

poem as Tasso predicts a future when the tyrant has been forgotten, and the prison-cell in Sant' Anna's has acquired a holy status:

when the towers  
 And battlements which guard his joyous hours  
 Of banquet, dance, and revel, are forgot,  
 Or left untended in a dull repose,  
 This – this shall be a consecrated spot!

(ll.236–240)

As we have seen, the 'consecrated spot' represents Byron's most intense engagement with the meaning of place, his largest claims for a direct connection with historical material, and his strongest investment in the notion of an ecstatic or even mystical communion with the dead. Another way of phrasing this would be Manfred's the 'place / Became religion', and here similarly there is a sense of the interpenetration of historical subjects. This is undoubtedly an extraordinary historiographical method, mixing religious emotion with historical narrative, and it is one that may be obscured by readings of Byron which get stuck on the fact that Tasso's voice is quite obviously the poet's own (so that Byron could be seen as merely 'projecting' himself into a vessel for his own narrow concerns). But this would be to fail to see the complexity in Byron's use of historical exchange, the possibility that an inter-subjective engagement of this kind with history may in fact change the conditions of the present – so that Byron/Tasso's 'prophecy' may not only anticipate the contemporary situation in the decaying and depopulated Ferrara, but may also in fact *create* the conditions of Tasso's 'far renown', bringing the work of the poet into the consciousness not just of an English audience, but to an Italian literary public in need of the unifying national myths and figures necessary for a *risorgimento*. The very fact that Tasso's 'far renown' is being celebrated by an English poet, gives Italian literary culture the European dimension Byron and Hobhouse both felt was a necessary element in a nationalist sensibility. At the same time these 'prophetic' dramatic monologues are also more subtle exercises in Byronic self-construction than has been allowed. Crumbling and unpeopled Ferrara, and the towers and battlements of Alphonse's ducal palace 'left untended in a dull repose' are also a transposed version of a decaying Newstead Abbey, which Byron had finally resolved to sell during this same period of early 1817 – a protracted process of legal manoeuvring signalling the

final abandonment of his metonymic ancestral identity.<sup>71</sup> Tasso's desire to belong in memory to a specific place derives from Byron's sense of homelessness and wandering, of being out of place, and it is partly in defiant response to this that the poem is prophesying both its own success or afterlife as a poem and Byron's own future vindication when the injustices of which he felt himself to be the victim will be avenged. Decaying Ferrara is not only, then, a version of Newstead Abbey but of the 'brilliant theatre' of regency London left behind in 1816 ('thronged with all the forms of gaiety and splendour'), so that as so often in the verse post-1816, there is a veiled warning against the complacency of British culture, or at least there is the fantasy of a future moment in which London will have been brought to its knees.

This axis of exchanged places (a geographical and historical interchangeability) is the central component of Byron's writing in exile, most obviously in relation to Italy and Italian politics, but also always obliquely to England. In the case of Ferrara, prophecy and vindication *in place* offer a symbol of redress for the suffering of the historical Tasso, or at least offer a self-enacting prophecy of vindication which contributes to the notion of a liberal and defiant Italian unification movement centred in a national literary canonicity. Such retrospective acts of reclamation of course fall far short of any notion of consolation for the madness of the individual, and *The Lament* firmly belongs to that sequence of works which anxiously examines the notion of the mind as its own place and how this fits into a broader political context. But at the heart of Byron's historiographical method is this notion of the sanctuary, in which the memory of a figure of national historical significance is preserved through association with a specific place, a 'consecrated spot' that offers an intense and inter-subjective relation with the past, experienced and witnessed by Byron, and placed at the centre of his 'prophecies'.

