

**A Pilgrim of Historiography – Ivan Pregolato**

**A Pilgrim of Historiography: Byron and the  
Discourses of History in Early Nineteenth-Century  
Britain**

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**Abstract**

This thesis aims to understand Byron's *œuvre* in relation to the discourses of history in early nineteenth-century Britain. As a contribution to the historicist critical approaches of the past decades, my dissertation discusses the different ideas surrounding the concept of 'history' in the first two decades of the 1800s, a period marked by change. As shown, these discourses of history were notorious for their heterogeneity and, by analysing Byron's poetry and letters, it becomes evident that Byron engaged with these multiple interpretations as well. Roughly, three types of discourses of history are discussed below: the classical knowledge which was perpetuated in the educational system of the time and discussed in travelogues; the whig interpretation of history and the teleological concept of 'liberty' through time; and the idea of powerful forces that act 'behind' history, such as economics and the inseparability of power embedded in creating historical narratives. This thesis concludes that is impossible to speak of a single Byronic historical narrative and, rather, argues that Byron's texts espouse pluralistic conceptualisations of history.

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*To my mother*

*'A fila anda...'*

**Acknowledgements**

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**Abbreviations**

- CPW      *Lord Byron. The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980-93)
- BLJ      *Byron's Letters and Journals: The Complete and Unexpurgated Text of All the Letters Available in Manuscript and the Full Printed Version of All Others*, ed. by Leslie A. Marchand, 12 vols (London: John Murray, 1973-81)
- RSLPW    *Robert Southey: Later Poetical Works, 1811-1838*, ed. by Tim Fulford, Lynda Pratt, Rachel Crawford, Carol Bolton, Diego Saglia, Ian Packer and Daniel E. White, 4 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto Publishers, 2012)
- DNB      *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*  
<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/>>
- OED      *Oxford English Dictionary. OED Online*  
<<http://www.oed.com/>>

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Thus ceased she: and the mountain shepherds came,  
Their garlands sere, their magic mantles rent;  
  
The Pilgrim of Eternity, whose fame  
Over his living head like Heaven is bent,  
  
An early but enduring monument,  
Came, veiling all the lightning of his song  
  
In sorrow; from her wilds Ierne sent  
  
The sweetest lyrist of her saddest wrong,  
  
And Love taught Grief to fall like music from his tongue.

(Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Adonais*, XXX)<sup>1</sup>

There, in a moment, we may plunge our years  
In fatal penitence, and in the blight  
  
Of our own soul, turn all our blood to tears,  
And colour things to come with hues of Night;  
  
The race of life becomes a hopeless flight  
To those that walk in darkness: on the sea,  
  
The boldest steer but where their ports invite,  
  
But there are wanderers o'er Eternity  
  
Whose bark drives on and on, and anchored ne'er shall be.

(George Gordon Noel Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto III, LXX)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Complete Poetical Works of Shelley*, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson and corrected by G. M. Matthews (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 438.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Byron. *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980-93), II, 103; 662-70. All quotations from Byron's poetry, its annotations and editorial commentary are taken from McGann's edition, henceforth referenced (CPW, volume, page(s); poem's line number(s)).

**Introduction**

– The moment I could read – my grand passion was *history* – and why I know not. ('My Dictionary'. 1 May 1821)<sup>1</sup>

This is how Byron, musing in his journal in Ravenna, 1821, writes about history. The study of the past was, in his words, the first and foremost passion since he had learnt to read. Since the rise to prominence of historically-oriented criticism of Byron's life and works in the last three decades, much criticism has placed Byron in conjunction with 'history'. It has not always been so. Criticism in the first half of the twentieth century was dominated by a more formalist line of thought and, consequently, tended to neglect historical contexts in favour of poetic aesthetics. Much as John Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' (1820), which implies that art in its transcendental aspects trumps lived historical experience, this critical tradition was inclined to pay closer attention to the words on the page and delve into the intricacies of certain themes in detriment to minute historical analyses. As Jerome J. McGann argues, Byron's poetry cannot 'be adequately interpreted without bringing a fair amount of historical and biographical information to bear'.<sup>2</sup> As a result, Byron was mostly

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<sup>1</sup> *Byron's Letters and Journals: The Complete and Unexpurgated Text of All the Letters Available in Manuscript and the Full Printed Version of All Others*, ed. by Leslie A. Marchand, 12 vols (London: John Murray, 1973-81), VIII, 108. All quotations from Byron's correspondence and journals are taken from Marchand's edition, henceforth referenced as (BLJ, volume, page number(s)).

<sup>2</sup> Jerome J. McGann, *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 17.



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overlooked or accepted as an ‘anomaly’ in favour of his fellow canonical ‘Romantic’ poets: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley and Blake.

Byron’s poetical language, style and preoccupations differed from that which was deemed as ‘Romantic’ by the critics in those decades and, therefore, was perceived as an ill-fitting example. René Wellek (1903-95), for instance, placed Byron in a somewhat peripheral position within the critic’s conception of ‘Romanticism’. For him, what bound ‘Romanticism’ together were the following ‘three criteria’: ‘imagination for the view of poetry, nature for the view of the world, and symbol and myth for poetic style’.<sup>3</sup> Byron did ‘not share the romantic conception of imagination’, despite the ‘Wordsworthian stanzas’ in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* canto III.<sup>4</sup> T.S. Eliot’s (1888-1965) essay on the poet (1937) also dismissed Byron’s poetry from a formalist perspective:

Of Byron one can say, as of no other poet of his eminence, that he added nothing to the language, that he discovered nothing in the sounds, and developed nothing in the meaning, of individual words. I cannot think of any other poet of his distinction who might so easily have been an accomplished foreigner writing English. [...] Byron writes a dead or dying language.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> René Wellek, *Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 161.

<sup>4</sup> René Wellek, 'The Concept of "Romanticism" in Literary History: II. The Unity of European Romanticism', *Comparative Literature*, 1 (1949), 147-72 (p. 165).

<sup>5</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Byron', in *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), pp. 193-206 (pp. 200-01). For a good overview of Byron studies throughout the twentieth century, see Jane Stabler, *Byron* (Harlow: Longman, 1998), pp. 1-26.

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Byron's poetry was considered to be exceptionally verbose and, contrary to his 'Romantic' contemporaries, he had not delved into the beauties of language – 'symbol and myth for poetic style' as Wellek termed it – and, consequently, occupied an awkward position in the English canon for most romanticists up until the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> M. H. Abrams, for instance, in his seminal *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), mentions the poet only three times and is only interested, like Wellek before him, in quoting the poetry of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* canto III since it is, among Byron's compositions, the one that best matches Abrams's Wordsworthian/Coleridgean notion of 'Romanticism'.<sup>7</sup> In his *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971), he states: 'Byron I omit altogether; not because I think him a lesser poet than the others but because in his greatest work he speaks with an ironic counter-voice and deliberately opens a satirical perspective on the vatic stance of his Romantic contemporaries'.<sup>8</sup> Given the heterogeneous conceptualisations of 'Romanticism', the terms 'Romantic' and 'Romanticism' are presented in inverted commas throughout the thesis for it mostly refers to

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<sup>6</sup> For formalist readings of Byron before the advent of 'new historicism' (discussed below), see, for example, Michael Kennedy Joseph, *Byron the Poet* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1964); Robert F. Gleckner, *Byron and the Ruins of Paradise* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1967); Jerome J. McGann, *Fiery Dust: Byron's Poetic Development* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968).

<sup>7</sup> M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 347, n77.

<sup>8</sup> M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), p. 13.

