

Jones, 'Intertextual Influences in Byron's Juvenalian Satire' (1993). On the attack on Jeffrey and possibly confused satirical aims of the poem, see William Christie, 'Running with the English Hares and Hunting with the Scotch Bloodhounds' (1997) and 'Byron and Francis Jeffrey' (1997); also Muriel Mellown, 'Francis Jeffrey, Lord Byron, and *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*' (1981).

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, a Romaunt

Cantos I-II

This phenomenally successful poem which made Byron internationally famous was a travelogue (see *Life and Contexts*, pp. 5–9 and *Criticism*, pp. 85, 102, 112). More than that, it was also the modern sceptic's version of pilgrimage: a quest for meaning in a Europe no longer centred on Christianity or fired with the French revolutionaries' secular belief in human perfectibility. The protagonist, Harold, was the poet's alter ego, a libertine satiated with sin, whom the narrator treats with distanced irony and sometimes outright moral condemnation, as he travels across the Iberian peninsula and through the Ottoman Empire. The tone varies between sardonic mockery and serious concern in its use of Harold for self-dramatisation. Harold leaves behind his mother, sister, mistresses, home, his home and homeland, domesticity and duty, to set out on a masculine quest of adventure which will substitute for the sense of purpose and destiny he lacks.

The poem is written in the interlaced Spenserian stanza ABABCBCC which uses only three rhymes in nine lines and concludes with a couplet. Byron thought it would be flexible enough to produce a range of moods: 'droll or pathetic, descriptive or sentimental, tender or satirical, as the humour strikes me' (*CPW* II, 4). However, Paul West has commented that it sets up 'a closed circuit of sounds in ninety-two syllables: they echo each other too quickly for too long' sometimes producing an unwanted sonority (Jump 1973: 156). Byron initially deployed the Spenserian stanza in the same way as did his eighteenth-century models, Scots James Thomson, James Beattie and the English Johnsonian, William Shenstone, whose archaisms produce a deliberately quaint burlesque of epic romance:

Ah me! in sooth he was a shameless wight,
Sore given to revel and ungodly glee;
Few earthly things found favour in his sight
Save concubines and carnal companie,
(*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* I, 2)

A libertine, an embittered sceptic, an anti-hero, Harold is the obverse of the Christian knight idealised in the Middle Ages. Yet he is also a man of feeling, performing spontaneous lyrical effusions of his own in ballads, such as his last 'Good night' to his native land of England or the song 'To Inez' on his 'secret woe', sung to explain his *Weltschmerz* to a kindly Spanish maid. He is the earliest version of the 'Byronic hero', who had evolved out of the Gothic villain, with a dash of the child of nature and the gloomy egoist: types found in eighteenth-century literature (Thorslev 1962: 138–9). Many readers have seen the character

as a self-portrait, though Byron strenuously denied this (see *BLJ* IV, 13–14). Philip W. Martin comments on the staginess of this alter-ego device by which Byron can watch himself perform (Martin 1982: 21). As we shall see in Part 3, Martin and other twentieth-century critics have criticised Byron as a poseur (see *Criticism*, p. 100). Ironically, they judge the poet by the criteria he himself helped produce, for he would take confessional poetry further than ever before in order to produce an impression of sincerity. We see this happening as the narrator's moralistic travelogue becomes increasingly self-referential in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*: interspersed by melancholy asides, referring to the deaths of friends and family members the poet had suffered during composition. One lost love especially intrigued readers, in lines we now know were probably inspired by the death of Byron's friend the Cambridge chorister, John Edleston:

There, thou! – whose love and life together fled,
Have left me here to love and live in vain –
Twin'd with my heart, and can I deem thee dead,
When busy Memory flashes on my brain?
(*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* II, 9)

The narrator's act of composition is made to seem spontaneous by the diary-like use of the present tense: 'Full swiftly Harold wends his lonely way' (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* I, 45). Yet he reminds us he has been imagining not viewing the scene when he interrupts a paean to Spanish beauties with an address to the Greek mountains supposedly before his eyes as he writes:

Oh, thou Parnassus! whom I now survey,
Not in the phrenzy of a dreamer's eye,
Not in the fabled landscape of a lay,
But soaring snow-clad through thy native sky,
In the wild pomp of mountain majesty!
(*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* I, 60)

Jerome McGann comments that by the end of these two cantos the narrator has gradually become as introspective and brooding as Harold, who correspondingly declines in importance. Indeed, he will fade away entirely after the Rhine journey of Canto III (McGann 1968: 67–93). McGann admits that the use of Harold as ego-projection was a clumsy device and that contrasting Romantic and satiric/sceptical points of view in the poem were not handled with assurance or consistency. On the other hand, the importance of the development of the poem in Cantos III and IV will lie in the fact that Byron's fragmented poetic identity is foregrounded and shown in process. The pilgrim's paradoxical search for an ideal in spite of his pessimistic awareness of the tarnished nature of the fallen world, his elegiac lament for the heroism of the past, this very contradictory mixture of fervour and despair was the essence of Byronism, which encapsulated the mood of disillusioned liberals at the time of the end of the Napoleonic wars. Byron himself commented: 'If ever I did anything original it was in C[hil]de H[arol]d' (*BLJ* IV, 107). In a recent essay, Philip W. Martin comments that the poem is difficult for a modern reader, not because of hidden meanings, but because of its

surface: its 'complex movements back and forth through time', as it questions the nature of heroism and the way history is made (Bone 2004, 79).