## 2.4 The spirit and body of place: *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* IV

The fourth canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is dedicated to John Cam Hobhouse whose own life, as the dedication acknowledges, is bound up with the compositional history of the poem, and whose collaborative contributions were to be significant in creating the symbiotic relationship of the body of the poem to its supplementary system of notes. Perhaps we should reverse the terms of this metaphor and say that the *body* of the system of notes supports the spirit of the poem, since it is

the notion of spirit that seems central to the canto, and because the body of the book of *Childe Harold* soon grew too large to contain Hobhouse's material, giving birth to the separate *Historical Illustrations* (1818). Byron saw the final book of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (poem and notes) as the completion of his monument to experience, and Hobhouse himself as the person who had shared in much of that experience. It is this connectedness which is celebrated by the dedication:

It has been our fortune to traverse together, at various periods, the countries of chivalry, history, and fable – Spain, Greece, Asia Minor, and Italy; and what Athens and Constantinople were to us a few years ago, Venice and Rome have been more recently. The poem also, or the pilgrim, or both, have accompanied me from first to last; and perhaps it may be a pardonable vanity which induces me to reflect with complacency on a composition which in some degree connects me with the spot where it was produced, and the objects it would fain describe; and however unworthy it may be deemed of those magical and memorable abodes, however short it may fall of our distant conceptions and immediate impressions, yet as a mark of respect for what is venerable, and of feeling for what is glorious, it has been to me a source of pleasure in the production, and I part with it with a kind of regret, which I hardly suspected that events could have left me for imaginary objects.<sup>72</sup>

It is not certain whether 'imaginary objects' refers to the poem itself, or the objects 'it fain would describe', or the 'magical and memorable abodes', or the 'spot where it was produced'. In an important sense the terms are interchangeable; that is, each could be described with the oxymoron 'imaginary objects', because Byron perceives the chain of connection between the spot, the abodes, the objects, and the four cantos of the poem as both a creative process and an *actual* sequence of physical and material connections, and furthermore believes that the imaginative life of the former is embodied in the material reality of the latter. In the case of the fourth canto, the dedicatee John Hobhouse also belongs to this incorporated sequence, as if he were a further 'imaginary object' Byron was giving up with regret. In later years Hobhouse remembered being physically present during the fourth canto's process of composition, (or 'coupleting'), as he and Byron had taken their evening rides at La Mira on the banks of the Brenta near Venice in 1817.<sup>73</sup> More significantly perhaps, Hobhouse claimed to have supplied some of the fourth canto's 'objects' himself:

When I rejoined Lord Byron at La Mira...in the summer of 1817, I found him employed upon the fourth canto of 'Childe Harold', and, later in the autumn, he showed me the first sketch of the poem. It was much shorter than it afterwards became, and it did not remark on several objects which appeared to me particularly worthy of notice. I made a list of those objects, and, in conversation with him, gave him reasons for the selection. The result was the poem as it now appears, and he then engaged me to write notes for the whole canto.<sup>74</sup>

By 'objects', Hobhouse is referring to architectural constructions – he listed, for example, Hadrian's Mole – as well as particular places he deemed worthy of notice, including the Capitol, and historical figures such as Livy and Virgil; but the word 'objects' seems particularly suited to the kind of fleshing-out or objectification he aimed for in his notes to the poem. The final canto of *Childe Harold* is an extended meditation upon these 'objects' and the spots or abodes in which they are encountered, but it is also a meditation upon the very process of bringing creative thought to bear upon the 'things' of the world, how (or whether) the spirit of a poetic work may be rooted in the materiality of historical place, and how (or whether) certain material objects may also become 'imaginary', or charged with an aura or halo. This interaction of spirit and body is then given a specific historical resonance in the canto's Italian context as the relationship between historical place and a regenerative national 'spirit' is closely examined. At the same time, it is always a concurrent part of Byron's writing-as-an-exile, particularly in the last two cantos of *Childe Harold*, to resist the compelling material realities of place and abode, in order to assert the radical freedom of the mind as its own place:

I've taught me other tongues – and in strange eyes  
Have made me not a stranger; to the mind  
Which is itself, no changes bring surprise;  
Nor is it harsh to make, nor hard to find  
A country with – ay, or without mankind...

