coping with a more complex notion of reality.¹ Initially, this approach provides a useful perspective for dealing with most Romantic and post-Romantic writers. But L. J. Swingle's analysis of Romantic poetic strategies provides a more accurate account of the principal effect of Don Juan. Swingle would agree with Peckham that the poet breaks down conventional orientations and expectations of order--that he disrupts the reader's equilibrium and produces skepticism in order to put him in touch with the underlying world of unstructured data. But Swingle also maintains that the artist follows this procedure not merely to establish his own new order, but also to expand the possibilities that many different kinds of order will be entertained, explored and evaluated independently by the reader himself.²

Thus, in Chapter One we will consider episodes in Don Juan that have been designed to expose false certainties and illuminate unconsidered complexities inadequately dealt with in conventionally accepted explanations of the human environment; and we will look at the foolish and often horrendous consequences caused by such oversights. More specifically, we will analyze how the poet confronts the reader with visions of order--plausible interpretations that men have abstracted

¹ New York: Chilton Books, 1965, p. xi (Preface).

² "On Reading Romantic Poetry," PMLA, 86 (1971), 976-977. Also in partial agreement with Swingle's interpretation, Michael G. Cooke argues that Don Juan is "a multiform statement of obligatory irresolution," "aiming toward a state of disequilibrium in the reader and society," to create "a universe of the unpredictable" and "a recognition of disorder where it has been blinked away or denied." But in his argument Cooke fails to take note of the positive, though tentative, orders that the poem suggests can be created. See The Blind Man Traces the Circle: On the Patterns and Philosophy of Byron's Poetry (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 128-140.

from experience in order to exert control upon themselves and the external forces of their environment--only to have such visions rendered obsolete by the influx of fresh data from a cosmos that is too vast and unpredictable ever to be fully controlled by any mortally limited perspectives.

The grand backdrop for Byron's world view of the unpredictable, vast, and indifferent forces of nature that are too complex to be fitted neatly into rationally prescribed categories is established in the shipwreck scene of Canto II. As Ernest Lovell points out, in the eighteenth-century it was

customary to assume that the order of the universe was purposive, harmonious, and generally benevolent towards man--all these because it was so planned by a good and intelligent Deity.³

In Don Juan it is Inez who most prominently represents this kind of outdated, orthodox, teleological view of nature when she sends Juan out to experience the world and to mend his morals:

As if a Spanish ship were Noah's ark,
To wean him from the wickedness of earth,
And send him like a dove of promise forth. II.8⁴

But by presenting a barrage of facts selected from authentic reports of shipwreck victims at sea,⁵ Byron demonstrates that such clear-cut meaning

³ Byron: The Record of a Quest (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1949), p. 186.

⁴ All references to Don Juan in my text will be to Byron's Don Juan: A Variorum Edition, 4 Vol., eds. T. G. Steffan and W. W. Pratt (Austin, Texas: Univ. of Texas Press, 1957), II, p. 161.

⁵ See Byron's reference to the record of his granddad's narrative, Canto II, stanza 138, and also his prose defense of his factually accurate, historically representative method of poetry in his letter to Murray dated August 23, 1821:

and optimism is patently unwarranted by experience.

Byron firmly establishes his case for the incomprehensible, unmanageable complexity of the world by packing his more realistic Spanish ship with all manner of men who try all manner of strategies to assert order and achieve a measure of self-sustaining control over their stormy environment. For example, on board are men of experience and cool rationality who when facing the dangers of the gale know how to man a pump or thrum a sail. There are others who prefer to dress in fancy clothes, drown their fears in rum, or suddenly adopt the tenets of true religion. Some desperate brutes try cannibalism to keep themselves alive. Yet after we see the shipwrecked victims experience a continuous series of unpredictable events, most of which turn out to be unfavorable, and after we see them make numerous attempts to adapt to the changing situations, we judge along with the poet that the final effectiveness of all their efforts bears little distinction. In the long run even the most pragmatic procedures provide only momentary comfort and security, and most men end up disillusioned, suffering, then dead. As Byron describes the few remaining passengers on sighting a "providential" bit of land, all come to experience error, confusion and doubt in the face of the

With regard to the charge about the shipwreck,--I think that I told both you and Mr. Hobhouse, years ago, that there was not a single circumstance of it not taken from fact; not indeed from any single shipwreck, but all from actual facts of different wrecks.

The Works of Lord Byron, 13 Vol., eds. E. H. Coleridge and R. W. Prothero (1898-1904; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1966), V, pp. 346-347. All references to Byron's letters, journals (hereafter cited L J), and poetry (except Don Juan) will be to this edition unless otherwise stated.

unpredictable, overpowering elements of nature:

With twilight it again came on to blow,
 But not with violence; the stars shone out,
 The boat made way; yet now they were so low,
 They knew not where nor what they were about;
 Some fancied they saw land, and some said 'No!'
 The frequent fog-banks gave them cause to doubt--
 Some swore that they heard breakers, others guns,
 And all mistook about the latter once.

II.96

Even Juan illustrates the idea that the prospect of man's long-sought salvation is just barely possible. For only he of all the seaman arrives on shore, and he manages this feat not with the ease of a traditionally pre-ordained hero but by a very slender thread of random luck, a well-developed natural skill of swimming, and a great deal of obstinate perseverance:

There, breathless, with his digging nails he clung
 Fast to the sand, lest the returning wave,
 From whose reluctant roar his life he wrung,
 Should suck him back to her insatiate grave:
 And there he lay, full length, where he was flung,
 Before the entrance of a cliff-worn cave,
 With just enough of life to feel its pain,
 And deem that it was saved, perhaps in vain.

II.108

A perplexing, uncharted course across vast waters facing frail mariners trying to find their way, however, is not just an apt metaphor for the adventures of this particular episode; it is also generally appropriate to the predicament in which most men find themselves when confronting the inanimate forces of the cosmos. A grand mass of confusing and contradictory events, desires, and restrictions confront men whenever they try to make their way through the civilized chaos of human society and chart out a personally satisfying course for their own lives. As the worldly-wise narrator states the general case:

Well--well; the world must turn upon its axis,
 And all mankind turn with it, heads or tails,
 And live and die, make love and pay our taxes,

And as the veering wind shifts, shift our sails;
 The king commands us, and the doctor quacks us,
 The priest instructs, and so our life exhales,
 A little breath, love, wine, ambition, fame,
 Fighting, devotion, dust,--perhaps a name. II.4

In many, various episodes Byron proceeds to elucidate this observation on the complex forces working upon us against our own best interests and desires. He does so by placing his young and not infallible hero in the company of some characters who are much less than adequately prepared to deal with the vicissitudes of life, and then he lets us see the mostly unfortunate consequences of their behavior.

At the top of the list of men and women who practice methods for coping with life's changing events that are clearly less than satisfactory both for themselves and for other men are those who are ruled exclusively by their own selfish passions. These are the characters who try to make the world conform solely to their own subjectively limited phantasies and notions of order. They are self-deluded people who are tempted to impose their own tyrannical will on events and other men while failing to take into account the needs and desires of others and the natural, limiting facts of material existence. Lambro and Gulbayez represent on a small scale characters who attempt to maintain such control, order, and self-satisfying pleasure within their own petty, self-limited spheres of influence. For example, Lambro is depicted as having created quite a haven for himself on his own little island. But when Haidée challenges his imperial rule by asserting her own wishes, Lambro's unrestrained passion leads to complete dissolution of his retreat and the pleasurable human habitation upon it (IV.72). As the metaphorical description of the scene makes clear, the rash indulgence of the desire to sustain without alteration his own totally self-imposed order destroys

the Golden Age that his island abode might have sustained; for both his only child, Haidée, and "the second principle of life" within her, an unborn babe who "might/Have dawn'd a fair and sinless child of sin" (IV.70), succumb to death from the actions motivated by his extreme, outdated possessiveness and overmastering rage.

In the case of Gulbayez, as she buys people for her pleasure and commands servants with complete disdain, as she unnaturally has all her phantasies fulfilled and never meets with restraint or criticism until she has her baffling encounter with Juan (V.112-122), it is clear that her sphere of influence yields, if not total desolation, a false bower of bliss. In this situation her kingdom represents a kind of Babylon (V.93-94) replete not with the beauty of humanly satisfying forms of life but with an overwhelming surfeit of perverted and grotesque refinements of pleasure (V.80-90). Indeed, her collection of eunuchs, dwarves and captive slaves serves as a direct reflection of this kingdom's stultifying impotence amidst abundance.

On a grander scale Catherine and her surrogate Suwarrow represent historically real characters who have attempted to impose their self-aggrandizing plans for fame and glory upon the external world. As Byron graphically explains in the war cantos (VII, VIII, and IX), the world that these people determinedly help to create is truly a horrendous and demonic labyrinth. It is a world signalized by violence, waste, ruin, pride, and vindictiveness. It reflects a moral and psychological condition which Jerome McGann has quite properly identified as one of "superfluous evil," for in these circumstances men freely choose to cooperate against their own best interests in their disasters and thereby

compound their natural, unavoidable loss of security.⁶

According to Byron, Catherine and Suwarrow exemplify the way in which inappropriate and ultimately self-defeating strategies come about. Both possess a large quantity of "vain ambition." This gargantuan, self-willed desire, for glory manages to sustain grand "hallucinations." It blinds them to the real cares and sufferings of other men to which they should address themselves. In these circumstances they conveniently omit certain unpleasant facts from their world view, and these omissions in turn do not permit them to use their very real power to establish a new, free society--an act which would bring them true fame. Instead, these omissions allow them to continue to support ruthless brutality. The resulting ferocity and insensitivity fostered by their reign (or previous ones just like theirs) conditions ordinary men to be as blind and calloused to the general state of society as are their leaders.⁷

Thus, even the ordinary men who must bear the brunt of the great men's grand plans continue blindly and willingly to participate in and aggravate social problems that far too often lead to insanity, suffering, and destruction. As Byron explains in Canto VII, stanzas 44-46, the foolish, self-deluded John Bull society that cannot detect its own unnecessary sufferings and hardships is all too willing to follow the

⁶ Don Juan in Context (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 144-146.

⁷ Jack Johnson, the spokesman for vast, worldly experience, confirms this opinion when he explains to Juan that

Most men are slaves, none more so than the great,
To their own whims and passions, and what not;
Society itself, which should create
Kindness, destroys what little we had got....

"false light," Suwarrow--a man who treats other men like machines (VIII. 53) and dirt (VIII.58), a man whose most exalted praise goes to Catherine for her ability to propagate wide-spread destruction (VIII.133). Hence these two leaders' (Catherine and Suwarrow's) blind quest for noble glory is portrayed and judged by Byron to result in the opposite achievement, villainous infamy (VIII.134) for themselves and a world of hell for those who fall under their sway.

An alternative to the prospect of a flattering, self-delusive, and rigidly self-imposed order preferred by people like Catherine is suggested by the narrator. It is a vision of a prolific and unpredictable world which at best is only partially understood by man.⁸ It is a complex vision composed of many successive, tentative orders which have been revised according to the most recent data of his experience. But Byron lets us know directly from his own experience that this kind of perception provides few of the comforting and highly attractive reassurances which all men at times so ardently desire. For example, even while the poet criticizes the superficial goals of young nobles in the carpe diem section of Canto XI, stanzas 75-86, he himself betrays a mood of exasperation towards the "strange vicissitudes" of life, for he, too, recognizes the truly effective power of the fears and pressures experienced by these men:

In short, the list of alterations bothers.
There's little strange in this, but something strange is
The unusual quickness of these common changes.

Talk not of seventy years as age; in seven
I have seen more changes, down from monarchs to
The humblest individual under heaven,

⁸ As McGann succinctly observes, "while the world is the subject of our understanding, it is not subject to our understanding." Don Juan in Context, p. 112.

Than might suffice a moderate century through,
 I knew that nought was lasting, but now even
 Change grows too changeable, without being new.... XI.81-82

In this situation the poet understands from his own painful, hellish experience as a regency dandy how men quite naturally seeking to make a name for themselves and to win a measure of security in the world of fashionable society could be sidetracked from achieving a truly satisfying goal in life. He understands how if they are not grand enough to be complete villains towards other men, they might in this more restricted sphere become petty villains unto themselves in an attempt to gain control and create some semblance of order in their world. In fact, almost as an inverse corollary to the theory of the grand tyrant, Byron proposes and analyzes the predicament of purposefully artificial role-players--the characters who inhabit the mock heroic world of British "high society."

The prototype of these character is, of course, Inez, the lady "mathematical" and "all-in-all sufficient self-director" of Canto I (stanzas 11 and 12). But almost the entire supporting cast of the English cantos is crowded with flat, stock characters who in an attempt to make money, catch a husband, gain approval of potential benefactors, or in other similarly conventional pursuits of happiness, excessively inhibit the freedom and variety of their responses. In this way they manage to create lives of total vacuity, numbing boredom, or frivolous insanity. As Byron describes the scene, these emotionally and intellectually stymied people have become empty, undifferentiated "placemen" (XIII.5), mechanical "puppets" pulling at their own strings (XII.89), and phony, self-regimented soldiers:

Sometimes, indeed, like soldiers off parade,

They break their ranks and gladly leave the drill;
 But then the roll-call draws them back afraid,
 And they must be or seem what they were: still
 Doubtless it is a brilliant masquerade:
 But when of the first sight you have had your fill,
 It palls--at least it did so upon me,
 This paradise of pleasure and ennui.

XIV.17

In this situation men are judged to be creators of a life style that provides much less than a satisfactory exercise of their own human potential. For by inhibiting the responses of their own true, independent nature, which "sublimes, /Whate'er it shows with truth" (XIV.16), they fail to develop adequately that unique quality of human character that denotes sincere human worth, freedom and vitality. In this case their world becomes an artificially restrictive paradise of ennui.

In The Plot of Satire Alvin B. Kernan has described the basic narrative stance assumed in Don Juan in the following terms:

Byron's sense of life as 'endless movement and change' determines 'the central rhythm,' 'the controlling concept of the poem,' 'its basic action,' a pattern which 'comprehends and is made up of the movements of all the component parts, characters, events, metaphors, settings, stanza forms, rhythms, and rhymes.' This being true, it then follows that 'In every case, what he holds up to ridicule is some attempt to restrain life, to bind and force it into some narrow, permanent form.'⁹

Yet even though the narrator repeatedly maintains this stance of attacking all manner of false, artificial restraints, even though he repeatedly recognizes the folly implied in trying to impose too rigidly men's dreams for meaning, security, control and happiness upon the prolific and changeable events of nature, he knows that some kind of order is necessary for any kind of practical human action to take place. Thus as an alternative to such falsely unnatural restraining orders,

⁹ This cogent summary of Kernan's book, The Plot of Satire (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1965), was composed by Ernest Lovell in "Byron," The English Romantic Poets, ed. Frank Jordan (New York: The Modern Language Association of American, 1972), p. 324.

Byron proposes a tentative, revisionary kind of truth based on acknowledging his sincere reactions to the prolific facts of his experience. But in pursuing this kind of self-consciously qualified truth, the narrator quite clearly understands that his past knowledge and skillful procedures developed for dealing with his human situation provide no guarantee that he himself can always find comfort or happiness or that he himself will be free from further error and folly. Rather, just as Manfred became aware that "The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life,"¹⁰ the poet of Don Juan demonstrates that he himself is still repeatedly vulnerable to all kinds of foibles and painful dismay in trying to make some sense of human experience.

Let us consider one such case. In presenting the idyllic tale of Juan and Haidée, the more experienced narrator knows that their innocently perceived world of Edenic happiness cannot last. He knows that events unconceived in their imaginings are likely to take place to alter their perception of the world, for he understands that their vision of the world is one which excludes much of the jaded, cynical, disillusioned experience of love so common to himself and most other men. To see this point, we need only to compare his description of Haidée as a maid who "had never heard/Of plight and promise to be a spouse,/Or perils by a loving maid incurr'd..."(II.190) to his portrait of the foolish world of unrestrained passion in which worthies, heroes and conquerors are all facilely equated as historically verifiable cuckolds (II.206).

But if the narrator's disillusionment and wisdom in such matters of passion is superior to the perception of these men or of a Gulbayez or a Catherine, this knowledge provides no adequate substitute for the

¹⁰ Manfred, Act I, scene 1, line 12.

original "alchemic joy" (II.202) of pure, innocent love--the passion displayed by Juan and Haidée "Where heart and soul and sense in concert move" (II.186). Rather, in this episode the narrator portrays himself as a man who, since the time when he could remember such a simple, unadulterated emotion of love, is aware that he has suffered many painfully wounding storms of passion (II.214); and through this process of self-conscious recognition he has managed to accumulate a heap of confusing, diseased remnants of emotion. "Rage, fear, hate, jealousy, revenge, compunction" (II.215) have somehow failed to be digested or eliminated adequately by his wisdom. Instead of completing a naturally healthful process, these passions have been collected "Like knots of vipers on a dunghill's soil" (II.215) and stored ready to inflict their poison on all future experiences of possible happiness.

If one is slightly more fortunate, however, what experience can bring is a kind of expanded perspective toward the unsettling vicissitudes of life. It can bring an attitude of detached, stoical calm based on a self-conscious and pragmatic evaluation of the new lessons to be learned from one's present condition. This is the message that the worldly-wise Jack Johnson passes on to Juan when the ingénu remarks:

'You take things coolly, sir,' said Juan. 'Why,'
 Replied the other, ' what can a man do?
 There still are many rainbows in your sky,
 But mine have vanish'd. All, when life is new,
 Commence with feelings warm, and prospects high;
 But time strips our illusions of their hue,
 And one by one in turn, some grand mistake
 Casts off its bright skin yearly like the snake.'

.....

'All this is very fine, and may be true,'
 Said Juan, 'but I really don't see how
 It betters present times with me or you.'

'No?' quoth the other; 'yet you will allow
 By setting things in their right point of view,
 Knowledge, at least, is gain'd, for instance, now,
 We know what slavery is, and our disasters
 May teach us better to behave when masters.'¹¹ V.21,23

This kind of rationally instituted equanimity in the face of the strong and indifferent powers of nature which allows one to take advantage of the lessons of his experience, however, is a very fragile condition. For, as the narrator knows only too well, the body attached to this wisdom-creating mind is highly susceptible to all kinds of unpredictable and pernicious effects from the elements. Indeed, the digression on the murder in Ravenna (V.33-39) is designed to illustrate just how fragile this stoical balance can be.

At first Byron retells the events that happened just beyond his doorstep with a high degree of self-assurance. Though a bit surprised, he is not really upset by the facts of the situation as he has come to experience them. In this mood he simply reports a factually precise cause and effect relationship:

The other evening ('twas on Friday last)--
 This is a fact, and no poetic fable--
 Just as my great coat was about me cast,
 My hat and gloves still lying on the table,
 I heard a shot--'twas eight o'clock scarce past--
 And, running out as fast as I was able,
 I found the military commandant
 Stretch'd in the street, and able scarce to pant.¹¹ V.33

At this point the narrator's mind is working well. He is coolly detached from and completely adjusted to the logical consequences of the situation. In fact, as the feminine rhyme ending and the casual, colloquial language of the next stanza suggest, the poet has achieved a stance of psychological

¹¹ This poetic account conforms to a high degree of accuracy with several prose accounts of the event (the murder of Commandant Del Pinto on December 9, 1820) which Byron wrote to his friends immediately after the incident occurred. See L J, V, pp. 133-140.

good humor and personal indifference somewhat like that of Hugh Kenner's "stoic comedians" of the twentieth century:¹² "The man was gone: in some Italian quarrel/Killed by five bullets from an old gun-barrel" (V.34).

The narrator, however, does not let his digression conclude with this light-hearted report. Instead, as he continues to scrutinize the scene, the facts of the case, like the bullets in the commandant's body, begin to penetrate his consciousness in a more disturbing manner:

I gazed upon him, for I knew him well;
 And though I have seen many corpses, never
 Saw one, whom such an accident befell,
 So calm; though pierced through stomach, heart, and liver,
 He seem'd to sleep,--for you could scarcely tell
 (As he bled inwardly, no hideous river
 Of gore divulged the cause) that he was dead.... V. 35

Even though the narrator has himself faced death many times before and therefore has achieved a certain degree of self-conscious accommodation to the idea, he still finds himself curiously attracted to the strange, mysterious calm of the commandant's corpse. But the very novelty of the situation indicates that there remains a residue of inadequate comprehension of the state of death--of the state of extreme calm which belies an inwardly bleeding body "pierced through stomach, heart, and liver." Thus indulging in a mood of simple curiosity, the narrator self-consciously decides to explore his own doubts about man's ultimate condition:

So as I gazed on him, I thought or said--
 'Can this be death? then what is life or death?
 Speak!' but he spoke not: 'wake!' but still he slept:--
 'But yesterday, and who had mightier breath?
 A thousand warriors by his word were kept
 In awe: he said, as the centurion saith,

¹² See Kenner's opening description of a stoic as one who accepts a limit. Flaubert, Joyce, and Beckett: The Stoic Comedians (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), p. 13 (Preface).

"Go," and he goeth; "come," and forth he stepp'd.
 The trump and bugle till he spake were dumb--
 And now nought left him but the muffled drum.'

V.36

From this perspective of a rationally chosen, self-conscious confrontation with the wounded body, however, something more important than a careful scrutiny of the state of death is accomplished. For example, the dramatic contrasts developed between the awesome forces of life and the total passivity of death yield very little new or unusual information about the mysterious state. (Obviously death results in a cessation of physical power, of the ability to alter and control one's circumstances. It is a natural limitation to the state of life.) Rather what is significant in the narrator's rendition of this episode is the great deal he learns about the present workings of his own mind and his immediate psychological condition: the narrator had already known that he was on the road to death, and a glance at this new incident merely should have served to reinforce his awareness of this fact of human experience. For the narrator had thought that he like the commandant had already actively and heroically "faced Napoleon's foes until they fled" (V.37). He had thought that continual and repeated knowledge of death had armed him with sufficient prowess to confront the formidable foe, death, with calm assurance. But the thrust of Byron's queries indicates that he has overestimated his ability to adjust with total indifference to this major anticipated change in his mortal condition.¹³ For what the narrator comes to see more and more clearly is that despite his close, sympathetic identification with the calm, heroic

¹³T. G. Steffan observes that at this point in the tale Byron is guilty of exaggerating the historical account of the commandant's military victories and other heroic exploits--a reaction that befits the narrator's current, highly subjective, emotional involvement in the story. See Vol. I, 80-84.

aspects of the commandant's condition he, too, can become emotionally and rationally overwhelmed ("butcher'd in a civic alley" V.37) in a most unheroic and regrettable way by any such accidental quirk of fate. Thus, as Byron finally describes the commandant's body, just so is the fabric of his mind:

The scars of his old wounds were near his new,
 Those honourable scars which brought him fame;
 And horrid was the contrast to the view-- V.38

At this point the narrator changes his strategy in an attempt to re-establish his critical objectivity and detachment. First he breaks away from the pathetic description of the commandant's body. Then he tries anew to analyze and evaluate the process he has just completed:

But let me quit the theme; as such things claim
 Perhaps even more attention than is due
 From me: I gazed (as oft I have gazed the same)
 To try if I could wrench aught out of death
 Which should confirm, or shake, or make a faith.... V.38

By means of this new procedure the narrator does achieve a measure of success in understanding the nature of the human situation, since he finally does not juggle the facts to fit any simplistic, reassuring pattern of meaning:

But it was all a mystery. Here we are,
 And there we go: but where? five bits of lead,
 Or three, or two, or one, send very far! V.39

Still this summation of his predicament yields no completely satisfactory resolution. For instance, the poet again tries to be factual and casual in his count of the bullets. But still there is lacking the light-hearted banter of the earlier stanzas. Rather in this case the rhyme scheme of "lead," "shed," and "dead" serves to underscore a mood of heavy-weighted depression as the narrator is again thrown back to a disheartening consciousness of the extreme fragility and alienation that is

involved with his mortal condition:

And is this blood, then, form'd but to be shed?
 Can every element our elements mar?
 And air--earth--water--fire live--and we dead?
We, whose minds comprehend all things? No more.... V. 39

Thus the last stanza reveals that like so many of his early melancholic heroes Byron still longs to have the sufferings of his mind assume the grand, heroic, and ritual significance of tragedy.¹⁴ To his credit Byron does leave his desires posed in the form of questions, since experience in this case simply does not translate into any such comforting, reassuring heroic pattern.¹⁵ But the strong element of remorse reminds us, nevertheless, that for the moment the poet has become overwhelmed by an awareness of his own insignificance and insecurity. For

¹⁴ P. L. Thorslev, Jr., has defined this mood of melancholic disillusionment or Weltschmerz as the trademark of the early Byronic heroes like Childe Harold. As Thorslev recognizes, "[It is] the psychic state which ensues when there is a sharp contrast between man's ideals and his material environment--and his temperament is such as to eliminate the possibility of any sort of reconciliation between the two." The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1962), p. 88.

¹⁵ Philip Pinkus in the article, "Satire and St. George," argues that

Respectable modes of literature ...[unlike satire] manage to twist a possible unhappy ending into some ritualistic celebration of the vital juices, or anaesthetize the conclusion with gaseous overtones of "the dignity of man," "the noble triumph of the human spirit over adversity," "the reassertion of the moral order...." [They do this] because the form of literary modes--tragedy, comedy, romance--apart from the content, is not intended to be realistic, it is ritual, a ceremonial dance of words to invoke the spirit of moral law....[Satire is, however] the only literary mode that faces the consequences of evil in this world without the usual anaesthetics. In satire, the dragon comes into his own.