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the historical period in question rather than a single unifying trend in the literature of the late 1700s-early 1800s.<sup>9</sup>

Byron's position as an ill-fitting example within 'Romanticism' has changed from the early 1980s onwards with the advent and rise to prominence of a series of historicist readings of literature. Critics started emphasising historical contexts alongside literary writings. A pioneering work is Carl Woodring's *Politics in English Romantic Poetry* (1970) which argues that political concern is more important 'as a generative force and an argumentative presence in the romantic movement in England, and in major poems of that movement, than one could gather from most criticism of the last fifty years'.<sup>10</sup> It was only in the following decades, however, that literary criticisms similar to Woodring's gained momentum in 'romantic' studies.<sup>11</sup> Instead of dealing with the words on the page as if they could be detached from their socio-historical formation, literary texts are perceived as always-already formed/forming the very contexts in which they are included.<sup>12</sup> Due to this change in literary scholarship in the past decades, Byron studies rose to a more prominent and less precarious position in the field of 'Romantic' studies. This change was part

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<sup>9</sup> Jerrold E. Hogle, 'Romanticism and the "Schools" of Criticism and Theory', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. by Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 1-33 (pp. 1-3).

<sup>10</sup> Carl Woodring, *Politics in English Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Another early work which differs from the formalism *en vogue* at the time is Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background 1776-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

<sup>12</sup> See pp. 24-37 below for a discussion of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism.

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of a much broader shift in attitudes and methodologies which enlarged the field far beyond the canonical 'big six' by including women writers, labouring authors and works of prose. The latest edition of Duncan Wu's *Romanticism: An Anthology*, albeit still guided by the poetry of the old canon, includes forty-two authors, spanning from Richard Price (1723-1791) to Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861).<sup>13</sup> Not only has the field of 'Romanticism' been enlarged to include hitherto neglected authors but also its historical timespan has been extended. This has led to a better understanding of 'Romanticism' not only concerning its interpretation but also its participation in the larger cultural environment of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and beyond.

The 'Wordsworthian' stanzas of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* canto III, traditionally interpreted as Byron's quest for 'Romantic' escapism, are a good example for illustrating this change in critical perception. Within a historicist interpretation, they are read as deeply engaged with the post-Waterloo political landscape.<sup>14</sup> Hoagwood argues that Byron did not shift towards the 'Romantic' themes as postulated by Abrams and others, but rather transposed historically-specific references into a 'symbolic register' (Hoagwood, 'Historicity', pp. 93-94). Mountains, for instance, are personified in terms of monarchical power (CPW, II, 100; 590-98) and a storm is depicted in warlike terms:

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<sup>13</sup> *Romanticism: An Anthology*, ed. by Duncan Wu, 4th edn (Chichester: Wiley, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Terence Allan Hoagwood, 'Historicity and Scepticism in the Lake Geneva Summer', *Byron Journal*, 19 (1991), 90-103 (p. 90).

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Now, where the quick Rhone thus hath cleft his way,  
The mightiest of the storms hath ta'en his stand:  
For here, not one, but many, make their play,  
And fling their thunder-bolts from hand to hand,  
Flashing and cast around: of all the band,  
The brightest through these parted hills hath fork'd  
His lightnings, – as if he did understand,  
That in such gaps as desolation work'd,  
There the hot shaft should blast whatever therein lurk'd.  
(CPW, II, 111; 887-95)

These nature verses are not Byron's experimentation with an escapist register, but rather 'laboriously loaded [...] symbols with iconographic political content' (Hoagwood, 'Historicity', p. 99). Read in that light, the poem does not solely describe the sublime aspects of nature but also metaphorically engages with the events of the Napoleonic Wars and their aftermath.

However, what has remained underdeveloped in this new historicist change in Byron studies is the conception of 'history' in itself as it emerges through his *œuvre*. The historicisation of Byron's work has focused on his life and works from a myriad of perspectives, but the discipline of history in itself has not been thoroughly analysed from the perspective of the Byronic texts. This thesis seeks to answer questions such as 'what did Byron mean by "history"?' and 'what guiding assumptions were taken for granted by the poet and his contemporaries when writing historically?' As will become clear, the

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search for a single notion of a 'Byronic' conceptualisation or understanding of history branches out into many directions which juxtapose and often contradict one another. This complexity in historical thought is the result of the status of 'history' as an academic discipline in the early nineteenth century: still seeking to establish itself in Western thought amidst the social upheavals of the time.

Caroline Franklin called upon future work to be done on this subject in her essay 'Byron and History' (2007):

Instead of either assuming that literary works directly reflect the time in which they were written, or taking the present as a fixed point of reference by which to measure or judge past texts, the best new historicist work understands both texts and our own critical response to them as discrete processes of imagining or reinventing the past which should be compared and contrasted. So future studies could pay some attention to Byron's own historicism and the relationship between his poetry and the romantic historiography of his time.<sup>15</sup>

This very topic was the subject of the annual International Byron Conference which took place in 2009. The topic is, as the papers presented at the conference demonstrated, extremely vast and subject to countless lines of enquiry, ranging from Byron's personal histories to the relationship between

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<sup>15</sup> Caroline Franklin, 'Byron and History', in *Palgrave Advances in Byron Studies*, ed. by Jane Stabler (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 81-105 (p. 85).

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his existentialism and Heideggerian hermeneutics.<sup>16</sup> That conference marked the outset of the present thesis.<sup>17</sup> A topic which constantly appeared in the papers presented was the impossibility of approaching the poet's life and works as if he espoused a clearly-established notion of 'history'. On the contrary, the Byronic texts are marked by a plurality of historiographical notions, which oftentimes voiced contradictory points of view. This thesis analyses Byron's writings in relation to the fragmented discursive environment in which he is inserted.

### The discourses of history

Following Foucault, Stephen Bann has argued that the social upheavals of the late 1700s and early 1800s engendered a deep 'desire for history' in all aspects of social life in Europe.<sup>18</sup> The historical mentality we possess is 'the product of the Romantic period, when the whole range of our contemporary concerns

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<sup>16</sup> For a summary of all of the conference activities, see Andrew Stauffer and Maria Schoina, 'The 35th International Byron Society Conference: "Lord Byron and History" 6-13 September 2009 Messolonghi and Athens', *The Byron Journal*, 38 (2010), 62-70.

<sup>17</sup> Ivan Pregolato, 'Ancient Greece in the Byronic Text: *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* Canto II and the Idea(s) of History in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain', in *The Place of Lord Byron in World History: Studies in His Life, Writings, and Influence: Selected Papers from the 35th International Byron Conference*, ed. by Nic Panagopoulos and Maria Schoina (London: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012), pp. 79-87. This paper was also expanded and published as an article: Ivan Pregolato, 'The Historical Discourse(s) of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*: Classical Fetish and Whiggism', *Working with English: Medieval and Modern Language, Literature and Drama*, 6 (2010) 46-61.

<[http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/~aezweb/working\\_with\\_english/6/pregolato\\_2010.pdf](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/~aezweb/working_with_english/6/pregolato_2010.pdf)> [accessed 1 December 2014]

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Bann, *Romanticism and the Rise of History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), p. 5; Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002). Foucault delineates the 'outer limits' of this shift in historical thinking between 'the years 1775 and 1825', p. 239.