(IV.8)

The hope that belonging nowhere may represent a freedom to belong anywhere and to speak any language, to cease to be a stranger, is a hope that had come under sharp pressures post-1816 for Byron, and yet it is a hope that *Childe Harold* canto four re-asserts. As we have seen, this desire for a centred self is bound to the notion of a 'world elsewhere' and to

the sharp memory of departure from England. In fact the memory of England is always in an acute and troubled relation to the claims in Byron's writing for a limitless cosmopolitanism, citizenship of the world, or the desire to dissolve into the elements. At the beginning of the fourth canto Byron again wonders about the ability of the spirit to travel independently of the body after death, and thinks of England:

Perhaps I loved it [England] well: and should I lay  
 My ashes in a soil which is not mine,  
 My spirit shall resume it – if we may  
 Unbodied choose a sanctuary. I twine  
 My hopes of being remembered in my line  
 With my land's language...

(IV.9)

The notion of the 'sanctuary' – that is, a resting place for the spirit in eternity, an *in-placement* of the kind Byron had imagined for Bonnivard and Tasso, particularly in the context of a national (literary) identity – is another of the central subjects of the fourth canto, as the poem treads its paths through Northern and Central Italy, marking its progress by way of tombstone, home, epitaph and inscription. Byron connects the notion of an 'unbodied' spirit choosing to return to its native soil from exile with the notion of literary remembrance in posterity, and one of the questions the fourth canto repeatedly asks is what kind of physical sanctuary or resting place Italy can offer the spirit of those whose hope is to be remembered with their 'land's language'. In this respect the relationship between the poem and its heavy body of supporting notes is again a vital one, as the notes methodically examine the authenticity of these places of sanctuary and remembrance by recording the fact that Byron and Hobhouse had indeed actually *been there* themselves. But whereas the poem narrates a sequence of charged moments in consecrated places, dwelling upon the mysterious or supernatural force of certain 'spots', the notes follow in the footsteps of the poem with the material supplement of facts and details, and with a sense of a certain distance between the pilgrim and, as it were, the pilgrim's pilgrim, or editor. This sense of shadowing the poem with a secondary act of empirical and clear-headed information-gathering is crucial to the effect of the whole, to the sense of an interaction between a body of knowledge and its 'imaginary objects', but it also means that there is a powerful analogical and structural relation-

ship between the notion of the poem as authenticated by its notes, and the kind of cultural sanctuary both poem and notes bear witness to in Northern and Central Italy. If there is a spirit of national identity which may unify the Italian peninsula in the regeneration of a *risorgimento* then it is nourished by the kind of cultural memorialising and celebration which the notes to the poem take pains to enact and record. Taken together then the poem and its notes represent the kind of recuperative and memorialising project both Byron and Hobhouse believed was necessary for just such a *risorgimento*, the gathering and unifying of a set of literary and historical figures under the transcendent sign of a national 'spirit'. This 'spirit' is recorded by the poet Lord Byron, while the acts of tending and protecting are repeated by the poet's editor, John Hobhouse – many of Hobhouse's notes furnish or *tend* Byron's poem with examples of precisely this kind of cultural and memorial guardianship or sanctuary. Hobhouse records of Petrarch, for example, that 'every footstep of Laura's lover has been anxiously traced and recorded. The house in which he lodged is shewn in Venice. The inhabitants of Arezzo...have designated by a long inscription the spot where their fellow citizen was born';<sup>75</sup> or of Ariosto: 'They possess his bones, they show his arm-chair, and his ink-stand, and his autographs. "Hic illius arma/ Hic currus fuit..."[*Aeneid* I. 16–17] The house where he lived, the room where he died, are designated by his own replaced memorial, and by a recent inscription.'<sup>76</sup>

The fourth canto puts itself in these places and retraces the footsteps of those literary and historical figures it deems centrally important to Italian nationalism. These include the footsteps of Lord Byron himself, as the poem remembers journeys in the East Byron had made in 1810. Stanzas 44 to 46 follow the path described in the 'celebrated letter of Servius Sulpicius to Cicero', which Byron's note to the stanzas quotes in English translation from Conyers Middleton's *History of the Life of M. Tullius Cicero* (1741):