Queen's Quarterly, 70 (1963), 30. In the present digression the poet expresses his longing for ritualistic significance, but his fidelity to the facts of his experience ultimately keeps him from yielding to such a well-structured pattern of meaning.

the moment he cannot locate that good, meaningful resource within himself (self-conscious objectivity) that will alter his personal orientation to acceptance of his own mortal limitations. For the moment all he can do is dismiss this painful reflection and leave his thoughts as problematical.

In the Bishop Berkeley episode of Canto XI.1-6 the poet explores another problem area of his own personality. He learns that even with the best of intentions he too can be tempted to become a self-restricting Inez of metaphysics. As in the digression on the murder in Ravenna, he recognizes that all men, including himself, tend to impose a selective, subjectively idealistic interpretation upon experience, for each man would like to see himself as a victorious hero, achieving his own self-pleasing, self-comforting goals in the face of an indifferent universe. He knows also that any such interpretations are always conditioned by the finite amount of concrete experience that a person has had and been able to acknowledge up to the present moment. But in this case, as an alternative corrective measure to such restrictions, the poet declares that the most sincere and valid procedure for one to follow is to admit the existence of all the contradictory and unflattering evidence as one becomes aware of it even if this new recognition means that one must abandon one's former beliefs and falsely comforting structures of meaning. Yet, as we shall see in the following episode, even such a self-consciously astute proclamation does not prevent him from adopting an obviously foolish pattern of behavior with disastrous consequences for his own psychological well-being.

To establish the credibility of this argument, Byron creates multiple points of view for observing the same phenomena, and then he

proceeds to demonstrate by comparison the relative merit or deficiency, inclusiveness or restrictiveness, of each perspective. For example, in preparation for his critique of Bishop Berkeley's grand system of idealism, the poet builds himself up as an audacious man of vast, wide-ranging experience. Under the rubric of political observer Byron describes himself as one who has travelled outside his native isle and thereby has achieved an understanding of the problems of English society that far exceeds the pleasant, self-centered perspectives of its common citizens. Witness his lament for England's exclusion of some most relevant pieces of information--an omission that dooms England to some very unsatisfactory procedures:

Alas! could she but fully, truly, know
 How her great name is now through-out abhorr'd;
 How eager all the earth is for the blow
 Which shall lay bare her bosom to the sword;
 How all the nations deem her their worst foe,
 That worse than worst of foes, the once adored
 False friend, who held out freedom to mankind,
 And now would chain them, to the very mind;--

Would she be proud, or boast herself the free,
 Who is but first of slaves? The nations are
 In prison,--but the gaoler, what is he?
 No less a victim to the bolt and bar.

X.67-68

Then on an individual scale the narrator's perspective when approaching the city of London is depicted as that of a disillusioned realist who is primarily concerned with the unpleasantly bleak brick and smoke ingredients that are essential to the city's economic and material existence. This grimly realistic view in turn is set in apposition to Juan's naive, magical and idealistic interpretation of the same scene--an incomplete perspective that will lead the young man into a troublesome encounter with a highway robber later on:

A mighty mass of brick, and smoke, and shipping,
 Dirty and dusky, but as wide as eye

Could reach, with here and there a sail just skipping
 In sight, then lost amidst the forestry
 Of masts; a wilderness of steeples peeping
 On tiptoe through their sea-coal canopy;
 A huge, dun cupola, like a foolscap crown
 On a fool's head--and there is London Town.

But Juan saw not this: each wreath of smoke
 Appear'd to him but as the magic vapour
 Of some alchymic furnace, from whence broke
 The wealth of worlds (a wealth of tax and paper):
 The gloomy clouds, which o'er it as a yoke
 Are bow'd, and put the sun out like a taper,
 Were nothing but the natural atmosphere,
 Extremely wholesome, though but rarely clear. X.82-83

At this point in his self-characterization as a man who refuses "to ignore the unpleasant and evil no matter how much they might contradict his aspirations and ideals, and the picture he would like to hold of man and the universe,"¹⁶ Byron introduces us to the theories of Bishop Berkeley. In particular the poet discloses his own difficulties in accepting any such self-limited, untested, unobjective hypothesis.

With tongue in cheek he praises the Bishop's system:

What a sublime discovery 'twas to make the
 Universe universal egotism,
 That all's ideal--all ourselves! XI.2

He then argues that, no matter how much he would like to believe such theories, he has too strong a sense of his own personal material existence to be deceived in this manner:

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. XI.1

More specifically the poet adds that his appreciation for such "soarings"

¹⁶ Edward E. Bostetter, The Romantic Ventriloquists (Seattle: The Univ. of Washington Press, 1963), p. 256.

and systems are spoiled by doubt--a personal mental proclivity that forces him to consider as an alternative to any untested, subjective, idealistic theory a noticeably more disturbing hypothesis:

And that which after all my spirit vexes,
 Is, that I find no spot where man can rest eye on,
 Without confusion.... XI.3

But lest doubt--"that sole prism/Of Truth's rays" (XI.2)--in its turn becomes a limiting perspective for him, the narrator's argument self-consciously betrays itself and implies that one should doubt even doubt. Witness the befuddling semantics used in trying to come to terms with his own usually preferred mental conditions: "Oh Doubt!--if thou be'st Doubt, for which some take thee,/But which I doubt extremely" (XI.2). At this particular moment the narrator himself cannot be sure what doubt is; and recalling his earlier reflection in Canto V stanza 23 ("who/Would pique himself on intellects, whose use/Depends so much upon the gastric juice?"), the condition of doubt as a derivative of "Indigestion" (XI.3) is itself cast into ill repute. That is, the narrator's objection to Bishop Berkeley's system, that it is based on a subjective orientation and that it is artificially selective and self-limiting in its interpretation, can be equally applied to his own favored position of skepticism. Thus the next step in his "logic" against subjective idealism is no longer to counter with subjective doubt, but to assume a more radical form of realism.

This new position born out of the confusion of trusting neither idealistic belief nor doubt is simply to report what exists: "If I agree that what is, is; then this I call/Being quite perspicuous and extremely fair" (XI.5). From this new advance in consciousness, then, the narrator is at liberty to report all of his feelings and reactions no

matter how much they might contradict or put into ill repute what he has said before. They will not have to fit into any of his previously established categories or formulations. Then the narrator's next example immediately "proves" his own freedom by its inconsistency. Personal physical discomfort which once made him doubt all subjective idealisms is now reported to make him a staunch believer in orthodoxy:

The truth is, I've grown lately rather phthisical:
 I don't know what the reason is--the air
 Perhaps; but as I suffer from the shocks
 Of illness, I grow much more orthodox.

The first attack at once proved the Divinity
 (But that I never doubted, nor the Devil);
 The next, the Virgin's mystical virginity;
 The third, the usual Origin of Evil;
 The fourth at once establish'd the whole Trinity
 On so uncontrovertible a level,
 That I devoutly wish'd the three were four
 On purpose to believe so much the more.

XI.5-6

Although from one point of view the narrator's example of change in himself reveals an advance in his own consciousness that should serve to mitigate the effect of any one particular orientation, looked at from another perspective, it represents a kind of bathetic regression. For what he says about "never doubted" and "incontrovertible" proof, and a desire to believe more, in a humorous way (the humor added by the poet's own superior self-conscious view), takes him back to a point of view that would be in favor of imposing yet another rigid, unquestioning, idealistic system upon the facts of experience; but this position is one that has been judged to be inferior not just in the argument against Bishop Berkeley but by the concluding structure of Canto X, and indeed by all the cantos to this point. Thus the narrator, that self-dramatized man of much and varied experience (XI.7), knows all too well that whatever satisfying freedom he has gained by learning to acknowledge the contradictory facts

of his experience and by revising his former interpretations accordingly can be easily lost under the stressful conditions exerted by external and internal forces upon his mortal body.

Yet even when the narrator in his most lucid moments is not tempted or compelled to search for grand, supernatural knowledge and plans of order like the revelations of Canto XI.6, he finds that his capacity to understand the human situation is still many times frustratingly inadequate to his intuition of the complexity of his experience. For example, while analyzing the "Je ne sçais quoi" deficiency in Lord Henry's character (XIV.72-84), the poet tries to search out and identify pragmatically the motivations affecting everyday human existence. Yet even when considering the problems of man in society solely within this non-religious, naturalistic context, the narrator finds that his most promising procedure for understanding--his ad lib method of reacting, responding and readjusting to his continually increasing perception of the facts of experience--can be carried to extremes of refinement where it, too, can no longer provide useful information upon which to base a modestly reliable judgment.¹⁷

Let us consider the text. At first the poet paints a rather broad, forthright sketch of the most obvious traits of Lord Henry:

He was a cold, good, honourable man,
Proud of his birth, and proud of everything;
A goodly spirit for a state divan,
A figure fit to walk before a king;
Tall, stately, form'd to lead the courtly van

¹⁷ Most of this chapter was conceived and written long before I had a chance to read Jerome McGann's recently published book, Don Juan in Context. In the following analysis our findings and conclusions (e.g., Byron's experimental, suppositional method of poetry, pp. 117-119) are in particularly close agreement.

On birthdays, glorious with a star and string;
 The very model of a chamberlain--
 And such I mean to make him when I reign. XIV.70

Byron concedes, nevertheless, that this artistic portrait cannot name an essential, elusive quality of this man's character that is needed to understand his behavior--something of which he himself is not fully conscious at the moment: "But there was something wanting on the whole--/ I don't know what" (XIV.71). The poet notes that women have labelled Lord Henry's mysterious deficiency a lack of "soul" (XIV.71). But he is not satisfied with this answer, for he is seeking something which can be specifically related to and tested against his own experience of the world. Therefore the poet carefully begins to search his momentarily opaque memory for some more precise clues to this fictive creature of his own imagination, Lord Henry Amundeville.

In order to locate and define this unknown attribute, the poet begins by posing a tentative, macroscopic description of the problem facing him. As he again modestly concedes ("for what I know" XIV.72), "That undefineable 'Je ne sçais quoi'" may have led to the creation of Homer's Iliad "since it drew to Troy/The Greek Eve, Helen, from the Spartan's bed" (XIV.72). But though the poet is able to draw a new and more particularized judgment from this analogy to the creation of an epic story, it is clear from the new stanza that this assessment of the problem has been accompanied by a goodly measure of self-biased limitation. His first conclusion is spoken from the position of a man who has been much maligned by women ("thus it is some women will betray us," XIV.72). It is spoken from a perspective most sympathetic to the established powers of the king and curiously obtuse to the case to be made in favor of young Paris: "Though on the whole, no doubt, the Dardan boy/Was

much inferior to King Menelaus" (XIV.72). Thus, as the poet is finally led to admit (XIV.73), there still remains "an awkward thing which much perplexes"; the poet's first attempt at understanding is somehow not yet in accord with his emerging subconscious apprehension of the complexity of human motivation.

The narrator's next strategy, however, attempts to overcome this limitation by a kind of imaginative grasp of the situation in the manner of Tiresias. While admitting the physical impossibility of becoming a new Tiresias (73), Byron is still able to consider the possibilities and end results of either sentimental or physical love for both sexes. This is a speculative exercise which leads him to the next hypothesis, "a something all-sufficient for the heart/Is that for which the sex [female] are always seeking" (74). Though again bearing only partial knowledge, this statement does demonstrate an advance from the narrator's earlier position. From the perspective of a hurt outsider ("thus it is some women will betray us"), he has proceeded to a kind-hearted understanding of his opponents' frustration--a position that allows him to see women more sympathetically as "Frail mariners without a chart" (74).

After achieving this new compassion for the opposite sex, the narrator is able to re-group his mental forces and yet again vigorously re-organize his interpretation of experience. Now he is free to go back to and range over the collective treasure house of past experience; great writers such as Shakespeare and Rousseau provide him with a hint of meaning and bolster his own intuition. Yet in a typically romantic manner, the description of the narrator's process of literary allusion puts emphasis on the individual who self-consciously selects from the past what is pertinent and meaningfully related to his own experience.

While the thought was latent in the collective writings of the past, he has been an active discoverer through his own self-conscious analysis of his present, immediate response. In this sense of bringing the potential thought forth into his own individual consciousness, then, it is appropriate for him to use Archimedes' expression "Eureka! I have found it!" (76); and in consequence of this new addition of fact into his active consciousness, it is just as appropriate to his style that the narrator comes up with a fresh hypothesis to match the new perception:

What I mean
 To say is, not that love is idleness,
 But that in love such idleness has been
 An accessory, as I have cause to guess. XIV.76

What the narrator does to his allusion to Horace in the next stanza offers further proof of his tendency to interpret the past selectively according to the present values and needs of the individual. The narrator continues to borrow and refine the common collective insights of his cultural heritage (even if he mistakenly attributes both maxims to Horace), both agreeing and disagreeing with them as he judges from his own experience. But by this point in his speculative process, something very curious has begun to occur. The scrupulous habit of mind that has prodded him to continue the search for the exact expression of his response to a complex experience is leading him away from his genuine discovery of Lord Henry's deficiency as a lover ("Your men of business are not apt to express/Much passion," 76) towards the extremities of the narrator's reasoning capacities. In fact the whole progression of the narrator's thoughts in this section can be interpreted as a kind of personal mental analogue for Cuvier's theory of successive destructions and creations of

the universe. Witness the description given in Canto IX:

Oh, ye great authors!--Apropos des bottes,--
 I have forgotten what I meant to say,
 As sometimes have been greater sages' lots;--
 'Twas something calculated to allay
 All wrath in barracks, palaces, or cots:
 Certes it would have been but thrown away,
 And that's one comfort for my lost advice,
 Although no doubt it was beyond all price.

But let it go:--it will one day be found
 With other relics of 'a former world,'
 When this world shall be former, underground,
 Thrown topsy-turvy, twisted, crisp'd, and curl'd,
 Baked, fried, or burnt, turn'd inside-out, or drown'd
 Like all the worlds before, which have been hurl'd
 First out of, and then back again to chaos,
 The superstratum which will overlay us.

IX.36-37

The above passage describes a process of mind repeated over and over again in Don Juan. It is that of the narrator rescuing some thought or action out of the chaos of his vast experience, interpreting it, making it a useful basis for human judgment and further action only to have this thought subsumed into another area of chaos. Just so, the narrator has been concerned to organize some semblance of meaning within the context of the tiny "chaotic" Je ne sçais quoi area of Lord Henry's personality. Thus far he has been quite successful. He has been able to select, arrange and reduce the materials of his experience to a manageable form. He has been able to marshall his thoughts and re-apply them in a progression of refining hypotheses that leads him to a highly relevant discovery. But the second part of the "universal" process--that of anarchy's reasserting itself and obliterating meaning and order--is still waiting to be experienced.

As part of the human condition this recurring situation cannot really be avoided. At least as far as Byron is aware of the way his mind works, the labyrinth of mental perplexity and its accompanying

frustration will always reassert itself, for as Caesar (a mask for the Devil) complains in The Deformed Transformed:

This is the consequence of giving matter
The power of thought. It is a stubborn substance,
And thinks chaotically, as it acts,
Ever relapsing into its first elements. (Pt.I, sc.ii, ll.316-9)

In other words the mind of mortal man will always participate in the cosmic processes of material existence. But in this particular situation the poet dramatically aggravates his own discomfort.¹⁸ He refuses to recognize his own mortal limitations and act accordingly. He is not content in his search for knowledge to stop at the modest but highly pertinent explanation of Lord Henry's deficiency as a want of idleness in love. Instead, as more and more disparate facts come to mind (facts associated with the desire to solve everyman's longings for happiness once and for all), the narrator displays a kind of obstinate compulsion to fit them into a grand structure of useful meaning; and consequent upon following this grandiose, unrestrained desire, he gets himself further entangled in the irritating perplexities of too much thought.

As critics since Hazlitt have noted,¹⁹ the jockeying of perspectives and the fast, impulsive train of thought that carries the narrator to his

¹⁸ In the following excerpt from his letters dated May 9, 1817, Byron calls specific attention to the irritation caused by the discrepancy between man's total apprehension of the complexity of experience and his disproportional powers to understand logically and explicate the situation:

There must be a sense or two more than we have as mortals,
which I suppose the Devil has (or t'other); for where there
is much to be grasped we are always at a loss, and yet feel
that we ought to have a higher and more extended comprehension.

L J, IV, p. 119.

¹⁹ "Spirit of the Age," in The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, ed. P. P. Howe (Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1932) XI, p. 75 (note).

maddening conclusions are techniques very similar to those found in Tristram Shandy; but in this particular case the strategy leads to very little comic resolution. For example, when the narrator presently recalls the classical authority Horace ("'Beatus ille procul!' from 'negotis,'" 77), one would expect his intent would again be to approve the state of idleness. Yet he vehemently disagrees with such a conclusion and states "in his teeth" (like a snarling dog ready for a fight) that idleness itself is not a pure and simple virtue. In fact, as the narrator scrutinizes the subject even more carefully, he finds that according to his own personal experience the condition of idleness in love and life in general is teeming with a multitude of vices:

That many of the ills o'er which man grieves,
And still more women, spring from not employing
Some hours to make the remnant worth enjoying.

And hence high life is oft a dreary void,
A rack of pleasures, where we must invent
A something wherewithal to be annoy'd.

XIV.78-79

Seeking an alternative strategy to avoid these predicaments, the narrator next contemplates withdrawal from society. But as an image borrowed from Sheridan suggests ("An oyster may be crossed in love," 81), this postulate, too, is beset with its own retinue of problems, and he summarily dismisses it as a possibility for providing happiness.

At this point, in a state of exasperation at the failure of his speculations to provide any totally satisfying solution, the narrator abruptly breaks off his train of thought and addresses an impassioned plea to Wilberforce, a morally heroic man, who, somewhat like the narrator in his present attempt to slay the evil giants of the mind, has

"struck one immense Colossus down" (83).²⁰ Yet what begins as a hymn of praise turns out to be something quite different. Concomitant with this one example of freedom successfully achieved is a recognition of its polar opposite--widespread slavery as it is propagated by the ruling powers of Europe in the Holy Alliance (85). And the narrator's caustic response to this situation is not to follow Wilberforce's exemplary procedure of emancipation but to call for a repressive counterattack to "shut up" all the whites. Indeed the stringent invective and impassioned denunciations of this passage prod one to recall George M. Ridenour's thesis: when the poet uses the impassioned Juvenalian high style to "soar" as he nears the truth of experience, he is closest to exhibiting the Luciferian sin of pride, and like Lucifer this "soaring" pride will eventually lead him to a fall.²¹

At this point in the digression the reader definitely begins to wonder whether the narrator's tone is one of righteous indignation as he would have us believe or one approaching psychological madness. One begins to doubt whether his previous arguments are really logically valid or merely the self-generated fever of another impassioned tyrant. For even though he has offered sworn testimony that his reactions and interpretations are based on authentic events (80), and even though he equates his argument with the wisdom of a great scientific experimenter such as Archimedes (76), there remains the strong suspicion that his present mode of behavior instead of preventing or neutralizing his own

²⁰ The narrator here tacitly equates his intellectual ability to locate the deficiency of Lord Henry's character with Wilberforce's political action which set the Negroes free.

²¹ The Style of Don Juan (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1960), p. 27.

discomfort has augmented his feelings of irritation and caused him to select from his past experience and read into his present interpretation of that experience more hellish chaos than perhaps there really is.

If we follow his argument a bit further, however, we find that the comically bathetic lines "Shut up--no, not the King, but the Pavillion,/ Or else 'twill cost us all another million" (83) (the personal satiric attack is here displaced onto the object of excess), signal a fresh turning point.²² The narrator's indulgence of vitrolic bile has run its course. Though at the moment he still sees madness everywhere, though at the moment he only sees that all the strategies of which he and most other men have been able to conceive lead not to comfort or certainty but to more cases of confusing, undesirable complexity, he is now resigned to his own mortally limited powers to change these things:

Shut up the world at large, let Bedlam out;
 And you will be perhaps surprised to find
 All things pursue exactly the same route,
 As now with those of soi-disant sound mind.
 This I could prove beyond a single doubt,
 Were there a jot of sense among mankind;
 But till that point d'appui is found, alas!
 Like Archimedes, I leave earth as 'twas. XIV.84

Finally the narrator learns something new. He now knows most surely like Archimedes (like a self-consciously objective scientist of his own behavior) that he has done what he could do in verse. He has composed a picture in order to understand and communicate the manifold confusions and inappropriate behavior to be found in society; he has vented his anger and expelled his spleen through the medium of satire; and by

²² Michael G. Cooke has noticed that Byron's humor provides an "index of critical self-restraint" (i.e., laughter indicates the poet's awareness of human limitations), p. 144.

dismissing this currently objectified scene from his mind, he can go forward into new experiences and perhaps have a chance to achieve a less passionately disturbing state of stoical good humor in the future.

Thus, on many different occasions Byron makes us aware that the common condition of man is one of an insecurity and a disequilibrium resulting from his exposure to the complexly changing events of the universe. Under these circumstances men try to formulate visions of order and put them into practice. They try to abstract interpretations from the mass of changing data in order to bring about conditions for satisfying their own desires and re-achieving a pleasing state of emotional calm.

Yet as we have seen in the present chapter, there are also a number of self-imposed conditions that increase one's chances for experiencing failure and frustration. For example, in an attempt to maintain a permanent state of stability many men try not to recognize the manifestations of change and complexity which totally permeate our material existence. They habitually tend to see only what is pleasing to themselves, what they have seen before, or what somebody else has told them to see and deny or block out everything else. And by failing to take into account the fullest range of experience which is available to them, they tend to choose actions which result in unnecessary pain, dissatisfaction, and confusion both for themselves and for other men in their society.

Then, too, even under the best of circumstances, when a flexibly alert man of much and varied experience tries to discover meaning and order within his experience, the results are not always those that he would desire. As the poet sets up his argument, the world of nature,

of self, and of other men is just too complex and unpredictable ever to be fully comprehended or controlled by any mortal, subjectively limited perspectives towards it.

Yet as we shall see in the following chapter, the poet's most expansive vision of the human condition is not totally discouraging. For despite many past errors in behavior, he is aware that he in particular and potentially all thinking men have access to a natural, vitally self-sustaining mode of consciousness. Specifically, he is aware that on many occasions in the past he has exploited a natural willingness to confront the manifold, unstructured data of experience directly without being rigidly bound to conventional explanations of the events. Consequently, he has developed certain refined perceptual techniques that many times do allow him to envision, evaluate and adopt new more germane modes of behavior. Indeed, the poet is aware that especially while writing Don Juan, he is in possession of an artfully "re-creative" strategy that repeatedly leads him to establish a condition of self-liberating concord where again as in youth "heart and soul and sense in concert move," II. 186.

CHAPTER II: REACTIONS TO CHAOS

Part A: The Psychological Quest

In recording her conversations with Lord Byron in Italy, Lady Margarite Blessington noticed that the famous poet showed "a candour in talking of his own defects, nay, a seeming pleasure in dwelling on them" that registered a tone of self-complacent adjustment to these faults--a tone that did not give her much hope for his future amendment.¹ Yet without reflecting her attitude of moral denigration, we, too, can agree that from his most self-consciously detached and expansive perspective the author of Don Juan is aware of a pattern of meaning in his own poeticized history that ultimately allows him not to be too upset by past errors in judgement or other unfortunate changes in his circumstances. For in looking back over his wide variety of experiences in the world of high society and in writing speculative poetry, Byron is aware that precisely because he has been willing to pursue an independent, non-conventional course of action based on less than a total knowledge of human existence, precisely because he has been daring enough to make some mistakes and suffer the consequences of his own deeds, he has been able to develop a modus operandi which allows him repeatedly to come into new, self-corrective relationships with his changing environment. Even while seeing himself amidst the prolific flux of events in nature, amidst the compounded confusions of human society, and subject to a multitude of biological alterations inside his own body--a compilation of circumstances which he has not at all times been able to decipher or manage adequately--he knows he has learned some valuable lessons from his experience. He knows that he continues to possess the powers of autonomous

¹ Conversations of Lord Byron, ed. E. J. Lovell, Jr. (1834; rpt. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 75, 228.

creativity to hypothesize, evaluate and adopt new categories of thought and modes of behavior in response to the changing events of his environment. And as he does so he knows that he continues to increase the vital courage necessary for becoming an ever more creatively independent personality.

One modern definition of intelligence has been given by Dr. Bernard Rimbaud. According to his analysis intelligence consists in

the degree of availability of one's experience for the solution of immediate problems and the anticipation of future ones; and the ability to see relationships and meanings by having access to as many alternatives as possible at approximately the same instant of time.²

To see in detail how Byron can effectively mobilize his energy and skills to confront, investigate and interpret anew the manifold changes within his environment, let us consider the opening digression of Canto XIV stanzas 1 - 12. In simple outline form Byron's standard procedure is first to release his mind from the conventional categories previously used to interpret experience: he recognizes the successive destructions of outmoded systems of thought (1). Then somewhat like Haidée when

she was shaken by the dream,
The mystical usurper of the mind--
O'erpowering us to be whate'er may seem
Good to the soul which we no more can bind;
IV. 30

the poet has the daring will to follow his most intimate and recently emerging desire to wherever it may lead. But, of course, the poet with wide-awake consciousness has the skill to ascertain the meaning of his current responses (6). He explicitly states the purpose and judges the validity of this personally well-known process for the continued benefit

² Man's Rage for Chaos, Appendix, p. 320.

of himself and the novitiate reader (7-8). He offers a fresh interpretive vision of all of his past experience on the basis of his new insight (9-10). And concurrently, he evaluates his new vision to see if it reveals an appropriate skill, technique or procedure which might be used to manipulate himself or his external environment more efficiently to secure his desires.