The poem was innovative, too, in turning an Augustan topographical poem into an expression of Romantic orientalism (see Criticism, pp. 111–14). For Harold travelled East, experiencing 'Greece': so-called by classical scholars, even though the area had never been a unified state and had long formed part of the Ottoman Empire. He even journeyed into the Islamic heart of the little-known and dangerous land of Albania. Byron had been influenced by other poems describing travels in Greece such as Richard Polwhele's *Grecian Prospects. A Poem. In Two Cantos* (1799), William Falconer's *The Shipwreck* (1804) and Waller Rodwell Wright's *Horae Ionicae* (1809). But *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* followed up the familiar Philhellenist narrator's meditations on the ruins of classical civilisation, his anguished address to Athena, 'Where are thy men of might? thy grand in soul?' (II, 2), with a brilliant portrait of the contemporary inhabitants, 'The wild Albanian kirtled to his knee' (II, 58). The depiction of Ali Pasha's court at Tepelini (II, 55–64), its minarets and harem, the picturesque scene of his warriors preparing an evening feast, the dancing and singing of the wild Suliote tribesmen around their fire (II, 71–2): all evoked a primitive, tribal culture with a Barbarian beauty of its own.

On the smooth shore the night-fires blaz'd,
 The feast was done, the red wine circling fast,
 And he that unawares had there ygaz'd
 With gaping wonderment had star'd aghast;
 For ere night's midmost, stillest hour was past
 The native revels of the troop began;
 Each Palikar his sabre from him cast,
 And bounding hand in hand, man link'd to man,
 Yelling their uncouth dirge, long danc'd the kirtled clan.
 (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* II, 71)

In a recent brilliant essay on this poem, Nigel Leask has shown that there were two somewhat contradictory aspects of Byron's Philhellenism: mere melancholic musing over past greatness, which was a great selling point of the poem; and, in dialogue with this, an embryonic streak of revolutionary political activism (Bone 2004: 99–117). In this rousing celebration of Ali Pasha's military prowess, Byron's poem challenged the merely nostalgic type of Philhellenism with a realistic vision of what a contemporary uprising would look like.

As was his wont, Byron continually made additions and adjustments to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, to which miscellaneous lyrics, informative and combative footnotes and information on the contemporary Greek language were appended. It was not until the tenth edition of Cantos I and II was published that he ceased making changes. Contemporary readers were particularly intrigued by the addition of lyrics addressed to a mysterious Thyrsa, Harold/Byron's dead love ('Without a stone to mark the spot', 'Away, away, ye notes of woe', 'One struggle more, and I am free', 'And thou art dead, as young and fair', 'If sometimes in the haunts of men', 'On a cornelian heart which was broken'). Scholars have shown that though the addressee seems feminised, these

poems had actually been inspired by news of the death of John Edleston, for whom Byron had experienced intense feelings of protective and idealised love but also sexual guilt (see *Life and Contexts*, p. 4 and *Criticism*, p. 115).

Further reading

The most important study of the poem as a whole is the very detailed second chapter of Jerome McGann's *Fiery Dust*, though its author has subsequently rejected some of the conclusions of this book. John Jump's anthology of nineteenth- and twentieth-century criticism, *Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage and Don Juan: A Casebook* (1973) is now dated. On the character of Harold, consult Peter L. Thorslev Jr., *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes* (1962). Peter J. Manning considers the poem's popularity as a travelogue in 'Childe Harold in the Marketplace: From Romaunt to Handbook' (1991).

When considering Cantos I and II specifically, Byron's letters to his mother while travelling on his Grand Tour set the scenes the poem dramatises, especially that of 12 November, 1809 (*BLJ* I, 226–31). McGann gives a crisp summary of the ideology of the poem in *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (1985b: 258–64). Gleckner gives a detailed reading of the poem, emphasising its pessimism (Gleckner 1967: 39–90). Paul Elledge examines forms of valediction in his essay 'Chasms in Connections: Byron Ending (in) *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* 1 and 2', reprinted in Stabler (1998: 123–37). On the depiction of Spain, see Diego Saglia, *Byron and Spain: Itinerary in the Writing of Place* (1996). For a feminist reading, see Caroline Franklin's 'Cosmopolitan Masculinity and the British Female Reader of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*' (1997). On homoeroticism and the 'Thyrza' poems, see Louis Crompton (1985: 158–95). For a postmodernist view, see William H. Galperin, *The Return of the Visible in British Romanticism* (1993). Two recent excellent essays on the first two cantos are: 'Heroism and History: *Childe Harold* I and II and the Tales' by Philip W. Martin (Bone 2004: 77–98), and 'Byron and the Eastern Mediterranean: *Childe Harold* II and the "Polemic of Ottoman Greece"' by Nigel Leask (Bone 2004: 99–117).

Canto III

The next section of the poem was published in 1816 and was inspired by the poet's later tour, following on from the collapse of his marriage (see *Life and Contexts*, pp. 14–15 and *Criticism*, p. 86). Europe was at last at peace with the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815. The poem however, is anything but peaceful – it is an agonised expression of inner turmoil. We are immediately plunged into the poet's innermost thoughts on the baby daughter he will never see again:

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

Awaking with a start,
 The waters heave around me; and on high
 The winds lift up their voices: I depart,
 Whither I know not; but the hour's gone by,
 When Albion's lessening shores could grieve or glad mine eye.
 (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* III, 1)

But exactly halfway through the stanza, the focus is abruptly jarred, all the more effectively by way of a misplaced participle, from the inner mind's eye to a willed refocusing on exterior reality. This dichotomy indicates the theme explored in this canto: the narrator will attempt to find an escape from the inner self through meditating on the most picturesque rivers, lakes and mountains in Europe. The poet was by now a well-known public figure, and his readers would know all about the separation scandal that drove him to leave England in 1816, never to return. Nevertheless, the openness with which he spoke in the opening and closing stanzas to his baby daughter and about his own emotional turmoil was something new and shocking. There are also allusions in the poem to the speaker's 'sin' (III, 73), his imagining 'a sister's voice' (III, 85); while the lake and river are compared to a nursing mother (III, 71) and the steep cliffs of the Rhine valley to 'lovers who have parted/ In hate' (III, 94). Readers are therefore reminded of the biographical context of the speaker's melancholy. Byron later said of the poem: '[I]t is a fine indistinct piece of poetical desolation, and my favourite. I was half mad during the time its composition, between metaphysics, mountains, lakes, love inextinguishable, thoughts unutterable, and the nightmare of my own delinquencies' (*BLJ* V, 165).

