

"DEAR OBJECT OF DEFEATED CARE:"
AN ANALYSIS OF CHARACTER TRANSFORMATION
IN CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE

A Thesis

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PREFACE

Heroes are an indispensable part of nineteenth-century verse and prose, and none so dominate the period as the weary travellers of Childe Harold, plagued with spent emotions and satiated desire.

Byron's earlier canon evidences minor examples of such characters, but Childe Harold and the narrator of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: A Romaunt have been accorded the distinction of the first characters in English literature who fully display the facets of Weltschmerz. This study proposes to analyze the development of those characters within Childe Harold. Although a definite direction of alteration is apparent in the characters of Harold and the narrator, inconsistencies in character attitudes are evidenced in the work. Byron's haphazard composition techniques are generally responsible for such inconsistencies. Coleridge notes, in fact, that Byron had inscribed on the verso of the original manuscript the line: "Dear Object of Defeated Care," indicating, it seems, the author's awareness of inadequacies in the text.

Lines struck from the Preface of the original manuscript are explicit in their identification of Byron as the narrator from the poem's inception. To facilitate this examination, however, the narrator will be considered

solely in his relationship to the text of the poem. Parallels which might have been drawn between incidents in the poem and Byron's private life were not drawn in the belief that such matters were foreign to a textual examination.

Lastly, it has been necessary to specify the dominant character in each stanza of the poem. The result is, of necessity, a rather artificial framework. It is necessary because most serious critics of the Byronic Hero in Childe Harold have constructed similar structures, none of which are in strict accord. Some scholars have even considered a third character, a narrator-Harold, in Canto III. For the purposes of this study, however, all sentiments emanating from a narrator-like character have been considered the sentiments of the same character.

The following chart simply traces the dominant character throughout the poem:

<u>Stanza</u>		<u>Dominant Character</u>
	<u>Canto I</u>	
To Ianthe		Narrator
1		Harold
2-13		Narrator
14		Harold
15-28		Narrator
29-81		Harold
82-84		Narrator
85-93		

Canto II

1-15	Narrator
16	Harold
17-29	Narrator
30-33	Harold
34-39	Narrator
40-43	Harold
44-54	Narrator
55-56	Harold
57-63	Narrator
64	Harold
65-69	Narrator
70-73	Harold
74-98	Narrator

Canto III

1-7	Narrator
8-15	Harold
16-50	Narrator
51-55	Harold
56-118	Narrator

Canto IV

1-163	Narrator
164	Harold
165-186	Narrator

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CHAPTER I

CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE:

A HISTORY OF CRITICISM

Lord Byron was certainly no stranger to the powers of the British press when, on Tuesday, March 10, 1812, Cantos I and II of Childe Harold were first issued.¹ His literary career had, in fact, been dominated by the watchful eye of criticism. But serious scholars of the era are not inclined to deal as harshly with Childe Harold as they had with Byron's Hours of Idleness, in 1807.² Possibly, English Bards and Scotch Reviewers had taken its toll. Probably, contemporaries are pleased to discover a degree of maturation that has been absent in Byron's earlier works. Regardless, Byron's contemporaries are pleased with the poetic prospects offered in March of 1812, and the British reading public grants Childe Harold a reception equal to that of any literary production of the century.³

Although one editor might praise the elements

¹Ernest Hartley Coleridge, The Works of Lord Byron, II, xii.

²Ibid., p. 1.

³John Drinkwater, The Pilgrim of Eternity, pp. 180-181; Sir Walter Scott, "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," Quarterly Review, XVI (October, 1816), 175.

of the epic tradition incorporated in Childe Harold⁴ and another its originality;⁵ although one editor might compliment Byron for an ability to work within the confines of the Spenserian stanza⁶ and another eschew its use,⁷ all agree upon its poetic merit. Jeffrey of the Edinburgh Review leads the way in his unqualified praise of Cantos I and II:

. . . [it is] really a volume of considerable power, spirit and originality--which not only atones for the evil works of his nonage, but gives promise of a further excellence. . . .⁸

Jeffrey continually points to the force and originality of the volume as indicative of the power exhibited within.⁹

Not to be outdone, the editors of both the Eclectic Review and the Christian Observer are quite lavish in their reviews of Byron's creation. The editor of the Christian Observer is quick to note the

⁴George Ellis, "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, a Romaunt," Quarterly Review, VII (March, 1812), 191.

⁵F. Jeffrey, "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," Edinburgh Review, XIX (February, 1812), 467.

⁶Ibid., p. 468.

⁷Ellis, op. cit., pp. 192-193.

⁸F. Jeffrey, "Harold," Edinburgh Review, XIX (1812), 466.

⁹Ibid., pp. 467-474.

poetic manner of execution¹⁰ as well as the descriptive power of the work.¹¹ The editor of the Eclectic Review is even more impressed. He quickly seizes the opportunity to praise Byron's use of the Spenserian stanza¹² and the energy, sublimity, and discrimination witnessed in the poem.¹³ Byron's verse is pleasing, the editor notes, and Byron is a reasoning poet who exhibits bold and daring personifications throughout the poem.¹⁴ The editors of the Eclectic Review are also impressed by the descriptive power evidenced in the poem,¹⁵ nor are they alone in this appraisal.¹⁶ Lastly, they point to the classical recollections of Greece as " . . . the most pleasing part of Lord Byron's poem."¹⁷ Only Ellis of the Quarterly Review remains rather silent.

¹⁰"Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," Christian Observer, XI (1812), 377.

¹¹Ibid., p. 378.

¹²"Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," Eclectic Review, VIII (June, 1812), 632.

¹³Ibid., p. 634.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 635.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 636.

¹⁶F. Jeffrey, "Harold," Edinburgh Review, XIX (1812), 468.

¹⁷Eclectic Review, p. 636.

He does concede, however, that the poem is in keeping with the epic tradition, but that concession is quickly lost in a labyrinth of derogatory observations:¹⁸

. . . we complain . . . of the habitual negligence, of the frequent laxity of expression--of the feeble or dissonant rhymes which almost always disfigure a too close imitation of the language of our early poets. . . .¹⁹

The implication of negligence is not exclusively a Quarterly Review complaint, for Jeffrey of the Edinburgh Review also notes many examples of what seem to him the results of a hasty composition.²⁰ In general, however, Ellis of the Quarterly Review is Byron's most consistent linguistic critic, for he also points to Byron's use of an affected vocabulary as an example of patching embroidery with rags.²¹ His distaste for Spenserian diction is evident in these lines:

Spenser, it must be observed, is always consistent. He lived at a time when pedantry was the prevailing fault . . . of the flighty and illiterate.²²

¹⁸Ellis, op. cit., pp. 191-197.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 193.

²⁰F. Jeffrey, "Harold," Edinburgh Review, XIX (1812), 475.

²¹Ellis, op. cit., p. 193.

²²Loc. cit.

As mentioned, Jeffrey of the Edinburgh Review is critical of the haste and carelessness evidenced in Cantos I and II; his primary objections, however, are the lack of direction and the absence of affection for mankind.²³ The lack of a storyline is, of course, a result of Byron's inability to delegate a sufficient amount of power to Harold, who was to be the unifying force. (Byron does, however, remark that the character "makes no pretension to regularity.")²⁴ The misanthropic nature of the Cantos only heightens what the editor of the Christian Observer refers to as "truly romantic feelings."²⁵ The editor, however, does not allow romantic feelings to interfere with his criticism of offensive reflections in the poem. Most perturbing, he contends are the reflections of the narrator.²⁶ The narrator's atheistic musings²⁷ and moral philosophy²⁸

²³F. Jeffrey, "Harold," Edinburgh Review, XIX (1812), 466.

²⁴Coleridge, op. cit., p. 3.

²⁵Christian Observer, p. 378.

²⁶Ibid., p. 377.

²⁷Ibid., p. 380.

²⁸Ibid., p. 382.

are severely criticized; the "narrator" is, of course, assumed to be the poet:

Indeed, we do not hesitate to say, that the temperament of his [Byron's] mind is the ruin of his poem. . . . Let him turn to Quinctilian, and he will find a whole chapter to prove that a great writer must be a good man.²⁹

The editor of Eclectic Review is the least critical, repeating, however, the charges of misanthropy³⁰ and Godlessness.³¹ His only original complaints, concerning Byron's powers as a satirist in verse, have since lost their effectiveness:

. . . Lord Byron labours under a very unfortunate mistake as to his gifts and qualifications as a satirist . . . we are really alarmed for his fame, if he will not give over this preposterous ambition.³²

When confronted with the characters in the poem, Byron's contemporaries do not display the diversity witnessed above. In unison, they accept Byron's "Preface" and disavow any connection between Harold and Byron. In unison, they assume the narrator to

²⁹Ibid., pp. 382-383.