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with the past first became accessible to representation’ (Bann, p. 5). Conceptualisations of history underwent profound changes in a relatively short period of time. The consequences were not only the historicisation of human experience, but also the self-conscious realisation that the writing of the past is in itself subject to social processes which are far from neutral and self-evident. James Chandler has argued in *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* that such a change in historical mentality happened at some point between the 1790s and the Battle of Waterloo (1815). The texts from the 1700s, he maintains, tended to ‘distinguish [themselves] in terms of threshold distinctions – reason/passion, liberty/slavery, state of nature/state of civil society, nature/second nature’ while those after 1815 tended to grasp more materialist notions: ‘historical movements, historical necessities, epochs, and formations’.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, there is a transition towards a self-consciously historical mentality which is more sophisticated and sceptical of its own self-representations. These trends in the history of European thought would later give birth to a more self-perceived ‘scientific’ ethos to the discipline, with French Positivism and the Marxist historical materialism being two prominent examples. This thesis roughly follows this chronological shift in historical attitudes, as the first chapters deal with Byron’s engagements with received historical knowledge whilst the latter ones approach the poet’s self-conscious and critical attitudes

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<sup>19</sup> James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 25.



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to the writing of history in itself. What follows is a series of studies of ‘history’ as undertaken via Byron’s poetry, letters and miscellaneous prose. This thesis seeks to evidence some themes which appear in the texts written by the poet and, searching within its historical context, to outline how Byron at times corroborates or opposes the diverse historiographical attitudes of his epoch.

The historicist traditions that inform this thesis stem from the theories of discourse as proposed by Foucault and his successors, such as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. As Foucault put it:

The question posed by language analysis of some discursive fact or other is always: according to what rules has a particular statement been made, and consequently according to what rules could other similar statements be made? The description of the events of discourse poses quite a different question: how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?<sup>20</sup>

The methodological approach here espoused is to analyse the discourses of history in the early nineteenth century by reading Byron’s texts in light of the discursive formations which surround/form/feed into it/them. ‘Byron’ is not the point from which a certain idea of history emanates, but rather the point where the notions of history converge and/or overlap. However, this is not to say that ‘Byron’ is passively determined by the discursive practices with which

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<sup>20</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge 2002), p. 30.

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he engaged. On the contrary, his writings constantly show his individual criticism of the historiographical discourses that he employed. As Paul Smith argues:

The symbolic realm, the *place* where we are in language and in social formations and which is also the *process* whereby we fit into them, *constructs* the ideological. In that sense, to regard resistance to ideology as anything but a *by-product* of the ideological itself must be to posit some kind of innate human capacity that could over-ride or transcend the very conditions of understanding and calculation – indeed of social existence. Resistance does take place, but it takes place only within a social context which has already construed subject-positions for the human agent. The place of that resistance has, then, to be glimpsed somewhere in the interstices of the subject-positions which are offered in any social formation. More precisely, resistance must be regarded as the by-product of contradictions in and among subject-positions. The subject/individual can be discerned but not by the supposition of some quasi-mystical will-to-resistance. What I propose, then, is that resistance is best understood as a specific twist in the dialectic between individuation and ideological interpellation.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 25. Emphases in the original.

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Byron's critical engagements with the discourses of history in the early nineteenth century are examples of these 'by-products of contradictions' within discursive practices. By embracing the pluralistic and complex discursive environment of historical thinking in the early 1800s, one can better comprehend the poet's contradictory positions inasmuch as his texts also indelibly participate in the creation of historical knowledge. Those 'interstices of the subject-positions' within Byron's writings explain how he could, for instance, uphold the study of classical civilisations whilst simultaneously rebuking his contemporaries for paying too much attention to ancient Greece in detriment to the country's woes under Ottoman rule in the 1800s (see pp. 111-19 below).

The discourse methodology here engaged with is not related to the 'discourse analysis' which 'is commonly applied to the linguistic techniques utilized in more or less formal descriptions of the different discursive forms used in communication'.<sup>22</sup> Rather, this thesis's close readings of Byron's poetry and prose are always informed by the historical context rather than a linguistic approach to the texts themselves.<sup>23</sup> Foucault defined discourse in *The*

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<sup>22</sup> Jacob Torfing, *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe, and Žižek* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 11-12.

<sup>23</sup> For the 'more or less formal' discourse analyses not used in this thesis, see, for example, Gillian Brown and George Yule, *Discourse Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Oxford: Wiley, 1993); Adam Jaworski and Nikolas Coupland, eds, *The Discourse Reader*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2006); or Teun A. van Dijk, *Discourse & Power* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). This is not to say that these completely ignore social context (especially Critical Discourse Analysis), but these approaches tend to

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*Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) as ‘a group of statements (*énoncés*)’ that belong to a somewhat loosely formed (but obeying its own complex hierarchical logic) ‘discursive formation’:

[Discourse] is made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined. Discourse in this sense is not an ideal, timeless form that also possesses a history; the problem is not therefore to ask oneself how and why it was able to emerge and become embodied at this point in time; it is, from beginning to end, historical – a fragment of history, a unity and discontinuity in history itself, posing the problem of its own limits, its divisions, its transformations, the specific modes of its temporality rather than its sudden irruption in the midst of the complicities of time (*Archaeology*, p. 131).

Discourse is the always-already historical groupings of notions which qualify and delimit a certain aspect of lived experience: for example, the notions surrounding life and its discourses of medicine and biology; the notions surrounding wealth and its discourses of economy and money; the notions of time, the past and lived human experiences and its intrinsic discourses of history. Discourse is the historical and ever-changing groupings of statements.

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emphasise the linguistic aspects of language and power rather than the socio-historical.

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It is not only a linguistic category but historically consisted and embedded in relations of power.

Following Foucault's work from a post-Marxist point of view, Laclau and Mouffe succinctly defined discourse in the 1980s as '[t]he structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice'.<sup>24</sup> As they argue:

[...] [T]he material character of discourse cannot be unified in the experience or consciousness of a founding subject; on the contrary, diverse *subject positions* appear dispersed within a discursive formation. [...] [T]he practice of articulation, as fixation/dislocation of a system of differences, cannot consist of purely linguistic phenomena; but must instead pierce the entire material density of the multifarious institutions, rituals and practices through which a discursive formation is structured (Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, p. 109).

It is these 'diverse subject positions' that appear in the Byronic texts which this thesis discusses. The studies presented below of the 'multifarious institutions' show the great complexity in defining the concepts of history in early nineteenth-century Britain. Foucault defined a discursive practice as 'a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or

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<sup>24</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), p. 105.

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linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function' (*Archaeology*, p. 131). These 'conditions of operation' of a certain discourse are bound by a series of complex power relations: 'discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized'.<sup>25</sup> What follows is an attempt to trace how competing conceptualisations of 'history' in the early 1800s manifest themselves in a constant power struggle throughout the poet's *œuvre* via his own interpretations and authorial position in relation to them.

Drawing from the conceptualisation of 'discourse' as outlined above, the current thesis aims to comprehend the historiographical discourses of the 1800s-1820s by utilising Byron's *œuvre* as the focal point where numerous discourses converge. The present thesis focuses, most specifically, on the idea of history *in itself*, the notion of what history as a discipline and field of knowledge *is* and its subsequent *writing*. What is here discussed is the poet's engagement with the myriad historiographical discourses and their often elusive social habitat – formal education, political affiliation, interpretation of contemporary events – and how these diverse notions of history are discussed/appropriated/metamorphosed throughout Byron's verses, letters and other writings.

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<sup>25</sup> Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. by Robert Young (London: Routledge, 1981), pp. 48-78 (pp. 52-53).