The poetic voice is much more confident now than in the earlier cantos: freer in the rhetorical control of the Spenserian stanza, using enjambment more frequently and even running on from one stanza to the next. The poet begins by clearly differentiating between himself and the misanthropic Harold, 'The wandering outlaw of his own dark mind' (III, 3). He explains that it is through moulding such creatures of his imagination the artist can intensify and distil the experience of life and make something worthwhile even out of his misery. That way he transcends mere self:

'Tis to create, and in creating live
 A being more intense, that we endow
 With form our fancy, gaining as we give
 The life we image, even as I do now.
 What am I? Nothing; but not so art thou,
 Soul of my thought! with whom I traverse earth,
 Invisible but gazing, as I glow
 Mix'd with thy spirit, blended with thy birth,
 And feeling still with thee in my crush'd feeling's death.
 (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* III, 6)

Harold is then brought on stage and the narrator portrays him as a solitary intellectual rebel who refused to conform:

He would not yield dominion of his mind
 To spirits against whom his own rebell'd;
 Proud though in desolation;
 (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* III, 12)

The poet next demonstrates his determination to universalise the human condition by bringing the Childe up sharp against something greater than merely his own sorrows as an object for contemplation: 'Stop!- for thy tread is on an Empire's dust!' (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* III, 17).

Harold is standing on 'this place of skulls, / The grave of France, the deadly Waterloo!' (III, 18) (see *Life and Contexts*, p. 13). For the spiritual desolation marking the opening of the poem is political as much as it is personal. The defeat of Napoleon also meant the end of the ideals of the French revolution and the restoration of monarchical or imperial dynastic rule over most of Europe. For the reader, the poem acted as an on-the-spot report from the battlefield itself. Byron's exciting recreation of the night before the battle (III, 21–6), his elegiac mourning for all the young men cut down (III, 27–31) and meditation on the human capacity for endurance of sorrow (III, 32–5) bring him to an analysis of the titanic figure of Bonaparte himself (III, 36–45).

There sunk the greatest, not the worst of men,
 Whose spirit antithetically mixt
 One moment of the mightiest, and again
 On little objects with like firmness fixt,
 Extreme in all things!
 (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* III, 36)

In empathising with Napoleon, the artist's own subjectivity colours his interpretation, for he paints a Romantic overreacher comparable with himself, an extreme example of humankind's paradoxical mixture of grandeur and the contemptible.

. . . there is a fire
 And motion of the soul which will not dwell
 In its own narrow being, but aspire
 Beyond the fitting medium of desire;
 (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* III, 42)

Byron was later criticized for giving too favourable a portrait, and thus being unpatriotic, but he declared: 'I have spoken of him . . . as a man of great qualities and considerable defects' (*BLJ* V, 202) (see *Criticism*, p. 87). Byron would go on in the third and fourth cantos to examine many such prototypes of the Romantic individualist, which would take over the function of Harold, in enabling the writer to project his own *Weltschmerz* as an aspect of the spirit of the age.

McGann suggests that Canto III is the first poem Byron wrote in which he was able completely to subdue his own Haroldian scepticism (McGann 1968: 165). This view has also been recently endorsed by Alan Rawes (Rawes 2000: 50–79). To achieve this, Byron has Harold turn to 'maternal nature' as he journeys along the river Rhine.

There Harold gazes on a work divine,
 A blending of all beauties; streams and dells,
 Fruit, foliage, crag, wood, cornfield, mountain, vine,
 And chiefless castles breathing stern farewells
 From gray but leafy walls, where Ruin greenly dwells.
 (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* III, 46)

The delineation of the fertility of the Rhine landscape, with its empty castles indicating the passing of all conquerors, is one of the conventional topographical set pieces of the canto. Others are the sea voyage, and the contrast between the sublime Alps and the stillness of deep lakes. For the modern sceptic, though, who, like Harold, has abandoned orthodox religion and whose political ideals have been overthrown, Nature offers more than moralised topography or picturesque beauty: it connects him with forces greater than the self. Harold therapeutically ‘gazes on a work divine’ and obtains restorative solace. He remembers too the human beauty of his forbidden but pure secret love (III, 55) and is inspired to sing ‘The Castled Crag of Drachenfels’. But as Joseph remarks, it is the more complex narrator not the flat character Harold who later in the canto experiences a pantheistic communion with nature reminiscent of that in Wordsworth’s ‘Tintern Abbey’, when contemplating Lake Lemna (Joseph 1964: 77).

I live not in myself, but become
 Portion of that around me; and to me,
 High mountains are a feeling, but the hum
 Of human cities torture . . .
 (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* III, 72)

By the middle of the canto the poet has abandoned Harold, the figure in the landscape which helped direct our view. Now the artist’s own subjectivity is the subject as well as the medium of the poem in lyrical first-person narration. The external tour has been subordinated to the poet’s psychological journey. Canto III has sometimes been judged severely because of the failure to maintain the use of the protagonist, as well as its lack of structural coherence. Gleckner comments that it is possible to see the merging of Harold and the narrator in two ways: ‘first, as the poet absorbing into himself his own metaphor of fallen man, for properly such a metaphor remains a mere counter, a figure in a tableau, unless it is made articulate through the imagination of his creator; and secondly, as Harold finally become articulate, not merely in lamentations of his own personal plight but as the visionary historian of man’s eternal lot amid the ruins of a universe not well lost and a nature glorious and beautiful but flatly indifferent’ (Gleckner 1967: 229).