The narrator begins his digression by describing the twin domains of nature and of human thought as rather ominous and infinitely vast pits:

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--

XIV.1

The subjunctive mood reveals that the speaker has been and is now presently haunted by the desire for permanence and security--that he is attracted to a condition of finality where there would be no more need to risk failure, folly and possible pain to achieve a more satisfying condition in life. But then the use of the conditional mood also suggests the narrator's present lack of whole-hearted commitment to this idea. So, from a reconsidered evaluation of his presently unsettled reaction the narrator proceeds to unleash his mental forces and indulge himself in a wide range of imaginative speculations that begin to alter his original melancholic attitude and propel him towards a more accurate reading of his present desire.

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.

But System doth reverse the Titan's breakfast,
 And eats her parents, albeit the digestion
 Is difficult. Pray tell me, can you make fast,
 After due search, your faith to any question?

Look back o'er ages, ere unto the stake fast
 You bind yourself, and call some mode the best one.
 Nothing more true than not to trust your senses;
 And yet what are your other evidences? XIV.1-2

In these stanzas the poet, of course, is toying with the idea of nihilism. He assumes that there exists an indefinite number of culturally conditioned categories for ordering experience which any man is capable of adopting at any time with little or no guarantee of the truth or relevance of his orientation.³ Witness Byron's close scrutiny of the state of death and the multitude of differing, inconclusive hypotheses that he can generate from this awareness. First he can conceive that the state of death in the long run of eternity may or may not exist (3). Then even if he decides to assume that biological death is the common destiny of men in present times, there is still a multitude of plausible speculations that he can offer to explain what the mysterious state might entail: Men fear it and weep in the presence of it, yet the thing that is most like death as far as we can presently judge, is sleep; and restful sleep, after labor, is a condition which all men welcome (4). And such speculations could be added to indefinitely if the situation was one of complete nihilistic skepticism. But despite the many equivocal posings of his argument, the pattern of the narrator's thoughts belies the perception of a different kind of validity for human knowledge. For in the process of exploring the multitude of contradictions within his own thoughts, Byron comes to see that his ideas are converging towards a point of revealing what is most central to his immediate response.

Particularly in the dramatization of the rejected role of the Suicide

³ For a full discussion of the common errors found in a naive analysis of subjective perspectivism see E. E. Hirsch's "Faulty Perspectives," Essays in Criticism, 25 (Jan. 1975), 154-168.

(4-5) as one who hastily "spends" all of his resources shrinking away from the piecemeal "installments" of death (i.e., the successive changes of life), the poet comes to see that there exists a stance other than fearful avoidance which is more appropriate to his most dominant need of the moment. He comes to see that suicidal fear can be transformed into courage (5.2). And as he explores his most recently emerging ideas about courage, he sees that this latter daring stance is related to a positive, life-sustaining force within himself. He finds that it is related to a wish to know at this very instant of his existence the maximum potential of his human life--an optimum biological limit which paradoxically implies that he most surely needs to confront and acknowledge that final, material state of "quiescent clay":

'Tis round him, near him, here, there, every where,
 And there's a courage which grows out of fear,
 Perhaps of all most desperate, which will dare
 The worst to know it:--when the mountains rear
 Their peaks beneath your human foot, and there
 You look down o'er the precipice, and drear
 The gulf of rock yawns,--you can't gaze a minute
 Without an awful wish to plunge within it. XIV.5

But, of course, in terms of this dream sequence of fleeting, nightmare images of death (echoing Hamlet I.i.141-2: "'Tis here!/ 'Tis here!/ 'Tis gone!"), knowing life to its fullest present limit does not mean physically jumping into the mountain depths that would unnaturally and prematurely end the essential work of mortal existence. Instead, as the poet conceives the inverse of the suicidal process, one imaginatively "retires" from one kind of abyss of self-defeating activity in order to pursue a possibly more fruitful kind of labor in another domain:

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 unknown; 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.5

Since in the preceding stanzas the poet has just performed the task of following the inclination of his own lurking thoughts of their own fearfully self-exhausting limit, he knows that presently he has the increased power of daring will and vital mental acumen within his possession. He knows that on this occasion he has discovered his own true path through the wilderness of experience (a path that mankind in general might miss, 1). He knows that he presently wants to approach the goal of a personal New Jerusalem--life lived and known to its fullest, human potential. Indeed, once he has achieved this crucial insight into his current need, he then understands that the "abyss" of nature and of man's thoughts that could be viewed from one perspective as a labyrinth of hell or a chaos of prolific uncertainty could from another perspective be transformed into a fascinating and ultimately challenging perception of an indefinite, unbounded potential of matter and form upon which a person can draw in order to re-create both in imaginative and pragmatic terms a new kind of uniquely satisfying environment for himself and just possibly for other men in his vicinity like the Gent. Reader (7) or lively traveller (14).

To make sure that his perhaps inexperienced audience understands this point, the poet adds an explicit analysis of his latest achievement:

But what's this to the purpose? you will say.
 Gent. Reader, nothing; a mere speculation,
 For which my sole excuse is--'tis my way;
 Sometimes with and sometimes without occasion
 I write what's uppermost, without delay;
 This narrative is not meant for narration,
 But a mere airy and fantastic basis,
 To build up common things with common places.

You know, or don't know, that great Bacon saith,
 "Fling up a straw, 'twill show the way the wind blows;"
 And such a straw, borne on by human breath,
 Is poesy, according as the mind glows;
 A paper kite, which flies 'twixt life and death,
 A shadow which the onward Soul behind throws:
 And mine's a bubble not blown up for praise,
 But just to play with, as an infant plays. XIV.7-8

Predictably, the narrator is the first to admit the realistic limitations of his mode. It has as "airy and fantastic a basis" as any other abstracted product of the human mind. It presents a selectively reduced, verbal reconstruction of experience. Obviously it will never be identical with or commensurate to the fullest, non-conceptualized data of his existence. But in making this qualification, the poet asserts that his "fantastic" mode possesses some very real human virtues. For example, he is allowed to witness the collection of the raw data of experience as they are entering into an assimilatable form for himself. Rational hypotheses derived from this procedure may be inaccurate or misleading, but the insightful responses presented within the context of their imaginative origins provide him with the irreducible factual evidence of his unique, psychic history.⁴ They provide him with a graphic and emotionally intense record of his mind's complex and changing activities as they have immediately been perceived and conceived by himself. Indeed, the allusion to the "great" natural scientist, Sir Francis Bacon (7), and the groping selection of metaphors which follow (poetry is like a straw moved by the wind--analogous to the human breath in speech--or like a flying kite, or a "shadow" cast by the "glow" of the human mind) are designed to suggest both the inferential difficulties and the general empirical validity of his mental procedure. In this sense, then, a

⁴ Robert Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1957), pp. 35-36.

collection of such "common" (7.8) and repeatable moments of insight provides him with an authentic verbal replica of his self-defined personality. But more importantly, the poet suggests that this phenomenologically existent mind in full and impartial contemplation of its own activities of consciousness produces the very real, undeniable effect of fascinating ego-satisfaction comparable to the unselfconscious joys of childhood.

In an article entitled, "Romanticism and Anti-selfconsciousness" Geoffrey Hartman has argued that the Romantic poet's original anxiety-ridden awareness of man's loss of innocence and infant security can be compensated for and overcome by going through the perilous straits of consciousness (e.g., by courageously facing the abyss of one's thoughts and desires) until one reaches a more expansively liberating, "self-transcending" level of consciousness or imagination. This type of internal, psychological quest for "knowledge not purchased with a loss of power" is the feat that has been undertaken and achieved by the poet in these stanzas under present consideration.⁵ Nevertheless, Byron is not totally content to end his argument at this stage of development even though the final image of stanza 8 depicts the poet in an almost solipsistic state of egocentric free play. Instead, precisely to make sure that his mode is not merely a narcissistic fantasy of yet another self-deluded mind, the poet re-submits his present, self-pleasing discovery to a second evaluation. Harold Bloom has described the extended structural formula of the internalized quest romance as follows:

All romance, literary and human, is founded upon enchantment; Freud and the Romantics differ principally in their judgement as to what it is in us that resists

⁵ Romanticism: Points of View, eds. Robert Gleckner and Gerald Enscoc (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970) 288-289.



enchantment, and what the value of that resistance is. For Freud it is the reality principle, working through the great disenchanter, reason, the scientific attitude and without it no civilized values are possible. For the Romantics, this is again a dialectical matter, as two principles masquerading as a reality principle and identical to the ego's self-love that never ventures out to others, and the other "creative", which resists enchantment in the name of a higher mode than the sympathetic imagination.⁶

Bloom later identifies this second, higher mode as Imagination's bride-- a kind of self-transforming, on-going creation of the imagination.⁷

Specifically, in Byron's case one must add that his imaginative mode must be seen both to define and motivate a practical, behavioral change within his current personality.

If we now use Bloom's formula to interpret Byron's procedure in the present digression, we can see that the first test occurred when the poet encountered and successfully rejected the alien, self-limiting role of the Suicide who failed to venture out to face the successive installments of life's changes and disillusionments. Then, in stanza 9 Byron initiates a procedure to see if he can imaginatively restructure the collected data of his experience in a way that will reveal a practical behavioral strategy which might possibly lead him to secure his dream:

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;--
 Of passions too, I have proved enough to blame,
 To the great pleasure of our friends, mankind,
 Who like to mix some slight alloy with fame;

⁶ "The Internalization of Quest Romance" in Romanticism and Consciousness, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1970), pp. 12-13.

⁷ Bloom, p. 17.

For I was rather famous in my time,
 Until I fairly knock'd it up with rhyme.

XIV.9

The opening line of this stanza, of course, alludes to Milton's Paradise Lost ("the world was all before them" XII.646). In that poem the phrase is used to describe the post-lapsarian condition of Adam and Eve on leaving Eden after Michael has given Adam a panoramic view of man's future and after Michael has counseled Adam on his present need to create "a paradise within." And likewise this section of Don Juan resonates, but in a purely humanistic context, with a dynamically balanced awareness of the narrator's past and possible future experiences as he presently seeks to create a paradise within.⁸

For example, following the initial statement of potential vision, the narrator's linear flow of thought reads on one level like an extended temptation scene. One by one Byron singles out the forces that have in the past destroyed and could again in the future threaten to frustrate his chances for maintaining a self-pleasing, paradisiacal state of calm, self-confident equilibrium. He knows that as a material existent in the world of nature and of other men, he has been and will continue to be subject to the forces of his own disruptive passions (9), the conservative restrictions of society (9,10) and the biologically degenerating forces of his own mortal mind (10). Yet as Byron proceeds in his analysis, he does not give up the struggle in despair. Rather, he comes to see that by writing self-conscious poetry, he does in fact possess a means to counteract all of these forces (11). Indeed, he comes to understand in minute detail that his need to respond to all these many

⁸ McGann also agrees that the initial line is full of significance, for he observes: "The remark is not a simple joke but a profound appreciation of the fact that any immediate moment localizes orders that are equally lost or gained [i.e., orders which can be dissolved and re-arranged according to the most dominant, momentary concerns of the observer]." Don Juan in Context, p. 102.

stimuli has spurred him on to find an activity that in itself is fundamentally exhilarating and re-energizing:

I think that were I certain of success,
 I hardly could compose another line:
 So long I've battled either more or less,
 That no defeat can drive me from the Nine.
 This feeling 'tis not easy to express,
 And yet 'tis not affected, I opine.
 In play, there are two pleasures for your choosing--
 The one is winning, and the other losing. XIV.12

Thus at this point in his argument the poet is fully cognizant of the realistic chances he has for encountering folly and error in the future. But like a seasoned gamester from the depths of his past and presently discriminated experiences, he affirms that he is more determined than ever before to continue the techniques of full, creative self-consciousness. For as the final image of child-like play tells us, the narrator has found a non-supernatural, practical and artful means for opening the gates of paradise and manifesting man's unfallen potential for satisfying his instinctual desires.⁹ In an insecure and anxiety-ridden world he has found a technique for altering and increasing his awareness of time and place, of himself and the possible meaning of his continuing existence.

In a more succinct form the symbolic portrait of Aurora Raby conveys the poet's deep-seated appreciation for this final stage of full creative self-consciousness:

Early in years, and yet more infantine
 In figure, which had something of sublime
 In eyes which sadly shone, as seraphs' shine.
 All youth--but with an aspect beyond time;
 Radiant and grave--as pitying man's decline;
 Mournful--but mournful of another's crime.

⁹ Northrop Fry "The Keys to the Gates" in Romanticism and Consciousness, pp. 250-254.

She look's as if she sat by Eden's door,
And grieved for those who could return no more. XV.45

Once the entire process of creative self-consciousness has been fully re-analyzed and re-evaluated by the poet, he is again ready to return to a consideration of his role as a free and active participant in the real world of an impersonal nature and of other men. He returns as one who on several past occasions has been able to hypothesize, interpret and adopt new, more relevant modes of satisfying behavior and as one who would like to share these self-discovered skills with other individuals.¹⁰ He returns as one who possesses a pragmatic technique which can be used not only for altering his own behavior, but also for effecting changes in the perceptual habits of the readers of his poem. Consequently, the poet just might be able to bring about concrete, practical changes in the external world of human society that would cause it to function more in accord with his most essential and humane desires.¹¹

For example, in the role of satirist-social reformer, the poet directly proclaims his strong support of freedom of thought (i.e., full

¹⁰ The poet possesses sufficient knowledge of history and himself to imagine that other men might possibly possess similar intrinsic needs and desires. See W. J. Bate's discussion of the sympathetic and expansive nature of imagination in "Negative Capability" in Romanticism and Consciousness, pp. 338-9.

¹¹ McGann is correct to emphasize Byron's distaste for the unqualified notion that man's mind alone creates its existential condition, that Nature is totally a projection of man's inner light, i.e., Imagination. As McGann observes, there exist others and an impersonal Nature with which man must establish a relationship, and a consciously established human community offers for Byron the ultimate proof of paradise regained. Don Juan in Context, p. 148.

creative and self-critical consciousness) for all men in all circumstances:

And I will war, at least in words (and--should
 My chance so happen--deeds), with all who war
 With Thought;--and of Thought's foes by far most rude,
 Tyrants and Sycophants have been and are.
 I know not who may conquer: if I could
 Have such a prescience, it should be no bar
 To this my plain, sworn, downright detestation
 Of every despotism in every nation.

It is not that I adulate the people:
 Without me, there are Demagogues enough,
 And Infidels, to pull down every steeple,
 And set up in their stead some proper stuff.
 Whether they may sow Scepticism to reap Hell,
 As is the Christian dogma rather rough,
 I do not know;--I wish men to be free
 As much from mobs as kings--from you as me.

IX.24-25

The narrator does not leave this present appeal for social and political reformation to rest simply on an abstract emotional plea, however. He also confronts us with a portrait of Wellington, who has failed to exercise his full powers of consciousness. The poet speaks directly to that personage of the discomfiting, commonly agreed upon facts of human experience which he has failed to recognize. He frankly informs him that this failure in personal perception is directly related to a larger context of general social misery. And the narrator himself performs anew the act of recalling and exercising his full powers of consciousness as a possible means of preventing such personal and widespread social ills in the future.¹²

Initially, Wellington is accused of being a man of stunted moral growth ("...though your years as man tend fast to zero,/ In fact your Grace is still but a young Hero." ii). He is presented as one who has

¹² Michael Cooke's description of Byron's "counter-heroic humanism" fails to explore the direct relationship between Byron's social criticism and his repeatable moments of affirmative, clearly well-organized patterns of thought. "The Limits of Skepticism: the Byronic Affirmation," Keats-Shelley Journal, 17 (1968), 97-111.

failed to live up to his most intrinsically graceful and morally heroic potential due to a lack of full, creative self-consciousness in regard to the consequences of his exclusively self-centred behavior. For despite the superficial case that can be made out for his greatness as a military hero, the poet brings to light a large number of private, political and professional deficiencies that do indeed justify the common contempt for this man's name. ("Wellington" has been punned down by the defeated citizens of Europe to "Vilainton" (9)--a name which sounds like villain in English and is defined in French as a man of falsely discriminating judgement,--a man of "bad taste".)

First on an intimate, personal level the narrator reports that Wellington's deficiency as a true moral hero is manifested in his failure to behave with common courtesy to his immediate associates and fellow countrymen:

I don't think that you used Kinnaird quite well
 In Marinet's affair--in fact 'twas shabby,
 And like some other things won't do to tell
 Upon your tomb in Westminster's old abbey. IX.2

As Pratt's notes explain, Lord Kinnaird, elder brother of Byron's friend Douglas Kinnaird, felt compromised and betrayed when he brought the political informer, Martinet, to Paris supposedly under a grant of safe conduct, and Wellington had Martinet arrested at the very same time that he was entertaining Kinnaird at his residence.¹³

Yet what in a private example could perhaps be interpreted as a small oversight and minor social blemish is also seen to be indicative of a grander social malaise: a general disregard for all of the citizens of his own country and for the people of Europe as well (IX.3). For unlike the grand full-fledged heroes of antiquity, Cincinnatus and

¹³ Pratt, IV, 193.

Epaminondas (7), and the modern example, Washington (8), who scorned monetary recompense for their labor, Wellington has been concerned only for his personal aggrandizement (3). With particular reference to his behavior at the peace conferences after Waterloo, Wellington is presented as one who has no conception at all of what most men would call restoration. Instead of beneficently healing the injuries of a war-torn civilization and instigating a new, healthful growth of common liberty for all men, the general is seen only to repair the "crutch" of the maimed and obsolete authority of the monarchies.

Still this type of non-perceptive and unsympathetic behavior is not really surprising in a person of Wellington's typically unmindful profession. As Byron observes, "War's a brain-spattering, windpipe-splitting art,/ Unless her cause by Right be sanctified" (4). And the ultimate, personal consequence of such a full-time occupation, if it is pursued as in the present case without ever impartially considering the basic needs of other men, is that the perpetrator of these deeds conditions himself to become a totally debased and unregenerate beast. As the poet makes shockingly clear, he becomes only "'the best of cut-throats'" (4) or the worst of brutes.

Thus, it is the poet's firm purpose in this bold introduction first to jolt his reader into a fresh awareness of the circumstances of his existence and then to activate those thought processes which could humanize such a powerful man. As the poet explains his motivation in Canto XII:

But now I'm going to be immoral; now
 I mean to show things really as they are,
 Not as they ought to be: for I avow,
 That till we see what's what in fact, we're far

From much improvement with that virtuous plough
 Which skims the surface, leaving scarce a scar
 Upon the black loam long manured by Vice,
 Only to keep its corn at the old price.

XII.40

Similarly, in the present digression Byron exploits a variation of this metaphor about purposefully processed food for thought when he proclaims that his own immediate attitude in writing caustically incisive poetry is patently unlike the eulogizers who would pander to Wellington's preferences for flattery. For their unctuous behavior (epitomized by the hack writers of the Gazettes "Who fatten on their country's gore," 10) reflects a cannibalistic corruption of taste which fails to recognize and repulse what is intrinsically nauseating in human experience. But it is precisely the intent of Byron's strategy to offer to view the unflattering muck of Wellington's personality so that these evils can be recognized and eliminated and a new, healthful growth towards moral responsibility can be propagated on this now freshly re-conditioned loam of human experience. Or to alter the metaphor, while writing satire, the poet ruminates upon the excesses of Wellington's grossly insensitive appetites in order that this mass of unsavory experience might be chewed over and discarded as the putrid stuff of existence that it is. He performs this labor first in order that there might be developed an improved sense of taste and then, ultimately, that there might be generated a new growth in Wellington's current state of atrophied self-consciousness:

I am no flatterer--you've supped full of flattery:
 They say you like it too--'tis no great wonder:
 He whose whole life has been assault and battery,
 At last may get a little tired of thunder;
 And swallowing eulogy much more than satire, he
 May like being praised for every lucky blunder,
 Called "Saviour of the Nations"---not yet saved,
 And "Europe's Liberator"---still enslaved.

IX.5

A frank description of Wellington's self-delusive and indiscriminate

appetites, however, is not all that the narrator has to offer. In addition to creating such an indicting portrait of a calloused egotist, the narrator places the details of Wellington's reprehensible behavior within an increasingly expansive context of the positive human potential which he has failed to develop. More specifically, the poet's tactic is to recall models of self-effacing patriotism that have actually existed in history. First, there is Cincinnatus who, after only sixteen days of successful military action in defense of Rome, modestly returned to cultivate his private farm just as he had provided conscientious service to his society at large. In fact, the poet goes on to surmise that in general:

Great men have always scorned great recompenses:
 Epaminondas saved his Thebes, and died,
 Not leaving even his funeral expenses:
 George Washington had thanks, and nought beside,
 Except the all-cloudless Glory (which few men's is)
 To free his country: Pitt too had his pride,
 And, as a high-soul'd Minister of State, is
 Renowned for ruining Great Britain gratis. IX.8

Then after illustrating his latest, realistically qualified hypothesis about gratuitous leadership, the poet recalls his own most hopeful, visionary ideal of what might have been achieved for European civilization if a fully self-conscious hero had taken charge of the war. And again the poet forcefully underscores the significance of his remarks by placing his statement of pure desire in jarring apposition to a portrait of the present, lamentably depleted condition of society that has resulted from Wellington's short-sighted greed:

Never had mortal Man such opportunity,
 Except Napoleon, or abused it more:
 You might have freed fall'n Europe from the Unity
 Of Tyrants, and been blest from shore to shore:
 And now--what is your fame? Shall the Muse tune it ye?

Now--that the rabble's first vain shouts are o'er?
 Go! hear it in your famished Country's cries!
 Behold the World! and curse your victories! IX.9

Finally, in the most broadly inclusive and rhetorically emphatic terms the poet concludes his denunciation:

You did great things: but not being great in mind,
 Have left undone the greatest--and mankind. IX.x

Thus, as Wellington's potential for doing good service to his human community is seen to be so great, just so his total failure to achieve this goal is judged to be so profound. Consequently, at the present moment the results of Wellington's most detestable behavior should warrant suicide--or at least the expulsion and death of that part of his egotistical self-hood which has blocked the way to achieving a fully self-conscious regeneration of his character.

On the basis of this insight, then, the poet instigates a new strategy. First he directly challenges this great anti-hero to jump into the abyss of his emotions and identify those baleful impulses which have made him less than the creative, moral hero that he might well have been:

Death laughs--Go ponder o'er the skeleton
 With which men image out the unknown thing
 That hides the past world, like to a set sun
 Which still elsewhere may rouse a brighter spring. IX.11

The familiar lesson that the poet first reads in this exercise of momento mori poetry is one of the vanity of all transient, earthly glories--of the ultimate personal inconsequence of such selfish, narrowly defined goals as those that Wellington has just been seen to value so highly:

Death laughs at all your weep for:--look upon
 This hourly dread of all! whose threaten'd sting
 Turns life to terror, even though in its sheath:
 Mark! how its lipless mouth grins without breath! IX.11

Then, in lines that echo Shakespeare (Hamlet, V.ii and I Henry VI, IV. viii), the poet vividly depicts the horrible and humbling destiny of our organic decomposition--the factual, material reality that frustrates the desires of even the most powerful of men:

Mark! how it laughs and scorns at all you are!
 And yet was what you are: from ear to ear
 It laughs not--there is now no fleshy bar
 So called; the Antic long hath ceased to hear,
 But still he smiles; and whether near or far
 He strips from man that mantle (far more dear
 Than even the tailor's), his incarnate skin,
 White, black, or copper--the dead bones will grin. IX.12

Yet in confronting such a traumatic scene, the poet comes to see that there exists within the human psyche a force other than fear that can begin to operate to bring about a more pleasing and appropriate re-orientation to the unflattering reality of our transient, mortal existence. For, after a person dwells upon his personal impotence and insignificance in relationship to death, then the spectre of "Life" within him can rebound. The still vital powers that presently exist within him can now borrow the laughing attitude of triumphant death, and he can become completely free of and objectively indifferent to all the trivial, unessential "nothings" of conventionally accepted pursuits:

And thus Death laughs,--it is sad merriment,
 But still it is so; and with such example
 Why should not Life be equally content
 With his Superior, in a smile to trample
 Upon the nothings which are daily spent
 Like bubbles on an ocean much less ample
 Than the eternal deluge, which devours
 Suns as rays--worlds like atoms--years like hours? IX.13

Once this awareness is fully acknowledged, then a person becomes completely re-conditioned to discover and attend to the most central exigencies of his present life. In terms of the narrator's parameters, the choice before all of us becomes whether "To be or not to be?" (IX.14). The

choice becomes whether to be committed to the "pre-mature," physically deleterious and ultimately self-murdering death-in-life impulses within us (as Wellington's past lack of creative self-consciousness has resulted in the enslavement of most of Europe and personally threatens to end in something like Buonaparte's stomach cancer) or whether to be committed to the life-in-death forces that would attend to what is most pleasurable in human experience and consequently propagate those kinds of attitudes which could realize such desires for oneself and just possibly for other men, too.