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Inasmuch as the elusive historiographical discourses of his epoch are concerned, Byron's *œuvre* refuses to be entirely pigeonholed into one cohesive discourse, but rather voices a series of divergent discourses. The Byronic poetic voice is, as quoted in the epigrams at the onset of this thesis, a '[wanderer] o'er Eternity | Whose bark drives on and on' (CPW, II, 103; 669-70), but he does not utter a singular and monolithic historiographical discourse. Nor are his writings, as implied by Shelley's 'Pilgrim of Eternity', the outcome of a characteristic 'Romantic' ethos that envisions the writing subject as if inhabiting a place outside/above history. Rather, Byron's works are here read with regards to the poet's grounded position in relation to a myriad of historiographical debates, as he is never 'anchored' to a specific discourse. The poet is, to pun on Shelley's words, a Pilgrim of Historiography. This 'pilgrimage' is not destined to arrive at an 'essential' understanding of the discipline of history, but is an enduring, endless, 'boldest steer [...] on the sea' (CPW, II, 103; 667-68), which visits the discontinuous and dissonant 'harbours' of historiographical discourses.

### **Historicist readings**

This thesis is staunchly informed by a historicist standpoint. The texts written by Byron's pen – poems, letters and miscellaneous prose – are read in relation to the historical background against which they were written. However, this relationship between 'text' and 'context' is not a merely reflective and self-evident one. The text does not simply mirror the historical events and practices

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which surround it. Nor do historians or literary critics neutrally see in the texts the ‘truth’ of the past as they read them from their own historical standpoint in the present. As Paul Hamilton has summarised, historicism is guided by a ‘double focus’. Firstly, historicism ‘is concerned to situate any statement – philosophical, historical, aesthetic or whatever – in its historical context. Secondly, it typically doubles back on itself to explore the extent to which any historical enterprise inevitably reflects the interests and bias of the period in which it was written’.<sup>26</sup> When approaching the past with a historicist frame of mind, one is always suspicious of what the past tells, given how ‘[historicism] offers up both its past and its present for ideological scrutiny’ (Hamilton, p. 3). In other words, the text analysed does not possess a self-evident ‘hidden message’ which the historian/literary critic can ‘discover’ and unveil. Also, his/her analysis is always-already imbued with the issues and questions of his/her historical present.

Critics have analysed two movements within literary studies which exemplify this theoretical background: New Historicism and Cultural Materialism.<sup>27</sup> They both ‘refuse to see literary texts against an overriding background of history or to see history as a set of facts outside the written

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<sup>26</sup> Paul Hamilton, *Historicism* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> The former is mostly associated with the work of Stephen Greenblatt in Renaissance studies and the latter with the work of Raymond Williams in cultural studies. See Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012) (first published 1980) and Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).



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text'.<sup>28</sup> As much as 'history' is the narrative of the past and possesses an intrinsic aspiration to purport what has been in its 'truthfulness', it is always transmitted by language and its material 'textualness'. There can be no separation between the 'text' and the 'context', but rather an amalgam of the two which is linguistically transmitted through the passing of time. In short, 'history is not objective knowledge which can be made to explain a literary text' and literature 'is not [...] simply a medium for the expression of historical knowledge. It is an active part of a particular historical moment' (Brannigan, p. 3):

[T]he object of study is not the text and its context, not literature and its history, but rather literature *in* history. This is to see literature as a constitutive and inseparable part of history in the making, and therefore rife with creative forces, disruptions and contradictions of history (pp. 3-4).

It is these 'creative forces, disruptions and contradictions' which have inspired a series of studies guided by a historicist standpoint. It is these plural liaisons between the historically-grounded experience with its set of discourses and ideologies and the literary text which historicist approaches seek to understand. Raymond Williams classifies as 'structures of feeling' the complex relationship between already established structures (e.g. the ideological and

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<sup>28</sup> John Brannigan, *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998), p. 3. For a selection of relevant texts, see Kiernan Ryan (ed.), *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism: A Reader* (London: Arnold, 1996).

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the socio-economical) and the actual lived experience of the 'I'. According to him, the 'structure of feeling' occurs when the 'I' articulates its position against those established structures. This articulatory moment happens before such cultural experiences are appropriately turned into the 'past' by socially lived and intellectually absorbed experiences:

It is not only that we must go beyond formally held and systematic beliefs, though of course we have always to include them. It is that we are concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, and the relations between these and formal or systematic beliefs are in practice variable (including historically variable), over a range from formal assent with private dissent to the more nuanced interaction between selected and interpreted beliefs and acted and justified experiences (Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 132).

The discursive 'fissures' in the conceptualisations of history in the early nineteenth century which are read here in Byron's verses and prose can be read as a 'structure of feeling'. The poet's 'nuanced interaction[s]' with the always fragmented and overlapping historiographical discourses of his times are constant throughout his works and each chapter below deals with one of those discourses in a clearer focus.

Within 'Romantic' studies, the historicist turn is mostly associated with Jerome McGann's *The Romantic Ideology* (1983). The book's main

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argument is that it is necessary to investigate how ‘Romanticism’ and ‘Romantic poetry’ in general had been hitherto studied while its own ‘self-definitions’ have been taken for granted. The study of ‘Romanticism’ was perceived in the early 1980s by McGann as a fossilised formalist line of thought which interpreted the movement’s notions as ahistorical, as if the poet could transcend his/her context through the power of literature. On the contrary, McGann’s thesis is that ‘Romantic characterizations – both artistic and critical – can be usefully studied by placing them in a critical context which attempts to understand them in terms other than their own self-definitions’.<sup>29</sup> His aim is to go beyond the formalist methodological point of view of approaching ‘Romantic’ texts by emphasising an openly historical criticism:

[A]rtistic products, whatever they may be formally, are materially and existentially social, concrete, and unique. Consequently, the study of such products must be carried out through a socio-historical framework which equally takes into account the human history of criticism and scholarship – those media by which culture maintains and reproduces the works which it inherits from the past  
(*Romantic Ideology*, p. ix)

McGann’s intention was to open up ‘an historical methodology to literary studies’ and better perceive ‘how literary criticism is involved with ideology,

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<sup>29</sup> Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. ix.

and how it might find the means for achieving a critical distance, however provisional, from its own ideological investments' (pp. ix, x). This 'ideology' is the accepted generalisation that 'Romanticism' is governed by the commonplaces of 'imagination for the view of poetry, nature for the view of the world, and symbol and myth for poetic style' (p. 18). On the contrary, McGann argued that the 'Romantic' age was marked by a heterogeneity in terms of its discourses; both with regards to literary notions of the time and the larger socially and culturally accepted norms.<sup>30</sup> This thesis differs from McGann's seminal work inasmuch as it does not follow his Marxian analysis of literature. Rather, though also informed by a preoccupation with the historical conditions and their inevitable relation to the flourishing of literary works, the current thesis works with more fluid, fragmented and pluralistic notions of power. Instead of embracing a somehow all-embracing conceptualisation of 'ideology', this thesis is informed by a post-Foucauldian tradition of discourse analysis. These power relations in the conceptualisation of 'history' are plural

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<sup>30</sup> For a critique of McGann's theses, see Richard Cronin, *The Politics of Romantic Poetry: In Search of the Pure Commonwealth*, Romanticism in Perspective (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 6-9. However, McGann's more recent work is more attentive to the themes of 'Romantic' transcendence. See, for instance, Jerome J. McGann, 'Byron's Lyric Poetry', in *The Cambridge Companion to Byron*, ed. by Drummond Bone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 209-23 and Jerome J. McGann, 'General Analytical and Historical Introduction', in *Byron and Romanticism*, ed. by James Soderholm (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1-18. For a more recent appraisal and critique of New Historicism in 'Romantic' studies, see Damian Walford Davies, ed., *Romanticism, History, Historicism: Essays on an Orthodoxy* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2009), pp. 1-13.

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and each chapter discusses a diverse aspect of the discourses of history in early nineteenth-century Britain and Byron's relation to them.