Not all critics would go as far as Gleckner in stating that the quasi-Wordsworthian vision of a pantheistic nature is depicted as illusory. In meditating on nature the poet/narrator loses his separate identity – if only temporarily – within the ‘eternal harmony’ (III, 90) of the universe, and is reconnected with the spirit of love. True he questions the pantheistic vision even as he asserts it:

Are not the mountains, waves, and skies, a part
 Of me and of my soul, as I of them?
 (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* III, 75)

But when he describes Lake Lemán at night (III, 85–93), the narrator strongly affirms the unity and beneficence of a sacred nature:

From the high host
 Of stars, to the lull'd lake and mountain-coast,
 All is centered in a life intense,
 Where not a beam, not air, nor leaf is lost,
 But hath a part of being, and a sense
 Of that which is all Creator and defence.
 (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* III, 89)

Byron makes this Wordsworthian vision of nature his own, for he immediately follows this scene of mystical stillness with a violent storm to show nature as essentially changeable, and as capable of violence and destruction as of peace.

And this is the night: – Most glorious night!
 Thou wert not sent for slumber! let me be
 A sharer in thy fierce and far delight, –
 A portion of the tempest and of thee!
 (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* III, 93)

The Byronic poet delights in the revolutionary energy of nature and its changeability mirrors his own 'mobility' of temperament.

Throughout the canto, the narrator attempts to sublimate his personal misery through his own act of imaginative creation, thereby producing the poem itself. Byron projected that Haroldian part of himself which seemed cut off from humanity into his depiction of thinker and novelist Jean-Jacques Rousseau – who was reclusive, a botanist who idealised nature and whose political writings helped inspire the French Revolution (see *Life and Contexts*, p. 15). When the poet described the Swiss landscape where the philosopher had lived, he mythologised the artist as a suffering hero:

Here the self-torturing sophist, wild Rousseau,
 The apostle of affliction, he who threw
 Enchantment over passion, and from woe
 Wrung overwhelming eloquence, first drew
 The breath which made him wretched; yet he knew
 How to make madness beautiful, and cast
 O'er erring deeds and thoughts, a heavenly hue
 Of words, like sunbeams, dazzling as they past
 The eyes, which o'er them shed tears feelingly and fast.
 (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* III, 77)

Byron portrayed Rousseau's Platonic concept of 'love as passion's essence – as

a tree / On fire by lightning', a search for an 'ideal beauty, which became / In him existence' (III, 78) in his creation of the heroine of his influential novel of sentiment *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Heloise*. Byron portrays himself in comparable imagery in Stanza 97, in his intense but vain desire to condense into one word with all the force of lightning all the contradictory elements of his selfhood: 'Soul, heart, mind, passions, feelings, strong or weak'. But Byron's lightning is not self-consuming passion, but a weapon made of language he wishes he could wield against his enemies. For he hopes 'there may be / Words which are things' (III, 114): thoughts which can materialise and inspire revolutionary action.

The poet was also influenced by the idealist philosophy of Percy Shelley, who had accompanied him on his pilgrimage to Clarens, at the upper end of Lake Geneva, the area described in Rousseau's novel (see *Life and Contexts*, pp. 14–16). Stanzas 94–104, the last to be incorporated into the finished canto, were composed on the spot (*CPW* III, 311).

Clarens! sweet Clarens, birth-place of deep Love!
Thine air is the young breath of passionate thought;
Thy trees take root in Love; the snows above
The very Glaciers have his colours caught,
(Childe Harold's Pilgrimage III, 99)

This passage shows Byron's capacity for a mystical apprehension of the spirit of place, and he appended a note which strongly asserts that the artist does not imagine but is merely the conduit for such a spirit: 'if Rousseau had never written, not lived, the same associations would not less have belonged to such scenes . . . they have done that for him which no human being could do for them' (*CPW* II, 312).

Yet hard on the heels of his Shelleyan assertion that love 'is the great principle of the universe' (*CPW* II, 312), the poet-narrator turns to more Haroldian intellectual heroes. For Ferney and Lausanne, near Lake Geneva, were respectively associated with the 'Titan-like' giants of scepticism, the freethinking French Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire and the ironic historian Edward Gibbon. The former excelled in ridicule: 'Now to o'erthrow a fool, and now to shake a throne' (III, 106); whereas the latter was 'the lord of irony' which sapped 'a solemn creed with solemn sneer' (III, 107). Byron admires these sceptical Enlightenment thinkers as much as the visionary Rousseau who expressed the spirit of love which inhered in the landscape of Clarens. It is not that the poet now rejects the redemptive possibilities of nature, but that this ideal has tempered rather than entirely replaced Haroldian scepticism.

For, as Vincent Newey suggests, the third canto is 'no drama of maturation, but a holding operation' (Beatty and Newey 1988: 164), and as it draws to a close the poet returns to his sense of personal bitterness at the vituperation he has received in the press during the separation scandal: 'I have not loved the world, nor the world me' (III, 113). Switzerland had long been idealised by republicans as the refuge of exiled or unpopular radical thinkers, amongst whom Byron now counts himself. Yet he has not merely returned full circle, for it is with a renewed sense of poetic vocation he can now confidently address his daughter, who also represents

his future readers, posterity. However much she has been taught to hate him she will rebel, 'I know that thou wilt love me' (III, 117):

Albeit my brow thou never should'st behold,
My voice shall with thy future visions blend,
And reach into thy heart,—when mine is cold,—
A token and a tone, even from thy father's mould.
(*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* II, 115)

Further reading

For Byron's changing aims during composition, see McGann (1968: 112–21, 165–73). On the literary relationship of Byron and Shelley, see Charles E. Robinson, *Shelley and Byron: The Snake and Eagle Wreathed in Fight* (1976: 421–4). For a reading that situates the canto within a dialectic of pessimism and benevolism, see M. K. Joseph, *Byron the Poet* (1964: 76–83); while Alan Rawes argues that the canto is primarily comedic because its movement turns away from the tragic vision of the earlier verse in *Byron's Poetic Experimentation: Childe, Harold, the Tales, and the Quest for Comedy* (2000: 50–79). Vincent Newey examines Byron's creation of doublings of himself in 'Authoring the Self: *Childe Harold III and IV*' (1988). Stephen Cheeke examines ideas concerning the spirit and body of place in *Byron and Place: History, Translation, Nostalgia* (2003: 68–81).