It is at this point in the meditation that we see most clearly the difference between the poet's individual, pragmatic and continually self-transforming mode of moral investigation and the more traditional forms of casuistry. For the kind of moral choice recommended for Wellington (and for all men) is not to be based on an externally pre-determined principle. Rather, the kind of choice the poet prefers is to be worked through independently by each individual. In fact, to illustrate to his audience how one should perform this task and simultaneously to meet his most recently defined requirements for full, creative self-consciousness, the poet again undertakes a fresh, internal re-formulation of his experience (IX.15-21).

In this particular digression the poet's goal is the condition of good digestion---a physiological condition that arises when desire, judgment and deeds are operating in full, life-sustaining concord with each other (XI.14). Indeed, the poet underscores the positive value of his present insight by recalling the opposite, but complementary wisdom of Horace:

"O dura ilia messorum!"---"Oh

Ye rigid guts of reapers!"--I translate
 For the great benefit of those who know
 What Indigestion is--that inward fate
 Which makes all Styx through one small liver flow.
 A peasant's sweat is worth his Lord's estate:
 Let this one toil for bread--that rack for rent,
 He who sleeps best, may be the most content. IX.15

The general lesson that Byron reads here, then, is that in the long run we reap the full consequences of our self-chosen actions: the natural, physiological tortures that ensue from chronically ignoring our own or any man's most intrinsic human needs provide our all too physically real experience of hell. Under these circumstances, the poet tentatively values the modest yet nourishing labor of the farm peasant in contrast to the ultimately taxing effort of the great lord.

Yet, even while keeping the racking consequences of such inattentive behavior before our eyes as something for all of us to avoid, Byron does not claim that he has never experienced the inward pain caused by faulty discernment and inappropriate deeds. In fact, to the contrary, the detailed, visceral images of his translation suggest that he has been only too intimately familiar with this lamentable condition.¹⁴ Hence, befitting this most recent perception of personal fallibility, the poet re-evaluates the practical, plausible limits of any one man's ability once and for all times to interpret, judge, and realistically resolve the fundamental moral questions of human existence for himself or for other men.

First, the poet recalls the physical limit placed on the perceptions of any individual: "'Tis true we speculate both far and wide/And deem because we see, we are all-seeing'" (16). This observation then pushes him towards the position of skepticism (17). But then the poet discovers

¹⁴ Some specific examples of the poet's failures in personal perception see Chapter I above, pp. 12-34.

that the attitude of skepticism contains its own human limits: total skepticism precludes any practical, self-sustaining action in the real, tangible world of every-day experience (18). So as a fresh, imaginative hypothesis the poet considers the activity of collecting pretty shells of material experience. This activity is one which is imagistically equivalent to the process of scientific discovery employed by Newton ("that proverb of the mind" who declared he felt only "'like a youth/ Picking up shells by the great ocean Truth,'" VII.5). Thus in the present situation Byron comes to see that mortal minds must be content to base their judgements on incomplete perceptions of physical experience and therefore be liable to error. But at the same time he also realizes that a mindfully alert accumulation of such surprising bits of data, if not commensurate to all possible human experiences, still provides increasingly valid guidelines for forming modest, tentative judgements about how one should more effectively gratify one's most essential desires.

On the basis of this latest configuration, then, the poet understands that like a rejuvenated scientist of the human soul (psyche) he is justified in getting on with the task of leading a creatively self-conscious life in space and time and human society (19).¹⁵ As the poet confides in stanza 20, he may not fully understand the grandiose, abstract words of "theogony," "philanthropy," "cosmogony," and "misanthropy", but he does immediately comprehend the concept of wolfish behavior in men ("lykanthropy") from his own first-hand perceptions as recorded in this canto, and perhaps at this very moment he can do something useful to alter

¹⁵ For a more detailed account of Newton's positive contribution to his fellow mortals through a process of creative, scientific discovery and Byron's explicit wish to do the same in poetry see Canto X.1-4.

this latter, despicable condition. For as a direct result of vehemently repudiating such insensitive behavior as that practiced by Wellington towards his fellow men and paying heed to his most personal intimations of well-being, he sees himself undergo a new kind-hearted change in attitude. He sees himself achieve a calming, self-saving grace which might possibly point the way for other men, too, to bring about their own benevolently humane transformations:

But I, the mildest, meekest of mankind,
 Like Moses, or Melancthon, who have ne'er
 Done anything exceedingly unkind,--
 And (though I could not now and then forbear
 Following the bent of body or of mind)
 Have always had a tendency to spare,--
 Why do they call me misanthrope? Because
They hate me, not I them.

IX.21

From the beginning of Don Juan, of course, the poet has demonstrated a willingness and ability to maintain a creatively alert stance toward the changing data of his perceptions. Yet as a consistent, recurring pattern, Byron goes on to make ever more refined observations concerning the basic personality traits which allow him to cope with the uncertainties of human existence with growing confidence and satisfaction. He becomes ever more explicit about what they are composed of, about how these components dynamically interact, and about the consequences of these repeatable interactions both in terms of personal satisfaction, zest, and determined will for continued effort and in terms of providing a modestly valid basis for his hypothetical story about Juan.

For example, as the natural foundation for his finely honed consciousness Byron points to the temperamental condition of mobilité. In Canto XVI the poet assigns this attribute to the character of Adeline, but it is quite clear from the surrounding stanzas (93, 99) that this

perceptual trait is essential to his own self-adaptive, poetic nature,
too:

So well she acted, all and every part
 By turns--with that vivacious versatility,
 Which many people take for want of heart,
 They err--'tis merely what is called mobility,
 A thing of temperament and not of art,
 Though seeming so, from its supposed facility;
 And false--though true; for surely they're sincerest,
 Who are strongly acted on by what is nearest. XVI.97

Byron goes on to offer a more detailed description of his condition in the notes to this stanza. As the poet observes,

I am not sure that mobility is English, but it is expressive of a quality which rather belongs to other climates, though it is sometimes seen to a great extent in our own. 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.¹⁶

This kind of initially unsettling, acutely sensitive response to the changing stimuli of one's environment accompanied by a simultaneous awareness of the unstructured possibilities of all of one's past experience, however, represents only part of the narrator's powers of consciousness. For added to this faculty is the ability to create his own imaginative visions of order in the hope of gaining some new control over the recent novel events of his experience.

In a primitive, rudimentary form one can see this latter ability to create expedient forms of order in the actions of the buffo. The buffo is also a storyteller. He selects events from his past and present experience and puts them into new, imaginative arrangements to see which actions he should pursue or avoid--to see what in his present environment he must be resigned to accept or what he can be spurred on to change. And the formulation of these orders provides him with a measure of self-

¹⁶ Pratt, IV, 285-286.

adaptive relief:

By one of these [captive Italians], the buffo of the party,
 Juan was told about their curious case;
 For although destined to the Turkish mart, he
 Still kept his spirits up--at least his face;
 The little fellow really look'd quite hearty,
 And bore him with some gaiety and grace,
 Showing a much more reconcil'd demeanour
 Than did the prima donna and the tenor. IV.81

But an external evaluation of the benefits of this technique is barely sufficient to suggest the mature poet's heartfelt joy in recognizing his present, on-going ability to call upon all of his faculties of perception and watch them operate in spontaneous, creative, and self-liberating concord with one another. Indeed, the immediate emotion proves to be so real and satisfying that the poet comes to appropriate to himself as his most authentic, essential and sincerely self-revealing behavior the role of the *improvvisatore* artist:

I perch upon an humbler promontory,
 Amidst life's infinite variety:
 With no great care for what is nicknamed glory,
 But speculating as I cast mine eye
 On what may suit or may not suit my story,
 And never straining hard to versify,
 I rattle on exactly as I'd talk
 With anybody in a ride or walk.

I don't know that there may be much ability
 Shown in this sort of desultory rhyme;
 But there's a conversational facility,
 Which may round off an hour upon a time.
 Of this I'm sure at least, there's no servility
 In mine irregularity of chime,
 Which rings what's uppermost of new or hoary,
 Just as I feel the Improvvisatore. XV.19-20

Ridenour is most helpful in understanding the concept of *improvvisatore* artist described here when he calls attention to Byron's familiarity with Madame de Staël's novel, Corinne, ou Italie and suggests that in this story "The mobile Corinne is by vocation an *improvisatrice*."¹⁷ In these

¹⁷ Ridenour, Appendix B, p. 165.

circumstances Corinne, is seen purposefully, habitually, and skillfully to indulge herself in an exhilarating exploitation of a natural talent. She revels in what she calls a "supernatural enthusiasm" when she shows herself presently to be in possession of a well-developed but still unpredictable technique that allows her to manifest and discover the indefinite potential of her personality, that allows her spontaneously to re-formulate or "transcend" her past, outmoded definitions of herself in light of her most recent awareness of novel experience. As Corinne describes her reactions,

Improvisation seems to me a sort of animated conversation. I do not permit myself to be confined to this or that subject; I abandon myself to the impression which the interest of my audience produces in me.... Sometimes that interest raises me above myself and enables me to discover in nature or my own heart daring truths and vital expressions which solitary reflection could not have produced. Then I think I experience a supernatural enthusiasm...I feel myself a poet....when my soul is uplifted, when I speak, not from personal feelings, not in my own behalf, but because I am moved by the dignity of humanity and the glory of the world.¹⁸

But, of course, there exists a major difference between Byron's and Corinne's interpretations of this basic creative experience. For when the poet of Don Juan calls himself an improvvisatore artist, he seeks to understand in pragmatic, non-supernatural terms the habits and attitudes which can be used repeatedly to nurture and sustain his most essential powers of creativity. Indeed, primarily from the data recorded and analyzed in his digressions--his "speeches from the throne" (III.94) which are metaphorically equivalent to Aurora Raby's "throne" of self-passing consciousness (XV.47)--the poet comes to understand ever more self-critically the imaginatively artful but also phenomenologically real and practical mental strategies which allow him to

¹⁸ Translated by Jerome McGann in Fiery Dust, p. 281.

generate new and more personally germane meanings from the events of his history and which ultimately provide a sincere, self-justified foundation for the style of his present poem.

That Byron's account of creative consciousness is a scientifically accurate description of certain general perceptual processes can be judged by comparing his observations to those given by twentieth-century gestalt psychologists. For instance, in Canto XV stanzas 19-20, the poet describes his role of improvisatore artist in terms of the spontaneous yet natural and dynamically balanced activities of walking, riding and talking; and, likewise, under the rubric of "properties of the self" Frederick Perls, Ralph Hefferline, and Paul Goodman describe a "middle mode of creative disinterest" where

whether the self does or is done to, it refers the process to itself as a totality, it feels it as its own and is engaged in it [e.g., the French reflexives s'amuser, to have a good time, or se promener to take a walk, so perhaps in English "to address to"].¹⁹

In particular the psychologists note that the spontaneously creative act is

neither directive nor self-directive, nor is it being carried along though essentially disengaged, but it is a discovering-and-inventing as one goes along, engaged and accepting.

The spontaneous is both active and passive, both willing and done to; or better, it is a middle mode, a creative impartiality; a disinterest not in the sense of being not excited or not creative, for spontaneity is eminently these, but as the unity prior (and posterior) to activity and passivity, containing both.²⁰

¹⁹ Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality (New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., 1951), p. 376.

²⁰ In an extremely interesting footnote to this paragraph, Perls laments the loss of the specifically "middle mode" verbs in the English language. As he points out, "This is a disease of language. Greek has a regular middle mode with, plausibly, the disinterested meaning we here require: e.g., dunamai, have power to, or boulomai, want" (p. 376). But

A supportive analysis of the general properties of spontaneous creativity, however, is not all that gestalt psychologists have to offer. For their in-depth examination of the component subsystems of the process of a gestalt formation agrees exceedingly well with Byron's portrait of his own inventive and analytic procedures. Specifically, Perls suggests that the major divisions in an alert, unrepressed and self-integrating (i.e., non-neurotic) mode of "creative adjustment" to one's environment are (1) the coming into a free, unstructured awareness of one's total milieu, (2) achieving a point of insightful awareness, and (3) appropriating to oneself a newly created order based on that insight. Traditionally these partial stages of the total process have been called Id, Ego, and Personality:

As aspects of the self in a simple spontaneous act, Id, Ego and Personality are the major stages of creative adjustment: the Id is the given background dissolving into its possibilities, including organic excitations and past unfinished situations becoming aware, and the environment vaguely perceived, and the inchoate feelings connecting organism and environment. The Ego is the progressive identification with and alienation of the possibilities, the limiting and heightening of the on-going contact [with the actual transient present], including motor behavior, aggressing, orientation, and manipulation. The Personality is the created figure that the self becomes and assimilates to the organism, uniting it with the results of previous growth.²¹

as critics of Don Juan have recognized whenever they have been compelled to come to terms with Byron's elusive, "Horatian," middle mode, or colloquial language, this particular Romantic poet has discovered and masterfully utilized an appropriate idiom for one who continually chooses to address himself to the creative activities of reacting, responding and imaginatively re-adjusting himself to the changing, novel data of his environment.

²¹ Perls et al., p. 378.

Literary critics such as Patricia Ball in her study of the formation of Byron's "central self"²² and Jerome McGann in his study of the "mythologizing" of the poet's character that takes place in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*²³ also confirm that a self-created personality is the predictable result of pursuing the activities of full, creative self-consciousness. Or as the gestaltists say, "the personality is a structure of the self which is largely discovered-and-invented in the analytic procedure itself...; it is the assumption of what one is, serving as a ground on which one could explain one's behavior, if the explanation were asked for... Personality is essentially a verbal replica of the self."²⁴ Thus in purely practical terms, the aftermath of several complete uninhibited encounters should be the adoption of certain self-consistent patterns of behavior-- of certain "group-identifications and viable rhetorical and moral attitudes."²⁵

In the immediate context of *Don Juan* a group identification refers to something like Byron's self-determined choice to write in the English language (see also *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, IV.8-10). Though he has settled in Italy, the poet continues to be loyal to his early Whig principles (specifically unlike the renegade, Southey as dramatized in

²² The Central Self: A Study in Romantic and Victorian Imagination (London: Univ. of London, the Athlone Press, 1968), p. 3.

²³ In *Fiery Dust* (p. 25) McGann limits his discussion of the poet's creative powers to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, but what Byron learned there with sardonic and melancholic effort he draws upon and develops with more ease, skill and stoical good humor in *Don Juan*.

²⁴ Perls et al., p. 382.

²⁵ Perls et al., p. 423.

the Dedication, 1,17) and write engaging and didactic poetry about a libertine "hero" for the benefit of the clear thinking, positive-acting men of that country. This activity represents a natural extension of the poet's own most intimate morality, for he knows he prefers freedom to despotism. He knows he prefers an opportunity for creative self-transformation rather than an unnatural stasis caused by adherence to an outmoded or externally imposed system of laws even though he prudently recognizes all men's calculated risk of new errors and follies in the future. He makes this choice because he pays heed to history and reads on his own pulse that the former situation is a more effective and satisfying means for coping with the unpredictable, disruptive circumstances of our human environment.

That Byron has successfully completed many past encounters also can be judged by the wide variety of self-adjusting and manipulative techniques that he has ready at his disposal in his poem. For example, Byron has chosen a relatively inchoate, open, episodic and digressive poetic structure which allows him to include any new material in his work as it happens to enter his awareness, not as it must fit into any preconceived notions of a logical, Aristotelian plot;²⁶ and his language is that of a multi-toned and cadenced conversational mode. Then, too, the poet knows that if the political problems of the real world of European society threaten to become too overpowering for him to cope with directly (Dedication, 16), he can refresh himself by fantasizing an idealistic

²⁶ For an indepth discussion of this idea see Leonard Deen's article "Liberty and License in Byron's Don Juan," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 8 (1966), 347. McGann has also observed that it is precisely Byron's consistent personality trait of "openness to change" which provides the key to the poem's "experimental," episodic form, i.e., the whole design is "relatively inchoate and deliberately left open to modifications, additions, and removals" (Don Juan in Context, p. 117).

tale like that of Juan and Haidée's island romance (e.g. "theirs was love in which the mind delights/ To lose itself, when the old world grows dull,/ And we are sick of its hack sounds and sights," IV.17). And if his poetic method fails to satisfy him on every occasion--if, for instance, his passions and fanciful imaginings verge towards the extreme of emotional and mental instability--Byron knows that he can always break away from his fabricated world-view and "take a ride in some green lane" until his personal harmony can be re-established physically (IX.85).

Thus the impartially alert, uninhibited discovery, assimilation and repeated exercise of all these various attributes of a creatively self-sustaining personality is what Edward Bostetter attempts to come to grips with in his summation of the poetic process of Don Juan:

The record of Don Juan, then, is a record of release and growth as man and artist; canto by canto, the range of Byron's awareness expands. The amused and almost scientific detachment which includes himself as well as the rest of mankind, and which enables him to express himself in all the vagaries and caprices of moods, in all his impulsiveness and irresponsibility as a human being at the same time that he stands aloof and controls the perspective, insures a never-flagging incentive and an almost literally inexhaustible source of subject matter.²⁷

Yet, paradoxically, as Keats knew so well, in the best of circumstances a truly self-expansive creator appears not to have much personality; like Shakespeare this artist would seem to have negative capability. Or to change the simile to one of Byron's favorites, the creatively aware self is like water, a fluid substance able to assume the form of its receptacle. (See my analysis of the water imagery of Canto XIII. 55-65 in Chapter III, pp. 130). Perls links this attribute to the nature of the closing of a successful encounter, for

²⁷ Bostetter, p. 296.

the self exists not as a fixed institution but especially as adjusting to more intense and difficult problems, [and] when these situations are quiescent or approach equilibrium, the self is diminished. So it is in sleep or in any growth as it approaches assimilation.²⁸

In this situation, the self is seen to have

found and made its reality, but recognizing what it has assimilated, it sees it again as part of a vast field. In the heat of creative contact, one says, "It is this, not that, and now, "It is only this let us open our minds to that."²⁹

Hence, at this stage of post contact the creative self knows that its nature exists only as potentiality. The self knows that if it is to have a continued relevant, present existence it must re-submit itself to the entire process. It must continue to react to, reformulate and digest all the novel, transient stimuli encountered in its environment.

²⁸ Perls et al., p. 374.

²⁹ Perls et al., p. 427.

Part B: The Narrative Venture

Consistent with the poet's perception of the cyclical but on-going processes of creative self-consciousness, Byron begins the final cantos by re-structuring and re-evaluating the facts of his history with an ever more adroit application of his skills. Indeed, judging by the final, expansive perspective of the narrator in Canto XVII as he looks back over the common and familiar rules for fostering the independent growth to maturity of children (1-4) of historical ages (6-9), and his own consciousness (9-11) in preparation to confront a new, unsettled situation, we understand that the pattern of Juan's development from an awkward and innocent, but lively young gentleman to a skillful and graceful but slightly degenerate libertine hero represents in a physical and social form the progress and development of Byron's internal powers of consciousness as he has become increasingly aware of them.³⁰ That is, at one level of understanding Juan, "he whose very body was all mind" (VIII.54), represents "The physical manifestation of the narrator's intellectual energy": his continuing narrative story imaginatively portrays the concrete and sometimes surprising behavioral consequences of pursuing a particular mode of self-consciously alert perception.³¹

³⁰ Along with Byron gestalt psychologists recognize that the consequences of non-inhibited, non-neruotic perception and clear gestalt figure formation are manifested in fully integrated, "graceful," motor-muscular activity (Perls et al., p. 116-117). Early on in the poem Juan and Haidée possess the ability to recognize clearly the impulses for essential self-satisfaction without the aid of language. But for the post-Edenic narrator the principle means for re-achieving such a state of harmonious bliss is to go through the contemplative and linguistical processes of self-amending consciousness. See Canto II.36-39.

³¹ As James R. Thompson continues to point out, "Placed in an essentially destructive situation, Juan always emerges successfully, his particular virtue is his adaptability. In short, he is not so much a character as an embodiment of sheer vitality." "Byron's Plays and Don Juan: Genre and Myth," Bucknell Review, 15, No.3 (1967), 33.

Thus in this sense Juan's adventures and the narrator's moral and poetic discoveries can be read as reflexive, mutually illuminating modes. For example, when the story of Juan begins, the young man has little notion of what desires are operating to move him along the path of human experience:

Poor little fellow! he had no idea
 Of his own case, and never hit the true one;
 In feelings quick as Ovid's Miss Medea,
 He puzzled over what he found a new one,
 But not as yet imagined it could be a
 Thing quite in course, and not at all alarming,
 Which, with a little patience, might grow charming. I.86

For the poet's part initially we are presented with a broad definition of his poetic style that is rather misleading and imprecise. For although his early evaluation is correct in depicting his obstinacy to go his own way even if he must violate the rules of tradition, this preliminary observation does not include a full and explicit appreciation of his tendency to digress:

Most epic poets plunge "in medias res"
 (Horace makes this the heroic turnpike road)
 And then your hero tells, whene're you please,
 What went before--by way of episode,
 While seated after dinner at his ease,
 Beside his mistress in some soft abode,
 Palace, or garden, paradise, or cavern,
 Which serves the happy couple for a tavern.

That is the usual method, but not mine--
 My way is to begin with the beginning;
 The regularity of my design
 Forbids all wandering as the worst of sinning,
 And therefore I shall open with a line
 (Although it cost me half an hour in spinning)
 Narrating somewhat of Don Juan's father,
 And also of his mother, if you'd rather. I.6-7.

Thus both the poet and his libertine "hero" are portrayed as knowing very little of what they would be about. They have both been hemmed in by the traditional rules of their inherited culture. Juan's

mother provides him with a very strict, traditionally moral education that leaves a lot of questions about human experience unanswered, and in a similar way Horace is not an adequate guide for the kind of artistic effort the present poet is embarking upon. But despite these archaic, culturally inculcated rules each character indulges in his most natural form of passion: Juan for a woman, and the narrator for sinfully wandering, self-consciously digressive poetry. And each is granted his reward of pleasure. For his efforts of passionately indulged behavior Juan achieves the ambrosial sin of Julia (I.127) and becomes "divested of his native modesty" (II.1). And just so the narrator humorously dramatizes himself as indulging in a new, freely irregular (I.120) poetic experiment ("To show his parts," I.128) to such an extent that he, too, achieves a state of poetic intoxication:

If ever I should condescend to prose,
 I'll write poetical commandments, which
 Shall supersede beyond all doubt all those
 That went before; in these I shall enrich
 My text with many things that no one knows,
 And carry precept to the highest pitch:
 I'll call the work "Longinus o'er a Bottle
 Or, Every Poet his own Aristotle." I.204

To be sure both characters are eventually restrained from a totally unlimited, reckless indulgence of their passion; Juan is sent on a voyage to Cadiz "To wean him from the wickedness of the earth" (II.8); and the objectively self-conscious poet knows he is involved in a process of biological exhaustion and that his poetic efforts may not end in complete public approbation or long-term fame (I. 208-220). Still by following their most dominant, willfully independent desires both characters are portrayed as firmly on the path toward establishing and refining their personally unique rules of satisfying behavior (Juan, I.191; Byron, I.205-206). They are on the path towards achieving an optimum

amount of modestly self-confident, mature and gracefully self-liberating identity.

Of course, from the beginning of the poem the totally objective poet knows that unlike the ingenue, Juan, he already possesses a large measure of self-discriminated preferences within the bounds of his personality, for as in Beppo he writes in the flexible, Pulciquesque style with good-humoured ease, and he has a life-time collection of many other forms of self-conscious writing behind him. But there is always a value to himself and his reader in retracing the stages of his own progress, since first he has the pleasure of knowing and measuring how far he has come (this process is ironically similar to the miser counting his stored-up, earthly treasure, I.216). Then, too, the poet can keep in mind and share with others the errors and successes of his past experiences in order that they all might capitalize upon them in the future. And finally, he has the opportunity to recognize some new problem he might not have seen before and respond to it afresh in new, self-surprising ways. For as McGann reminds us,

In Don Juan Byron makes a great virtue of not comprehending the world in a unified, integrative, or closed system. By giving in completely to the surprises of his life, by emphasizing that, even in retrospect, one appreciates and can respond to more than the achieved order of events, Byron in fact opens his mindto further experiences of [possibly more germane visions] of order.³²

To see such a process of independent growth and re-evaluation at work, we can consider the change in relationship that takes place between Juan and Jack Johnson in the war cantos. So I argued in Chapter I (pp. 13-14), Jack Johnson represents the personality of a pragmatic realist who knows how to ride with the potentially overwhelming tide of human

³² Don Juan in Context, p. 103.

events--who knows how to take frustration and disillusionment in his stride. Specifically, he was shown to have developed from experience an attitude of detached stoical calm towards the immediate, changeable powers of the universe; and the information which he passes on to Juan concerning the practical limits of any one individual's power to change the entire world in his favor (V.21-23) is seen to produce a major advance in the young man's education. Yet the poet understands that the consequence of applying just one orientation consistently as a life-time strategy has its own drawbacks: an unrelieved diet of self-centred opportunism and a recognition of a severely limited field of achievement in comparison to the cosmos could lead one to the sour-tempered position of cynicism--an attitude which Johnson's concluding remarks do indeed suggest: "'To feel for none is the true social art/ Of the world's stoics--men without a heart'" (V.25). But as Juan discovers and both he and the poet demonstrate, an individual can adopt a more hopeful and personally satisfying stance.³³

Juan and the poet establish their autonomous modes of behavior during the seemingly unpropitious circumstances of the seige of Ismael. In terms of Juan's adventure Byron presents his leading character thoroughly enmeshed in the commonly ungraceful activity of human slaughter and destruction; and insofar as Juan is a naively willing, sensation-seeking

³³ Even Byron's most immediate poetic model, Samuel Johnson, felt in his poem, "The Vanity of Human Wishes," that he must add a more imaginatively hopeful, Christian ending to his adaptation of Juvenal's pessimistic satire on the human condition. Yet Byron's present notion is that each creatively self-conscious person can repeatedly get in touch and act in accord with his own most fundamental feelings of joy and rejuvenation without recourse to an external, authoritarian or supernatural religious mythology. Of course, to the ruling establishment as Byron portrays them, for instance, in "The Vision of Judgment" these independent, self-responsive, and self-adaptive experiences represent a satanic threat to the status quo; but to the poet these experiences reflect something more accurately labelled demonic, because in their new, unimplemented form they are full of the motivating (potential) energy for either good or ill.