These changes in perception of the 'Romantic' period are not only concerned with the literature of the traditional 'big six' of the 'Romantic' canon, but also the various writers unearthed by historically-oriented scholars since then.<sup>31</sup> In fact, understanding of the field has dramatically changed with the renaissance of historicist approaches. Moving beyond the male-oriented canon of the six main 'Romantic' authors and analysing the reading culture of the period, it is evident that the literary market from 1780 to 1830 was dominated by women writers. Not only that, but ten out of the twelve best-selling authors from the 1790s onwards were women.<sup>32</sup> If the works of Charlotte Smith (1749-1806), Anna Barbauld (1743-1825), Anna Seward (1742-1809), Hannah More (1745-1833), Mary Tighe (1772-1810), Mary Robinson (1756/1758?-1800), Felicia Hemans (1793-1835), Letitia Landon (1802-1838), Elizabeth Inchbald (1753-1821), Hannah Cowley (1743-1809) and Joanna Baillie (1762-1851) are read and studied again today, it is in large part due the

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<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, Jane Stabler, *Burke to Byron, Barbauld to Baillie, 1790-1830* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Alan Liu, *Wordsworth, the Sense of History* (Stanford University Press, 1989); Keith G. Thomas, 'Coleridge, Wordsworth and the New Historicism: "Chamouny; the Hour before Sun-Rise. A Hymn" and Book 6 of "The Prelude"', *Studies in Romanticism*, 33 (1994), 81-117; Kenneth Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth* (London: W.W. Norton, 1998); William H. Galperin, *Historical Austen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

<sup>32</sup> Anne K. Mellor and Susan J. Wolfson, 'Romanticism, Feminism, History, Historicism: A Conversation', in *Romanticism, History, Historicism: Essays on an Orthodoxy*, ed. by Damian Walford Davies (London: Taylor & Francis, 2009), pp. 143-62 (pp. 143-44). For print runs of works from a range of authors in the 'Romantic' age, see Appendix 9 in William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 578-664.

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revisionism of New Historicism allied to the technological advances which facilitated the access to historical texts (Mellor and Wolfson, pp. 146-47).<sup>33</sup>

New Historicism had a major impact on Byron studies. Malcolm Kelsall's *Byron's Politics* (1987) sought to comprehend the poet's political sympathies by historicising Byron's involvement with the Whigs and their politics during his lifetime. The poet was the inheritor of the ideals laid down by the 'patrician Whigs, the revolutionaries of 1688 to whose order by rank, if not directly by wealth or birth, he belonged'.<sup>34</sup> According to the whiggish tradition, human history consists of the temporal development of 'liberty'. Kelsall's 'whiggish Byron' is discussed in chapters 3 and 4 below. Of particular importance is his insight that Byron voices a series of 'contradictions' in attempting to tackle the events he witnessed. As Kelsall has shown, the whig interpretation of history as espoused by the poet finds its own limitations amidst the texts themselves. In the stanzas dealing with the rise and fall of Napoleon in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* canto IV, for instance, it is evident how Byron attempts and fails to explain the new (embodied by Napoleon as the champion of historical 'liberty' into a tyrant) within an old discursive paradigm

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<sup>33</sup> For a compendium of historiography written by women writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Gary Kelly, 'Romanticism and the Feminist Uses of History', in *Romanticism, History, Historicism: Essays on an Orthodoxy*, ed. by Damian Walford Davies (London: Taylor & Francis, 2009), pp. 163-81. For Byron's influence on women's literature in the 1800s, see Caroline Franklin, *The Female Romantics: Nineteenth-Century Women Novelists and Byronism* (London: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>34</sup> Malcolm Kelsall, *Byron's Politics* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987), p. 2.

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of acritical historical meliorism.<sup>35</sup> As Kelsall argues, it is a ‘problem of new wine in old bottles’, since [t]he force and complexity of events cannot be contained in the old paradigm’ (*Byron’s Politics*, p. 69). His readings of Byron in relation to his Whig political sympathies and its accepted historiographical tradition is of utmost importance when studying the discourses of history during his lifetime and certainly plays a great part in the current thesis.

More recent historicist works have dealt with Byron’s works from diverse points of view. Jane Stabler’s *Byron, Poetics, and History* approaches the historicity of the reading public during the poet’s lifetime and how these ‘networks of anticipated and actual reading responses affected Byron’s texts at the time of composition and publication’:

[I]n the process of reading, we tend to experience texts as the author’s contemporary (whereas when we reflect critically on them, we place them historically). That experience of contemporaneousness and historical difference is one of the most distinctive qualities of reading Byron.<sup>36</sup>

Byron’s ‘poetics of digression’, a concept though mostly formulated with the aim of better understanding the aesthetics of the Byronic and their

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<sup>35</sup> For Byron’s ambivalent attitudes to Napoleon, see Simon Bainbridge, ‘Staging History: Byron and Napoleon, 1813-4’, in *Napoleon and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 134-52.

<sup>36</sup> Jane Stabler, *Byron, Poetics, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 9.

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composition and reception in the early 1800s, reaches a conclusion concomitant to the present thesis: that his writing ‘resists the totalising discourse of any theoretical model’ (Stabler, *Poetics*, p. 17). The Byronic text resists being read as a facile example of a single historiographical discourse in the early 1800s, as shown throughout this thesis. Stabler’s work presents a historically-informed analysis of the poetical aesthetics in Byron’s poetry. Her historicisation of Byron differs from the current thesis due to her emphasis on Byron’s formal receptions and the poet’s writing style. Stabler’s historicisation is mostly focussed on the historical context of Byron’s reading public.

Stephen Cheeke’s *Byron and Place* also tackles Byron’s work in a historicist manner. Cheeke is interested in the poet’s experiences when he was physically present in the famous historical locations which he rendered in his compositions. *Byron and Place* discusses the sort of historical knowledge which Byron could obtain by his physical presence in those places.<sup>37</sup> Cheeke also perceives the impossibility of speaking of Byron being guided by one historiographical ‘theory’:

The sheer force of Byron’s “grand passion” [history] distinguishes him from other writers of the period with the exception perhaps of Sir Walter Scott, but its tendency to take different forms, its tendency indeed to emerge as

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<sup>37</sup> Stephen Cheeke, *Byron and Place: History, Translation, Nostalgia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 7.



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passion rather than system may obscure any sense of an overarching theory (Cheeke, p. 10).

Indeed, it is possible to speak of a series of Byronic senses of history depending on the texts the literary critic/historian chooses to consult. Cheeke enumerates three diverse ones: the ‘deeply pessimistic’ and gloomy Byron – a reading which emerges from a biographical point of view – Kelsall’s Whig Byron and a ‘Gibbonesque’ version of Byron’s sense of ‘repetition, fatalism, and patterns of decline’ (p. 10). However, despite the poet’s negative characterisations of history in its abstract form (‘the grand liar’ in *Don Juan*, IX; 644 and the ‘History, with all her volumes vast, | Hath but *one* page [...]’, *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, IV; 968-9), the poet’s relationship to the material sources and documents of the past paints it as a rather ‘vital’ history and not a ‘moribund’ one (p. 11). Byron’s relationship to history in its documentary form is always one of deference, as he constantly seeks to present himself to his readers as an accurate source on the events and places he writes about. Cheeke describes his study as ‘the delineation of a life story, or a topo-biographical study’ (p. 13). The current thesis, on the other hand, is interested not as much in the poet’s biography (although it is also mentioned at points when it is deemed as relevant to the historical context) but rather the discursive environment in which he wrote and published in the early nineteenth century. The theme of Byron’s visits to the historical spots and their subsequent renditions in the verses is analysed in chapter two below. Furthermore, this thesis argues that Byron’s gloomy and fatalistic historical despair is a consequence of his

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disillusionment with the historical whiggism of his historical epoch. It is no wonder that these nihilist sentiments are voiced mostly in Byron's post-Waterloo verses, a period which saw the return of autocratic and gerontocratic regimes in Europe (see chapters 3 and 4 below).