Canto IV

Byron dedicated the final canto to J. C. Hobhouse and heads the poem with a personal letter to his dedicatee, in which he pays him a heartfelt tribute for his loyalty and support in the separation crisis. This bitter mention of his marriage indicates that the new section of the poem will continue the theme of the poet's resentment at his blasted reputation, from the conclusion of Canto III. The poet declares Hobhouse had been an even older and better friend to him than Harold and his poem, and had accompanied him on many of the travels on which it had been based. Hobhouse had collaborated with Byron on the notes to the canto, which he amplified and which were separately published as *Historical Illustrations to the Fourth Canto of Childe Harold* (1818). These provide invaluable information on the literary and artistic sources that inspired the poetry, and also often give a political gloss relating its generalities to specific current issues. Hobhouse would become a radical MP by 1820 (see *Life and Contexts*, pp. 16–17).

Just as Percy Shelley had inspired the Romantic tendency of Canto III, which gives direct access to the poetic imagination in its mystic apprehension of a spiritualised exterior world, so the influence of Hobhouse on Canto IV saw something of a return to a more conventionally topographical and antiquarian mode with the traditional theme of *sic transit gloria mundi*. Before returning to *Childe Harold*, in the verse drama *Manfred* and the dramatic monologue *The Prisoner of Chillon*, Byron had set out with a critique of materialism (nature as empty of

spirit), yet concluded with a vision of the independent mind as rising above the determinants of place and time and a renunciation of the idea, posited in Canto III, that the physical world was infused by spirit (Cheeke 2003: 89). Gleckner describes Canto IV as an 'extraordinary imaginative journey into nothingness and despair' (Gleckner 1967: 297): even when it rises to prophetic heights this poetry is never utopian, always grounded in the real.

The protagonist, Harold, is now entirely dispensed with. Byron announced,

[T]here will be found less of the pilgrim than in any of the preceding, and that little slightly, if at all, separated from the author speaking in his own person. The fact is, that I had become weary of drawing a line which every one seemed determined not to perceive.

(CPW II, 122)

His fame meant he could now rely on readers' familiarity with the world-weary melancholic personality he dramatised as his public image and could thus dismiss the apparatus of a fictionalised persona (see Criticism, p. 86).

Italy was both the traditional destination of a Christian pilgrimage and the art-lover's Grand Tour. To the modern Haroldian sceptic, particularly a Briton who had been brought up in a Protestant rational culture, a pilgrimage to Rome meant surveying a culture riddled with a superstitious religion, which had been superseded by scientific and historical thought, and the ruins of past empires, which mocked the ambitions of rulers. The alienation and nihilism produced by secular, historical relativism could, however, be offset by the hope that Italy – the cradle of republicanism in the ancient world – would provide a rebirth of political liberty and enshrine it in the creation of a new nation-state. For Republicans such as Byron and his friends, the ruins of ancient Rome were of a more than antiquarian interest. After the defeat of the French republic, young idealists turned to Italy (most of which was ruled by Austria) as well as Greece (part of the Ottoman Empire), and fixed on them their dreams of revolution against imperial, monarchical tyranny. Indeed, the aristocratic Grand Tour tradition of which the poem is a product, had been an important contributory factor in engendering the concept of Italian nationalism. For it was classically educated tourists who had first conceptualised the peninsula as one entity, rather than a collection of city-states and regions. It then took the Napoleonic occupation to provoke a spirit of defensive patriotism amongst the inhabitants.

Byron's epistolary dedication to Hobhouse concludes with a deliberately provocative antithesis between the 'bacchanal roar of the songs of exultation still yelled from the London taverns, over the carnage of Mont St. Jean' (Waterloo) and the British 'betrayal of Genoa, of Italy, of France, and of the world' in the Congress of Vienna, which had reinstated monarchical and dynastic regimes over Europe. The way Byron referred to the British in the third person and scoffed at their 'permanent army and suspended Habeas Corpus' indicated he was now taking up the cudgels against his homeland and its Tory government in no uncertain manner. His poem would inculcate the opposite of British jingoism: cosmopolitanism. This was the Enlightenment virtue promulgated by travel. Italy had now become Byron's adopted country.

The poem opens in Venice (IV, 1–19), then follows the usual tourist route from

northern Italy to Rome via the cities of Arqua, Ferrara and Florence and the contrasting picturesque landscapes of Lake Trasimene, the river Clitumnus, the cataract of Velino and the Appenine mountains. More than half of the canto is devoted to Rome: 'Oh Rome! my country! city of the soul!' (IV, 78). Rome in Byron's day was a tranquil and overgrown site of ancient ruins, not a large city. Within this section are set-piece meditations on the Colosseum in moonlight (IV, 128–45), and Saint Peter's and the art gallery of the Vatican (IV, 153–63). Byron was writing in a well-known, well-worn aristocratic tradition in his reflections on the civilisation which was the source of European culture. But meditating on the ruins of its imperialistic grandeur implicitly brought comparisons to mind with both the recently defeated Napoleonic and the currently burgeoning British empires.