(VIII.29) participant in the brutal forces of war, he runs the risk of becoming contaminated by the hellish confusion of the hour just like all his other enraged comrades in arms:

He knew not where he was, nor 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 lively brains;
 And where the hottest fire was seen and heard,
 And the loud cannon pealed his hoarsest strains,
 He rushed, while Earth and Air were sadly shaken
 By thy humane discovery, Friar Bacon! VIII.33

In a similar way Byron presents himself in the war cantos as a totally unrestrained, passionately involved satirist waging a widespread, general war in verse (VII. 8) against the "vanities" and "nothingness" of human life:

Dogs, or Men!--(for I flatter you in saying
 That ye are dogs--your betters far) ye may
 Read, or read not, what I am now essaying
 To show ye what ye are in every way.
 As little as the Moon stops for the baying
 Of Wolves, will the bright Muse withdraw one ray
 From out her skies--then howl your idle wrath!
 While she still silvers o'er your gloomy path. VII.7

In one sense the splenetic frenzy displayed by the poet when he calls all men dogs and wolves could be used as evidence for Byron's all too human potential for inhumane over-kill. But to the poet's credit he does not succumb to the temptation to become a totally insensitive beast even as he explores and is engulfed by the horrifying acts of his "fellow men" in war. Instead, amidst narrative scenes where all notions of beneficent, civilized behavior are being destroyed, "where each tie that can bind/ Humanity must yield to steel and flame" (VIII.58), where the deafening, inarticulate sounds of battle assert their effective power to prevent any kind of shared, rational communication (VIII.58), the poet begins to perceive new, possibly more fruitful grounds for re-establishing the bonds of human community. At this very moment he begins to

perceive a little bit of living hope ("you might almost hear a linnet [sing]," viii.59). And he confirms his intuition of possibly more positive action by freely indulging in a digression (VIII.60-68) that seeks to define his most fundamental, current desire.

In this case as the narrator "ponders on the present and the past" (60), he begins to see that within a wider spectrum of human existence (the total inchoate wilderness of human experience that can eventuate in either a heaven or a hell) there have existed and may possibly exist again historical models of exemplary human virtue. For example, the narrator first recalls the name of Sylla, a man who had a rare kind of good fortune. He was able to retire from a career of revenge and bloodshed at the height of his military power and enjoy the remainder of his life "in fullness of prosperity."³⁴ But then as the supreme ideal of the fortunately blessed, the narrator rescues and delineates his personally mythologized portrait of General Boon [sic, all puns intended]:

The General Boon, back-woodsman of Kentucky,
Was happiest amongst mortals anywhere,
For killing nothing but a bear or buck, he
Enjoy'd the lonely, vigorous, harmless days
Of his old age in wilds of deepest maze.

Crime came not near him--she is not the child
Of Solitude; Health shrank not from him--for
Her home is in the rarely-trodden wild,
Where if men seek her not, and death be more
Their choice than life, forgive them, as beguiled

³⁴ Pratt (IV, 177) quotes lines from Byron's "Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte" which are based on Plutarch's description of Sylla:

The Roman, when his burning heart
Was slaked with blood of Rome,
Threw down the dagger--dared depart,
In savage grandeur home.

By habit to what their own hearts's abhor--
 In cities caged. The present case in point I
 Cite is, that Boon lived hunting up to ninety;

And what's still stranger, left behind a name
 For which men vainly decimate the throng,
 Not only famous, but of that good fame,
 Without which Glory's but a tavern song--
 Simple, serene, the antipodes of shame,
 Which hate nor envy e'er could tinge with wrong;
 An active hermit, even in age a child
 Of Nature, or the Man of Ross run wild.

'Tis true he shrank from men even of his nation,
 When they built up unto his darling trees,--
 He moved some hundred miles off, for a station
 Where there were fewer houses and more ease;
 The inconvenience of civilization
 Is, that you neither can be pleased nor please;
 But where he met the individual man
 He showed himself as kind as mortal can.

VIII.61-69

Traditionally, readers have not liked this particular digression on Daniel Boone. Most critics have felt that such an idyllic scene has no proper business existing in the middle of the war cantos. Yet this kind of disapproving reaction fails to take into account how the spontaneous, seemingly inconsistent digression might satisfy a very real and immediate need of the poet. For, used in opposition to the callousing and enslaving attitudes of contemporary society, this procedure allows him to rescue, protect and sustain with more than normal, "realistic" frequency his most essential heart's desires. It allows him to re-condition himself by bringing forward into the present those moments from mankind's past collective experience which are currently judged to be most pleasurable to the natural man within his being. And ultimately it allows him to map out his independent, contingent plans for action and change in his external environment even though he is fully aware that his visionary interpretation of history represents a rare, "idealistic" portrait of human behavior and probably has no great

chance for wide-spread implementation among the generally over-crowded, unmindful hordes of mankind which presently surround him (VIII.68).³⁵

Alternatively, if we consider Byron's presentation of Juan's situation in Canto VIII stanzas 89-104 it is quite clear that the young man's virtuous actions also stem directly from his independent and striking perception of something that needs to be saved and nurtured. Juan and no one else sees Leila amidst the carnage. Juan alone saves her from the villanous Cossacques (VIII.92). And Juan alone experiences the reflexive satisfaction of his "joy to save" (96) as a direct result of courageously following the natural bent of his heart's most central desire. Indeed, the sequence of physical activities involved in this rescue scene again mirrors both the structure of the Boone digression in particular and the larger argument of the war cantos as a whole (see above Chapter II, pp. 46-57). For example, Juan recognizes, then repudiates (i.e., literally cuts his source of value away from) all traces of externally conditioned brutality (92-94) so that a modicum of non-egotistical sympathy may survive (i.e., may be consciously assimilated into his personality) and form the freely chosen bonds of a new social relationship between himself and the young orphan girl.³⁶

But to make sure that we understand the personal significance and intensity of the foregoing events, Byron has Juan's altruistic behavior

³⁵ For a more extreme dramatization of the real and redeeming powers of the human imagination see Byron's Lament of Tasso. Here the poet, Tasso, is portrayed as maintaining his sanity and capacity for human tenderness even while he is physically and mentally rotting away in prison cell--even while he realizes all the hellish restrictions of his present environment. In this poem Byron presents Tasso as just having completed Jerusalem Liberated--a poem of sustained and sustaining awareness of a positive, social goal for human achievement. See Patricia Ball, p. 112.

³⁶ In "Byron and the Terrestrial Paradise" E. D. Hirsch, Jr., has argued that Juan experiences periodic redemptions from the fallen, insecure

tested by the arch-pragmatist, Johnson:

Said Juan--"Whatsoever is to be
 Done, I'll not quit her till she seems secure
 Of present life a good deal more than we."--
 Quoth Johnson--"Neither will I quite ensure;
 But at the least you may die gloriously."--
 Juan replied--"at least I will endure
 Whate'er is to be borne--but not resign
 This child, who is parentless and therefore mine." VIII.100

Even in response to his mentor's continued and most conventionally prudent considerations, Juan obstinately stands committed to his independent discernment of his most fundamental need:

Johnson said--"Juan, we've no time to lose;
 The child's a pretty child--a very pretty--
 I never saw such eyes--but hark! now choose
 Between your fame and feelings, pride and pity;--
 Hark! how the roar increases!--no excuse
 Will serve when there is plunder in a city;--
 I should be loth to march without you, but,
 By God! we'll be too late for the first cut."

But Juan was immovable.... VIII.101-102

Thus it is adamantly clear that Juan has attained a new growth in courage beyond that of his former teacher. It is adamantly clear that he has found his uniquely self-responsive and self-responsible raison d'être for his present course of action. And in return for this

condition common to most men based on "a vision of totally self-less and totally fulfilling love relationship" (From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1965), p. 474). It is just my notion, however, that more and more as the poet matures this condition of periodic redemption issues from and reflects his various creative and analytic habits of perception. That is, the visions of selfless love that we see depicted in Juan's adventures may have originated from a naively perfect love situation in youth and from time to time new, surprising occasions for pleasure and beauty again do come his way in life, but from the perspective of a "fallen" poet these more often than "common" (realistic) visions are representative of his consciously pursued and artfully re-creative procedures of self-adjusting consciousness.

committed stance to protect the beloved orphaned child Juan, himself, in specific contrast to the majority of the impassioned and deluded brutes who rush eagerly into war (VIII.103), becomes shielded and saved in some new small way from the desensitizing insanities of his present civilization. He, himself, becomes more accurately re-oriented upon the path for achieving the vision of his most mature, self-completing ideal,
Aurora Raby:

Rich, noble, but an orphan; left an only
Child to the care of guardians good and kind....³⁷ XV.44

From one point of view, then, the progress of Juan's story can be read like the experience of young Sir Gareth in both Malory's and Tennyson's tales. That is, young Juan, the physical manifestation of the poet's moral and aesthetic consciousness is seen to undergo a process of accumulative experience and education which enables him to discover the identity of his own self-transforming ideal. He is seen to be committed to enduring the strenuous process of acquiring some practical skills of survival (equivalent to earning his protective suit of knightly armor, XV.14) that reveals and actualizes one's potential virtue for securing the good life. And finally he is allowed to achieve with the graceful ease of accomplished self-mastery, a vision of his uniquely self-satisfying, self-completing lady.

³⁷ After Leila (a little "Day-dawn girl," XII.56) accompanies Juan on a few more adventures and is finally tutored under the guiding, educative care of Dame Pinchbeck (XII.42-51), Juan is permitted an introduction to Aurora. Significantly, Lady Pinchbeck of the Society of Vice Suppression represents the conservative rules of behavior derived from a personal experience of the errors and excesses of love (i.e., a passion for life that the poet himself knows only too well):

Moreover I've remark'd (and I was once
A slight observer in a modest way)
And so may every one except a dunce,
That ladies in their youth a little gay,

Yet insofar as Juan's adventures illustrate the experience of a mortal hero operating in a realistic world of enormous complexity and change, there are major qualifications to be placed on the complete success of his adventures. First because Byron places his story within the context of a world that is too grandly complex and changeable for any one human perspective to comprehend all of it at any one time, the allegorical image of Juan's self-completing lady will have to be revised continually. Byron's hero will need to conceive of and adopt new goals in response to new situations. Secondly, because the poet sets up the story so that Juan is seen to develop the new rules of his behavior by pursuing the as yet unknown limits of some natural passion, the young man is likely to "sin" both in terms of an orthodox, archaic interpretation of human behavior and in terms of his own self-established morality: he dares to subject himself and others who might come into contact with him to unknown frustrations, errors, and pain.

Yet despite a recognition of potential fallibility, the poet and his novitiate hero of experience, Juan, remain committed to following their own most central desires. For even if a particular resultant situation turns out to be otherwise than either one had hoped, the poet knows that the circumstances might ultimately be turned to their advantage.

Besides their knowledge of the world, and sense
 Of the sad consequence of going astray,
 Are wiser in their warnings 'gainst the woe
 Which the mere passionless can never know.

XII.44

In this developmental, educative sense, then, Aurora Raby represents a more mature and self-consciously refined version of Leila (and even of nature's first oracle of love, Haidée—"the sister of the dawn" (II.142).

He knows that if recognized and re-evaluated, such errors can lead to an increase in awareness and a new, more appropriately refined behavior.

As McGann explains this relationship in Fiery Dust:

In Byron's view every "fall" [into sin or error] occasions a convulsion of some sort and though the events seem to signal a recession in one sense, its truest function is to provide an occasion for further blessedness. Falls are evil only if they are not capitalized upon. More surely they are the gifts of life, for, as Byron told Augusta during his great fall, "not in vain, / Even for its own sake do we purchase pain." Samisa and Azaiel [in Heaven and Earth] fall away from heaven, but in doing so they become more admirable, indeed, more capable morally than the god whom they desert: Their "lower" state of being is presented as really more full."³⁸

And specifically in regard to Byron's Don Juan period McGann again argues:

A person becomes himself fully only by successive falls away from an original condition, or--to use another of Byron's favorite images--by travelling, by constantly going somewhere and becoming something else. In each separation, in each fall, one can look for an increase in consciousness.³⁹

Finally, the third major restriction to be placed on the young hero's unlimited development of consciousness is his mortality. As the poet knows so well, every potential human hero is on an irreversible course towards biological decay, death and dissolution. Thus as a natural consequence of his material existence the progress of Juan's physical dexterity, like the repeated thought patterns of the poet's mind in particular and the process of the universe in general, is seen to emerge from chaos and awkwardness, to order, refinement and graceful activity and finally to return to a degenerate but free state of chaos.

³⁸ Fiery Dust, p. 266.

³⁹ Fiery Dust, p. 270.

In terms of a fully self-conscious personality this process suggests that one must ultimately reconcile himself to the full, natural life cycle. It means that while participating in a material life one must adjust to his natural, reciprocally bound relationship to the state of death. As the poet says of Adeline's plot to engineer Juan's social fate (but it is equally true of the narrator's and potentially every man's self-accommodating mind on the road to death),

the dance
Of marriage--(which might form a painter's fame,
Like Holbein's "Dance of Death"--but 'tis the same);--

XV.39

Thus in the final cantos the poet comes to acknowledge many disheartening restrictions placed upon a modern mortal hero, but at the same time he is not yet totally resigned to inaction. Instead, as is typical of his past behavior under stress and insecurity, he sets about to identify his most recent, dominant need, and in the process he demonstrates that he in particular possesses a modest but full human measure of adaptive skills, wisdom and vital self-determination. He demonstrates that he in particular knows how to create something uniquely suited to the moment to increase his present awareness and sustain his most intimate sense of vital delight. Witness the Rabelasian joy the poet evinces when constructing the modestly modern but classically representative feast of Canto XV stanzas 67-73.

To be sure, as the poet enters into his latest gourmandizing fray, he recognizes that he could get hopelessly lost among the myriads of past, man-made concoctions for pleasure:

The mind is lost in mighty contemplation
Of intellect expended on two courses;
And indigestion's grand multiplication

Requires arithmetic beyond my forces.
 Who would suppose, from Adam's simple ration,
 That cookery could have call'd forth such resources,
 As form a science and a nomenclature
 From out the commonest demands of nature? XV.69

But to the poet's ultimate credit during a full display of the many inventions of man, he manages to discriminate that there are some things to be avoided (66), some things to be enjoyed (68) and some things that, though good at one time, have to be relinquished (like Adeline's beauty to the Gaunt Gourmand, Death, XV.9), for the continued maintenance of one's ongoing equilibrium:

But I have dined, and must forego, alas!
 The chaste description even of a "bécasse;"

And fruits, and ice, and all that art refines
 From nature for the service of the gout,--
Taste or the gout,--pronounce it as inclines
 Your stomach! XV.76-77

And still within the bounds of the poet's rapidly concluding digression (a natural psychological limit which on a smaller scale is analogous to an individual's biological span of life), Byron manages to take one last fleeting look at some natural, unadulterated good food in order to savor and sustain with more than common frequency his original, uncorrupted taste for the most basic components of good health. In a brief parting scene he depicts a pastoral meal of olives and bread that is uniquely appropriate to a mortal and decadent but also artfully rejuvenated heir of the Greek Golden Age:

The simple olives, best allies of wine,
 Must I pass over in my bill of fare?
 I must, although a favourite plat of mine
 In Spain, and Lucca, Athens, everywhere:
 On them and bread 'twas oft my luck to dine,
 The grass my table-cloth, in open air,
 On Sunium of Hymettus, like Diogenes,

Of whom half my philosophy the progeny is.⁴⁰

XV.73

The parallel achievement for Juan is reflected in his modestly outstanding skill in the social arts. As described by the poet, his condition is one that suggests a taint of sin but also reveals a refined vigor for adjusting to his changing environment. His is a condition that provides him with an appearance of cool, self-assurance and a vitally seductive charm; it is a condition that is uniquely unlike that of the usual, massively bored crowd at Norman Abbey who are prematurely deadened by their conventional procedures for dealing with the manifold components of material existence:

[Juan's] conduct, since in England, grew more
Strict, and his mind assumed a manlier vigour;
Because he had, like Alcibiades,
The art of living in all climes with ease.

His manner was perhaps the more seductive,
Because he ne'er seem'd anxious to seduce;
Nothing affected, studied, or constructive
Of coxcombry or conquest: no abuse
Of his attractions marr'd the fair perspective,
To indicate a Cupidon broke loose,
And seem to say, "Resist us if you can"--
Which makes a dandy while it spoils a man.

They are wrong--that's not the way to set about it;
As, if they told the truth, could well be shown,
But right or wrong, Don Juan was without it;
In fact, his manner was his own alone....

XV.11-13.

But no matter how "serene, accomplished and cheerful" (XV.15) this slightly tainted, "hero of experience," and the self-consciously mature poet may be at this stage of their careers, the mutable condition of all sub-lunary phenomena requires that they continue to re-assert their fully alert powers of creative self-consciousness. It means they must break away from outdated, inappropriate states of adjustment. It means

⁴⁰ Without considering the implications of man's psychic need to re-establish his equilibrium by repeatedly taking in new food to replace the energy used up in living and thinking, W. Paul Elledge traces many of the images of "Gargantuan" feasting that occur throughout the poem. See "Byron's Hungry Sinner: The Quest Motif in Don Juan," JEGP, 69, (1970), 1-13.

that if they want to know life to its fullest, most consummating potential at any new moment, they must "retrograde in the dance of death" (XV.39) and risk adding a fresh knowledge of awkward folly (natural human evil) to their accumulating personal histories. And hopefully, by so doing, they just might find a new bit of life's palpable charm to rescue, cherish and appropriate to their own increasingly rich state of decadent self-awareness.

To illustrate these facts of the human condition as he most recently has been able to understand them, the poet in Canto XVI presents us with a "gothic" tale of Juan's encounter with a ghost--complete with the hackneyed trappings of a time-worn hall (16), creaking doors (116), moonlight meditations (13), and a willow tree (110). From one point of view, of course, the blatantly artificial machinery of a gothic tale suggests that the poet could be indulging in an ironic joke on his reader for being attracted to such a totally fantastic, usually hackneyed and grossly sensation-seeking form of literature (XV.95-98, XVI.1-2). Still from another point of view the poet is completely serious in choosing such a mock-heroic form of narrative as a particularly clever device for enticing the common reader to follow his often repeated but still scary processes of full creative self-consciousness.

For example, in the final stanza of Canto XV.91 Byron dramatizes the fact that at the very moment of writing the tale of Juan's adventures, he himself is "haunted" by a "discordant" (XV.97) thought that might very easily have been taken from the pages of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage:

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! The eternal surge
 Of time and tide rolls on, and bears afar
 Our bubbles; as the old burst, new emerge,
 Lash'd from the foam of ages; while the graves
 Of Empires heave but like some passing waves.

XV.99

Given these circumstances of the poet's currently maladjusted mood, it is fitting that we should find our hero of action, Juan, also about to experience a new, discomforting change in awareness. But what is unusual in this latest episode is the fresh emphasis placed on Juan's nascent powers of speculative reasoning. As Byron paints the picture, Juan like the poet at midnight (XV.98) is somewhat perplexed, pensive, and "disposed/ For contemplation" (XVI.15), and like the poet again (XVI.3) he finally decides not to retreat from but to give into and pursue his own presently emerging, meditative mood. Juan begins by opening up his gothic chamber to survey the ancestral portraits of his present abode (XVI.17). Then in an eerie, moonlight situation just as "shadows wild and quaint" appear to "start from the frames which fence their aspects stern" (XVI.18), Juan has his first encounter with the ghost--that image of mutability and death which is a true "mistress" of our mortal existence (XVI.20). Thus in the present context it is obvious that the room is analogous to the chamber of the poet's mind (the location of the mental configurations which have organized and given meaning to his past self-aware experience), and the process of opening up this chamber to review the archaic portraits of the past (XVI.19) is similar to the narrator's activities of gestalt formation that we have witnessed so often in previous digressions.

In such a traumatic situation, however, Juan does not react with his accustomed agility and grace. Rather, less like a traditional hero and more comically like an ordinary, non-omniscient man, Juan responds to

this new, personally unprecedented occurrence with vague sensory perception, motor awkwardness and all too mortal fright. He cannot properly interpret what he sees in the darkness. Is it a mirage or a thing existent (22)? Is it from earth or heaven or hell (23)? Like a statue of death-in-life Juan is totally petrified by his lack of comprehension in regard to this new phenomenon. His head is entwined with demonic snakes (23) and language needed to question the ghost cannot be made to flow (23). At the moment all he can do is strain his eyes and stare intently at the spot "where first the figure gleamed" (25).

Nevertheless, with the passage of time our modern Perseus is able to recall a degree of his previous energy and some rudimentary analytical skills in order to re-orient himself a bit more effectively to his new, highly disconcerting circumstances (26-28). But as the guests at morning breakfast are able to perceive, Juan has not yet managed to regain his previous, exceptionally refined level of equilibrium (29-30). His old strategies for coping with experience are seen to be no longer completely adequate to the altered circumstances.

At this stage of his adventure Juan has the good fortune to have Adeline intervene in his predicament and show him an alternative procedure that just might help him deal more satisfactorily with his new and frightful perceptions. Specifically, Adeline's self-tested procedure for coming to terms with her perception of the ghost has been to construct a lucidly self-conscious tale and set it within the artfully restricted but charmingly simple bounds of a ballad called "'Twas a Friar of Orders Gray." The strategy employed on this occasion is similar to that pervading Byron's poem in general. As Leonard Deen observes, "the habit of verbalizing and projecting one's fears in a symbolic story

allows one imaginatively to reduce such fears to manageable proportions."⁴¹
 (In other words, one can creatively accommodate oneself to one's own perceptions of insecurity.) And the added value of the lyric form, as John Hollander has suggested, is that "the artifice of strict rhythmical expression yields an effect of pleasing delight since it reflects a perfect balance of spontaneous effort which strives to hold in check the workings of strong passions whose unbridled indulgence could prove quite painful."⁴²

Not surprisingly, then, the consequences of Adeline's performance prove to be immediately beneficial. For herself the demonstration confirms her self-achieved contentment. For her audience the thrilling, completely integrated demonstration of order and emotion, perception and speculation, effectively charms them, too (41). Especially if we judge by Juan's reaction, the results of this enchanting configuration is to "restore" him to a momentary sense of equilibrium. But to a modern, creatively self-conscious hero, one must still issue a few notes of warning. First there is a real danger any such a magically seduced observer may not take Adeline's lesson to heart: he may by-pass his distinctively personal and critically acute impulses and ultimately

⁴¹ Deen, p. 355.

⁴² "Romantic Verse Form and the Metrical Contract" in Romanticism and Consciousness, p. 187. Just recently I have become aware that this argument could be strengthened by referring to the affective, motivating power of archetypal images (C. G. Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, ed. and recorded Aniela Jaffé, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 347.) and the mesmerizing rhythms of right-sided brain impulses which Julian Jayne argues are the seat of the lost voices of the gods, i.e., unconscious divine speech, the foundation of poetry. "The Lost Voices of the Gods," rev. of The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind, by Julian Jaynes, Time, 14 March, 1977, p. 51.

gain only a new "mantle of hypocrisy" (3). As the motto of Werner cautions, "Everyone must judge according to his own feelings." Everyone must ultimately do his own work of consciousness. A failure to pursue this latter course of action explains the deplorably superficial attitudes of Lord Henry as he buys famous portraits (56-57), hires an architect to build a new Babel on the foundations of his ancestral hall (57-59), and expounds a self-contradictory political philosophy (71-75). In these situations Lord Henry is seen to introject--to take on wholesale, as his own--a variety of external, alien and inappropriate interpretations of experience. Thus in order to avoid such fatuously inconsistent postures as those of Lord Henry and to decipher his unique response to his present environment, Juan retires from the commonly unredeemed society of the dinner table (90) and independently strives to apply his nascent powers of consciousness.