Carla Pomarè in *Byron and the Discourses of History* seeks to comprehend the diverse discourses of history in the early 1800s and how these can be read in relation to Byron. She also rejects the concept of *one* sort of history which the poet might have endorsed, but rather 'stress[es] the notion that Byron's engagement with history is situated at a time when a plurality of historical discourses were being articulated, corresponding to a plurality of historiographical practices'.<sup>38</sup> This is evidenced by 'his concrete use of both the materials provided by historical narrations and the epistemological models accompanying them' (Pomarè, p. 2). Also analysing the discursive practices in the early 1800s, Pomarè calls attention to the relationship between 'Byron's writings and historiographical texts':

[Historiographical texts are] considered not only as a source of the historical information he cherished so much, but also as models from which he drew textual practices that were to become trademarks of his production, that is, the massive use of footnotes and paratextual matter that is one of the focuses of my approach (p. 2).

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<sup>38</sup> Carla Pomarè, *Byron and the Discourses of History* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), p. 3.

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Pomarè's study reads the poetical text as part of the much larger cultural ('textual') reality where the conceptualisations of history dynamically clash, corroborate and contradict each other. This positions Pomarè's work, in contrast to this thesis's emphasis on Byron's poetry, alongside critical work which focuses on the 'romantic' paratext.<sup>39</sup> Drawing from Ann Rigney's work, Pomarè considers Byron to be important in the historiographical debates of the period for his 'use of history escapes this impending crystallization [of the burgeoning nationalistic historical narratives as argued by Rigney] and reflects instead the fluidity of the historical universe of his time, which makes it imperative to recover multiple "modes of discourse"' which can be read in the poet's writings: his verses, the miscellaneous prose and his letters (p. 4).<sup>40</sup> Being no historian, the poet was 'unbothered by methodological considerations' though he paid heed to a few tenets of history, such as authority and accuracy (Pomarè, p. 4). Pomarè states that 'Byron's insistence on facts may be a source of some embarrassment' for those in the twenty-first century, given how 'history' after the 'linguistic turn' was shown to be a narrative of the past rather than the authoritative 'truth' of what has happened (p. 5).<sup>41</sup> As a result, the present thesis shares with Pomarè the use of inverted

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<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, Ourania Chatsiou, 'Robert Southey's 'Old Curiosity-Shops': 'Common-Placing' and Paratext', *Working with English*, 4 (2008) and Alex Watson, *Romantic Marginality: Nation and Empire on the Borders of the Page* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012).

<sup>40</sup> Ann Rigney, *Imperfect Histories: The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> As examples of works which discuss the 'linguistic turn' in historical writing, see Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*,

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commas when dealing with Byron's historical 'facts' in order 'to keep a safe distance from the naïveté of positing the existence of an extra-linguistic realm of facts waiting to be mercifully recovered by historical discourse' (p. 5).

Although sharing a methodology and overall theoretical positions, this thesis differs from Pomarè's in the texts analysed and the respective historical narratives which they address. Pomarè is mostly interested in Byron's relationship to Italian history and literature, most specifically in *The Prophecy of Dante* (1819), *Marino Faliero* (1821) and *The Two Foscari* (1821). She argues that Byron's depiction of Venetian history, for example, is an instance when the poet, even though explicitly following 'accurate' historical sources to aid his composition, presents the reader with complex narratives which simultaneously supported and subverted the city's historical myth (Pomarè, p. 82). The theme of using and subverting sources with the intent of creating alternative historical narratives is explored below in the analyses of the Siege of Izmail in *Don Juan* and *The Vision of Judgment* (1822) (see pp. 205-27 and pp. 288-316, respectively). Overall, this thesis is mostly preoccupied with Byron's political positions in relation to engendering historical narratives within a larger historiographical practice, such as his engagements with the institutions which fostered the classicist knowledge he inherited and the whig

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trans. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 3 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984-88); Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. by Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

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interpretation of history. Pomarè, on the other hand, concentrates on Byron's specific readings of history books, especially those in his library.

As much as the 'historicist turn' is dominant in the present thesis, it would be erroneous to consider it, teleologically, the most advanced stage of literary criticism there is. A critical tradition more oriented towards the language and forms of poetry rather than its context is still just as important and it thrives in both 'Romantic' and Byron studies. While some formalist critics feel that historicist criticism 'offers a knowledge of the text purchased at the ruinous cost of wilfully refusing the kind of pleasure in language, its sounds and its rhythms, that it is the peculiar function of poetry to offer', the vast majority inhabit a much more nuanced position (Cronin, p. 13). Susan J. Wolfson, for example, also seeks to revitalise a criticism preoccupied with poetic forms but which does not neglect historical contexts:

[The aim is to develop a] contextualized formalist criticism that remaps New Criticism (especially its claims of literary autonomy and its paradigms of unity and coherence) but frankly retains its commitment to close reading and its care for poetic form.<sup>42</sup>

Wolfson does so with Byron's *The Corsair* (1814). She not only pays heed to the apparent contradictions between the poet's well-known creative 'eruption'

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<sup>42</sup> Susan J. Wolfson, *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 2.

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when composing and the choice of rigid heroic couplets, but also to the irony of employing an 'heroic' poetical form in a composition about an outlaw (Wolfson, pp. 134-63). In effect, Byron and 'Romantic' studies can only profit from a diversification in methodologies and differing points of view. Formalist and historicist approaches can only complement one another and enrich the academic debate.<sup>43</sup>

That being said, the current thesis is strongly dominated by historicist readings of Byron's poetry. Each chapter is led by a discussion of a specific historiographical discourse and how it can be read in relation to Byron's *œuvre*. The first chapter, 'The Classical Past', discusses the obsession Byron and his contemporaries had with antiquity and the histories of ancient Greece and Rome, their myths and 'factual' data in general. It argues that Byron dealt with classical history and culture at length throughout his career, though this classicist discourse was more predominant during his early writings. It is argued that the references to ancient Greek and Roman knowledge adorn the poetry

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<sup>43</sup> For other more formalist-oriented studies, see also Michael O'Neill, *Romanticism and the Self-Conscious Poem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Alan Rawes, *Byron's Poetic Experimentation: Childe Harold, the Tales, and the Quest for Comedy* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2000); Matthew Bevis, *The Art of Eloquence: Byron, Dickens, Tennyson, Joyce* (Oxford University Press, 2007); Gavin Hopps, 'Byron and Grammatical Freedom', in *Liberty and Poetic Licence: New Essays on Byron*, ed. by Bernard Beatty, Tony Howe, and Charles E. Robinson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), pp. 165-80; Sarah MacKenzie Zimmerman, *Romanticism, Lyricism, and History* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999). For a reading of Byron in relation to the history of philosophy, see Terence Allan Hoagwood, *Byron's Dialectic: Skepticism and the Critique of Culture* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1993). For a deeply postmodern reading of Byron (with strong influences of historicist practices), see Jerome Christensen, *Lord Byron's Strength: Romantic Writing and Commercial Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

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in an ornamental way concomitant to that of antiquarians who gather the remnants of the past in cabinet collections. This is tied to a classicist discourse which was created and disseminated by schools and universities and which was perceived as a sign of aristocratic superiority and one's higher socio-cultural standing.