'On my return from Asia, as I was sailing from Aegina towards Megara, I began to contemplate the prospect of the countries around me: Aegina was behind, Megara before me; Piraeus on the right, Corinth on the left; all which towns, once famous and flourishing, now lie overturned and buried in their ruins. Upon this sight, I could not but think presently within myself, Alas! how do we poor mortals fret and vex ourselves if any of our friends happen to die or be killed, whose life is yet so short, when the carcasses of so many noble cities lie here exposed before me in one view.'<sup>77</sup>

Byron had 'often traced' this path in 1810, and retraces it in his memory in the fourth canto:

Wandering in youth, I traced the path of him,  
 The Roman friend of Rome's least-mortal mind,  
 The friend of Tully: as my bark did skim  
 The bright blue waters with a fanning wind,  
 Came Megara before me, and behind  
 Aegina lay, Piraeus on the right,  
 And Corinth on the left; I lay reclined  
 Along the prow, and saw all these unite  
 In ruin, even as he had seen the desolate sight;

For Time hath not rebuilt them, but uprear'd  
 Barbaric dwellings on their shattered site,  
 Which only make more mourn'd and more endear'd  
 The few last rays of their far-scattered light,  
 And the crush'd relics of their vanished might.  
 The Roman saw these tombs in his own age,  
 These sepulchres of cities, which excite  
 Sad wonder, and his yet surviving page  
 The moral lesson bears, drawn from such pilgrimage.

That page is now before me, and on mine  
*His* country's ruin added to the mass  
 Of perish'd states he mourned in their decline,  
 And I in desolation: all that *was*  
 Of then destruction *is*; and now, alas!  
 Rome – Rome imperial, bows her to the storm,  
 In the same dust and blackness, and we pass  
 The skeleton of her Titanic form,  
 Wrecks of another world, whose ashes still are warm.

(IV.44–6)

The retracings and overlayings here are complex. Byron's journeys in Greece in 1810 had taken him in the footsteps (or the sailing path) of Servius Sulpicius, whose famous letter of 45 BC to Cicero consoling him on the death of his daughter (her death is coincident with the passing of the Republic – a fact picked up perhaps in Byron's emphasis of 'Rome imperial') described the journey through the gulf

of Corinth with its sights of once-great cities in ruins. What Middleton translates and Byron's note reproduces as 'when the carcases of so many noble cities lie here exposed before me in one view', is, in fact, two lines of poetry Sulpicius quotes from an unknown source ('uno loco tot oppidum cadavera / proiecta iaceant'), so that the Sulpicius letter is itself already a rehearsal of a commonplace. Byron himself elsewhere comments that 'we can all feel, or imagine, the regret with which the ruins of cities, once the capital of empires, are beheld; the reflections suggested by such objects are too trite to require recapitulation', and among many examples he may have been remembering Walter Shandy's expansive quotation from Sulpicius' letter on hearing the news of the death of his son.<sup>78</sup> But these stanzas attempt to revive and deepen the commonplace by overlaying it with multiple examples and ironies which have been brought into focus through Byron's own journey over these same common places. The stanzas retrace Byron's paths of 1810, and reflect upon the fact that Sulpicius' and Cicero's Rome can now be added to the list of ruined cities. This fact is figured in terms of the place-page: Sulpicius' 'surviving page' is 'now before' Byron (as Megara was 'before me'), and 'on mine' (i.e. here in the fourth canto) Rome is figured as a further example of the 'cadavera', although in the case of Rome her 'ashes still are warm'. The place-page is then both a palimpsest (layered with Byron's writings upon Middleton's translation of Sulpicius' letter) and, as in the case of Greece in *The Giaour*, a fresh corpse in which there are still perhaps faint traces of life. The notion of interchangeable places underpins this passage in several ways. The lingering warmth in the ashes of Rome derives from the exchange of places or the intermixing of texts between Byron and the Roman, the closing of the gaps of centuries in the re-enactment of Sulpicius' journey, and the re-experience of his 'sad wonder' in 1810 and again now, albeit textually, in 1817; for a moment the temporal gap seems to have closed: 'all that *was* / Of then destruction *is*'. Nevertheless, the possibility of changing places across history also of course points to the destruction of imperial powers – Rome has exchanged her glory for the 'ashes' of her present condition, since exchanging places brings with it both the possibility of connection with the past *and* the certainty of empires falling. This paradox is a recurring one in the fourth canto and always carries with it the unspoken warning that British imperial power occupies a similarly interchangeable place, as well as the unspoken hope that the current oppression of Italy is reversible. The fact that Sulpicius' 'surviving page' was able to deliver