But even if Juan is basically unlike Lord Henry, there are two important reasons why he should not immediately expect to duplicate Adeline's most gracefully astute performance. First Juan is a novice when it comes to dealing speculatively with the fleeting ghosts of consciousness. And secondly, common sense tells us that Adeline's lyrical tale is a rare, isolated case of clear, archetypal perception and classically skilled execution.⁴³ We can understand this latter point

⁴³ In this context one should note that Adeline represents a descendent of the intellectual Apollonian muses (XVI.47). That is, Adeline appreciates the formal arrangements and logical judgments that can be abstracted from life while Her Grace appreciates the infinite variety of new, unpredictable impressions that can be discovered in life. Still, Aurora Raby, the highest symbolic ideal so far developed, represents that total (verbal and non-verbal ("silent")) creative potential which might possibly be manifested from a full and emotionally harmonious interaction between these two poles of thinking and feeling.

more clearly if we compare the description of Adeline's performance on the harp (like chaste Dian with her bow, XVI.38) to the more decrepit and adulterated state of the narrator's lyre in Canto XVII.13). Specifically, the image of the narrator's broken and worn lyre reminds us that not on every occasion in the past has he been able to stay within the self-conserving bounds of a classically balanced aesthetic (or morality) and that he has had to pay a heavy toll for his behavior. But we also know from the accumulated events of the poem that by repeatedly following the bent of his own passions throughout a life-time of consciousness--whether or not the manifested results were the most desirable that could have been imagined--the poet possesses a fuller and more refined knowledge of the essential attributes which do in fact compose his mortal character. Consequently, he currently has a good chance to modify his initial, sublimely melancholy stance to fit this existing (perceived and conceived) human entity and therefore, self-reflexively bring about his more complete and uniquely appropriate satisfaction.

To achieve this latter goal, then, the poet himself takes on the role of an acutely self-conscious educator, exemplar and metrical storyteller.⁴⁴ He fancifully describes Juan as he, too, is about to fathom and reformulate the unsettling intuitions of his most richly inclusive, "Shakespearian" (48) nature:

And full of sentiments sublime as billows
 Heaving between this world and worlds beyond,
 Don Juan, when the midnight hour of pillows
 Arrived, retired to his; but to despond
 Rather than rest. Instead of poppies, willows
 Waved o'er his couch; he meditated, fond

⁴⁴ The archtypal role that Byron here assumes is, of course, that of Orpheus.

Of those sweet bitter thoughts which banish sleep,
And make the worldling sneer, the youngling weep. XVI:110

Obviously, this initial description of Juan's mindfully expansive mood in terms of bathetically trite images is entirely consistent with the narrator's melancholic reflections given as a prelude to the present episode, and it begins to suggest the profoundly desired condition of Aurora's consciousness as well (XVI.48). But what the poet is attempting to define precisely at this particular moment in his life and story is that more centrally representative attitude which neither sinks to the depths of mindless trivia nor soars to the heights of the delusively sublime. Rather, as he writes he is trying to move forward in a process of balanced, creative speculation that freely draws from both extremes of common, materialized consciousness.

For example, given Juan's previously established, graceful manner in all kinds of society, his introductory brush with the spectre, and Adeline's enchanting model of creatively self-conscious behavior fresh in mind, one might have expected a more directly successful performance from the young man in his next confrontation with the ghost. But true to the poet's personal experience of the complex caprices of nature that can upset anyone's equilibrium and repeatedly make him vulnerable to discomfort, folly and failure, the poet does not let Juan fare so well at all. Instead, Juan's next encounter is not with the anticipated spirit but merely with an irrelevant cat (112). Then on a second attempt at careful sensory discrimination, Juan at least is granted an interview with the stealthy friar; but even on this occasion, just as on the first night of mystery, Juan is ungraciously struck dumb by his own response of fear:

Were his eyes open?--Yes! and his mouth too.
 Surprise has this effect--to make one dumb,
 Yet leave the gate which Eloquence slips through
 As wide as if a long speech were to come.
 Nigh and more nigh the awful echoes drew,
 Tremendous to a mortal tympanum:
 His eyes were open; and (as was before
 Stated) his mouth. What opened next?--the door. XVI.115

By the third interview with the ghost, however, Juan at long last reaches the extreme limit of his fear; and as he rebounds from this condition, the heroic, self-affirmative powers of his consciousness slowly begin to be re-mobilized and come to his aid:

Don Juan shook, as erst he had been shaken
 The night before; but being sick of shaking,
 He first inclined to think he had been mistaken,
 And then to be ashamed of such mistaking;
 His own internal ghost began to awaken
 Within him, and to quell his corporal quaking--
 Hinting that soul and body on the whole
 Were odds against a disembodied soul. XVI.118

Now the voice of reason based on his past accumulated experience begins to stir up the first sparks of truly defiant courage:

And then his dread grew wrath, and his wrath fierce;
 And he arose, advanced--the shade retreated;
 But Juan, eager now the truth to pierce,
 Followed, his veins no longer cold, but heated,
 Resolved to thrust the mystery carte and tierce,
 At whatsoever risk of being defeated. XVI.119

But even with this new release of aggressive courage within himself, Juan is assured neither of control of himself nor of the immediate situation. For more and more as if in the world of ordinary, unpredictable human reality, our fictive hero finds he has misjudged some of his circumstances. Consequently, he meets with frustration and is afraid. Yet amidst so many unpromising circumstances all is still not lost, for thanks to Juan's persistently alert sensory perception and a basic, self-determined will to follow his curiosity, the secret of the

mysterious phantom is unveiled:

And Juan, puzzled, but still curious, thrust
 His other arm forth--Wonder upon wonder!
 It press'd upon a hard but glowing bust,
 Which beat as if there was a warm heart under. XVI.122

He has discovered the tangibly real "phantom of her frolic Grace--Fitz-Fulke!" (XVI.123) Thus in yet another manifestation, Byron shows us that the specter of death potentially contains a graceful, fully voluptuous vision of life. He shows us that the capricious mistress of material existence, mutability, is something that can be recognized and revered as the consummating experience of life, for it is precisely an awareness of life's transientness that paradoxically puts a premium value on how we choose to live and know the present moment of our mortal existence.

From this emotional apex of spontaneous, insightful recognition, then, the consequences flow swiftly in a clear and consistent pattern. Quickly and calmly Juan forms a fresh hypothetical interpretation of his experience (123). Then he immediately succumbs to the seductive beauty of his new discovery. He totally (with heart and soul and sense) possesses and accommodates himself to his freshly perceived situation. He does indeed appreciate and enjoy life's completely transient but momentarily palpable beauty.

Thus despite the poet's comically ironic insinuation that he himself could by the latest imaginative story again be "fooled to the top of his bent" (XV.94), despite his teasingly inconclusive rendition of Juan's adventure (XVII.12-13), and despite the poet's non-flattering awareness that both the physical hero of the story with his dissipated countenance (XVII.19) and himself with his decrepit, trembling lyre have moved them-

selves further along the path to accomplishing their own natural demise, we know that on this particular occasion both consummate lovers of life and experience have incorporated a new bit of fleeting but intrinsically revivifying experience into their richly adulterated understanding of life (cf., Juan's pristinely virginal face, XVII.13). For as demonstrated before the present reader's eyes, the narrator's most recent tale does truly serve to shed some new light on (XVII.14) and alleviate his initial, darkly melancholic mood. It does yield a bit of practical wisdom and an immediately effective technique which allows him momentarily to come to terms with his latest perception of life's uncertainty. And just possibly this self-delighting display might also lead some sincerely fascinated reader to develop his uniquely authentic powers of creative self-consciousness, too.

Thus in the above selected episodes we have seen that on many occasions the poet does actually possess the powers and skilled techniques of autonomous creativity to hypothesize, evaluate and adopt new, more appropriate categories of thought and modes of behavior in order to satisfy his most essential needs. Basically, his technique for change consists first of loosening the bonds of past formulations of order; secondly of closely scrutinizing the data of his present experience to discover what is most central to his current needs, and thirdly, of attempting a hypothetical reformulation of his experience based on this insight. Under the best of circumstances this final configuration should concurrently yield a critical evaluation of his past experience, a desirable goal for him to achieve in the future and a practical strategy by which he might accomplish this goal in the present.

Although the content may vary, the basic pattern of this technique is recognizable over and over again in Don Juan. It is a procedure which is eminently visible in the poet's digressions. It is a procedure whose physical and social consequences are assayed by the actions of Juan. But most importantly it is a verbal strategy by which the poet gains a sense of his own personality as it exists in a creatively interacting relationship with the complex events of his environment.

Sometimes the process has been known to fail, sometimes it has been known to yield certain desired goals, but there is no doubt that while the poet is engaged in such a process of full perceptual alertness, he feels his mortal human abilities fully challenged, fully alive, fully engaged with life. In this sense, then, no matter what the ulterior material consequences of a particular response may be, he feels himself momentarily at the heart of a new Golden Age of life lived and known to its fullest, most consumating potential.

Chapter III

AUDIENCE INVOLVEMENT IN THE LINGUISTIC PROCESSES OF BYRON'S DON JUAN

In discussing some of the fallacies commonly adhered to by modern skeptical perspectivists, E. D. Hirsch reminds us that verbal meaning from a mute text has no existence at all apart from the categories through which it is construed. He reminds us that verbal meaning exists only by virtue of the perspective which gives it existence. Then on the basis of this proposition he proceeds to argue that

Every act of interpretation [i.e., personal understanding] involves therefore at least two perspectives, that of the author and that of the interpreter. The perspectives are not fused; they are entertained both at once. Far from being an extraordinary or illusory feat, this entertaining of two perspectives at once is the ground of all human intercourse, and a universal fact of speech which the linguists have called the "doubling of personality." When we speak or interpret speech we are never merely listeners or merely speakers; we are both at once.¹

In reading any material, then, a person naturally adopts and participates in the alien categories of the writer. But what makes Don Juan such an exhilarating poem is that Byron purposefully forces the reader to become aware of his own independent categories of thought as he enters into contact with the various elements of the poet's composition. Basically, the poet is able to achieve this result because he presents himself as self-consciously fabricating both a world view and his own personality directly and presently before his audience's eyes; because he self-consciously postulates various kinds of audience responses which are sometimes in accord and sometimes in disagreement with his own immediate, localized attitude; and because, as A. B. England has correctly emphasized, the poet simultaneously creates a "linguistic

¹ Hirsch, p. 166.

environment" which is expressive of Byron's world view and which directly affects the reader's conception of what he finds within it.² In other words, by dramatizing certain aspects of his own personality as a fictional and fictionalizing creator, Byron calls into question the various kinds of poetic structures which he puts forward in his poem. But then the various kinds of rhetorical structures in which his information is embodied put the reader through diversely changing experiences and implicitly support (sometimes ironically so) the poet's own generalized interpretation of experience. And finally by explicit and implicit extrapolation from the poet's most vitally engaging role as an improvisatore artist who repeatedly comes into full and sensitive contact with the various unpredictable materials of his experience and re-organizes them according to his latest awareness, the ideal reader in his turn is expected to enter into a flexible, self-adjusting and dialectical relationship with the manifold, changing elements of the poem and interpret them according to his own most recent and personally relevant point of view.

Readers of various historical eras have testified to the effectiveness of Byron's rhetorical strategies in manipulating their responses. They have reported that the poem makes them feel, sometimes unwillingly, that the world is not well and solidly structured, that the world is not to be easily understood for all times by the mortal powers of human consciousness. For example, Byron's "friend" (X.11) Jeffery complained that Byron had used "all the powers of his powerful mind" to anticipate how an audience might think and feel, and seemed to have supplied a counter-attack that would prevent the audience from establishing any belief in

² Byron's Don Juan and Eighteenth-Century Literature (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1975), p. 106.

"the permanent reality" of any man's "good feelings or ennobling pursuits."³

Hazlitt, too, had his objections to the poet's disruptive tactics:

He [Byron] hallows in order to desecrate: takes pleasure
in defacing the image of beauty his hands have wrought,
and raises the hopes and our beliefs in goodness to
Heaven only to dash them to earth again and break them in
pieces the more effectually from the height they have
fallen. Our enthusiasm for genius or virtue is thus turned
into jest by the very person who has kindled it and who
thus fatally quenches the sparks of both.⁴

Francis Cohen, of course, issued the well known complaint about the unsettling, "scorching and drenching" effect of the poem caused by the quick succession of fun and gravity.⁵ Then, too, even a favorably impressed critic such as the anonymous reviewer of The Literary Examiner on 2 August 1823, felt disturbed by the "slightness of the partitions" which divide the categories of good and evil in the poem and Byron's "rapidity of glance which can at once perceive and expose the myriads of lurking avenues by which one can slide into the other."⁶

As for modern readers, whether or not they describe their reactions to the poem in such negative terms as William Marshall's "terminal irony"⁷ or in neutral ones like Michael Cooke's "obligatory irresolution"⁸

³ Extract from review of Sardanapalus, The Two Foscari, and Cain in Edinburgh Review, 36 (Feb. 1822) rpt. in Byron: The Critical Heritage, comp. Andrew Rutherford (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970), p. 199.

⁴ Hazlitt, XI, 75.

⁵ Cohen's remarks are acknowledged and refuted in Byron's letter to John Murray on Aug. 12, 1819, L J, IV, 341.

⁶ The Young Romantics and Critical Opinion, 1807-1824, comp. Theodore Redpath (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), p. 296.

⁷ The Structure of Byron's Major Poems (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1962), p. 177.

⁸ Cooke, p. 132.

or in terms of definite, positive approval such as Eric Singer's "mystifying" yet "exhilarating life and energy" of a narrative which flows and flows,"⁹ they are all reacting to an affective use of language which puts them through an unsettling experience and repeatedly baffles their attempts to come to a comprehensive, systematic, and permanently satisfying understanding of the poem. As McGann has aptly summarized the problem:

[Byron] arranges Don Juan in such a way that the reader will not be able to comprehend the form of it, or for it, so that the reader... will only make arrangements with it, come to terms with it (come to its terms, share its terms, come into relationships with it.)¹⁰

Obviously, these responses coincide with Byron's perceptions of his own problems of incomplete understanding of himself, of external nature and of other men. Yet reasoning by analogy from the poet's demonstrated self-adjusting vitality within the poem, one understands that this situation puts an added premium on the reader's need at least in limited, successive portions of the poem, to come into full, intimate contact with the new unsettling events of the story and ultimately assert his own independent powers of creative interpretation, evaluation and re-adjustment.

Under those circumstances it is appropriate that we investigate a few of the components of Byron's persuasively disquieting style. For example, if we, the audience, temporarily take Juan to be our fictive hero (IX.23)--as someone with whose growth and progress we can identify--as does Byron at the beginning of the poem (I.1), we yield ourselves up to following a series of surprising, sometimes pleasing and sometimes

⁹ "Thoughts on Canto II of Don Juan," The Byron Journal, 2 (1974), 76.

¹⁰ Don Juan in Context, p. 116.

harrowing events which make us feel by their totally unpredictable occurrence that the world is not to be easily understood, controlled or prepared for. Indeed, not only does the poet himself admit his lack of foresight as to what might come next in his own story (IX.41), but he also sometimes purposefully bates the reader's curiosity (XIV.97) and encourages speculation about what might happen next in order that he may summarily deny the efficacy of any such pre-conditioned surmises (XIV.99). Such strategies lead the reader to experience a great deal of frustration and uncertainty or, in turn, pleasurable open-mindedness according to the local circumstances of the poem and the reader's own current bent of mind.

Likewise, in reading the extended digressions where the poet substitutes psychological time for fictive time,¹¹ the audience is made to follow and participate in the initially mysterious and fearful perspectives of an unbound mind searching for meaning and order, not knowing what may come of the situation except as the creative process completes itself and is currently recorded by the poet. Again sometimes the process yields a personally satisfying resolution (e.g., as at the beginning of Canto XIV) or many times the process is seen to go amiss (e.g., the digressions analyzed in Chapter I above), these latter situations being particularly affective since the reader is left along with the local, hypothetical poet to experience puzzlement, a feeling of meaninglessness and discomfort.

¹¹ Robert Escarpit makes this useful distinction in Lord Byron: Un Tempérament littéraire (Paris: Cercle du Livre, c.1955-7), p. 74.

Further, if we consider the content of the digressions in conjunction with the content of the narrative story, we can easily agree with Leonard Deen that the digressions "deliberately violate the conventional function of a narrative plot to give a work form and continuity" and push us into "a fresh awareness of the disorder and dynamism of experience."¹² That is, by means of the digressions, Byron implies that there exists a vast world of factual data which lies outside the domain of the poem. It is a world of novel facts which cannot be totally planned for, nor completely and smoothly accommodated by some pre-ordained form. Rather it is a world which must be adjusted to afresh as new data enter into one's awareness and new intuitions of order emerge. As Deen explains: "His [Byron's] breaking into the narrative with his own adventures (such as his swimming the Hellespont with Mr. Ekenhead) and with history (in versified account in a 'graphical and technical' style of cookbooks, books of travels, and accounts of military campaigns) supplements the Aristotelian logic of plot with historical fact, and repeatedly destroys the fictional illusion and consistency of viewpoint for the sake of the irregular and inconsistent truth which is undeniable because it happened"¹³ --and, I might add, which is undeniable because the facts are presently coming together in strange and sometimes meaningful ways in the consciousness of the narrator. Thus this kind of rhetorical strategy serves both to point out the artificiality and to underscore an authenticity of poetic mode which is true to his own changing perceptions of his experience, true to the general

¹² Deen, p. 347.

¹³ Ibid.

historical facts of experience, and true to the projected reader of his poem because the poet admits his own artificiality (XVI.2) and leaves the reader free to entertain other perhaps more personally relevant structures of meaning.

On a smaller scale, too, we can find examples of linguistic structures which are particularly expressive of the poet's general Weltanschauung. For instance, Byron often constructs lists which overtly fail to build to one specific, unequivocal conclusion, but which thereby draw attention to the ultimately incomprehensible, unresolved perplexities of human life and the limited success one might expect to have in coming to terms with them. Specifically, let us consider stanza 10 of Canto XII where the poet selects an atypical series of motivations for a miser's actions:

Perhaps he hath great projects in his mind,
 To build a college, or to found a race,
 A hospital, a church,--and leave behind
 Some dome surmounted by his meagre face:
 Perhaps he fain would liberate mankind
 Even with the very ore which makes them base:
 Perhaps he would be wealthiest of his nation,
 Or revel in the joys of calculation. XII.10

First the list creates a shock effect because of its subject matter. Byron has discovered many things which could plausibly be said in praise of the traditionally disparaged role of the miser (e.g., the classical contrast would be to Juvenal's portrait of a miser in the Tenth Satire). But the way in which the content of this stanza is rhetorically presented also serves to persuade the reader that there exists an unlimited number of these possibilities from which to choose and that the present order might not be at all applicable to the case at hand. For example, the triple repetition of the word "perhaps," the loosely joining conjunction "or," and the indefinite modifiers "some" and "a" suggest that the

specific examples that we see here have been selected entirely gratuitously, that they are not leading to any one fixed, predetermined goal or conclusion. In fact, if we look even more closely at the initial proposition in lines one, two and three we see that grammatically it, too, mirrors the properties of indefinite expansion. For example, the direct objects in line two "to build a college" and "to found a race" at first appear to set up a balanced, self-contained equation in answer to the speculation of what great projects the miser might have had in mind. But in line three instead of initiating a new idea or at least giving the reader another balanced line of paired infinitive phrases (e.g., "to do something" or "to do something else"), Byron asymmetrically extends the sentence with a continuing list of objects for the last infinitive phrase (e.g., "a hospital," "a church") listed side by side without a formal logical conjunction. Thus it appears that Byron could add to the list of possible praiseworthy motivations ad infinitum.

Yet on further investigation it becomes evident that the miser's character is not to be completely whitewashed by such an apparently random selection of data. For despite the literal surface argument of the many possible praiseworthy or at least non-harmful motivations which could be attributed to "the intellectual lord of all" (XIII.9), the description of the miser's sculptured face as "meagre" (line 4) hints at ironic condemnation. This description calls into question the common connotative grandeur of the word "dome" as the actual, encrusted end product (as the ultimate selfish intent and goal) of the miser's lifetime of labors in contrast to a prior (at least grammatically so) wish to establish a viable, working, civic organization--a college, a hospital, a church. Then, too, the tone of ironic depreciation is further reinforced

by the rhyme scheme which links the meagre face with the "base" "race" of all mankind. Indeed, by means of this last generalized category of our common humanity both the reader and the poet himself become potential suspects for the crime of imperfect implementation of their desires, though there still exists an archaic hope ("fain") that all men might be freed from such a debasement of their "currency." Thus in stanza 10 the reader is confronted with a complex mixture of signals which function to disrupt his habitual conceptions of order and tightly organized meaning and which cause him to entertain many new and unusual hypotheses about the various motivations upon which men determine their future courses of action.

Still the ironically ambiguous perspective developed in this stanza is not without further use. For the conventionally incongruent signals of these lines set the reader up for and make him particularly vulnerable to the unflattering argument which emerges in the very next lines:

But whether all, or each, or none of these
 May be the hoarder's principle of action,
 The fool will call such mania a disease:--
 What is his own?--Go look at each transaction,
 Wars, revels, loves--do these bring men more ease
 Than the mere plodding through each "vulgar fraction"?
 Or do they benefit mankind? Lean Miser!
 Let spendthrifts' heirs enquire of yours--who's wiser? XII.11

The initial line of this stanza is marvelously efficient in both controlling and releasing the reader's point of view. Here the poet causes us to recollect and carefully consider all, then each of his previous examples. However, the conjunction "whether" and the ending pronoun "none" simultaneously permit us to hold his list in abeyance; we are free to come up with our own explanations, choices and evaluations. In addition to this strategy, the poet raises a series of rhetorically

intimidating questions which put the reader's potential alternative responses in a most unfavorable light. For not only does Byron call anyone who might still disapprove of the miser's passion a fool, he also shifts his attention away from analyzing possible worthy motivations to considering the final, implemented consequences of men's desires. Wars, revels, and loves, thus, are taken to result in analogous variations of the miser's remnant--an archaic dome surmounted by a meager, depleted, non-satisfied face. Thus the imagistic implication is that these actions may yield temporary personal excitement or pleasure (as does the miser's "revels in calculation"), but the actual long term and widespread benefit of such activity is meant to be taken as quite small and ultimately insufficient. Indeed, to secure this latter point, Byron next presents the miser's case from a most pedestrian and unsympathetic perspective: his joyous saving actions are now interpreted as "mere plodding through each 'vulgar fraction.'" Nor is this latest contrasting perspective all that is offered as a new possibility to be entertained. For to compound the complexity of the situation, to deny the reader any simple value judgment on the behavior of the miser, and ultimately to set the reader free to pursue his own complex evaluations, Byron offers the rather special story of the "Lean miser's" heirs. The consequences of this character's deeds as judged from their unique and unrepresentative (though also plural) point of view are those of undoubted benefit, fullness and repletion. The implication of the final line is, then, that each man must determine his own good, that this good may not be the same for all men, that this good (whether of personal and/or general value) is not a permanent, secure or monolithic commodity.

Complexity and uncertainty, however, are not all that one responds to

in Don Juan. If there exist chaos and instability within the fabricated world view of the poem, there also occur within this imaginative milieu certain false orders which are shown and felt to be quite inappropriate to the vast and changeable world of human experience. To understand through and through the jejune mentality of characters who would adhere to established orders and systems of control which are neither in deep accord with themselves, other people or the nature of the cosmos, one only needs to consider a stanza of Lord Henry's chatter with Her Grace Fitz-Fulke:

Lord Henry, who had now discussed his chocolate,
 Also the muffin whereof he complained,
 Said, Juan had not got his usual look elate,
 At which he marvelled, since it had not rained;
 Then asked her Grace what news were of the Duke of late?
 Her Grace replied, his Grace was rather pained
 With some slight, light, hereditary twinges
 Of gout, which rusts aristocratic hinges. XVI. 34

Rachael Brownstein offers a pertinent analysis of the main rhetorical signals of these lines:

The tight little octave can be seen as symbolizing the mechanical universe in which objects are determined [also manipulated and acted upon] with little regard for their intrinsic value or any ultimate sensible significance--and in this case words are objects. In this charmingly vicious stanza on the beau monde, the ordered chaos wrought by [comic] rhyme echoes the world described by the poet.

As Brownstein points out, the feminine rhymes ("chocolate," "look elate," "Duke of late") irrationally put Lord Henry's morning drink, Juan's distressed emotional condition and her Grace's absent, ailing husband on exactly the same objectively trivial, non-emotional level where Lord Henry would most like to keep them, while the masculine rhymes (ending with ained) seem to betray the psychological strain which underlies the superficial

¹⁴ "Byron's Don Juan: Some Reasons for the Rhymes, "Modern Language Quarterly, 28 (1967), 184.

vivacity of the breakfast party. Then, too, Lord Henry's halting, measured subordinate phrases, his stilted grammar ("whereof") and dignified vocabulary (e.g., "discussed"), which in another context could be appropriate to his role as justice of the manor, in the present informal conversation expose Lord Henry's pedantic dullness and inflexibility.