³⁰Eclectic Review, p. 633.

³¹Ibid., p. 630.

³²Ibid., p. 629.

be Byron.³³ In unison, they censure the surly character of Childe Harold.

In the Preface to Cantos I and II, Byron indicates that he anticipates innumerable parallels between himself and Childe Harold. He, of course, disavows such a connection: ". . . Harold is the child of imagination. . . ." ³⁴ The Coleridge text indicates that in the original manuscript, Byron was even more careful to distinguish between himself and Childe Harold.³⁵ This duality is accepted by all major critics of the first Cantos. Possibly the distinction is acknowledged to facilitate a wholesale attack upon the Childe's character without risking the wrath of the author. Regardless, the attack does appear, and no one handles it with more proficiency than Jeffrey of the Edinburgh Review:

Childe Harold is a sated epicure--
sickened with the very fulness of
prosperity--oppressed with ennui,
and stung with occasional remorse;
--his heart hardened by a long course
of sensual indulgence, and his opinion

³³It was a correct assumption, but did color their criticism.

³⁴Coleridge, op. cit., p. 3; George Wilson Knight, Lord Byron: Christian Virtues, p. 105.

³⁵Ibid., P. 4.

of mankind degraded by his acquaintance with the baser part of them.³⁶

Ellis of the Quarterly Review agrees wholeheartedly, adding the charge of "unknightly" knight.³⁷ The editors of Eclectic Review and Christian Observer simply reaffirm the charges made by Ellis and Jeffrey.

Contemporary criticism of the narrator is chiefly concerned with the degenerate effects that Harold seems to be having on the narrator, and Byron's inability to restrict misanthropy to the fictional character. Jeffrey of the Edinburgh Review complains loudly that the imaginary character is having an ignoble effect upon the noble narrator. The ennui and misanthropy of Harold discolor the noble narrator.³⁸ The editor of the Eclectic, in an almost clairvoyant observation, notes that Byron is, in fact, confusing the roles of the two characters, an observation that has often been made in relation to Canto III.³⁹ Harold, according to the editor of the Eclectic, occasionally

³⁶F. Jeffrey, "Harold," Edinburgh Review, XIX (1812), 466.

³⁷Ellis, op. cit., p. 192.

³⁸F. Jeffrey, "Harold," Edinburgh Review, XIX (1812), 467.

³⁹Eclectic Review, p. 632.

dismisses his own ennui, and the narrator is then guilty of expressing misanthropic principles which should have been voiced by Childe Harold.

Ellis of the Quarterly Review and the editor of the Christian Observer, though not particularly concerned with the cause of the narrator's occasional fits of misanthropy, are mightily concerned with the offensive reflections, per se. Both sources point to the following lines:

Even Gods must yield--Religions take their turn:
'Twas Jove's--'tis Mahomet's--and other Creeds
Will rise with other years, till Man shall learn
Vainly his incense soars, his victim bleeds
(II.iii.5-8)

Ellis is more concerned with the fact that these are the narrator's sentiments than with the sentiments themselves.⁴⁰

Canto III of Childe Harold was published on November 18, 1816.⁴¹ With Byron's success well established, even Jeffrey, the most skeptical critic, has accepted Byron's literary productions. The reading public, as always, clamors for Canto III, as evidenced by Murray's initial sale of 7,000 copies of the work to assembled booksellers before the poem's

⁴⁰ Ellis, op. cit., pp. 196-197.

⁴¹ Coleridge, op. cit., p. 213.

release.⁴²

Of the four major critics of Canto III, Jeffrey of the Edinburgh Review is by far the most thorough. He is most pleased with the force and energy that the work displays, and he remarks that, in force of diction, Byron surpasses all of his contemporaries.⁴³ The concise, condensed character of the poem is also complimented.⁴⁴

Possibly as a result of Ellis' over-critical appraisal of Byron's earlier powers which appeared in the Quarterly Review of 1812, Scott, writing for the publication in 1816 more than compensates with the most congratulatory review of Canto III in print. Scott even finds virtue in Byron's vice when he states:

. . . the want of polish in some of its minute parts rather adds to than deprives the poem of its energy.⁴⁵

As poetry, Scott finds Canto III to be strong, original, and powerful.⁴⁶ He closes his review with these lines:

⁴²Loc. cit.

⁴³F. Jeffrey, "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," Edinburgh Review, XXVII (December, 1816), 277.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 278.

⁴⁵Sir Walter Scott, "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," Quarterly Review, XVI (October, 1816), 189.

⁴⁶Loc. cit.

Lord Byron may not have loved the world, but the world has loved him, not perhaps with a wise or discriminating affection, but as well as it is capable of loving anyone.⁴⁷

The editor of the Christian Observer is also pleased, remarking that Canto III is the best Byron yet.⁴⁸ The editor of the Monthly Review is silent. (His silence should not be interpreted as a rebuff, however, as he simply offered an extremely cursory review of the piece.)

Negative comments aimed at the work in toto are limited to the apparent haste of composition and the author's seeming delight in his misanthropic creation. Jeffrey of the Edinburgh Review is particularly critical:

He [Byron] is frequently abrupt and careless, and sometimes obscure. There are marks occasionally, of effort and straining after an emphasis which is generally spontaneous He delights too exclusively in the delineations of a certain morbid exaltation of character and of feeling⁴⁹

The editor of the Christian Observer concurs.

It is the characterization of Canto III, however,

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 208.

⁴⁸"Lord Byron's Canto Third," Christian Observer, XVI (1817), 247.

⁴⁹F. Jeffrey, "Harold," Edinburgh Review, XXVII (1816), 279.

which most interests critics of the day. Even such a cursory appraisal as the editor of the Monthly Review offers, notes the inseparable nature of the narrator and Childe Harold.⁵⁰ It is this observation, this growing similarity of the narrator and Harold, which most affects all of the critics of Canto III. Scott, in the Quarterly Review, is the only critic who takes the time to analyze the growing proximity of narrator and Childe. He suggests that Byron may have identified with Harold, because (1) his masochistic character predisposed him to identify himself with feelings of guilt, (2) his satiric nature may have suggested the identity for capricious effect, (3) the creation, Harold, may have captured the creator, Byron, and (4) possibly Byron merely wished to flaunt the image of misanthropy in the faces of his critics.⁵¹ Certainly, all of Scott's suggestions are viable. Regardless of the reason, it is sufficient to say that the resemblance between narrator and fictitious character did not go unnoticed.⁵² Furthermore, the editors of the Edinburgh Review and the Christian

⁵⁰"Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," Monthly Review, LXXXI (1816), 312.

⁵¹Sir Walter Scott, "Harold," Quarterly Review, XVI (1816), 185.

⁵²Twentieth-century critics, such as Rutherford, believe the result produced a third character.

Observer are not content to simply point to a continuation of misanthropy, but suggest that the ennui is intensifying.⁵³ (The concluding Canto certainly substantiates such observations.)

Byron solved the problem of the narrator-Harold resemblance in Canto IV, published on April 28, 1818.⁵⁴ On January 2, 1818, in a letter to Hobhouse, Byron states:

With regard to the conduct of the last canto, there 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.⁵⁵

Minor reviews apparently found no reason to deal with the concluding Canto; consequently, Wilson of the Edinburgh Review and Scott of the Quarterly Review provide the chief criticisms.

Abolition of the fictitious guise most interests Scott and Wilson. Scott is so much impressed with the unusual presentation that he remarks:

. . . since the time of Cowper he [Byron] has been the first poet who, either in his own person, or covered by no very thick disguise, has directly appeared before the public,

⁵³Christian Observer, p. 253.

⁵⁴Coleridge, op. cit., p. 315.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 323.

an actual living man, expressing his own sentiments⁵⁶

Wilson concurs, calling Canto IV the most original poem in the language.⁵⁷ He is further impressed by Byron's descriptive powers in the Canto and calls the piece the best section of the completed epic. Scott addresses himself to the question of the popular success of the Canto and he concludes that Byron has both presented parallels between himself and Harold, and that he has intimated that he who so despised the world has the powers to win it.⁵⁸ Love of nature is, according to both publications, a distinct passion in the concluding Canto. This romantic justification of misanthropy, however, is colored by related remarks offered by Wilson, who is openly avoiding ". . . all reference to . . . distressing passions."⁵⁹ Scott also avoids direct reference to the "distressing passions" in Canto IV. This acknowledgement of pessimism, but failure to explore it, leaves both reviews suggesting a kind of primrose

⁵⁶Sir Walter Scott, "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," Quarterly Review, XIX (April, 1818), 217.