a moral lesson, 'drawn from such pilgrimage', but that this did not prevent Roman civilisation from succumbing to the same fate, places Byron's retracing of his journey in a relationship to the commonplace in which the danger and irony of *reversibility* becomes the moral lesson, rather than the fragility of worldly power. This different shading of emphasis – as if to say 'beware of the sentiment of wondering at the passing of worldly power', rather than 'see the passing of worldly power', is characteristic of the ways in which the fourth canto is suspicious of 'History', even as it immerses itself in historical detail and narrative, and fastidiously re-traces historical journeys.

This in fact is the paradox in which the canto is grounded. The possibility that *buried* national history may be remembered and brought back to life and that this is central to the hope of an Italian *risorgimento*, goes alongside the supposition that 'History' itself offers only cautionary lessons or examples of futility. The spirit of 'History' then seems to be radically at odds with the poem's mysterious faith in the aura of historical materials, a faith born out in Hobhouse's untiringly radical and republican notes to the poem, in which Italy's political fortunes, her cultural legacies, her treasures, her prophetic future are read into the lapidary landscape of tomb and epitaph. But the notion of an enduring 'spirit' is a complex one. The spirit-of-place and the national spirit of the *risorgimento* are shadowed not only by the negative spirit of History, but by the spirit of Nemesis, by Byron's meditations upon the wanderings of his own spirit in a country 'with, ay, or without mankind', and by the spirit of free reason 'Our right of thought – our last and only place / Of refuge...(IV.127).<sup>79</sup> There is a deep tension in the canto between the sense of a living historical spirit experienced in the places associated with the names of Italy's glorious dead, particularly the tombs of great men (Michelangelo, Alfieri, Galileo, Machiavelli), and the contrary sense of 'sad wonder' at the absorption of such a spirit into the brutal moral lessons of the place-page, most clearly readable upon the chaos of the Palatine hill:

There is the moral of all human tales;  
 'Tis but the same rehearsal of the past,  
 First Freedom, and then Glory – when that fails,  
 Wealth, vice, corruption, – barbarism at last.  
 And History, with all her volumes vast,  
 Hath but *one* page...

(IV.108)

It is to precisely the opposite notion of enduring spirit, to the buried strata of the palimpsest rather than the transparency of the 'one page', that the fourth canto repeatedly returns: to the *genius loci* of the Egerian grotto (pursued with minute obsession in Hobhouse's notes); to the 'spirit's feeling' in the 'things of earth, which time hath bent' (IV.129); and to the 'genius of the spot' of St Peter's, which may expand the mind of the visitor in contemplation. But this spirit-hunting is most alive in the famous stanzas on the Coliseum:

The seal is set. – Now welcome, thou dread power  
Nameless, yet thus omnipotent, which here  
Walk'st in the shadow of the midnight hour  
With a deep awe, yet all distinct from fear;  
Thy haunts are ever where the dead walls rear  
Their ivy mantles, and the solemn scene  
Derives from thee a sense so deep and clear  
That we become a part of what has been,  
And grow unto the spot, all-seeing but unseen.

(IV.138)

These lines again recall *Manfred's* place becoming 'religion', suggesting a sense of 'deep awe', but also a very particular sense of tangible and material connection to the past: 'we become a part of what has been'. Byron's dedication to the fourth canto had claimed that the poem connected him in some sense with the spots where it had been composed, or around which it organised its composition. Quite how real Byron felt these connections to be, readers of his poetry have found it difficult to measure because there has been an orthodoxy in Byron's critical reception which reads the supernaturalism of lines such as these in Hazlitt's terms of forcefully expressed commonplaces. Their famous afterlife, and the shadow retrospectively thrown by the language of tourism over this kind of topographical writing, has also obscured the extent to which they constitute an unorthodox historiographical method. Here, the dread power that inhabits the Coliseum seems to pass into those visiting the ruin in the midnight hour until they 'grow unto the spot', while at the same time becoming disembodied, 'all-seeing but unseen'. 'Grow unto' and 'all-seeing' are particularly extreme claims for a certain kind of heightened awareness and understanding produced by the fact of being present on the spot, where the hidden and buried connections of history become manifest, where the