Most readers regard the fourth canto as the most impressive, and Byron himself wrote to his publisher: 'I fear that I shall never do better' (*BLJ* V, 265). However, some critics comment that it is poorly organised in that its basic structure has been overlaid by digressions and the addition of sixty stanzas to the first draft (see *Life and Contexts*, p. 17 and *Criticism*, p. 105). Rutherford suggests that the lack of unity and coherence is also due to the way this canto expresses contradictory emotions of gloom and delight inherent in Byron's volatile personality (Rutherford 1961: 97–102). McGann, however, argues that Byron deliberately avoided Wordsworthian ethical consistency, preferring to embrace constant change in the psyche (McGann 1991: 55). He has also analysed the additions, and comments that many of these are not caused by Hobhouse's insistence that various antiquities be mentioned, or Byron's self-indulgence, but result from the poet's attempt to emphasise art and the artist as the spearheads of the movement towards nationalist consciousness or *risorgimento* (McGann 1968: 130). The medieval and Renaissance poets Petrarch, Dante and Tasso are regarded as the prophets of love and liberty disregarded in their own time, to whose roll-call, Byron implicitly suggests, his own name could be added.

This theme is announced in the opening of the poem in Venice, when the poet stands on the 'Bridge of Sighs', which he described in a letter as

that which divides or rather joins the palace of the doge to the prison of the state—it has two passages—the criminal went by one to judgement—& returned by the other to death—being strangled in a chamber adjoining—where there was a mechanical process for the purpose.

(*BLJ* V, 244)

This bridge symbolised the tyranny that accompanied even a Republican empire. The fall, first to Napoleon and then to the Austrians, of Venice, whose government had once been hailed as an ideal combination of the classical republican tradition with Christian culture is a warning most of all to her successor – the maritime empire of Britain. From a distance Venice 'looks a sea Cybele' (IV, 2), 'a ruler of the waters', but when one approaches there is an uncanny silence. Now the narrator sees that 'Her palaces are crumbling to the shore' (IV, 3) and 'The Bucentaur lies rotting' (IV, 11). Venice has lost her freedom and the whole city now 'Sinks, like a sea-weed, into whence she rose!' (IV, 13). It is only through 'Otway, Radcliffe, Schiller, Shakespeare's art' (IV, 18), that we can repeople

Venice in the days of her glory: it is literature which endows her memory with immortality. Indeed the poet-narrator himself is implicitly the latest ‘enchanter’ whose magic wand of poetry causes the wings of the centuries of Venetian history to expand in the daylight (IV, 1).

The beings of the mind are not of clay;
Essentially immortal, they create
And multiply in us a brighter ray
And more beloved existence:
(*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* IV, 5)

This recapitulates Canto III, 6, and the poet refers directly to his earlier poetry which ‘came like truth, and disappeared like dreams’ but promises ‘I could replace them if I would’ (IV, 7), from his teeming mind. Like the titanic poets of Italy’s past who were unappreciated or banished, Byron is a lonely wanderer and an exile: ‘I’ve taught me other tongues’ (IV, 8). Yet he puts himself on a par with Shakespeare when he declares he twines his ‘hopes of being remembered in my line / With my land’s language’ (IV, 9). His detachment from Britain endows him with the independence to speak the truth on European politics. The decay of Venice:

Is shameful to the nations,—most of all,
Albion! to thee: the Ocean queen should not
Abandon Ocean’s children;
(*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* IV, 17)

The melancholy and bitterness of Canto III still erupts, but expressed stoically and defiantly rather than in anguish. Indeed the poet comments that just as the tannen grows best in barren soil, and into a giant tree on Alpine peaks where it is blasted by the elements, ‘the mind may grow the same’ (IV, 20). His sufferings have made him ‘A ruin amongst ruins’, most fit then:

to track
Fall’n states and buried greatness, o’er a land
Which *was* the mightiest in its old command,
(*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* IV, 25)

And the poem expands to hymn Italy in her ruined state, where the fertility of nature outstrips the survival of creations of human culture, yet also suggests art’s potentiality to revive and flourish.

Thou art the garden of the world, the home
Of all Art yields, and Nature can decree;
Even in thy desert, what is like to thee?
Thy very weeds are beautiful, thy waste
More rich than other climes’ fertility;
Thy wreck a glory, and thy ruin graced
With an immaculate charm which cannot be defaced.
(*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* IV, 26)

The ego-projection which had been accomplished through the persona of Harold, is now achieved through elegiac meditations on graves or places associated with poets who had been what Shelley termed 'unacknowledged legislators' for Italy. The medieval love poet and pioneer of the sonnet form, Petrarch, had raised the Tuscan language to prominence and inculcated the beginning of political nationalism: he reclaimed his land 'From the dull yoke of her barbaric foes' (IV, 30). The sixteenth-century epic poet Torquato Tasso is painted as an even greater Byronic hero, unquelled despite imprisonment in a madhouse in Ferrara by a despotic ruler (IV, 36), though the sensitivity of the artist makes his own mind an instrument of torture. The great Renaissance poets – exiled Dante, author of the *Divina Commedia*; Ariosto, who wrote *Orlando Furioso*; Boccaccio, poet of the *Decameron* – all had shaped the common culture which bonded Italy and receive tribute from Byron, though they are still not sufficiently appreciated in their native 'ungrateful' Florence (IV, 57).

Stanzas 42 and 43 incorporate a translation of Vincenzo da Filicaja's sonnet 'Italia, Italia, O tu coi feo la sorte' (which had also been translated by Robert Southey and Felicia Hemans) in which Italy is imaged as a helpless woman, whose beauty seems to invite rape. Byron was influenced by his friend Madame de Staël's novel *Corinne, or Italy* (1807), which had protested against Napoleon's incursion through an allegorical representation of Italy as a woman poet deserted by her soldier lover (Wilkes 1999: 100–31). He paid fulsome tribute to her genius in the notes (CPW II, 235–6). Throughout the canto, Byron deploys images of vulnerable femininity to rouse his readers' chivalric determination to fight in her defence. Italy is 'Mother of Arts . . . Parent of our Religion' (IV, 47). Rome is 'Lone mother of dead empires!' (IV, 78), 'The Niobe of nations' (IV, 79) mourning for her dead children.