⁵⁷J. Wilson, "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," Edinburgh Review, XXX (June, 1818), 97.

⁵⁸Sir Walter Scott, "Harold," Quarterly Review, XIX (1818), 220.

⁵⁹Loc. cit.; Wilson, op. cit., p. 108.

Pessimism as the dominant philosophy of Canto IV.

The reviewers merely echo Byron's letter to Hobhouse when they affirm the Childe Harold-narrator identity in the final Canto.⁶⁰ The ennui evidenced was supposed an unfortunate result of close introspection.⁶¹

These, then, were the comments offered by Byron's contemporaries on Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. In some instances, they appear almost prophetic; in others they sorely miss the mark of objective literary criticism. Scott's comments are the most consistent, the most free of the bias which proximity breeds. Twentieth-century scholars have, in fact, called Scott's reviews " . . . fine examples of serious reviewing."⁶² But other reviews are also as penetrating as they are numerous.

Contemporary reviewing is always liable to the pitfalls proximity breeds, and Byron's rather notorious personal life and unequalled success certainly complicated the matter.⁶³ The installation of Byron's own

⁶⁰Sir Walter Scott, "Harold," Quarterly Review, XIX (1818), 217; Wilson, op. cit., p. 91.

⁶¹Sir Walter Scott, "Harold," Quarterly Review, XIX (1818), 228; Wilson, op. cit., p. 91.

⁶²John Wain (ed.), Contemporary Reviews of Romantic Poetry, p. 116.

⁶³Wain, op. cit., p. 116.

character as the narrator in Childe Harold could only lead critics to draw innumerable parallels between Byron's biography and the episodes in the poem. In matters purely poetic, however, contemporary reviews may be considered exceedingly objective and perceptive.⁶⁴

Criticism of the interim--the years 1820-1920--is sparse: sparse in quantity, quality, and direction. As the Victorian era turned to its problems of industrialization and the rather grim realities fostered by a growing middle-class, the Romantic school lost its once universal appeal. It was not, in fact, until quite late in the Victorian era that critics began to re-examine the products of Romanticism. One rather astute observer of Byronic criticism offers this summation of 1898 opinion:

To sum up the opinion held by the literary world at the present time, one might say that the poetry of Byron was at its best excellent rhetoric, at its worst slipshod and theatrical doggerel; that there is no real feeling in his work, no real sincerity.⁶⁵

⁶⁴Wain, op. cit., p. 116.

⁶⁵Stephen Phillips, "Poetry of Byron; an Anniversary Study," Cornhill Magazine, IV (January, 1898), 16; Cf. William E. Leonard, Byron and Byronism in America, pp. 85-90, for the attempts to imitate the work during the same period in which it was severely criticized.

The year, 1898, saw more than this summary of Byronic rejection, however, for it witnessed the most important piece of Byronic scholarship ever assembled, Ernest Hartley Coleridge's The Works of Lord Byron. This scholarly edition, still considered the definitive source for twentieth-century research, provides impetus for a wave of Byronic scholarship which is still evidenced.

Preceding Coleridge's publication, the only Romantics who had managed to remain in the public eye were Shelley and Wordsworth. Byron criticism--nearly all of which was biographic⁶⁶--had dwindled to a point at which

. . . disdainers of Byron had begun to feel that the ground was entirely their own; and the secret few, who in secret handed down the old Byron cult, must have fallen into desperation⁶⁷

The full effect of the Coleridge publication cannot be fully appreciated until a juxtaposition, such as the following, is examined. The first quoted passage was published in 1896, just two short years before the Coleridge publication; the second quotation was published

⁶⁶Anne Swanwick, Poets, the Interpreters of Their Age, p. 293.

⁶⁷Paul Elmer More, "The Wholesale Revival of Byron," Atlantic Monthly, LXXXII (November, 1898), 801.

shortly after the release of Works:

Byron, then seems to me a poet distinctly of the second class, and not even of the best kind of second, inasmuch as his greatness is chiefly derived from a sort of imitation, of the qualities of the first. His verse is to the greatest poetry what plaster is to marble, what pinchbeck is to gold.⁶⁸

The post-Coleridge appraisal runs as follows:

Byron, then is to be estimated chiefly by his range of power. In satire he is supreme, in description excellent, in the power of narration the second of English poets.⁶⁹

The discrepancy in critical judgment evidenced, here, is not the exception, but the rule.

Two articles produced during the Byronic Renaissance of 1898 deserve special examination, because they typify the desire of literary spokesmen to disassociate themselves from the old school of Byronic criticism. The Romantic preoccupation with biographic incident is gone; the Victorian preoccupation with technique is gone; and the ability to accept minor defects without disregarding the entire canon of the artist has appeared.

As mentioned, because Byron often drew his major characters to resemble himself and often acknowledged the resemblance, it was difficult for his contemporaries to avoid biographic parallels when dealing with

⁶⁸Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 80.

⁶⁹Phillips, op. cit., p. 26.

his poetry. By 1898, the critical audience has largely overcome this temptation. Neither of the major 1898 reviews fall victim to it. For example, More of the Atlantic Monthly calmly appraises Childe Harold in distinctly non-biographic terms. He assigns Cantos I and II to Byron's second period: that period in which he took pleasure in the melodramatic isolation from society. Cantos III and IV are categorized as works of the third period: that period which was marked by a Byron who would find relief in nature and the grandeurs of the past.⁷⁰ Phillips of Cornhill Magazine quietly avoids the entire issue. The Victorian preoccupation with technique is similarly absent from 1898 criticism. That is not to say that the technical aspects of poetry are not discussed by these critics, but that the minor technical errors which Byron habitually exhibited are no longer considered of a magnitude sufficient to destroy the attributes of his poetry.

Both reviews note what Byron's contemporaries and the Victorians had long objected to--Byron's obviously haphazard composition techniques which often rendered his language obscure.⁷¹ What marks a departure

⁷⁰More, op. cit., p. 809.

⁷¹More, op. cit., p. 809; Phillips, op. cit., p. 16; Cf. Paul West, Byron and the Spoiler's Art, pp. 130-133, for a discussion of Byron's writing habits.

in critical standards is not simply the recognition of technical flaw, but the ability of the critic to rise above technical inexactness, to evaluate the work in terms of its revolutionary spirit and classical art,⁷² its great satiric content,⁷³ its descriptive power,⁷⁴ its sympathy with man,⁷⁵ its classical metaphors,⁷⁶ its ability to tell a story,⁷⁷ and its sincerity.⁷⁸ Naturally, all critics do not succumb to the tenets of the Coleridge publication and the anniversary studies which accompany it. Occasionally, the old school still raises its head, censuring Byron's maudlin tones and misanthropic heroes, but, generally, 1898 may be cited as a convenient date with which to begin a study of the new Byronic criticism.⁷⁹

The outstanding trait of post-1920 Byronic

⁷²More, op. cit., p. 801.

⁷³Phillips, op. cit., p. 18.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 21.

⁷⁵More, op. cit., p. 806.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 802.

⁷⁷Phillips, op. cit., p. 21.

⁷⁸More, op. cit., p. 808.

⁷⁹William Allan Neilson, Essentials of Poetry, p. 232.

criticism is bulk. And it is the very quantity of critical work that precludes a simple explanation of contemporary trends. Rather, it becomes a more reasonable task to consider briefly what contemporary criticism of Byron is not. It is not, in general, caught up in rigid technical evaluations; it does not confuse biographic and textual examination; it is not limited by fact. The technical inexactness of Childe Harold was a pre-occupation of critics until the turn of the century. As noted in the previous examination, however, technical peccadillos began to occupy less of the critics' time early in the twentieth century, a trend that has continued to the present writing. Remnants of technical criticism still may be found in this century, of course, as no trend in literature operates exclusively. For example, as late as 1927, mathematicians in literary garb were publishing analyses of run-on lines and stanzas in Childe Harold in order to determine a progression of metrical freedom in the work.⁸⁰ But, generally, such exercises have been avoided by contemporary critics. Rather, Byron's critics have now divided into two distinct camps, both marked by a non-technical flavor: the

⁸⁰Harold Stein, "Note on the Versification of Childe Harold," MLN, XLIII (January, 1927), 34-35.

biographers--with Marchand safely in the lead--, and the philosophers of Romanticism--with Bruffee and Wain sharing the glory. If this century offers no other distinction, it may yet be considered a success. For this dichotomy must be maintained if serious scholarship is to flourish. Certainly, both camps have produced fine work and will continue to do so as long as they retain their identities. If their criticism is weak, however, it would seem to be a result of their casual attitudes concerning fact, their hypothetical zeal.⁸¹ But one hypothesis deserves another, and it would seem to one caught up in the fancies of the day that, if these trends are carried to their logical conclusions, if, that is, the hypotheses of the last 50 years can be substantiated by scholars of the next 50 years, then the present age of Byronic criticism will, indeed, be hailed as the Period of Inspiration.