very knowledge of *interconnection* becomes possible through contemplation of one's own presence in a particular place. There is nothing quite like this in early nineteenth-century historiography, nothing to resemble this particular historical method, if indeed we allow it to be a historical method, in which a strict literalism and material reality of place go hand in hand with a supernaturalism centred upon the notion of a 'magic spot', and in which direct and practical experience is raised to the level of visionary insight. The poem remembers the Coliseum's history and the 'bloody Circus' genial laws' (with a pun on 'genial', invoking the *genius loci*); and then taking their inspiration from the famous sculpture believed to be of a dying Gaul, the stanzas raise the historical ghost of a gladiator dying in the Roman circus, out-of-place in the sense of at a distance from his home:

– his eyes

Were with his heart, and that was far away;  
 He reck'd not of the life he lost nor prize,  
 But where his rude hut by the Danube lay  
*There* were his young barbarians all at play,  
*There* was their Dacian mother – he, their sire,  
 Butcher'd to make a Roman holiday –  
 All this rush'd with his blood – Shall he expire  
 And unavenged? – Arise! ye Goths, and glut your ire!

(IV.141)

This too is a famous and much discussed passage, for good reason.<sup>80</sup> Psychoanalytical and psychobiographical readings seize upon the encoded self-description here – Byron is obviously dramatising himself and his perceived condition of suffering-in-exile, his desire for revenge, as well as working through his theories of repetition, catastrophe and decline: the theory or anti-theory of History's single page. But the notion of interchangeability is again crucial to the meaning of the passage. The future invasions and sackings of Rome by barbarian hordes are conceived and made inevitable by this moment of death in the arena. This is how Byron habitually imagined the workings of an historical nemesis, as a direct and unequivocal swapping of places. At the same time the passage makes veiled predictions about contemporary Italian politics, because the promise of a reversal in the balance of power between Rome and the Danube is also of course a prophecy of the current (1817) oppression of Italy by the Austrian Empire. (The

same reversal is witnessed by Arnold and Caesar in the second scene of *The Deformed Transformed* (1824.) And if the balance along that historical axis can be reversed once then it can be reversed again, so that this is furthermore a heavily veiled promise of freedom for the Italian states: Rome and the Danube caught in an historical loop, their places and roles interchangeable. In other words, if history is a series of cycles, then those cycles, given the context of the fourth canto, may be liberating rather than merely blindly constraining. Most powerfully of all, the passage attempts to translate this broader symbolic interchange into an imaginative or empathetic act, so that there is a further multiple exchange of places as we enter the consciousness of the dying barbarian, and then imagine the barbarian's own consciousness imagining his wife and children at home. He is dying in *this* place in the Roman circus, but he is also '*There...*', psychically elsewhere. The deictic '*There*' acquires both a temporal and spatial charge, the furthest place in this sequence of imaginative exchanges and the most demanding for a reader to imagine, the hardest to reach. Those who do not like Byron's writing will find this merely sentimental, even false: the presumption that what is essentially an act of self-pity (Byron is remembering his wife and child *there* in England, his heart is bleeding and he is having thoughts of revenge), may be sufficient to imagine a gladiatorial death. But this passage makes more interesting sense as part of a broader historical method with deep implications for contemporary Italian politics and the hope of a *risorgimento*. Going out of oneself, exchanging places, brings the promise of reversal in political fortune (both a salutary and an encouraging moral lesson), *and* demonstrates the kind of historically recuperative and memorialising act required for the regeneration of a national spirit. In this sense the fourth canto strives to be a lesson not simply in what to remember, but *how* to remember – how to place oneself in an inter-subjective relation with the past. It is perhaps easy to mistake this principle of interchangeability for another version of narcissism, or to fail to engage seriously with its mode of proceeding because it is essentially a visionary or enthusiastic one. But Byron's historiographical method, for all its moments of ecstasy, also contains a hard-nosed pragmatism which understands that the history of the European continent (ancient and recent) is only properly understood in terms of its buried subjectivity, its unseen connections and chains of responsibility, its interpenetration of apparently separate and different interests, and that this very notion of interconnection is best understood *upon the spot*, where the reality of one's own physical presence in a particular place of historical significance makes it more possible to