Yet the founders of Rome had been suckled by a she-wolf, 'Mother of the mighty heart' (IV, 88) and this thought leads the poet into a moralising commentary on the masculine desire for conquest: from Rome's armies to those of Napoleon: 'a kind / Of bastard Caesar' (IV, 90). The next eight stanzas explore the hard lesson of the French Revolution: that those who conquer tyrants seem to turn tyrant in their place. The despairing poet turns back for comfort to the image of the endurance of the lone tree, now also a symbol of liberty like those trees planted to commemorate the French revolution.

Yet, Freedom! yet thy banner, torn, but flying,
Streams like the thunder-storm *against* the wind;
Thy trumpet voice, though broken now and dying,
The loudest still the tempest leaves behind;
Thy tree hath lost its blossoms, and the rind,
Chopp'd by the axe, looks rough and little worth,
But the sap lasts, – and still the seed we find
Sown deep, even in the bosom of the North;
So shall a better spring less bitter fruit bring forth.
(*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* IV, 98)

This stanza must have been an inspiration behind Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind', and scholars have suggested that both poems are probably indebted to

Thomas Paine's imagery of a budding twig at the conclusion of the second part of *The Rights of Man* (1969: 273). The energy of Byron's metre makes it a stirring trumpet-call for liberty, yet its imagery of nature's inevitable capacity for revival encapsulated in a buried seed also implies the many bleak years which lie ahead before that new tree of liberty is mature.

Canto IV is a political poem which makes an impassioned plea for Italy to be recognised as a cultural whole, on account of its shared linguistic, literary and artistic traditions, and which protests against its rule by the Austrians. Both the notes and the poem perform the cultural memorialising and celebration which Byron and Hobhouse thought necessary to prepare the ground for a *risorgimento* (Cheeke 2003: 99). The poem stops short of calling for revolution or putting forward a programme of action. McGann has even suggested that 'Italian *risorgimento* and the great artists of Italy's past and present are only mirrors in which we perceive the struggle of the poet of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* to offer a general redemptive vision to mankind at large' (McGann 1968: 131). Readers must decide how far they see the poem as narcissistic. Certainly, in Canto III the self-aggrandising poet had placed himself on the page of history by traversing the battlefield of Waterloo, and in Canto IV he situates himself within the pantheon of European high art. Yet we might see him representing the isolated heroic individual, especially the artist, as left with the unenviable task of handing on the torch of liberty in an age of repression and conservatism. His self-dramatising technique works to invite us to share his visionary poetic inspiration in action and his feeling for the special qualities that make up Italy.

Standing by the ivied tomb of an unknown Roman matron he is inspired to make the dead live in his words (IV, 99–104). Meditating by the fountain where a nymph Egeria 'the genius of the place' (IV, 116) loved and inspired the philosopher Numa, the poet finds that he can no longer believe in Love as an external spirit, but recognises that artists project into their works the beauty that emanates from and dis-eases the human mind (IV, 115–22). This capacity to imagine perfect beauty can be seen as a torment and a curse. For man and his endless desire is not part of the harmony of nature since the Fall:

This uneradicable taint of sin,
This boundless upas, this all-blasting tree,
Whose root is earth . . .
(*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* IV, 126)

The poet satanically situates his own psychic drama within the greatest arena in Rome, that of the Coliseum at night, where he dramatically calls upon Time and Nemesis to witness the curse of vengeance he calls down upon his enemies, only to turn it into forgiveness (IV, 130–7).

But I have lived, and have not lived in vain:
My mind may lose its force, my blood its fire,
And my frame perish even in conquering pain,
But there is that within me which shall tire
Torture and Time . . .
(*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* IV, 137)

By implication he associates himself and his poetry with the mighty building which will stand as long as Rome (IV, 145), as well as the heroism imbued in its stones from those such as the gladiator Byron imagines seized from the banks of the Danube, whom he pictures 'Butcher'd to make a Roman holiday' (IV, 141). The Coliseum had been consecrated by the Church in order to commemorate the Christian martyrs who had died there, but Byron adapts the notion of pilgrimage to sacralise his own secular quest to fight back against oppression and injustice. Individual self-renewal is thus linked with the wished-for renewal of the independence of Italy. So the matter-of-fact material reality of the tourist's visit to a famous place goes hand in hand with an almost supernatural apprehension of the Coliseum as a 'magic' spot (Cheeke 2003: 104–7) in which the poet communes with the spirits of the dead.

As he contemplates the magnificent Pantheon, the temple built in Hadrian's reign which was conventionally the most admired building of the Grand Tour, the narrator now conjures up a greatly contrasting scene of selfless love, though perhaps just as grotesque as the curse of forgiveness. He was inspired by the 'Caritas Romana' story of a young mother who had kept her aged patriot father alive by feeding him from her own breast when they were imprisoned together in one cell by the Emperor (IV, 148–51). A version of it had been dramatised by Arthur Murphy as *The Grecian Daughter* (first performed at Drury Lane in 1772), and was regularly performed starring Mrs Siddons. The story was an allegorical representation of the keeping alive of republican ideals even when these had been overthrown. It also links with the conclusion of Canto III (117–18) where Ada is imagined loving her father after his death through reading his verse, and thus keeping his spirit alive. If the reader identifies with Ada, the verse creates a sense of intimate relationship with the poet and thus exerts a great emotional pull.