⁸¹ Possibly the result of over-anxious attempts to purge past preoccupations with biographic interpretation . . .

CHAPTER II

AN ANALYSIS OF CHARACTER TYPES AND ATTITUDES: CANTOS I AND II

Cantos I and II of Childe Harold were written in five months between the dates October 31, 1809, and March 28, 1810.⁸² By the time of their publication, they had undergone innumerable additions and omissions, and the final manuscript did not reach the printer until the autumn of 1811.⁸³ The poem's phenomenal success can be gauged only by the fact that, in 1819, an eleventh edition of Childe Harold was published.⁸⁴

In so far as the structure of Childe Harold is concerned, it is basically three poems strung together by means of the unifying narrator. It is clear that Byron initially intended the character of Harold to provide the means of unifying a work of such dimensions. As he suggests in his Preface to the initial publication:

A fictitious character is introduced for the sake of giving some connection to the

⁸²Coleridge, op. cit., p. ix.

⁸³Ibid., pp. xi-xii.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. xiii.

piece; which, however, makes no pretension to regularity.⁸⁵

By the time of the publication of Canto IV, however, it becomes evident that Byron has relented in his original plan. He admits in the Preface to that final Canto that not only will the character of Harold cease to unify, but that it will cease to exist:

The fact is, that I had become weary of drawing a line which everyone seemed determined not to see . . . [and] it was in vain that I asserted, and imagined that I had drawn, a distinction between the author and the pilgrim. . . .⁸⁶

Thus, the only element of the lengthy poem which truly unifies the work from beginning to end is the character of its narrator.

With the exception of the two characters, Cantos I and II display little that could pass as structure. In the tradition of the romance, Harold wanders, or flees, almost aimlessly, and the work is primarily descriptive.⁸⁷

In the Preface to Cantos I and II Byron admits

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 3.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 323.

⁸⁷William H. Marshall, The Structure of Byron's Major Poems, p. 36.

the debt his hero owes earlier fictionalized heroes.⁸⁸ It is fitting that Byron acknowledge Harold's predecessors, for the Romantic Age, chiefly as a result of the emphasis placed on individuality during the period, is rich in heroes. Because artists of the period consider themselves alienated from the society in which they live, their heroes, similarly, are normally characterized by a tendency for isolationism.⁸⁹ Furthermore, organicism, a theory that proposes that an organism's own dynamic system constitutes life, is also an integral part of the romantic movement.⁹⁰ These facets of nineteenth-century doctrine produce fertile soil for hero-worship, and can, therefore, be deemed responsible for the numerous literary heroes of the age.

The Romantic Hero, then, is chiefly the result of organicism and individualism, and the most popular representative of the type is the Byronic

⁸⁸ Coleridge, op. cit., p. 8; Ernest James Lovell, The Record of a Quest, pp. 140-141.

⁸⁹ Thorslev, op. cit., p. 17; Kenneth A. Bruffee, "The Synthetic Hero and the Narrative Structure of Childe Harold III," Studies in English Literature, VI (Autumn, 1966), 670.

⁹⁰ Thorslev, op. cit., p. 17.

Hero.⁹¹ The popularity of the Byronic Hero, although surely the result of a complex array of nineteenth-century situations, attitudes and atmospheres, rests most firmly on its resemblance to its creator.⁹² Most assuredly, Byron denies the resemblance,⁹³ and his biography of the period confirms his denial,⁹⁴ but the review of criticism that inaugurated this study stands witness to the fact that, from the first publication, critics have been quick to take note of the similarity between Byron and his creations. The heroes, soon to be examined in more detail, need no such aid, for their merit lies in themselves.

Although allusions to the Byronic Hero alone would fill many a volume, few scholars have analyzed the hero's outward characteristics as concisely as Symon:

. . . he is a man of blood, love and lust, crime and theatrical swashbucklery, a ready swordsman, a leader of outlaws, but chivalrous in his lawless fashion. . . . The general idea of his mind is far less

⁹¹Ibid., p. 3; Elmer E. Stoll, "Heroes and Villains," RES, XVIII (July, 1942), 257.

⁹²Michael Kennedy Joseph, Byron the Poet, p. 23.

⁹³Coleridge, op. cit., p. xiv.

⁹⁴William A. Borst, Lord Byron's First Pilgrimage, p. 14.

precise. For it there is a vague comprehensive expression--'dark and gloomy.'⁹⁵

Symon's description, it must be remembered, is intended to be a general summing up, and Harold and the narrator will not display the breadth that Symon's analysis supposes. As Symon suggests, the workings of the Byronic Hero's mind are more difficult to analyze. Lefevre has approached the problem in this manner:

As a character, Childe Harold is well known for his violent, eruptive emotions, his aristocratic pride, scorn of man, contempt for rulers, and a dark, brooding preoccupation with the theme of freedom.⁹⁶

Not all appraisals of the Byronic Hero are as positive as Symon's and Lefevre's. Because poetry, rich in dark emotions, seems seldom to satisfy,⁹⁷ and because Byron's heroes, (particularly Harold), so greatly resemble their creator, criticisms such as the following are not uncommon:

. . . Byron possessed that fatal accompaniment of the Romantic spirit, the reluctance to reach sedate maturity. In the last resort, the Byronic Hero

⁹⁵J. D. Symon, Byron in Perspective, p. 123.

⁹⁶Carl Lefevre, "Lord Byron's Fiery Convert of Revenge," SP, XLIX (1952), 486.

⁹⁷Andrew Rutherford, Byron: A Critical Study, p. 12.

is a tripartite individual: he is the type of satanic, sadistic dandy.⁹⁸

The chief characters of Childe Harold, I and II--Harold and the narrator--although similar in many respects, reveal important discrepancies in personality early in the romance. Their individual natures can be most efficiently deduced by an examination of their attitudes regarding four aspects of their existence: self, mankind, nature, and love. That is, both characters are generally preoccupied with the same four matters, but their attitudes pertaining to these matters are not analogous.

Childe Harold's world is ordered as follows: self, mankind, nature, and love, and some conclusions may, in fact, be drawn from the simple ordering. He is, obviously, pictured by Byron--for Harold is chiefly a product of a third person presentation--to represent a self-contained, isolated figure. Furthermore, Harold's observations upon his fellow man are secondary to his desire for self-alienation. In Harold's life, nature is an infrequent concern, but is generally a positive force, so that one may note the romantic spirit fleeing from civilization to nature. Love, which occupied

⁹⁸Cedric Hentschel, The Byronic Teuton, p. 7.

a great deal of young Harold's time, becomes such a minor consideration that one finds the isolationist image complemented by its absence.

What, then, is the purpose of Byron's multifaceted Childe? In a word, it is to incorporate all the facets of ennui. Harold, though certainly not the first such character in literature, is usually considered to be the best representative of world-weariness.⁹⁹ The Childe's youth has been one of satiated desires, faded lineage, thwarted love. At last:

Apart he stalked in joyless reverie,
And from his native land resolved to go,
And visit scorching climes beyond the sea:
With pleasure drugged, he almost longed for woe,
And e'en for change of scene would seek the shades
below.

(I.vi.5-9)

The Childe, furthermore, carries with him a clandestine sorrow that he will not discuss with friends, if he had friends.¹⁰⁰ For to add to Byron's portrait of the satiated hero, the world has finished

⁹⁹ Samuel C. Chew, Lord Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage and Other Romantic Poems. p. xxi.