The second chapter, entitled 'Travelling to the Past', tackles this classical emphasis in relation to the abundant travel literature written on those places in relation to Byron's most travel-oriented poetry. Mainly focussing on *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-18), this is read alongside examples of travelogues of the late 1700s/early 1800s. Engaging with Cheeke's work, special attention is paid to the encounter between the historical places the poet had come across in his classical studies and his physical presence there. It is argued that the poet used those places to expound his knowledge of ancient history – and claim legitimacy of doing so via his presence on the ground – whilst simultaneously critiquing/revising the historical knowledge which he had received in his youth.

Chapter three, 'Inheriting the Past', discusses the historiographical discourses of the 1800s in terms of teleological narratives. Most specifically, the chapter deals with 'the whig interpretation of history' and its recurring theme of history as the inexorable march of 'liberty' through time. Following the primacy of ancient history in the historical mentality at the time, it was only natural that, over centuries, a notion of inheritance was forged from the

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ancient ideals of 'liberty' to the Britain of the 1800s. The whiggish reading of the past perceived those ideals as being perfected through time only to find their utmost form in the government and institutions of the British Empire. Byron's simultaneous espousal and critique of such discourse is addressed in the chapter, as it discusses how those historical narratives are intrinsically formed amidst the political debates of the period. Of particular importance is the specific rhetorical battle between the Tories (leading the government for most of the poet's lifetime) and the oppositional Whigs, with whom Byron sympathised and was involved. The discourse of the Whigs spoke of 'liberty' in terms of opposition to the absolute power of kings while also objecting to giving political powers to the masses. In Byron's lifetime, a period profoundly marked by the French Revolution and its consequences, this discursive middle-ground proved to be extremely problematic and this is a theme thoroughly explored throughout the poet's works.

Chapter four, '(Re)interpreting the Recent Past', further discusses the whig interpretation of history in relation to key historical events which occurred during Byron's lifetime. The chapter investigates Byron's depictions of the Peninsular Wars (1809-11) in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, his diverse responses in the aftermath of the Battle of Waterloo, his anti-war rhetoric and reinterpretation of the Siege of Izmail (1790-91). Through these separate studies, it is argued that Byron develops a gradual, though ambiguous, distrust of the whiggish narrative of history. The historical despair shown in Byron's



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verses is argued to be part of his disillusionment with the whiggish discourse of history and its theoretical failure to provide an adequate theoretical model to tackle the post-Waterloo socio-political environment which saw the return of monarchies and their absolutist claims to power.

Finally, chapter five (“‘Behind” the Past’) discusses how Byron’s poetry of the 1820s can be read alongside discourses of history which went beyond the simple, one-dimensional and linear whiggish reading of history. The chapter consists of three separate studies which argue that historical thinking in post-Waterloo Europe underwent changes: namely, history started being perceived in a much more sceptical vein, in contrast to the naivety of the whiggish view and its acritical march of ‘liberty’ through the ages. In the first study, *The Age of Bronze* (1823) is read in relation to the economic forces which the poem suggests are acting ‘behind’ the historical process. The poem contains an attack on landlords and the Jewish financiers whom the poet perceived to corrupt the historical march in their search for selfish gain. The second study addresses *Cain* (1821), which discusses not only how narratives of the past are created with their specific agendas, but how these divergent discourses clash. In the play itself this revolves around the discursive challenge posed by Lucifer against God’s ‘official’ narrative. The last study discusses the creation of an immediate history (the reign and legacy of George III) by contrasting the divergent histories put forth by Robert Southey’s *A Vision of*

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*Judgement* (1821) and Byron's subsequent satire of the poem, *The Vision of Judgment* (1822).

Overall, what becomes evident is that, when analysing a historical period's conceptions of history in relation to Byron's poetry and prose, one cannot simply pigeonhole the entirety of the poet's *œuvre* within one of the discourses and themes here approached. There is no such a thing as a single Byronic historiographical discourse. The antiquarian/enthusiast of classical knowledge and surveyor of famous historical sites exists alongside the political Whig and inheritor of the whig interpretation of history. His later writings were also sceptical of the whiggish acritical middle-ground to the point that Byron was hailed by political radicals after his death.<sup>44</sup> By analysing Byron's relation to the historiographical discourses in early nineteenth-century Britain, this thesis also adds to the knowledge of historical thought in the modern era in general.

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<sup>44</sup> The Chartists, for example. See Phillip Collins, *Thomas Cooper, the Chartist: Byron and the 'Poets of the Poor'*, Nottingham Byron Foundation Lectures (Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 1970).

## 1. The Classical Past

As to my reading, I believe I may aver without hyperbole, it has been tolerably extensive in the historical department, so that few nations exist or have existed with whose records I am not in some degree acquainted from Herodotus down to Gibbon (BLJ, I, 147-48).<sup>1</sup>

This is how Byron, on the eve of his twentieth birthday, boastfully describes his historical education in a letter to his friend – and later literary agent – Robert Charles Dallas (1754 – 1824). The poet's 'tolerably extensive' reading of historians ranges 'from Herodotus down to Gibbon': from the mid fifth century BCE to the late 1700s. Aside from demonstrating the extent of Byron's historical education, the focus on Herodotus and Gibbon emphasises the importance placed on the historians of antiquity – Herodotus for obvious reasons.

This chapter discusses the centrality of classical historical discourse in the education of aristocratic young men like Byron in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Byron's poetry clearly demonstrates this classical learning and his early work in particular is filled with numerous references to historical 'facts' from ancient Greece and Rome. In order to accurately place Byron's work amidst the historical discourses of the age, one must first consider the role and reception of the classics in a larger cultural environment; and second, one must analyse the function of the English boarding schools and universities in fostering historical knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> Byron to Robert Charles Dallas. 21 January 1808.

### 1.1 '[N]ought beneath the sun | Is new': classical predominance

From the sixty-seven poems which comprise Byron's first four volumes of poetry (1806-1808), *Fugitive Pieces*, *Poems on Various Occasions*, *Hours of Idleness* and *Poems Original and Translated*, no less than eleven compositions are either translations or imitations from ancient authors. These publications contain two translations and one imitation from Catullus ('Ad Lesbiam', 'Luctus de Morte Passeris', 'To Ellen', respectively); the 'Translation of the Epitaph on Virgil and Tibullus, by Domitius Marsus'; 'The Episode of Nisus and Euryalus: "A Paraphrase from the *Aeneid lib. 9*"'; two translations from Anacreon ('To His Lyre' and a fragment from *Ode 3*); a translation of Aeschylus ('Fragments of School Exercises, From the Prometheus Vincit of Aeschylus'); a 'Translation from the Medea of Euripides'; 'Imitation of Tibullus. "Sulpicia Ad Cerintum"'; and a translation from Horace, *Ode 3. Lib. 3*. Also, from the thirty poems collected by Jerome J. McGann that remained unpublished in Byron's lifetime, a total of four were translations from Anacreon (*Ode 5*, *Ode 16*, *Ode 34*, *Ode 47*), thus totalling 15.5 per cent of all of Byron's early poetic input as direct imitations of classic authors. These poems no doubt attest to a tuition saturated by the classics, at least from the perspective of an aristocrat with a privileged education such as Byron. Byron's contemporaries Percy Bysshe Shelley (*Prometheus Unbound*, *Hellas*) and John Keats (*Endymion*, *Hyperion*) similarly made use of classical tropes and themes in their poetry.<sup>2</sup> Even

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Sachs, 'Greece or Rome?: The Uses of Antiquity in Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Blackwell's Literature Compass*, 6 (2009), 314-31 (p. 319).