Her Grace Fitz-Fulke's response to this incongruous presentation of data secures the point of society's mundane conformity to inappropriate desensitizing habits of perception and behavior. Her slight, light portrait of His Grace's "slight, light, hereditary twinges" of "rusty" gout suggest that she, too, would like to continue this social masquerade of nonchalance, of objective non-involvement. It suggests that she, too, would like to maintain an image of her aristocratic husband as something like a degenerating, mechanical automaton--a mere mechanical suit of armor with no significant emotional ties to her. Indeed, the farcical presentation of this beau monde interchange and the disapproving evaluation that is thereby implied seem to be in remarkably close agreement with a modern psychological description of a type of rigid, artificially conditioned behavior which is endemic to contemporary society. Perls describes the modern scene in the following manner:

Just as in our culture as a whole there has grown up a symbolic culture devoid of contact or affect, isolated from animal satisfaction and spontaneous social intervention, so in each self when the growth of the original interpersonal relations has been disturbed and the conflicts not fought through but pacified in a premature truce incorporating alien standards, there is formed a "verbalizing" personality, a speech that is insensitive, prosy, affectless, monotonous, stereotyped in content, inflexible in rhetorical attitude, mechanical in syntax, meaningless. This is a reaction to or identification with an accepted alien and unassimilated speech. And if we concentrate awareness on these "mere" habits of speech, we meet extraordinary evasion, making of alibis, and finally acute anxiety.¹⁵

¹⁵ Perls, p. 321.

There are, however, exceptions to this common kind of rigid, alien and discrepant awareness at Norman Abbey. Juan has a "devil of a sweet voice" (XV.13) as an accompaniment to his "art of living in all climes with ease" (just as the poet has his flexible, conversational style), and Adeline pre-eminently displays her artfulness in her lyric response to the mysterious appearance of the Black Friar. Specifically, in the latter case one aristocrat demonstrates before our eyes as before the admiring guests of the Abbey that she has courageously confronted, worked through and expressed her own intimate, emotional response to the mysterious apparition. Indeed, the detailed historical and personal rendition of her story, the affective, connotative vocabulary, the non-comic rhyme scheme, the established but flexible meter, and above all the apparent "simplicity" (XVI.40) of the total performance tell us that Adeline has faced and come to full and complete terms with at least one significant event of her life--though, of course, Byron qualifies his praise of her presentation because it is not totally compatible with his own long-term experiences of comprehension or rather of limited, momentary understandings and adjustments to the vastly changing, unpredictable elements of human existence.

Yet besides such structural devices as lists, rhymes, meter, tone and grammar, which are imitative of the narrative world of vast perplexing change with only momentary organizations of appropriate (and sometimes inappropriate) order, there exists another group of rhetorical strategies which are designed to exploit a certain direct relationship assumed between the hypothesized, self-adjusting personality of the poet and the "fictionalized" reader of the poem.¹⁶ There exists a whole arsenal of

¹⁶ Walter Ong reminds us that "the writer's audience is always a fiction" (p.9), and that correspondingly "a reader must fictionalize

strategies designed both to make the reader grant authority and sincerity to the poet's account of events and to make the reader re-consider with bewildered skepticism the rendition of the facts which he has just been witnessing.

First let us consider some of the techniques of authenticity and sincerity with which Byron confronts the reader and to which the reader must correspondingly react. As mentioned earlier, Byron claims that the account of the world given in Don Juan is based both on a personally acute and a wide-ranging reading of human experience (IV.107). Obviously, the narrating voice gets its identifying facts and characteristics from the life of Lord Byron. To whom else but the historically existent person, George Gordon Noel, Lord Byron, could the narrative voice be referring when he reports,

Even I---albeit I'm sure I did not know it,
Nor sought of foolscap subjects to be king,---
Was reckoned, a considerable time,
The grand Napoleon of the realms of rhyme.

But Juan was my Moscow, and Faliero
My Leipsic, and my Mont Saint Jean seems Cain.¹⁷ XI.55-56

himself, he must conform to these projections, or at least learn how to operate in terms of these projections" (p.12) if he is to come into a meaningful and non-distorting relationship with the work of art. See "The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction," PMLA, 90 (1975).

¹⁷ But, of course, this self-consciously fabricated personality who repeatedly tends to interpret the events of life in a facetious tone (and in ottava rima stanzas, too) is not identical with the more melancholy, poeticized character explored in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. The facts used from Lord Byron's life are the same. Some of the concerns of both narrators are the same. Both imaginatively hypothesize and try out certain attitudes towards life. But the consciously chosen forms and styles of the poetic constructs allow different, limited, confined spectrums of one man's rich, imaginative, adaptable and "Shakespearian" nature to be revealed.

As Robert Langbaum has argued, the poetry of the Romantics establishes the validity of its perceptions by presenting them as "the genuine experience of an identifiable person."¹⁸ As McGann has advised, "to read Byron's poetry properly, one must become involved in the 'blazing personality' which it deliberately seeks to dramatize."¹⁹ And as Robert Escarpit has concurred, the poet's "personal" linguistic behavior is perfectly in keeping with a biographically plausible character: the simple, but artfully flexible mode of the digressions is "perfectly suited to the role that Byron could now assume with ease--that of a gentleman author who has seen everything and easily adapts his style to his audience, the digression opposing its 'bavardage' to cant on every level and unmasking it."²⁰ It is a role which Byron has self-consciously defined in the portrait of the improvvisatore artist who, while in the process of organizing fresh meaning from the manifold facts of experience, talks freely and naturally as if walking or riding along with a friend (XV.19-20).

This plausible and consciously adopted role of an accomplished man of experience directly sharing his insights with a responsive friend is that to which John Gibson Lockhart reacted so enthusiastically in his critique of the poem:

I think the great charm of its style is, that it is not

¹⁸ Langbaum, p. 46.

¹⁹ Fiery Dust, p. 25. McGann also warns that despite the narrator's denial (XI.138) on many occasions the events of the poem "tend to slip into disguised autobiography" (Don Juan In Context, pp. 40-1).

²⁰ Trans. Ernest J. Lovell, Jr. in The English Romantic Poets, Part IV: Byron, Frank Jordan, Jr., ed. (New York: The Modern Language Association of American, 1972), p. 303.

much like the style of any other poem in the world....Your Don Juan again, is written strongly, lasciviously, fiercely, laughingly--everybody sees in a moment, that nobody could have written it but a man of the first order both in genius and in dissipation,--a real master of all his tools--a profligate, pernicious, irresistible, charming Devil--and, accordingly, the Don sells, and will sell to the end of time, whether our good friend Mr. John Murray honours it with his imprimatus or doth not so honour it.²¹

This is the fabricated consciousness by which the audience is meant to be dazzled as the poet dexterously scans the vast European landscape and recounts Juan's travels from Moscow to London (e.g., "Now there is nothing gives a man such spirits/Leavening his blood as cayenne doth a curry,/As going at full speed," IX.72). This is the adaptable, imaginative consciousness by which the audience is meant to be fascinated as the poet slips so unobtrusively into the appropriate jargon of the highway robber (XI.17, 19). This is the audaciously independent, productive "spirit" of which the audience is expected to be justly in awe when the twelfth canto of the poet's "introduction" is drawing to a close:

I can't oblige you, reader! to read on;
That's your affair, not mine: a real spirit
Should neither court neglect nor dread to bear it.

And if my thunderbolt not always rattles,
Remember, reader! you have had before
The worst of tempests and the best of battles

²¹ John Bull's Letter to Lord Byron, ed. Alan L. Strout (1821: facsimile rpt. Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1947), p. 91. Note also that on occasion Lord Byron would completely agree with this evaluation. See Byron's letter to Murray dated Oct. 26, 1819 in Peter Quennell, Byron: A Self Portrait, (London: John Murray, 1950), II, 491:

It [Don Juan] is the sublime of that there sort of writing--it may be bawdy but is it not good English? It may be profligate but is it not life, is it not the thing? Could any man have written it who has not lived in the world? and [t]ooled in a post-chaise?--in a hackney coach?--in a gondola?--against a wall?--in a court carriage?--in vis à vis?--on a table?--and under it?

That e'er were brewed from elements or gore;
 Besides the most sublime of--Heaven knows what else-- XII.87-88

Yet, if on occasion this fabricated personality might be assumed to captivate or inspire admiration in an intimate, amiable manner, there is projected a whole range of other relationships between the poet and his fictionalized reader which are designed to be less pleasantly disconcerting. For as W. W. Robson has pointed out, the narrator's "sociable tone, his friendship with the reader is founded on the tacit agreement that he, too, is a fellow sinner."²² Michael Cooke is even more specific in his analysis of the various hypothetical roles into which the author casts his reader when he complains, "Byron makes us, however ungraciously, bear witness to and participate in the terms of Don Juan. He boldly convicts us of his characters nature or experience (I.112, IV.4) or of his own nescience (I.174, IX.17, XI.19, 40, XVI.109, XVII.3)."²³

Sometimes this projected audience involvement is based on the use of the generalized, authorial "we." In perhaps its most seductive form the poet begins by talking disinterestedly about mankind in general as that abstractly deduced entity which contains all the possibilities for both good and evil in both intent and action. In this situation it is easy for the reader to yield to his opinion of approval or disapproval. But then all of a sudden, with no advance warning, the poet can just as easily alter the context of his remarks and make that same pronoun, "we," become a weapon of direct and personal accusation. This is the type of strategy employed in Canto XII when the poet begins talking in an

²² "Byron as Improviser," in Byron: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Paul A. West (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 93.

²³ The Blind Man Traces a Circle, p. 46.

objectively detached manner about the dubious and unpredictable judgments of posterity and then abruptly proclaims:

Why I'm Posterity--and so are you;
 And whom do we remember? Not a hundred.
 Were every memory written down all true,
 The tenth or twentieth name would be but blundered. XII.19

Sometimes the poet forces us to assume roles with which we would not normally choose to identify ourselves simply by direct reference to that unique fictional creation, "the reader." The apostrophe to Wellington in Canto IX is the grand example of this technique. But there exists a whole host of unflattering, minor salutations (e.g., to the prudish and chaste reader [I.120, 209, III.12] to the gullible and non-discriminate reader [I.222], to the suspensefully "atrocious" reader [II.8, XIV.97], and to the excessively "grim" reader of Canto XV.95) that are meant to disturb our normal self-assurance.

Still, to lend credibility to these various hypothesized roles, the poet does on other occasions introduce the positions of several historically existent readers and critics of the poem, and he simultaneously presents himself as altering or justifying his immediate, local stance with reference to these comments just as any one would normally do in a non-fictionalized, dialectical communiqué. For example, in Canto IV the poet testifies that he is aware of public reaction to his poem and takes it as a reason for omitting certain material from his presentation:

Here I might enter on a chaste description,
 Having withstood temptation in my youth,
 But hear that several people take exception
 At the first two books having too much truth;
 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, than those two cantos into families.²⁴ IV.97

On the other hand, the poet also exposes the direct author-audience relationship for the conventional poetic fable that it is when he introduces such remarks as,

But for the present, gentle reader! and
 Still gentler purchaser! the bard--that's I--
 Must, with permission, shake you by the hand,
 And so your humble servant, and goodbye! I.221

Thus in this latter case the whole illusion of real-life verisimilitude disintegrates as one realizes the physical impossibility of shaking that purely verbal and typographical personality's hand.

Nevertheless, if any non-fictional reader grants temporary, skeptical deference to the perspectives explicitly defined for him to assume, there still exists a multitude of other techniques whereby the poet can force him to fall from a position of relatively secure, detached observer (like the audience to Adeline's lyrical display, XVI.41) and experience first hand (like Juan in his encounter with Her Grace Fitz-Fulke, XVI.122-123) a world of surprising complexity--an encounter which might just possibly bring the poet's real-life audience in posterity up to a new level of self-conscious awareness.

For example, Rachael Brownstein has noticed that now and again in contrast to his normally lucid conversational style the poet is not above indulging in some Babel-like jargon of the ingroup of Norman Abbey

²⁴ See also the poet's self-justifying remarks to Murray (V.101) and to Francis Jeffery (X.11-17) in response to Jeffery's critical review of Don Juan in the Edinburgh Review, 36 (Feb. 1822), 445. The biographical authenticity of the poet's desire not to be induced into a new quarrel with Jeffery is corroborated by Byron's letter to Thomas Moore on June 8, 1822 (LJ, VI, 80-81).

in order to baffle his audience and make them dramatically aware of how language can function as a barrier to authentic communication between men (XIV.21).²⁵ Then, too, as suggested earlier, the poet sometimes uses the device of watching the reactions of different story tellers and their listeners (IV.81, XVI.41, 52) within his own poem. And, of course, there is the infamous hoax of Canto I.209-210 where the poet directly gives lie to his audience. He claims that he has bribed the British Review in order to avoid unfavorable criticism of his poem.²⁶

But to understand through and through the world of change and complexity that Byron sees encompassing man's experience, and with which he wants us to become intimately acquainted, we should scrutinize one long sequence of stanzas in Canto III.78-90. In this particular episode of the "lying poet" contradiction piles upon contradiction, contexts expand seemingly without limit, so that no one single meaning can be abstracted with any degree of certainty. Indeed, the situation seems purposefully constructed to frustrate all our intuitions of meaning; it seems designed to illustrate the world view which Byron described after the unexpected death of his daughter, Allegra, in 1822:

however deeply human scrutiny may pry into the infinitely perplexed combination of events--however accurately human prudence may understand, arrange, and make use of what it knows--it still remains confined, nor even dreams of a thousand matters which come forth from the womb of the next hour.²⁷

²⁵ Brownstein, pp. 187-191.

²⁶ Evidence external to the poem simply fails to bear out this assertion, but much to Byron's personal amusement one simple-minded reader, William Roberts (editor of the British Review), took the poet's remarks to heart. See also the satirical reply of Worthly Clutterbuck (alias, Lord Byron), "Letter to the Editor of My Grandmother's Review," published in the Liberal, 1 (1882), 41-50. See Pratt, IV, 50.

²⁷ L J, VI, 50.

The atmosphere for doubt and skepticism in this episode is set by placing the poet's dramatic appearance within a cycle of decadence and degeneration (III.68 lyric 5) that has been initiated by Juan and Haidée's originally perfect, loving and sub-vocalized emotion (II.189). As Byron has described the process in Canto I, our central standards for judging pleasure, worth, and beauty spring from such basic, primal experiences:

But sweeter still than this, than these, than all,
 Is first and passionate love--it stands alone,
 Like Adam's recollection of his fall;
 The tree of knowledge has been pluck'd--all's known--
 And life yields nothing further to recall
 Worthy of this ambrosial sin, so shown,
 No doubt in fable, as the unforgiven
 Fire which Prometheus filc'd for us from heaven. I.127

But once any primary passion or desire (or for that matter, any intuitive insight) is carried forward into material existence and time, then a natural process of material corruption (a "poisoning" which turns "Marriage from love like vinegar from wine," III.1-5) begins to take place. Then all kinds of possibilities for unexpected or imperfect execution can manifest themselves. As Byron on another occasion cynically calculated the consequences of such "ambrosial sin,"

Man's strange animal, and makes strange use
 Of his own nature, and the various arts,
 And likes particularly to produce
 Some new experiment to show his parts;
 This is the age of oddities let loose,
 Where different talents find their different marts;
 You'd best begin with truth, and when you've lost your
 Labour, there's a sure market for imposture. I.128

Thus within this context of change and potential corruption the fictive poet is seen to be part and parcel of a company of both beautiful and impaired performers. "Dwarfs, dancing-girls, black eunuchs, and a poet" (III.78) are part of Juan and Haidée's "establishment" in time; they function as an extension and refinement of the lovers' original motivating passion.

Given this morally suspect milieu, Byron next presents the specific attributes of this fictional poetic character in the worst possible light. Judging by the initial remarks in the Dedication of Don Juan, the superlative of poetic evils for Byron is associated with the self-serving, renegade personality of Robert Southey. Hence, on this particular occasion we have Byron directing his criticism of this latest fictionalized poet towards his hypocritical, mercantile attitude in regard to his "occupation" ("He lied with such a fervour of intention--/There was no doubt he earn'd his laureate pension," III.80); towards his selfish, opportunistic morality (III.79) so unlike Milton's self-consistent stance of "tyrant-hater" (Ded.,10) and Byron's continuing "buff and blue" loyalties (Ded.,17); and towards his obfuscating verse (III.82) in direct contrast to Byron's "honest, simple verse" (Ded.,17). But while recognizing and delineating all of these various and lamentable faults, Byron leaves room for hope that this particular poet on this particularly hospitable occasion ("being on a lone isle, among friends," III.83) just might be able momentarily to accomplish "a short armistice with truth" (III.83).

Under these latter more than commonly propitious social conditions, Byron describes the court poet as yielding to his free thoughts and deriving from all of his wide-ranging experience (84) a kind of soul-stirring, almost Orpheus-like hymn perfectly suited to communicate directly to his audience his own emotional and intellectual reaction to the current problem of Greek subjugation.²⁸ In regular, measured language the

²⁸ As Ruskin remarked of stanza 10 (but the observation generally holds true for the entire song),

There is not a forced accent, nor a transposed syllable, nor a so-called poetic expression, throughout this sentence. But it cannot be read in truth of ordinary feeling and understanding without falling into march music. Fiction, Fair and Foul quoted in Pratt, IV, 95.

modern day Greek poet delineates for the potential benefit of all the Greek people in his audience a complete imaginative vision of their past, present and future. He is aware of their noble tradition inherited from classical Greece, and their present state of political degradation. He informs them of his dream for future freedom, and he incites them for the purpose of meaningful, heroic action in the present. Thus the present composition appears to be "that there kind of writing" of clear and natural speech of a man who has fully worked through his response to a complex historical situation.

Yet what is perhaps just as affective as the natural orderliness of this song is that the sentiments in favor of Greek independence are entirely in keeping with the anti-tyrant attitudes of the narrator that we find stated directly in the Dedication and throughout to the entire poem. Indeed, most conscientious readers of these lines would also know from other sources that since Byron's early European tour with Hobhouse, the real life poet deeply regretted the degraded state of Greece under Turkish rule. Most fans of Byron's poetry (and he was indubitably popular as well as infamous in his time) would know that a hope for the renaissance of Greek freedom had been a recurrent theme in his works. (See particularly, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, II.73 ff.) In fact, as we modern readers know from our perspective of "posterity," these verbalized, visionary concerns represent the authentic, sincere desires of one particular historical poet, since such self-consciously adopted poetic attitudes eventually led to concrete action in support of the Greek cause at Missolonghi.²⁹

²⁹ In response to the query of whether poetry itself offers pragmatic, realistic, and artful solutions to human problems or is itself mere empty verbalizing, which results in mere obsessive exhaustion of

In the immediate context of the lying-poet episode of Don Juan, however, the question of whether or not we can lend credence to these soul-stirring stanzas is not meant to be an easy matter to decide. For throughout this section there have been subtle hints that something might possibly be amiss with the hypothesized poet-narrator, "Byron," as well as with the actions of his fictional, quasi-alter ego from Greece. To be sure, Byron's explicit denunciation of the faults of this particular Greek poet represents a conscious effort to disassociate himself from such moral and poetic errors. But the ultimate poet of these stanzas knows only too well that he cannot totally escape the taint of his own imagistic assertion that poetry (i.e., language in its most passionate, affective form) and the men who put it into writing partake in the consequences of the fall. After all, the wordless sigh offers the best, most complete expression of Juan and Haidée's primal relationship; all other voiced, concrete language---"all the burning tongues the passions

energy without resolving any concrete issue, Perls concludes that the answer is both yes and no:

the problem that the artist does not solve is the one that makes him only an artist, free only in the vital activity of speaking but unable to use the words also instrumentally in further free acts; and many poets feel the obsessiveness of their art in this respect--finishing a work they are exhausted and still have not regained a lost paradise. (It is not to be seen that many other activities [besides writing] ...win us that lost paradise.) But as for the particular subvocal problems [which emerge and are made audible in poetry], they are really solved, one by one: the proof is that the successive art-works are fundamentally different; there is a deepening of the art-problem; and indeed this activity sometimes proceeds so far that the poet is finally forced to confront life problems which he cannot solve by artistic means alone. pp. 325-6.

teach" (II.189)--though complex and varied in their manifestations, can represent only limited, partial and sometimes willfully misleading representations of human experience.

To make sure that we fully understand this latter point, the ultimate, highly self-conscious teller of this tale introduces several kinds of self-incriminating evidence. For example, even as Byron explicitly denegrates the court-poet's style ("But now he sung the Sultan and the Pacha/With truth like Southey, and with verse like Crashaw." III.179), the doggerel rhyming of "Pacha" with "Crashaw" lets the reader know that Byron himself can descend to the lowest levels of prosody.³⁰ Then, too, when the narrator berates the turncoat's prideful self-exposure, the narrator himself stops to draw attention to his own procedure (But to my subject---let me see---what was it?---/Oh!--the third canto--and the pretty pair---" III.81). Byron might hope to mitigate temporarily this latest offense by adding, "Even good men like to make the public stare", but the long-term effect of this kind of self-serving display is to complicate and blur the distinctions between good and bad poets, good and bad men. The long-term effect is to make the reader confront on his own the manifold and changing factors involved in making valid

³⁰ Of course, from a more deeply ironic perspective such examples of faulty verse, logic and morals as those discussed here (See also Chapter I above pp. 14-33) can be understood as purposefully providing the audience with a direct experience of the sins against which the poet expostulates. They prove that on many occasions Byron knows how to use bad verse, faulty logic, excessive emotion, etc., in order to communicate with great rhetorical effectiveness the validity of his own objections to such imperfections. Nevertheless, just the fact that the poet can partake even in a self-consciously humorous manner in these common human and poetic misrepresentations leaves room for doubt that perhaps on not every occasion has he been nor will he be able or willing to give a clear and non-misleading representation of his experience.

judgments about what proper course of action a man should follow.

Still the most serious blow for undermining the reader's confidence in the present poet's vision comes at the end of the impassioned lyric. What Keats praised as the "chameleon" nature of a true poet, what Byron latter affirms as "improvvisatore" flexibility, the poet here denounces in the most blatantly unflattering terms (though the terms themselves are borrowed not without purpose from Britain's supremely amorphous poetic character, Shakespeare):

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.87

Thus in one fell swoop, Byron indicts everyone in the poetic profession, himself included, for being able to communicate artificially insincere and personally irrelevant emotions. Then, as if to illustrate that this morally suspect, deceitful and misleading stance might be directly applicable to his own nature in a most lamentable way, the poet-narrator, who has just put the passionate, politically committed Isles of Greece hymn into the mouth of a suspected, hypocritical character, immediately takes on as his subject matter an extended speculation on his own worst fears. Having considered the possibility that language can be intentionally perverted away from expressing a man's personally authentic meaning, he now reflects upon the possibility that language may not be able to communicate the heart of human experience at all. He speculates on the possible inadequacy of all human communication, on the possible nothingness of all human understanding, effort and glory.

Paradoxically, in this succeeding meditation the poet does not fail to communicate directly to the reader his own intuition of worthlessness.

He manages to do this first by formulating an explicit statement of the theme (III.87-89). Then he adds a burlesque equation that rhetorically reduces traditional heroic value to trivia: "Troy owes to Homer what whist owes to Hoyle" (III.90). And finally he puts the audience through the experience of a long, tangential, and obfuscating digression (III.90).

To take just one example of the latter technique, the poet criticizes writers who introduce trivia and unessential facts into the biographies of their heroes. He criticizes men who fail to get the central consequences of a man's actions weighted justly in regard to a wide range of data, men who interpret the facts of existences solely in accord with their own personally limited, idiosyncratic style. But once this criticism of other writers is made, Byron himself becomes guilty of introducing some very curious and unrepresentative facts about the personal lives of Milton, Shakespeare and the Lake Poets (91-95). Indeed, particularly in the description of the first two writers Byron tells stories which have very little bearing on the subject of their enormous literary achievements, although all of the vignettes do echo and demonstrate one of Byron's favorite themes--that of the generally wandering, erring nature of man. As the poet himself confesses, he has been guilty of taking his reader's attention away from the main body of his narrative argument:

But let me to my story: I must own,
 If I have any fault it is digression,
 Leaving my people to proceed alone,
 While I soliloquize beyond expression. III.96

The implication of the above remark, then, is that the present poet is self-consciously aware of his own reproachable behavior. The implication is that he, unlike some morally obtuse contemporary poets, possesses a knowledge about himself that might possibly allow him to make good and

appropriate use of his own nature. In fact, as the next stanzas continue to expand upon this notion, Byron claims that (1) he knows how to recognize bathetic effluvia (98); (2) he knows how to recognize sublime poetic worth; and (3) he knows how to be alluring and prevent boredom.

But can we really believe that this kind of self-conscious knowledge is sufficient to bring about a superior poetic performance at the present time? The structure of this argument, too, is designed to cast doubt on these assertions. For how much value is one willing to posit in the critical admonitions of the poet-narrator when he makes not one but two ultimately unsuccessful attempts to redirect his attention toward the main narrative plot (96, 101)? How much value can one grant to such perspicacity when the poet succeeds with only six more lines of narration (III.101-106) before he gets involved in another tangential digression? How much value can one grant to the pragmatic power of such self-conscious insight when in the next digression--which, it is true, might be praised for its avoidance of the problem of ennui--directly involves the poet in a most morally suspect display of self-indulgent emotionalism?