¹⁰⁰ Incest is most often cited by the critics steeped in the biographic interpretation. In fact, incest and Byron have become so synonymous in critical circles, that Charles Dubos in his Byron and the Need of Fatality suggests that all of Byron's worthwhile literature was produced after his incestuous relationship. The reader is left to his own conclusion.

with him: it has used him in his nonage and now discarded him in his hour of desolation. An additional bit of information necessary in a portrait of Harold is that his misfortune is not a result of his own misdeeds. He is clearly the victim of predestination.¹⁰¹

It is no small wonder that a character so beset with difficulties might, in Canto II, be described as the "cold Stranger"¹⁰² whose hardened heart no longer feels; a man who might view death with no emotion;¹⁰³ one who might see, but not feel, "Leucadia's rock of woe";¹⁰⁴ one who might stoically search barbaric shores for variety.¹⁰⁵ The reader's final view of Harold in Canto II confirms many suspicions. One finds that the character has remained essentially static throughout the first two cantos:

'Mid many things most new to ear and eye
The Pilgrim rested here his weary feet,
And gazed around on Moslem luxury,
Till quickly wearied with that spacious seat
Of Wealth and Wantonness, the choice retreat
Of Sated Grandeur from the city's noise:

¹⁰¹ Coleridge, op. cit., p. 74; Edward Wayne Marjarum, Byron as Sceptic and Believer, p. 10.

¹⁰² Coleridge, op. cit., p. 110.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 126.

¹⁰⁴ Loc. cit.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 127.

And were it humbler it in sooth were sweet;
 But Peace abhorreth artificial joys,
 And Pleasure, leagued with Pomp, the zest of both
 destroys.

(II.lxiv.1-9)

The Childe is still the searching, easily sated character who was first introduced. Harold's character, then, is a very unswerving one in Canto's I and II. In short, after Byron fully describes Harold's temperament, all further allusions only serve to intensify. Similarly, Harold's concept of mankind remains static throughout the first publication. It is best seen in these lines:

Through many a clime 'tis mine to go,
 With many a retrospection curst;
 And all my solace is to know,
 Whate'er betides, I've known the worst.

What is that worst? Nay do not ask--
 In pity from the search forbear:
 Smile on--nor venture to unmask
 Man's heart, and view the Hell that's there.
 (II.To Inez.8-9)

Mankind, then, is its own Hell. The Childe clothes his sentiment in various garb, but the conclusion is always the same: Hell is usually viewed as a result of man¹⁰⁶ and his ephemeral nature.¹⁰⁷ But a character cannot function in a totally negative sense, and Childe Harold finds his solace in nature. Nature is depicted

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 36

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 38.

by Harold as a good and lasting quality, dramatically opposed to the evil, ephemeral nature of man.¹⁰⁸

Love, that blissful state in which a younger Harold wallowed, is now deemed no more than a dream by Harold the exile:

Oh! many a time and oft, had Harold loved,
 Or dreamed he loved, since Rapture is a dream;
 But now his wayward bosom was unmoved,
 For not yet had he drunk of Lethe's stream;
 And lately had he learned with truth to deem
 Love has no gift so grateful as his wings;
 How fair, how young, how soft soe'er he seem,
 Full from the fount of Joy's delicious springs
 Some bitter o'er the flowers its bubbling venom flings.
 (I.lxxxii.1-9)

In brief then, Harold of I and II--often considered the greatest representative of ennui in the English language--is a self-centered character, displeased with mankind, in harmony with nature, and distrustful of love.

Such an agglomeration of characteristics invariably produces inconsistencies. But it was primarily as a result of Harold's breadth and his resemblance to Byron that the work achieved such immediate success.¹⁰⁹ Just such an agglomeration of characteristics prompted the following summation of the Childe of Cantos I and II: ". . . he is striking, if largely traditional,

¹⁰⁸Ibid., pp. 32, 33, 36-37.

¹⁰⁹Throslev, op. cit., p. 139.

and he was vastly popular, even if somewhat inconsistent."¹¹⁰ Such inconsistencies can, however, be summarized. Harold's mood is that of the lonely soul; his pose is satanic.¹¹¹ His near lethargic state is magnified by his static nature throughout Cantos I and II.

The narrator's character in Cantos I and II is partially similar to Harold's. Indeed, his attitudes regarding nature and love are nearly identical to Harold's. It is the prominence that the narrator gives to the areas of man and self, and his detailed consideration of them that distinguish his character and prompt critics to deem him worthy of consideration.¹¹² First, the narrator does not indulge in self-contemplation in either of the first two Cantos. The luxury of introspection is exclusively Harold's. Coupled with this exclusion is an increased awareness of society.¹¹³ It is this area that dominates the

¹¹⁰Loc. cit.

¹¹¹Leslie A. Marchand, Byron's Poetry: A Critical Introduction, p. 40.

¹¹²Andrew Rutherford, Byron: A Critical Study, p. 30.

¹¹³One notes that Byron's social criticisms were unique in their consistency.

the considerations of the narrator, just as introspection dominated the considerations of Harold. The category is enlarged because the narrator is concerned not only with man the individual, but also with the institutions of man. The church and body politic are the institutions considered by the narrator. The church--Byron has limited his observations to the Christian church--is viewed as a wasted institution and one rooted in hypocrisy and meaninglessness:

Even Gods must yield--Religions take their turn:
 'Twas Jove's--'tis Mahomet's--and other Creeds
 Will rise with other years, till Man shall learn
 Vainly his incense soars, his victim bleeds;
 Poor child of Doubt and Death, whose hope is built on
 reeds.

(II.iii.5-9)

Government occupies an even greater portion of the narrator's time. Byron was a consistent advocate of liberty, and his absolute belief in the acquisition of freedom is nowhere echoed so strongly as in the narrator's words:

Hereditary Bondsmen! know ye not
Who would be free themselves must strike the blow?
By their right arms the conquest must be wrought?
 Will Gaul or muscovite redress ye? No!

(II.lxxvi.1-4)

The narrator's considerations of man, though more numerous, are quite similar to Harold's negative observations. Similarly, they are usually limited to observations on hypocrisy and the ephemeral nature of man, Of the two, the narrator is more concerned with impermanence:

Remove yon skull from out the scattered heaps:
 Is that a Temple where a God may dwell?
 Why ev'n the Worm at last distains her shattered cell!
 (II.v.7-9)

But unlike Harold, the narrator does not aimlessly wander in search of an answer for he finds that mere existence is an end in itself:

Bound to the Earth, he lifts his eye to Heaven--
 Is't not enough, Unhappy thing! to know
 Thou art?
 (II.iv.1-3)

Nature for the narrator, as for Harold, is considered to be all that man is not. She is loyal, constant, even kindly in her wrath:

Oh! she is fairest in her features wild,
 Where nothing polished dares pollute her path:
 To me by day or night she ever smiled,
 Though I have marked her when none other hath,
 And sought her more and more, and loved her best in
 wrath.
 (II.xxxvii.5-9)

The narrator's opinion of love is more difficult to determine. Early in Canto IV, what seems to be a definite statement on the subject appears:

'Tis an old lesson--time approves it true,
 And those who know it best, deplore it most;
 When all is won that all desire to woo,
 The paltry prize is hardly worth the cost . . .
 (II.xxxv.1-4)

Later in the same Canto, what appears to be a direct contradiction occurs:

What is the worst of woes that wait on Age?
 What stamps the wrinkle deeper on the brow?
 To view each loved one blotted from Life's prize,

And be alone on earth as I am now.
(II.xcviii.1-4)

The apparent contradiction, here, may be explained in either of two ways: (1) loved ones in the second passage may refer exclusively to those related to the narrator by blood; or (2) the insertion of the second stanza after the Canto had gone to press may have produced an inconsistent emotion.¹¹⁴ Regardless, the first quoted stanza more nearly approximates the narrator's attitude toward love--a prize hardly worth the effort.

Briefly, then, the narrator of Cantos I and II may be considered a character little concerned with himself, displeased with man and his institutions, in harmony with nature and unsure of love. His chief characteristic, however, is that he has not remained entirely static. "His ironies become increasingly bitter and sardonic, his disillusionment grows, he becomes more and more introspective and brooding."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴Coleridge, op. cit., p. 163.

¹¹⁵McGann, op. cit., p. 71.