imagine exchanging places. Moreover, the principle of interchangeability always carries with it a specific agenda in the context of British politics. Hobhouse extends the contemplation of role-reversal explicitly to include Britain, in a long passage quoted from Middleton's *History of the Life of M. Tullius Cicero*:

The author of the *Life of Cicero*, speaking of the opinion entertained of Britain by that orator and his contemporary Romans, has the following eloquent passage: 'From their railleries of this kind, on the barbarity and misery of our island, one cannot help reflecting on the surprising fate and revolutions of kingdoms, how Rome, once the mistress of the world, the seat of arts, empire and glory, now lies sunk in sloth, ignorance and poverty, enslaved to the most cruel as well as to the most contemptible of tyrants, superstition and religious imposture: while this remote country, anciently the jest and contempt of the polite Romans, is become the happy seat of liberty, plenty and letters; flourishing in all the arts and refinements of civil life; yet running perhaps the same course which Rome itself had run before it, from virtuous industry to wealth; from wealth to luxury; from luxury to an impatience of discipline, and corruption of morals: till by a total degeneracy and loss of virtue, being grown ripe for destruction, it fall a prey at last to some hardy oppressor, and, with the loss of liberty, losing every thing that is valuable, sinks gradually again into its original barbarism.'<sup>81</sup>

Hobhouse is clearly responding to and complementing Byron's own fascination with historical interchangeability and is drawing out the moral and political lessons implicit in such imaginative acts. Britain's role as an imperial power stands in relation to an 'original barbarism' which the fourth canto forces a reader to imagine. The complementarity is a subtle one, however, in that Hobhouse's quotation from Middleton figures barbarism as an outer darkness to which British civilisation threatens to return, while Byron's verse attempts to imagine a barbarian interiority, a subjectivity, which will replace Roman civilisation. As such the salutary lessons of the imagination work not merely to undermine imperial power structures from within, but to open space in which to imagine the experience of historical suffering and oppression from outside the immediate context, something potentially even more damaging to the European hegemony.

For both Byron and Hobhouse there is a particular fascination with the space of the Coliseum as one in which this idea of the exchange-

ability of power is most suggestive and multiple, and in which the past is most tangibly alive. Hobhouse's notes record the story of the statue supposed to be that of Pompey, at the base of which Julius Caesar was said to have died, which was transported under the French to the Coliseum so that during a performance of Voltaire's *Brutus* the actor playing Caesar could fall at the *actual* base of the *actual* statue where the *actual* Caesar fell.<sup>82</sup> The Coliseum seemed to be a place in which authenticity could be stage-managed or re-enacted like this, in which the past might come alive through the aura of the material object. Significantly the *Historical Illustrations* also pays close attention to the history of the arena as a 'consecrated spot', literally consecrated by the Catholic Church at the end of the sixteenth century to honour the Christian martyrs who had died there. It is important to remember that when Byron and Hobhouse visited the Coliseum in May 1817 it was very much a Christian site, 'the picture of Jerusalem and the Crucifixion, still seen within the western entrance',<sup>83</sup> so that Byron's response to the place becoming 'religion', his statement that in 'this magic circle' we may 'raise the dead' and that 'Heroes have trod this spot' (IV.144), must be seen both as representing the counter-claims of a secular pilgrim who wishes to legitimise his own unorthodox enthusiasm, *and* as drawing upon an existing reservoir of Catholic emotion centred upon this spot. The blood of sacrifice initiates the process of consecration in the case of both heroes and martyrs – indeed the very idea of a direct communion with the heroes/martyrs of the past through the material connection of place has a Catholic inflection. Byron's historical method is, then, one which seeks at least to appropriate the language and emotion of religion, and even at times to share in it directly.