The conclusion of the poem finds the narrator at St Peter's basilica, whose grandeur always impressed Protestant tourists. But, as an experienced traveller, he can compare the mighty dome with the wondrous architecture of what Byron had thought was the Temple of Diana at Ephesus and the church turned mosque of St Sophia at Constantinople (see *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* II, 79). It is unique: a fitting successor to the temple at Jerusalem and the effect of its sublimity on the visitor is described in imagery of swelling expansion:

Enter: its grandeur overwhelm thee not;
 And why? it is not lessened; but thy mind,
 Expanded by the genius of the spot,
 Has grown colossal, and can only find
 A fit abode wherein appear enshrined
 Thy hopes of immortality; and thou
 Shalt one day, if found worthy, so defined,
 See thy God face to face, as thou dost now
 His Holy of Holies, nor be blasted by his brow.
 (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* IV, 155)

The next four stanzas take the reader with the poet into the basilica to experience the sense of immensity 'increasing with the advance / Like climbing some great

Alp' (IV 156); the senses taking in only an impression of 'Rich marbles—richer painting—shrines'. The act of perception cannot be totalising: 'Thou seest not all; but piecemeal thou must break, / To separate contemplation, the great whole' (IV, 157). This breaking down of the act of perception into its constituent parts serves as an analysis of the way the whole poem has functioned, as an example of loco-descriptive writing. But it is also an indication of Byron's view of nature and human life as always fragmented and in flux. McGann comments of this passage: 'The poet is made aware of the necessity of a "piecemeal" apprehension of a life which we never fully comprehend precisely because it involves us in constant passage and possibility' (McGann 1968: 38). So this, the culmination of the pilgrimage comes to no climax, but merely encapsulates the way the perceiving mind (both poet and reader) participates in the ongoing process which is life by momentary epiphanies and endless self-renewal rather than by one unifying vision or philosophy.

The poem concludes with descriptions of famous sculpture in the Vatican: the Laocoon, a statue of a father's agonising attempt to save his sons from the coils of sea serpents, illustrates the blend of a 'mortal's agony' with 'an immortal's patience' in the human condition (IV, 16). The contrasting Apollo Belvedere, 'a dream of love', like the Venus de' Medici described earlier (IV, 49–53), encapsulates not merely real human beauty, but rather: 'a dream of Love':

All that ideal beauty ever bless'd
The mind within its most unearthly mood,
(*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* IV, 162)

Art, the poet concludes, is immortal because it is created by the 'fire which we endure', that 'Prometheus stole from heaven', and consequently 'if made / By human hands, is not of human thought' (IV, 163).

The poem ends in the Romantic wooded landscape beside Lake Albano, where the poet meditates on the ocean – symbol of eternal change yet 'Unchangeable save to thy wild waves' play' (IV, 182). We might think of his image of himself in almost sculptural terms, as a Neptune figure riding the untamed billows:

And I have loved thee, Ocean! and my joy
Of youthful sports was on thy breast to be
Borne, like thy bubbles, onward: from a boy
I wantoned with thy breakers—they to me
Were a delight; and if the freshening sea
Made them a terror—'twas a pleasing fear,
For I was as it were a child of thee,
And trusted to thy billows far and near,
And laid my hand upon thy mane—as I do here.
(*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* IV, 184)

This is a daring stanza with its wordplay punning on child/Childe, and mane/main, which blend the figure of the pilgrim with the child at play in the sea. The last words, in their present tense and immediacy of place 'here', give a dramatic sense of the poet's real presence. The poem has sought to do this in all the scenes visited,

where places are rendered of particular significance, not only because of their existing historical or picturesque associations, but because they are now being newly associated with the composition of this poem by Byron. The last word 'here' seems to indicate the poem as well as the billows and leaves the reader with a reminder of his/her intimate connection with the author through the act of reading.

Further reading

On the influence of Hobhouse on this canto, see Andrew Rutherford, 'The Influence of Hobhouse on *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto IV*' (1961). On Cantos III and IV as a mediation on the theme of time and mortality, see especially Joseph (1964: 70–102). Malcolm Kelsall situates the poem in the context of Augustan and especially Whig representations of Italy in *Byron's Politics* (Kelsall 1987: 57–81). Gleckner sees the canto as a culmination of the total pessimism of the whole poem (Gleckner 1967: 267–98). But Alan Rawes argues, in opposition to Gleckner, that the canto, by exiling the Byronic hero and renewing a sense of Byronic rather than Wordsworthian idealism, is primarily positive, opening the way to the writing of comedy (Rawes 2000: 117–38). For a postmodernist reading, see William H. Galperin, *The Return of the Visible in British Romanticism* (1993: chapter 8).

THE ORIENTAL TALES

During 'the years of fame', Byron wrote six verse tales: *The Giaour* (1813), *The Bride of Abydos* (1813), *The Corsair* (1814), *Lara* (1814), *The Siege of Corinth* (1816) and *Parisina* (1816). They can be thought of as a series, most are set in the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century, and all of them are variations on similar themes. The Orient is here the domain of Gothic excess: violent, despotic, sensual. The male protagonists are often outlaws or renegades, competing with a patriarchal ruler for possession of a woman. The poems are full of stirring adventurous action, but all end tragically. The first three are of most importance, and so will be dealt with in more detail.

The Giaour

This poem is a famous example of Byron's habit of accretion. The first version was 375 lines long; the first published edition was 684 lines, but he did not cease adding to it until the seventh edition in December 1813, which reached 1,334 lines (CPW III, 413). It is an experimental, fragmented poem made up of snatches of narrative from different points of view. The fictional verse is framed by factual notes in which Byron cites his personal experience of the East and situates himself as an authority on Greek and Turkish culture, though he also acknowledges the help of Barthélemy d'Herbelot's invaluable reference work, *Bibliothèque Orientale* (1697), and Samuel Henley's scholarly notes to the English translation of William Beckford's Orientalist Gothic novel, *Vathek* (1784). Byron didn't