CHAPTER III

AN ANALYSIS OF CHARACTER TYPES AND ATTITUDES: CANTOS III AND IV

Canto III of Childe Harold is, for all practical purposes, a new poem. The structure of the Canto, the gulf of four years which separates it from its predecessors, and the attitudes of its chief characters substantiate this claim. Structurally, it is the most complex of the entire work and is distinguished both by its loss of the character of the Childe and its increased organization. The Canto begins and ends with the narrator's apostrophe to his daughter. The initial apostrophe is followed by (1) the narrator's isolation as a projection of Harold's isolation; (2) a description of Waterloo; (3) a description of isolation in Napoleonic terms; and (4) meditations on man's isolation. The stanzas on the Rhine Journey stand midway in the structure. Falling away from the midpoint are four segments that may be paralleled with the four that open the work: (1) meditations on man's isolation; (2) description of isolation in terms of Rousseau, Voltaire and the French Revolution; (3) an apostrophe to Italy; and finally (4) the narrator's isolation.¹¹⁶ In Canto III, then,

¹¹⁶Marshall, op. cit., p. 71.

the movement is away from the open-ended structure that marks Cantos I and II. Descriptive passages occur more frequently, and the original characters still grace the pages of the work, but the structure of the work is not now at the mercy of Harold's aimless wanderings. Furthermore, Canto III was written a full four years after the publication of Cantos I and II. Unlike the initial Cantos that were the result of Byron's periodic scribbling between October, 1809 and March, 1810,¹¹⁷ Canto III was composed hastily between May and June of 1816.¹¹⁸ As a result, Byron substantially alters the characters of the Childe and the narrator, so much so that many scholars see the emergence of a third character at this point in the narrative.¹¹⁹

In many ways, Harold of Cantos III and IV is different than the Harold who captured the British reading public of 1812. He has now become ". . . less rhetorical, and more poetic; less traditional and far

¹¹⁷Coleridge, op. cit., p. ix.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 211.

¹¹⁹Kenneth A. Bruffee, "The Synthetic Hero and the Narrative Structure of Childe Harold III," Studies in English Literature, VI (Autumn, 1966), 673-674.

more personal."¹²⁰ In short, the characters of the Childe and the narrator may be seen merging in this Canto.¹²¹ Furthermore, there is, in the character of Harold, ". . . less of cynicism, and more of suffering, less of sin and guilt, and more of being sinned against."¹²² It should also be mentioned that it has long been recognized that Harold's reputation as ". . . the first great English victim of the Romantic malady of Weltschmerz . . ."¹²³ is firmly rooted in Canto III. If any uncertainties exist regarding the major character in Childe Harold, one may easily resolve them at this point. Canto III marks the narrator's firm ascendancy to prominence, and Harold begins to fade from view. He is, of course, nearly non-existent in the final Canto. Byron has not slighted the character however, for the space he allots his character in Canto III is ample in which to draw the necessary conclusions. The Childe is still most concerned with self. Mankind, love and nature are all relegated to a position safely secondary to the Byronic Hero.

¹²⁰Andrew Rutherford, Byron: A Critical Study, p. 49; Thorslev, op. cit., p. 139.

¹²¹Bruffee, op. cit., p. 672; cf. John Wain, Essays on Literature and Ideas, pp. 86-87.

¹²²Thorslev, op. cit., p. 139.

¹²³Andrew Rutherford, Byron: A Critical Study, p. 64; Thorslev, op. cit., p. 142.

The Childe's character has been altered externally. It is suggested that he has forsaken Romanticism and will simply no longer feel. Time has altered him:

Yet Time, who changes all, had altered him
 In soul and aspect as in age: years steal
 Fire from the mind as vigour from the limb;
 And Life's enchanted cup but sparkles near the brim.
 (III.viii.6-9)

However, one finds that Harold is not the only victim of ennui. Nature and man are also altered by time; and in Canto III they forsake the Childe. The younger Childe had become satiated with passion. The Childe of Canto III cautiously fills his cup with nature, not passion, but finds to his dismay that it no longer soothes his existence, and clandestine sorrow still hangs over him. Mankind, too, strategically withdraws from the Childe. Because he will not submit, he is not fit to dwell with man:

But soon he knew himself the most unfit
 Of men to herd with Man, with whom he held
 Little in common; untaught to submit
 His thoughts to others, though his soul was quelled
 In youth by his own thoughts; still uncompelled,
 He would not yield dominion of his mind
 (III.xii.1-6)

The result of these occurrences is a stern, more tranquil Harold, and one who quietly accepts his mortality, but with a hint of nihilism:

Self-exiled Harold wanders forth again,
 With nought of Hope left--but with less of gloom;
 The very knowledge that he lived in vain,

That all was over on this side the tomb,
 Had made Despair a smilingness assume
 (III.xvi.1-5)

The Childe is aware that both he and mankind suffer from the same unalterable fate--dualism. Though certainly he does not explore the matter as fully as the narrator he does realize that, to escape his doomed existence, he must reach with the mind for the spirit. This topic is not explored further by Harold, for his chief concern is the effect that dualism is having on his person, and no topic so inclusive as dualism, something that affects all of man, can long hold Harold's interest.

His attitudes toward love are altered. Briefly, the Childe is now capable of two very restricted kinds of love. First, vicarious love:

For there was soft Remembrance, and sweet Trust
 In one fond breast, to which his own would melt,
 And in its tenderer hour on that his bosom dwelt.
 (III.liii.7-9)

And, secondly, the love of infancy:

And he had learned to love,--I know not why,
 For this in such as him seems strange of mood,--
 The helpless looks of blooming Infancy
 (III.liv.1-3)

The only assumption that one can draw from such a lover is that he is incapable of mature affection and must rely on paltry substitutes to satisfy his needs.

Nature, though not nearly as prominent in the

portrait of the Childe of III, is still a quality which, unlike mankind, can attain to immortality, and one which provides solace to the Childe:

Where rose the mountains, there to him were friends;
 Where rolled the ocean, thereon was him home;
 Where a blue sky, and glowing clime, extends,
 He had the passion and the power to roam. . . .
 (III.xiii.1-4)

But nature in Canto III loses its ability to convince, ". . . instead it has come to be thought of as impetuous and artificial."¹²⁴ Nature in earlier Cantos was something that could be counted on, a constant force in the affairs of men, but the later Cantos portray nature as ". . . a very model of randomness. . . ." ¹²⁵

The narrator of Canto III orders the matter of his existence in this manner: man, self, nature. Love, a sporadic concern of his, is not generally evident in this section. Many of the narrator's attitudes have appeared before, most in the character of Harold in earlier Cantos. For example, his belief that man's world is a world of woe is certainly not a new one. The "world of woe" doctrine is substantiated by the narrator's belief that the world is worthless: ". . . 'Tis but a worthless world to win or lose; / So hath it

¹²⁴Michael G. Cooke, The Blind Man Traces the Circle, p. 39.

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 48.

proved to thee, and all such lot who choose." (III.
xl.8-9) He further concludes that life is generally
unhappy and that man exists simply to endure pain:

They mourn, but smile at length--and, smiling, mourn
The tree will wither long before it fall;
The hull drives on, though mast and sail be torn;
The roof-tree sinks, but moulders on the hall
In massy hoariness; the ruined wall
Stands when it wind-worn battlements are gone;
The bars survive the captive they enthrall;
The day drags through though storms keep out the sun;
And thus the heart will break, yet brokenly live. . . .
(III.xxii.1-9)

His attitudes concerning man's death, freedom, pre-
destination, and isolation are also reminiscent of atti-
tudes expressed in the earlier Cantos. For example,
death is a blessing in that it provides fertilizer for
nature, but, more importantly, it unites man with his
spirit and, consequently, is the only sure solution for
man's dualism:

And when, at length, the mind shall be all free
From what it hates in this degraded form,
Reft of its carnal life, save what shall be
Existent happier in the fly and work,--
And dust is as it should be, shall I not
Feel all I see less dazzling but more warm?
The bodiless thought? the spirit of each spot?
Of which, even now, I share at times the immortal lot?
(III.lxxiv.1-9)

One recalls that the narrator's chief concern
in the earlier Cantos was that of liberty. Although
such sentiments are not expressed as often in Canto III,
they remain unaltered: ". . . all that most endears/
Glory, is when the myrtle wreathes a Sword,/ Such as

Harmodius drew on Athens's tyrant Lord." (III.xx.7-9)

As the character of the narrator draws nearer to that of Childe Harold in Canto III, it is not surprising to observe his occasional affirmation of isolation. It is typical, however, that the narrator also considers the liabilities of a state of isolation:

Is it not better, then, to be alone,
And love Earth only for its earthly sake?

* * *

Is it not better thus our lives to wear,
Than join the crushing crowd, doomed to inflict or bear?
(III.lxxi.1-2;8-9)

But even this loneliness is preferable to living in society.