But as I have been arguing, it is a model of feeling and response that is in tension with a contrary desire in Byron to be radically free of humanity, which means to be free of historical places altogether. The fourth canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* finally turns away from mystical communion with history in place, to the possibility of a dwelling place outside human history, a disembodied abode:

Oh! that the Desart were my dwelling place,  
With one fair Spirit for my minister,  
That I might all forget the human race,  
And, hating no one, love but only her!  
Ye Elements! – in whose ennobling stir  
I feel myself exalted – Can ye not

Accord me such a being? Do I err  
 In deeming such inhabit many a spot?  
 Though with them to converse can rarely be our lot.

(IV.177)

That question – ‘Do I err / In deeming such inhabit many a spot?’ is not a question directly asked anywhere else in Byron’s writing, because the forceful assertion of not being in error about the *genius loci* is so frequently the prevailing mode. But it is perhaps the question most seriously and secretly posed by his work, especially by *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, and for this reason it is an appropriate one for the fourth canto to close with. Here it is addressed to the ‘ennobling’ elements, and asks, as Manfred had, whether the natural world can offer a sanctuary for the self or whether this is finally a forlorn hope. The same question could be asked of the places of human history with which the fourth canto is equally preoccupied. ‘Do I err / In deeming such inhabit many a spot?’. Directed in that way, the question would then constitute a moment of rhetorical self-doubt, since it is obvious that having been in error upon the plains of Troy or Waterloo, in the *bosquets* of Clarens, or in the arena of the Coliseum, would mean an absolute negation of Byron’s response to such places, the primary force of which has been to *feel* an innate authenticating quality in the place or landscape itself, a quality he often calls a ‘spirit’. In other words, to have pondered the possibility of being in error in these places would have been un-Byronic, and even though our own enlightened scepticism may very well persuade us that the tombs upon the Troad have nothing to do with the Homeric tales, that the field of Waterloo was not marked out for significant events, that Clarens has no unique connection with ‘Love’, and that communion with the ghosts of history is not possible in the arena of the Coliseum, when we read Byron we are primarily engaged with the assertion of the opposite notion and with the idea of the impossibility of error in such an assertion. Reading him, then, is to enter into a fierce relation with the notion of authenticity and proof, with the notion of a certain kind of value and insight in *being there*, and perhaps above all with the claim to a particular truth in the materiality or body of place. Many readers may find this a difficult relation to sustain. When Byron recalled having stood upon the plain of Troy daily ‘for more than a month’ in 1810, and observed that ‘if anything diminished my pleasure, it was that the blackguard Bryant had impugned its veracity’, we might take the person of Jacob Bryant,

author of the *Dissertation concerning the war of Troy*, as a figure for the general reader of Byron, who must often feel as if he is in the position of someone who has somehow diminished Byron's personal pleasure by impugning the veracity of his responses. Later readers of Byron, particularly in the Victorian period, found themselves in a secret and sometimes guilty state of doubt in relation to his imaginative claims, and began to measure their intellectual development in terms of growing *out* of a taste for Lord Byron's poetry. It is a commonplace of Byron criticism to observe that modern readers are far more comfortable with the scepticism and demystification of *Don Juan*, than they are with the enthusiasm, even the 'religion', of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. But this is also crucially to do with the shape of Byron's own writing life, his uprooting in 1816 and his subsequent 'translation' in the years following. The commanding precedence of place, the overwhelming claim to authenticity through *being there* on the spot, and the sense of mystery in the historical *locus*, all really belong to the first half of Byron's writing career, and become realigned with his exile on the continent and his gradual absorption into Italian society, particularly in the years after 1818, when *Childe Harold* is completed. This realignment or translation from one place to another, when travel ceases to be travel and becomes acculturation, radically alters Byron's relation to geo-history, reconstituting the notion of *being there* in terms of being *in-between*. This will be the subject of the next chapter.