One has to admit that the repetitive, rhythmic and harmonious lines of the Ave Maria prayer sequence (102-109) are seductively beautiful. (They are replete with such highly ordered linguistic structures as consonance, assonance and alliteration particularly in regard to the "soft" sounds of a's, o's, and s's.) Indeed, Lord Byron, the arch-melancholic poet of early nineteenth-century Europe, would certainly have known from the popular success of his earlier verse that he had the affective power (IV.107, XII.77) to conjure up the most tender memories of peace and beauty in the reader's mind:

Ave Maria! blessed be the hour!

The time, the clime, the spot, where I so oft
 Have felt that moment in its fullest power
 Sink o'er the earth so beautiful and soft,
 While swung the deep bell in the distant tower,
 Or the faint dying day-hymn stole aloft,
 And not a breath crept through the rosy air,
 And yet the forest leaves seem'd stirr'd with prayer

Ave Maria! 'tis the hour of prayer!

Ave Maria! 'tis the hour of love!

Ave Maria! may our spirits dare

Look up to thine and to thy Son's above!

Ave Maria! oh that face so fair!

Those downcast eyes beneath the Almighty dove--
 What though 'tis but a pictured image strike--
 That painting is no idol, 'tis too like.

III.102-103

As a possible complicating reason for including these particularly evocative stanzas in a digression on the hypocritical, deceptive, or at best elusive character of poets, we might consider Joseph Kennedy's surmise that the very situation of the Ave Maria prayer recited at "the hour of love" called to Byron's mind associations of moral speciousness. For as Byron told Kennedy,

I have known in Italy a person engaged in sin,
 and when the vesper-bell has rung, stop and
 repeat the Ave Maria, and then proceed in sin:
 absolution cured all.³¹

At any rate the present reader is made to feel highly skeptical about the feelings actualized and assumed in the Ave Maria meditation when in the very next stanza the poet interrupts the tightly regular patterns of the initial stanzas with a metrically irregular, prosaically informal and bathetically self-parodying (i.e., in the manner of the Lake Poets) affirmation:

Some kinder casuists are pleased to say,
 In nameless print--that I have no devotion;

³¹ Pratt, IV, 101.

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.104

After this completely banalized declaration of faith, however, the poet still is not finished with his puzzling accumulation of diverse emotional moods. For in the next few lines Byron puts together a whole new set of rhetorical ploys to overcome the skepticism that he had just induced. The poet again offers his personal testimony that he has felt the natural calm and peace of the twilight hour. But this time he reinforces his statement with more smoothly flowing language (the soft sound of s's and o's again regularly echo throughout the stanza). This time the stanza is not filled out with trite images of altars and mountains. Instead, this time his lines contain allusions to traditionally recognized great poets and their fables. It contains allusions to an exact geographic location in Italy (the pineta woods near Ravenna), which is associated with classical history and which we know from external sources was a favorite retreat for a particular, real-life character, Lord Byron.

Thus within a linguistic environment which can convey so many congruent meanings and emotions at so many different levels of perception, the poet avows with quite some affective power that he personally has been haunted by some natural, non-unique, but artfully refined intuitions of order and meaning. He avows that he, too, in one particular place, at the particular moment of twilight, has directly experienced and understood the basic human response of reverence which has been transmitted down through the ages in the poetic stories of Dryden and his mentor, Boccaccio. Then, as if to follow the example set by these skillful

predecessors, as if to demonstrate his own individual comprehension of the moral to be gleaned from these stories ("not to fly/From a true lover" 56), the present poet at the very instant of writing the present poem attempts to get in touch with and express his own most central feeling of awe and respect for life; for Byron translates within the limits of his own previously chosen stanzaic form, with symbols which are entirely consistent with his own past awareness of experience, the poetry of the arch-lover of human existence, Sappho:

Oh Hesperus! thou bringest all good things--
 Home to the weary, to the hungry cheer,
 To the young bird the parent's brooding wings,
 The welcome stall to the o'erlabour'd steer;
 Whate'er of peace about our hearthstone clings,
 Whate'er round us by thy look of rest;
 Thou bring'st the child, too, to the mother's breast.³² III.107

The elegiac mood of the above lines continues into the next stanza also. But in this latter case Byron chooses to re-interpret a stanza from Dante's Purgatorio--the traditionally fabled region where a truly

³² To understand how Byron has altered and expanded certain elements of the classical poem to suit his own image system, we can refer to J. Simmond's translation given in Pratt's notes, IV, 102:

Evening, all things thou bringst
 Which dawn spread apart from each other,
 The lamb and the kid thou bringest,
 Thou bringest the boy to his mother.

In comparison to the original Greek poem we can see that Byron has retained the calming vistas of the pastoral landscape by redefining the classical images of the lamb and kid, boy and mother to be analogous to the harmonious, loving relationship established between Juan and Haidée in Canto II. More specifically, Byron's symbolism in this passage is meant to recall the scenes where Haidée "flew to her young mate like a young bird" (II.190), where Juan slept peacefully upon her bosom (II.195), and where Haidée felt more joy in watching him than "a child the moment when it drains the breast" (II.196). Then, too, Haidée and Juan first consummated their love at the twilight hour (II.183).

repentant transgressor may expiate his sins (perhaps the sins for which the libertine poet should presently ask forgiveness are those of obfuscating digression and prosaic insincerity?):

Soft hour! which wakes the wish and melts the heart
 Of those who sail the seas, on the first day
 When they from their sweet friends are torn apart;
 Or fills with love the pilgrim on his way
 As the far bell of vesper makes him start,
 Seeming to weep the dying day's decay;
 Is this a fancy which our reason scorns?
 Ah! surely nothing dies but something mourns! III.108

Thus in these last two heavily allusive stanzas what Byron does for himself and for his reader is again to salvage and sustain momentarily the concerted feelings of human tenderness and community which have been recognized within our literary heritage. Here he communicates afresh to his audience in posterity the emotionally full, present and personal realization of this aspect of our basic human nature.

But this mood of tender remorse for the rare and transient things of earthly beauty cannot hold. In fact, to reiterate the natural process of disorder, order and a return to chaos which the poet finds everywhere in his experience of reality, Byron allows this free encounter with his own most loving, humane sentiments to devolve into nonsense. For he who is so tender as to place even imaginary bouquets on Nero's tomb (109) is one who has "Transgressed" the great bounds of heart (XVII.2). That is, such a personal and sentimentalized reaction is excessive, non-representative and misleading. It is evidence of a personally idiosyncratic response which has failed to take into account the great preponderance of Nero's brutal and destructive deeds which can all too readily be affirmed by historical fact and the opinions of common humanity.

Somewhat to the narrator's credit, however, he does again

explicitly criticize himself for letting his poetic inventions sink "down at zero" (III.110)--for letting them become a kind of non-communication by over-extension and padding with irrelevant data.

What is more disconcerting from the reader's point of view is that in admitting his own folly and gloating over his own discernment, the devilish rogue continues to play the same tricks of "tedious" obscurity upon us. In the very process of bringing Canto III to an artificially contrived, peremptory end, the poet does not close with a stable, definitive summation of events. Instead, he sends us away from the evidence of the present text, away from the evidence of our own feeling of frustration, to a pedantically untranslated reference to Aristotle (111). Of course, this strategy could be interpreted as an attempt to achieve a more inclusive, historically balanced evaluation of the recent events of the digression, but for those readers who bother to search out the reference, the information is only more teasingly inconsistent. For what Byron has just described as a poetic "tediousness" which needs to be curtailed could be argued from this new, distracting allusion to Aristotle's rules to be the virtue of epic bulk and variety.³³ Thus the question arises, are we now to believe that the poet could subsequently use Aristotle's maxims to praise what he himself has just condemned? Well, in Byron's unpredictable mode we can never hope to decide beforehand what the poet might make of such a thesis--though possibly of course, he could argue that by adopting so many devious ploys to induce skepticism, boredom, sentimentality and a few rare, momentary feelings of peace, he has chosen a particularly apt mode for communicating his

³³ Pratt, IV, 104.

basic perception of common human experience.

Yet if one is generally made to feel ill at ease and unsettled by this long, accretion of alternating moods and contradictory evaluations, it is still not quite fair to say that Byron leaves us totally in the dark about the question of how to read his poem. We can, it is true, pick up partial clues from all areas of the poem, but in Canto XIII where the poet imaginatively lays out ground and explores the psychological landscape of his fictionalized ancestral home, Norman Abbey (55-74), Byron becomes particularly clear about how one should react to the diverse elements of the poem. Here the poet illustrates in detail how he reads and responds to the developing image system which serves to define the core of his unique personality; and in turn the poet's external audience is expected to read, interpret, and evaluate for itself the multifarious components of Byron's highly self-conscious narrative.

More specifically, the reader is first expected to identify completely with the poet's current point of view. We are expected to read sometimes with respect to the emotional depth of a personal experience, sometimes with respect to an expansively detached, historical perspective and sometimes with respect to the generally superficial behavior which is endemic to the puppets of high society. Then, ultimately, we are expected to follow the spirit of the poet's example. We are expected to avoid the tyranny of someone else's hypothetical interpretation of events. We are expected to extract our own meaning of this encounter according to the external standards of our own most personally acute and objectively wide-ranging awareness of experience. For as the poet earnestly implores:

Oh, reader! If that thou canst read,---and know,
'Tis not enough to spell, or even to read,

To constitute a reader; there must go
 Virtues of which both you and I have need. XIII.73

Let us consider the complete episode. Initially Byron conveys an attitude of respect towards his own refined and catholic reading of the landscape by making available for our reference a negatively contrasting point of view. For example, if we had not already guessed at the dead-end nothingness of the conventional, "placemen" (XIII.5) mode of behavior, the description of Lord and Lady Amundeville's approach to their ancestral home would have secured the point:

Lord Henry and the Lady Adeline
 Departed, like the rest of their compeers,
 The peerage, to a mansion very fine;
 The Gothic Babel of a thousand years.
 None than themselves could boast a longer line,
 Where Time through heroes and through beauties steers;
 And oaks, as olden as their pedigree,
 Told of their sires, a tomb in every tree. XIII.50

In direct opposition to these so obviously sterile perspectives of Babels and trees of death, however, Byron proposes to fill up his personal section of the poetic canvas with "a rich and rare/Mixed Gothic" mansion (55) surrounded by magically vital Druidic trees (56). In fact, if we take a closer look at the description of the druid oak, we see that this particular tree itself is richly laden with all kind of self-consistent, personally meaningful, historic and naturalistic associations. This description reveals a consciousness of the ancient Celtic mysteries. It takes into account the local historic legend of the courage of Caractus. Then, too, the strength and defiance of this latter hero categorize this tree as a direct imagistic descendant of the Tannen Tree of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. And the "dappled foresters" who "sally forth" from beneath its boughs tell us that this tree is located in that refreshing golden age wilderness area of the imagination that is populated

by the children of General Boon (VIII.65-67).

This emerging poetic landscape, however, is not designed merely to be a pleasantly diverting illusion. Rather, its purpose is seen to be similar to Byron's other hypothetical, dream compositions. It provides him with a working, creative retreat where new images may come forth and reveal the poet's immediate, complex understanding of his relationships to nature and to other people. Such a locale provides the poet with a time and a place where these new images may be rationally analyzed and evaluated, where he can make new distinctions about what course of action it might behoove him to pursue or avoid. Such a milieu provides him with a fresh opportunity to "accommodate" himself more satisfactorily to the multifarious elements of his past and present history as best as he is currently able to perceive them.

Given these basic concerns, then, we find that the structure of the present dream vision focuses on three major facets of human experience: (1) our existence as a natural, physical entity, (2) our sublimely heroic potential, which is predicated upon a consciousness of the mystery of death and a shared human community, and (3) the generally stultifying restrictions imposed by civilization upon our natural, physical energy and heroically independent consciousness.

As the primary foundation for constructing his own special British Sabine farm of the imagination, Byron locates his home for true patriots in a country setting that is "sheltered" (55) from the powerful and indifferant forces of external nature. Then within this consciously selected and protective vale, the poet proceeds to explore the vital, sustaining forces of his natural energies. In elevated, archaic, poetic language (e.g., "dappled," "stag," "quaff") Byron first describes a brook and then

a river which gives nourishment to the local fauna (56-57). In this situation the river symbolically reflects that life force which leads the poet on a path toward new experiences. It reflects the poet's own curious and passionate temperament upon which the whole style of the man and his poem is founded and to which the reader must react with a flexibility of his own. Then, too, the river leads to a lake before the grand ancestral home. But the relationship between this lake and its river source is specifically not the same as that between Lord Henry and his "river child" (XIV.87), Lady Adeline. In the latter case the outdated, conventional marriage bond between the Lord and the Lady threatens permanently to lull her personality into a non-vital sleep. But for the poet, himself, the ideal reservoir of collected experiences (57) provides only a temporary measure of stability, calm and order. It is a fluid reservoir which allows its river current to move freely within its banks (as the poet's mind roams through the categories of human experience and sometimes adopts for the moment a new and tentative structure of meaning). It is a reservoir where one's potential energy is added to and restored, so that one may again actively move forward to meet more of life's unpredictable experiences. And as the image of the deep cascade expiring into foam and re-grouping into a new rivulet suggests (57), it is a reservoir which allows its river source to expend its energy in a natural and truly calming action; it is a formation which permits the physical release of one's energies through an appropriately satisfying channel.³⁴

³⁴ This last image is, of course, comparable to the peace Juan finds after sexually consummating his love for Haidée (II.196-197); it is also comparable to the peaceful rest supposedly found by the farm peasants (and not their usurous landlord) after an honest day's creative labor (IX.15 see the critique of Wellington's character in Chapter II above pp. 47-52).

Once these natural life-giving components of the landscape and of his own character are delineated for the reader, Byron explores and responds to the more heroically sublime and mysterious elements of his poetic construct. The decaying abbey is the image to which the poet's most melancholy remorse accrues, for its "glorious" decomposing form (comparable to Byron's earlier but somewhat less splendid description of the present poem as an old temple dwindled to a column, XIII.1) provides substantial evidence both of man's rare, artful skill to create something of beauty and of the destructive powers of "time" and "tempest" in which man participates and the ultimate effects of which he knows he cannot escape:

A glorious remnant of the Gothic pile,
 (While yet the church was Rome's) stood half apart
 In a grand Arch, which once screened many an aisle.
 These last had disappear'd--a loss to Art:
 The first yet frowned superbly o'er the soil,
 And kindled feelings in the roughest heart,
 Which mourn'd the power of time's or tempest's march,
 In gazing on that venerable Arch. XIII.59

In the tempestuous chronicle of English religious history that follows (this section can also be read as a literary history of degeneration from a golden classical age of an original, appropriate order to a bronze age of Romantic rebelliousness) Byron understands that Englishmen lost their heroic statue of sainthood (XIII.60) when an archaic form of order represented by the traditionally sanctioned king was overturned, when "the gallant cavaliers fought in vain/For those who knew not how to resign or reign" (60), and when each house became a "fortalice" warring against its neighbor rather than functioning as an integral, cohesive part of the social fabric. But still surviving all the onslaughts of both man and nature is one most valuably unique "shrine of human feeling undefiled" (61). Somehow, by fortuitous chance in history and by the

special providential attention paid by the present bronze age but momentarily insightful poet, the icon of "The Virgin-Mother of the God-born Child" (61) has been spared and maintained. And in consequence of recognizing this rare image of tender feeling (a mature variation of the poet's original vision of perfect, human love between Haidee and Juan, II.142-143, 148-149) there appears to be a new dispensation of grace to the poet (XIII.61.5). There now appears to be new hope for founding a loving, integral human community based on a deep and essential communication among men.

Still this hope for essential meaning, profound human significance, and an eternal existence outside of time cannot hold. For, as Byron suggests in reviewing the overall remains of the once grand religious structure (XIII.62), a totally rational evaluation (using the full sunlight of reason) would have us recognize the overwhelming physical evidence of decline and imminent dissolution. It would force us to admit that the material components of the artistic structure are tending towards utter desolation, silence and inscrutable mystery. But before the final natural dissolution is accomplished, the poet (in a transfiguring moonlight situation) offers as a possible imaginative understanding of experience a portrait of an intimate, dialectical and harmonious relationship that has taken place between the forces of nature and the forces of human consciousness as they have been represented in a most rare and skillfully executed art form, the arch of the old Abbey.:

But in the noontide of the Moon, and when
 The wind is winged from one point of heaven,
 There moans a strange unearthly sound, which then
 Is musical--a dying accent driven
 Through the huge Arch, which soars and sinks again.
 Some deem it but the distant echo given
 Back to the Night wind by the waterfall,
 And harmonized by the old choral wall:

Others, that some original shape, or form
 Shaped by decay perchance, hath given the power
 (Though less than that of Memnon's statue, warm
 In Egypt's rays, to harp at a fixed hour)
 To this grey ruin, with a voice to charm.
 Sad, but serene, it sweeps o'er tree or tower:
 The cause I know not, nor can solve; but such
 The fact:--I've heard it,--once perhaps too much. XIII.63-64

The initial images of stanzas 62-64 suggest an interpretation of human experience similar to that offered by Joseph Campbell in his discussion of the "Cosmos of the Human Mind." For as Campbell speculates, there exists a possibility that our psychological projections about the processes of the universe might be essentially valid. After all, we ourselves considered as natural physical entities are subject to the same physical processes operating within us as within the cosmos at large. Hence our internal, psychological intuitions might be nature's way of giving us hints as to the kinds of orders we can legitimately expect to find in the external world of nature.³⁵

Nevertheless, in the last lines of the present meditation the poet suggests that he is willing to yield up even these latest, most interesting intuitions of possible meaning. At last as if to demonstrate his own mysterious but self-conscious accord with the vast, awe-inspiring forces of the universe, he simply acquiesces to their movement and gives up trying to impose any partial, humanly finite logic on the events of his experience. He simply stops resisting and gives in to that vast, inscrutable nature which transcends any man's effort to enclose it within a permanent, finite structure. He simply reports the perplexing facts of his existence because they have happened.

³⁵ Audio-Text Cassettes, CBC583, The Center for Cassette Studies, Inc., 8110 Webb Avenue, North Hollywood, California, 91605.

Thus end the first two sections of this digression dealing with the natural energies and sublimely self-conscious components of man's complex nature with which the poet seems to be in total, self-consistent accord. The third section of this meditation, however, suggests less promise. The tone is much more ironic as the poet explores the possibilities of adjusting satisfactorily to the external, artificial and self-conflicting orders imposed upon this natural creature by civilization:

Amidst the court a Gothic fountain play'd,
 Symmetrical, but deck'd with carvings quaint--
 Strange faces, like to men in masquerade,
 And here perhaps a monster, there a Saint:
 The spring gush'd through grim mouths, of granite made,
 And sparkled into basins, where it spent
 Its little torrent in a thousand bubbles,
 Like man's vain glory, and his vainer troubles. XIII.65

As Byron makes clear in the preceding stanza, the introjected roles that one is expected to assume by society result in the most unnatural, banalizing and hypocritically perverting components of a man's character. The image of the symmetrically ordered fountain decked with faces in masquerade secures this point. In particular the vital energy of the water (whether of a monster or a saint) is seen to flow through rigidly "grim" and artificially constrained, granite mouths. Then, too, in contrast to the naturally free flowing and adaptable river current mentioned in stanza 57, this flowing water has no chance to take on new forms. It has no lake to provide a measure of stability and a re-collection of potential energy. And it has no outlet of deeply satisfying release. Instead this tiny, raging stream expends what unnaturally confined and marshalled energy it possesses by dashing into shallow basins and evaporating its substance in illusive trivialities.

The dissatisfying consequences of such "courtly" cares are also recorded in the structure of the mansion. Even in the sheltered, naturally

propitious setting of Norman Abbey chosen by the founding monks, even where the original religious structure reveals that more than average care has been taken to accommodate an individual's natural physical and spiritual needs and protect him from the confusing demands of society (where cloisters, cells, refectory and a chapel have been preserved, 66), there still can be discerned in the modern renovations to the building a degenerate adjustment to the conventional, materialistic considerations of the world. As the poet notices on first reviewing the structure, it contains a grand mass of conflicting elements:

Huge halls, long galleries, spacious chambers, join'd
 By no quite lawful marriage of the Arts,
 Might shock a Connoisseur; but when combined,
 Form'd a whole which, irregular in parts,
 Yet left a grand impression on the mind,
 At least of those whose eyes are in their hearts.
 We gaze upon a Giant for his stature,
 Nor judge at first if all be true to Nature. XIII.67

Thus upon recognizing the general confusion, the poet presently attempts to sort out in detail and with acutely refined skill those aspects of the historic, social abode which should be shunned as discordant and soul destroying and those which might be consciously adopted and totally assimilated to achieve a more vital mode of existence.

The poet begins his study by examining the portraits in his ancestral gallery. What he sees in the first selection of paintings is none too promising. The importance given to the characters' superficial, decorative clothing, the general diminishing of heroic stature (68, 70) and the rapidity of glance with which the poet describes the cumulative roles of "steel barons," "Lady Marys," and "attorneys general" tell us that there is nothing much to take seriously in their personalities. (Their description is in direct contrast to Byron's affective, in-depth reading of an individual's potentially natural and self-authentic inner resources

in the first two sections of this digression.)

Yet not to extinguish all hope for the traditional refinements of civilization, not to make us think that all social strategies lead to a trivialized dead-end existence, Byron adds a collection of portraits to his imaginary gallery which do more than mark and preserve the conventional stations held by his particular ancestors. Indeed to show us that he himself can imaginatively entertain and possibly adopt new, more creatively appropriate modes of behavior, Byron includes in his next selection of paintings works by such rare and artful geniuses as Carlo Dolce, Titian, Caravaggio, Salvador Rosa and Rembrandt (71-72).³⁶ In this section we see that the poet's new gallery includes a variety of visions, perspectives and orientations towards life. It includes an expansive range of subject matter (e.g., Albano's dancing boys, martyrs awed, country landscapes, ocean vistas) and a refined depth of perception, as when Rembrandt makes his darkness equal light (he, too, has confronted the absolute mystery of human experience). But most importantly with the specific inclusion of Tenier's "bell-mouth'd goblet" the poet suggests that he personally is still attuned to the naturally lusty forces within his being and that he presently knows how he might best go about

³⁶ Pratt (IV, 248-52) reminds us that Norman Abbey bears a remarkable resemblance to Byron's real-life ancestral home, Newstead Abbey. He also calls attention to the fact that the latter section of the present digression is filled with portraits not in the historic house, but with paintings Byron had actually seen and admired in his travels throughout Europe. Thus, building up from the data of his personal history, Byron makes his imaginative and idealized human abode more catholic and more artful. Within the present and concrete confines of the immediate poem Byron has self-consciously been able to incorporate more human resources into his structure.

assuaging his desires and sustaining himself most satisfactorily.

Once the poet has achieved this plateau of refreshingly seductive illusion, however, he purposefully breaks the magic of his spell. He has presented his own flexibly diverse orientation toward experience, and it appears to be in accord both with his perceptions of the external world and with his perceptions of his own internal needs. But instead of letting his latest vision reign supreme, he directly calls upon the reader to assert his own independent powers of perception and judgment in a way that suggests that he, the poet, has no insight whatsoever into what he has just been doing. As a way of fully implicating the reader in the complex mysteries of experience Byron advises us:

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. XIII.73

At first glance, of course, this advice looks like a logically specious argument, a puzzling non-answer to the question of how to read Don Juan. But this riddle does provide significant clues to those who have read Byron's poem with care. For first by its illogical construction the reader is set free from the tyrannical imposition of the poet's own particular categories of thought. Then, secondly, following the highly affective and graphic order of the Abbey landscape, this non-sensical remark is suggestive of the basic cosmological metaphor of the entire poem--Cuvier's theory which sees the world going through a process from chaos to order to chaos again. That is, the riddle is entirely consistent with the poet's own external perception of the cosmos, of his internal perception of his own creative dreaming technique, and of the degenerating forces within society (e.g., a Golden Age devolves into one of Bronze--an originally valid social order becomes outdated and

inappropriate) which make it repeatedly necessary and possible for him to revise his interpretations of experience. And finally, while suggesting the poet's own limits of mortal comprehension, the riddle tacitly makes allowances for the potential reader's sinfully obtuse nature, too. The riddle suggests that just as the poet has had to recollect and revise his interpretations in light of new experience, the reader, also, might have to read and re-read the poem with care in order to discern new facts and implications which he might have missed on his first encounter with the story. In these many ways then, the cyclical, non-ending grammatical construction of stanza 73 suggests that it is time for the reader to get busy and go through that eternally unending task of confronting and coming into unpredictable, diverse and complex relationships with that ever-varying Aurora Borealis, that "wilderness of the most rare conceits" (XVI.3), Byron's Don Juan.

Thus by using many surprising and diverse combinations of rhetorical strategies, ranging from the smallest components of verbal communication (e.g., grammar, rhyme, meter, tone) to a general, detached narrative perspective, Byron creates a total linguistic environment within Don Juan which is entirely consistent with his own reported modes of perception and evaluation. It is a personalized, mental landscape whose self-consistent structures we recognize with more and more clarity as we go along, but whose localized combination of details we could never have predicted beforehand. In general the total projected vision makes us stand in awe of its manifold elements, but the particulars of its various localized, questioning and ironic points of view make us aware of our latent uncertainties about the poet's alien interpretation of the facts. They make us aware of our own immediate need to follow the

spirit of the poet's example, to take a first hand part in analyzing the full range of our present accumulated experience, and to assert, at least momentarily, our own independently creative and naturally emerging structures of meaning.

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