Although a majority of the narrator's observations in Canto III do relate to man, the above mentioned-- death, freedom, predestination, and isolation--constitute only a minor portion of his observations on man. He is chiefly a relator of information concerning man's dual nature. As Elledge notes, "The poems of Byron's second period (1816-1817)--The Prisoner of Chillon, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto III, and Manfred-- are basically organized by the theme of disparity between the sensuous and imaginative worlds . . ."126 This disparity is often referred to as the fire-clay

126W. Paul Elledge, Byron and the Dynamics of Metaphor, p. 10.

paradox,¹²⁷ and though it does, as Elledge observed, appear in other of Byron's works, it was first recorded by the poet in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.¹²⁸

The irony of existence for man is that, tiring of his environment, he can conceive of the spiritual, but he cannot attain to it in his mortal state. For example, the narrator, pondering the Alps, acknowledges the paradox: "All that expands the spirit, yet appals, / Gather around these summits, as to show / How Earth may pierce to Heaven, yet leave vain man below," (III.lxii. 7-9) Man's fate, when he tries to attain to the Spiritual in his mortal state, is only partial attainment, and he is left in a kind of limbo between the two worlds, looking down upon the hatred of mankind and up to the unattainable sublime:

. . . He who surpasses or subdues mankind,
Must look down on the hate of those below,
Though high above the Sun of Glory glow,
And far beneath the Earth and Ocean spread . . .
(III.xlv.3-6)

The narrator acknowledges the strivings of many men who sought to circumvent the fire-clay paradox and aspire to greatness. Their only reward was a possible smile in the Heavens:

¹²⁷Loc. cit.

¹²⁸Loc. cit.

They were gigantic minds, and their steep aim
 Was, Titan-like, on daring doubts to pile
 Thoughts which would call down thunder, and the flame
 Of Heaven again assailed--if Heaven, the while,
 On man and man's research could deign do more than
 smile.

(III.cv.5-9)

Nature is partially responsible for man's paradox as she allows man to be a part of nature or worldly matter and blesses him with the ability to comprehend the spiritual. This blessing is an incomplete one, however, because she does not allow him a means wherein he might physically attain to what he could mentally conceive:

. . . I can see
 Nothing to loathe in Nature, save to be
 A link reluctant in a fleshly chain,
 Classed among creatures, when the soul can flee,
 And with the sky--the peak--the heaving plain
 Of Ocean, or the stars, mingle--and not in vain.
 (III.lxxii.4-9)

Scholars have made various attempts to see in this passage the acquisition of a state of quasi-immortality by the narrator.¹²⁹ Obviously, such conclusions, at very best, collide with the narrator's character. The narrator proposes two solutions short of death for this paradox that may be implemented by man in his earthly state. The first is to eliminate the world of man and to become one with nature, ". . . true Wisdom's world will be/
 Within its own creation, or in thine,/ Maternal Nature!"
 (III.xlvi.1-3) However, the narrator contends that,

¹²⁹Joseph, op. cit., p. 77.

preferable to this mental escapism into nature, is the concealment by the spirit of all emotions:

Thus far have I proceeded in a theme
 Renewed with no kind auspices:--to feel
 We are not what we have been, and to deem
 We are not what we should be,--and to steel
 The heart against itself; and to conceal,
 With a proud caution, love, or hate, or aught,--
 Passion or feeling, purpose, grief, or zeal,--
 Which is the tyrant Spirit of our thought,
 Is a stern task of soul:--no matter,--it is taught.
 (III.cxi.1-9)

The ultimate solution, of course, is not of the world. Death is the ultimate solution. In death, man's yearnings after eternity can at last be accommodated, and man can become one with the spirit:

When elements to Elements conform,
 And dust is as it should be, shall I not
 Feel all I see less dazzling but more warm?
 The bodiless thought? the Spirit of each spot?
 Of which, even now, I share at times the immortal lot?
 (III.lxxiv.5-9)

Unlike the portrait of Harold--early and late essentially a portrait of self--the narrator's contemplations of self were non-existent in earlier Cantos. They are, rather, peculiar to Cantos III and IV. Basically, the narrator has assimilated the character of the Childe in I and II. The primary difference, the one that does not make the narrator a Byronic Hero per se, is that he does not attempt to blame his defeat on some clandestine sin. His fate is the result of his own inability. Hence, the most complete portrait of the narrator occurs

late in the Canto:

I have not loved the World, nor the World me;
 I have not flattered its rank breath, nor bowed
 To its idolatries a patient knee,
 Nor coined my cheek to smiles,--nor cried aloud
 In worship of an echo: in the crowd
 They could not deem me one of such--I stood
 Among them, but not of them--in a shroud
 Of thoughts which were not their thoughts, and still
 could,
 Had I not filed my mind, which thus itself subdued.

I have not loved the World, nor the World me,--
 But let us part fair foes; I do believe,
 Though I have found them not, that there may be
 Words which are things,--hopes which will not
 deceive,
 And Virtues which are merciful, nor weave
 Snares for the failing; I would also deem
 O'er others' griefs that some sincerely grieve--
 That two, or one, are almost what they seem,--
 That Goodness is no name--and Happiness no dream.
 (III.cxiii., cxiv.1-9)

Earlier, the narrator often analyzed himself, and his analyses certainly justify the dejection witnessed in the preceding Cantos. He found himself to be an unstable, hopeless wanderer. It is no wonder that so plagued by life, the narrator would desire the mental escapism earlier mentioned and the forgetfulness offered in the relating of the Canto to the reader.

He further suggests that the freedom granted by the romantic doctrine poisoned him. But, how he has changed, although he is ". . . still enough the same / In strength to bear what Time can not abate, / And feed on bitter fruits without accusing Fate." (III.vii.6-9)

It is this ability to accept the common fate of man without condemning those around him which characterizes the narrator in this Canto. Openly he recommends isolationism, but even in the depths of sorrow he admits, "To fly from, need not be to hate, mankind . . ." (III. lxix.1)

Coleridge states that in a letter to Murray, Byron suggests: "The Fourth Canto is not a continuation of the Third Subject-matter and treatment are alike new."¹³⁰ Many have speculated on the change, occasionally suggesting that, in eliminating the pattern of Canto III, Byron was admitting defeat.¹³¹ Such an argument is at best tedious. The new poem did depart markedly from the old, however, in the following respects: (1) Harold is totally absent,¹³² and (2) the Canto is plagued by innumerable insertions that tend to fragment the whole.¹³³ To eliminate the character of Harold must have caused Byron no small regret. He had tenaciously forged ahead with a portrayal of the Childe in the face of much critical disfavor. By the time

¹³⁰Coleridge, op. cit., p. 311.

¹³¹Joseph, op. cit., p. 75.

¹³²Rutherford, op. cit., p. 93.

¹³³Coleridge, op. cit., p. 313.

of the publication of Canto IV, however, in a letter to Hobhouse, Byron admitted Harold's discontinuation. He stated that he had tired of portraying a character that no one would accept and, although originally anxious to retain the character, he had abandoned Harold completely in Canto IV.¹³⁴

Although Byron's method of characterization is admittedly altered in this last Canto, the structure remains quite similar to that of Canto III. It abandons completely the travels of Belgium, Germany, and Switzerland, but centers instead on travels from Venice to Rome.¹³⁵ References, however, to Harold's character may be readily dispensed with, because the narrator alludes to him only on two occasions in the Canto. In the first reference, he notes that Harold has passed from the scene without fanfare; and in the second, he indicates that his task has been completed. These two references considered together indicate that Harold's task was life, a goal that is accomplished when he passes away. His only rewards, according to the narrator, have been those joys that nature has bestowed upon him.

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 323.

¹³⁵Rutherford, Byron: A Critical Study, p. 93.

The narrator's role, however, is much more complex. His primary object, here, as in Cantos I and II, is to describe, but now character traits and attitudes are expressed. They deal with the same matter as in earlier Cantos: man, self, love and nature.

The subject of mankind still occupies the majority of the observations. By examining the narrator's asides in Canto IV one concludes that the basic problem of Canto III, e.g., the paradox of dualism, still exists in the poem, but a crashing blow has been dealt the narrator because, for him, hope is dead:

We wither from our youth, we gasp away--
 Sick--sick; unfound the boon--unslaked the thirst,
 Though to the last, in verge of our decay,
 Some phantom lures, such as we sought at first . . .
 (IV.cxxiv.1-4)

The sense of the futility of existence is only heightened when the narrator realizes that neither man's greatest representatives nor his greatest accomplishments can escape final doom. Man's only accomplishment, in fact, is to pass his hereditary rage on to the next generation:

And thus they plod in sluggish misery,
 Rotting from sire to son, and age to age,
 Proud of their trampled nature, and so die,
 Bequeathing their hereditary rage . . .
 (IV.xciv.1-4)

Thus, the narrator surveys the history of mankind and finds it a failure and man a ". . . pendulum betwixt a smile and tear. . . ." (IV.cix.3) Man's life is equated

to a theatre in which the ". . . chief actors rot."
 (IV.cxxxix.9) The narrator further suggests that Fate alone is not totally responsible for man's deplorable situation, as the ". . . inhuman shout which hailed . . ." the slayer of a Gladiator insinuates. (IV.cxl.9) But, he notes that the Gods have been kind to undeserving man. They do not, at least, demand a reincarnation, and the fortunate find that ". . . Heaven gives its favourites--early death . . ." (IV.cii.6) Thus, short of the ultimate solution, man's only hope is that of mental escapism. It is by momentarily freeing the mind from the body that the basic problem of the dual nature of man can be solved.

The narrator in Canto IV, considers his own plight. In this respect, he, again, resembles the Childe of Cantos I and II, although he has also been seen contemplating self in Canto III. The conclusions that he draws are further reminiscent of another world-weary traveller in an earlier Canto. Still, he admits that his sorrows are self-wrought, not the result of clandestine sin or predestination; still, he laments his lot, crying to Heaven and Earth, ". . . Hear me, my mother Earth! behold it, Heaven! / Have I not had to wrestle with my lot? / Have I not suffered things to be forgiven?" (IV.cxxxv.2-4) On several occasions, he notes that hope is dead. But even more devastating than the death

of hope (a condition realized in Canto III) is the realization that there is no longer a need for it:

But could I gather from the wave-worn store
Enough hope for my rude boat, where should I steer?
There woos no home, nor hope, nor life, save what
is here.

(IV.cv.7-9)

The narrator never infers, as his fellow-traveller often does, that his fate is the result of external events, but in Canto IV he cannot resist a desire for vengeance, ". . . which shall yet be sought and found . . ."

(IV.cxxxiii.7)

Love still confuses him. Midway in the Canto, he admits that man (in his passion) is momentarily united with God, but in the remaining references he suggests that love exists only in the mind of man and that for he who loves in his mortal state: ". . . the cure / Is bitterer still, as charm by charm unwinds / Which robed our idols, and we see too sure / Nor Worth nor Beauty dwells from out the mind's / Ideal shape of such. . . ." (IV.cxxiii.1-5) One has noted, previously, that discrepancies such as the attitude toward love evidenced by the narrator in Canto IV were not uncommon in Byron's verses. This particular inconsistency may be explained by distinguishing between love and passion.

Once again, it is nature that meets with the narrator's approval in this, the final Canto. Following

a memorable passage in which he praises the attributes of nature, he concludes, ". . . I love not Man the less, but Nature more. . . ." (IV.clxxviii.5) His praise of nature in the final Canto is based upon two things: she is all powerful, and she is constant. Nature, too, is awarded the distinction of serving Byron as she once served Homer.¹³⁶ The narrator returns to the sea in the final stanza, just as Homer's Achilles returns to the sea in his moments of grief.

¹³⁶Coleridge, op. cit., p. 462.

CHAPTER IV

CHILDE HAROLD AND NARRATOR: DEFINING CHARACTER DIRECTION

In organizing and analyzing the characteristics of the chief characters in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, one is tempted to quote the words of Shiv K. Kumar: "His lordship was nothing if not inconsistent."¹³⁷ Byron's infamous inconsistencies, however, are primarily technical ones, for his characters follow rather consistent paths and, furthermore, arrive at their logical ends. Certainly, a work of the chronological breadth of Childe Harold may be excused occasional inconsistencies in its portrayal of major characters, and Byron exhibits occasional flaws of this magnitude. His errors of characterization, however, generally result from his awareness of the dualism in man's nature and ". . . his inability to be satisfied with any of the fashionable methods of bridging the gap. . . ." ¹³⁸

Considering the lesser of the two characters, Harold, one recalls his dominance of Canto's I and II. Within these Cantos he displays (1) an infatuation with self, and (2) lesser degrees of concern for society,

¹³⁷ Shiv K. Kumar, British Romantic Poets, p. 142.

¹³⁸ H. N. Fairchild, The Romantic Quest, p. 362.

nature and love.

His personage is presented as the epitome of ennui. His desires are satiated; his lineage is faded; his attempts to find true love have been thwarted. Some ominous sorrow plagues the wandering Childe, and his lot is complicated by the knowledge that his fate has been predestined. This early Childe seeks consolation in mankind and finds a Hell. In love, he discovers an illusion. Only nature offers constancy and beauty to the wanderer.

Canto III reveals an altered Harold. Although still a child of introspection, he is calmer, more tranquil. A major change in his attitude occurs in relation to nature. Once she was his only solace, but now she, too, has forsaken him. It is no small wonder that one detects the presence of nihilism:

Self-exhiled Harold wanders forth again,
With nought of Hope left--but with less of gloom;
The very knowledge that he lived in vain,
That all was over on this side the tomb,
Had made Despair a smilingness assume.

(III,xvi.1-5)

In contemplating mankind, Harold is first aware of man's essential flaw--e.g., dualism. He realizes that man's mortal state has doomed him. In love, he proves again that he has failed, for only vicarious and adolescent love can be supported by his satiated character. In brief, his character has shifted from what one scholar

has called an "exuberant romanticism"¹³⁹ to pessimism. Although certainly the victim of ennui in Cantos I and II, Harold's mood can rightly be deemed one of romantic exuberance because of the energy he displays--continually seeking--and the ever-present solace nature offers him.

As his career draws to a close, however, he is unable to seek God, rebuffed by nature, apart from man, and incapable of love. And so remains the wanderer, a just representation of Byron's prefatory remark:

. . . he never was intended as an example, further than to show, that early preversion of mind and morals lends to satiety of past pleasures and disappointment in new ones, and that even the beauties of nature and the stimulus of travel . . . are lost on a soul so constituted. . . .¹⁴⁰

The narrator's situation is more complex, and even harder to analyze. He is introduced as one whose chief concern is man and man's institutions. He finds no satisfaction with the Christian church and approves only of governments that grant freedom to the masses. He further sees hypocrisy and impermanence in man, but unlike Harold, he finds mere existence its own reward. In love, he finds the prize scarcely worth the cost, but in nature, he, as Harold of Cantos I and II, finds

¹³⁹Martin S. Day, History of English Literature 1660-1837, p. 394.

¹⁴⁰Coleridge, op. cit., p. 8.

constancy and kindness, even in wrath. Thus far, then, the narrator's attitudes may be differentiated from Harold's only in his belief that existence is its own reward and in his preoccupation with mankind as opposed to Harold's preoccupation with self.

Canto III presents the narrator as still preoccupied with mankind, but, here, his thoughts are colored by a gloomy pessimism that earlier characterized only Harold. Here, too, it is neither man's institutions nor man's liberty that occupy him, for he has become fascinated by the disparity between the mortal and immortal worlds. This clay-fire paradox consumes his intellectual energies throughout Canto III. He concludes that man's inability to attain to what he can imagine lies at the very heart of his unhappy existence on earth. Hence, he concludes that the ultimate solution is death. He finds that nature still reigns over man, but the paradox of existence supersedes a lengthy consideration of her.

To this point in the narrative, although the narrator has assumed many of the traditional poses of the Childe, he may still be readily identified as the narrator because he does not seek an exterior cause for his dualism, but is content to accept the blame himself. Furthermore, he continues to offer solutions:

mental escapism and death.

In Canto IV, he moves closer to the Harold figure of Canto III. It is, here, that he loses hope and views the history of man as a record of failure. These views, however, are pessimistic, not nihilistic, for still the narrator considers alternatives to man's paradox: mental escapism and death. He is weary, but admits that his woe is self-wrought and, finally turns, once again, to the solace and constancy of nature.

Harold, then, has moved from a state of romantic exuberance to one of extreme pessimism in his brief hour upon the stage. All has been lost on him, but not so on the narrator. The stronger character has survived self-knowledge and the pain of the human paradox, never yielding to a total suspension of belief. Certainly, he acquires, in Canto III, many of the pessimistic tendencies of his fellow traveller, but his unrelenting belief in solution, and his inability to find his torment as the result of man's actions or nature's, preclude a final categorizing of his state as pessimistic. His has been a movement from romantic exuberance through romantic pessimism and back to romantic exuberance. He has survived.

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