Wordsworth approached classical themes in his compositions: ‘Laodamia’, ‘Dion’, the myth sections in book IV of *The Excursion* and a translation of Virgil’s *Aeneid*.<sup>3</sup> Contrary to the traditional view that the ‘Augustan’ Britain of the 1700s was dethroned by the ‘Romanticism’ of the 1800s with its supposed rejection of the ‘literary authority of the ancients’, the primacy of classical learning still formed a huge part of nineteenth-century British culture.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, Byron’s classicism was particularly pronounced. The classical predominance present in Byron’s early compositions was not only confined to translations and imitations; it also consisted of numerous, scattered ‘factual’ references from ancient history amidst the verses and in the many appended prose notes. These compositions are the product of a young author eager to show his assimilation and mastery of a culture that treated the knowledge of the works and history of antiquity as a means of showing one’s intellectual cultivation, given its perceived superiority in relation to other academic studies (see pp. 54-55 below). In the early nineteenth century classical studies were considered to be *the* subject one would have to study because of the cultural status which they traditionally possessed. Needless to say, importance attached to classical themes is in fact the product of numerous social processes embedded in networks of power. Public schools and universities (in Byron’s case, Harrow and Cambridge) maintained an

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<sup>3</sup> J. Douglas Kneale, *Romantic Aversions: Aftermaths of Classicism in Wordsworth and Coleridge* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Sachs, *Romantic Antiquity: Rome in the British Imagination, 1789-1832* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 3.

institutional grip which perpetuated the social status attributed to the study of the classics which was in turn trumpeted by the aristocracy. Classical themes and authors were bundled together as objects attributed with a superior cultural value and knowledge of classical history is objectified with an inherited cultural and social significance. As Bourdieu has argued, this type of historical knowledge plays the role of 'cultural capital'.<sup>5</sup> Knowing ancient history is the essential part of a very socio-discursive practice of social capital. Apart from translations and imitations, the examples one might gather from Byron's works to illustrate this discursive practice are numerous. The preface to Byron's first public book of poetry intended for a wider audience, *Hours of Idleness* (1807), contains many references to classical knowledge. The overall tone is one of grandiloquence, with the poet keen to point out his young age and poetical diletantism whilst simultaneously placing himself alongside the great names of the past: to evidence that this was his first work intended for a large audience and to stress this development in his writing career, he quotes the anecdote from Julius Caesar's life, taken from Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars*: "I have pass'd the Rubicon", and must stand or fall by the "cast of the die" (CPW, I, 32; 19-20). In an act of self-deprecation, he notes the unoriginality of his poems on entirely classical allegories; to succeed in doing so 'in an age so fertile in rhyme', he argues, 'would be a Herculean task, as every subject has already been treated to its utmost extent' (p. 33; 39-41). Byron ends the

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<sup>5</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. by John G. Richardson (London: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 241-58 (p. 243).

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preface with a discussion of literary immortality, citing the Latin poets Virgil and Horace:

But [poets] derive considerable fame, and a few, not less profit, from their productions, while I shall expiate my rashness, as an interloper, certainly without the latter, and in all probability, with a very slight share of the former, I leave to others “Virum volitare per ora”. I look to the few who will with patience “dulce est desipere in loco” (CPW, I, 33-34; 51-57).

In ‘Adrian’s Address to His Soul, When Dying’, Byron not only provides the Roman Emperor Hadrian’s (76-138 CE) reputed last words in the original Latin but also follows it with his own version:

Animula! vagula, blandula,  
Hospes, comesque, corporis,  
Quae nunc abibis in loca?  
Pallidula, rigida, nudula,  
Nec, ut soles, dabis jocos.

### Translation

Ah! gentle, fleeting, wav’ring sprite,  
Friend and associate of this day!  
To what unknown region borne,  
Wilt thou, now, wing thy distant flight?  
No more, with wonted humour gay,

But pallid, cheerless, and forlorn. (CPW, I, 69-70; 1-6)

These constant references to classical Rome and Greece bring to mind a classical antiquarian. In lieu of gathering marbles, coins, old books and manuscripts, the Byronic text 'collects' quotations and references to authors, myths and historical events to adorn the poetry. According to Ken Arnold, antiquarian practices date back to the first forty years of the seventeenth century, when it became fashionable amidst the English upper-classes.<sup>6</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano's discussion of antiquaries allows the possibility for poetry as an antiquarian artefact: 'antiquaries collect all the items that are connected with a certain subject, whether they help to solve a problem or not'.<sup>7</sup> The antiquarian then is not a historian; s/he is the person who loves and collects traces of the past without being necessarily interested in a chronological and philosophical line of enquiry.<sup>8</sup> The method of antiquarian study is a 'systematic survey'; a minute description of the relics of the past (p. 288). This type of knowledge of the past is the '*display* of learning as an end in itself' (Momigliano, 'Rise', p. 61).<sup>9</sup> The classic past for the antiquarian is dealt with as in terms of classification and collection (Momigliano, 'Ancient', p. 311). Byron's scattered references to antiquity are an ostentatious presence in the poetry to flag up his allegiance to a form of knowledge culturally allied to notions of a superior taste

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<sup>6</sup> Ken Arnold, *Cabinets for the Curious: Looking Back at Early English Museums* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano, 'Ancient History and the Antiquarian', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 13 (1950), 285-315 (p. 286).

<sup>8</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano, 'The Rise of Antiquarian Research', in *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 54-79 (p. 54).

<sup>9</sup> Emphasis added.



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and intellectual refinement. References to ancient Roman and Greek culture are rendered with reverence, as seen in ‘Fragments of School Exercises, from the Prometheus Vincit of Aeschylus’:

Great Jove! to whose Almighty throne,

Both Gods and mortals homage pay,

Ne'er may my soul thy power disown,

Thy dread behests ne'er disobey.

Oft shall the sacred victim fall,

In sea-girt Ocean's mossy hall;

My voice shall raise no impious strain,

'Gainst him who rules the sky and azure main. (CPW, I, 75-76; 1-8)

Byron's paraphrase of Aeschylus, even though 'received by [the headmaster Dr Drury] but coolly' was published in *Hours in Idleness* (CPW, I, 370). The poem pays explicit homage to Jove and the last two lines evidence the reverence that the Harrow students at the time had for their classical tuition. Byron flaunted his classically-inspired compositions and took for granted that the reading public would enjoy them, as made evident by the preface to *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* concerning the non-classical authors he derides in his satire:

With regard to the real talents of many poetical persons whose performances are mentioned, or alluded to in the following pages, it is presumed by the Author that there can be little difference of opinion in the Public at large[.] (CPW, I, 228; 28-29).

*English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* and its intended sequel, *Hints from Horace*, are the finest examples of Byron's traditionalist allegiances towards the ancients and their texts. The former poem is not simply an *ad hominem* retaliation on Brougham's review of *Hours of Idleness* in *The Edinburgh Review*, but is also part of a larger discussion regarding the inherited cultural themes and practices of the ancient past in the early 1800s.<sup>10</sup> In both poems, Byron expounds his preference – fierce allegiance, even – to the long-established cultural norms of the ancients in stark contrast to the new ideas proposed by periodicals of his day. Byron, in his quest for revenge against the 'Scotch reviewers', considers *The Edinburgh Review* to be representative of the new poetry and aesthetics, even though the reality was far more complex than that.<sup>11</sup> *Hints from Horace* on the other hand is an imitation of Horace's *Ars Poetica* and shares the Horatian goal of rigorous, patterned poetical composition. These can roughly be summarised as follows: first, to seek unity (harmony and proportion), poetical cohesion and sobriety; second, dramatic poetry should follow a number of Greek models (number of characters on stage, number of acts) and third, a poet should aim for impartiality and the moral duty to impart wisdom.<sup>12</sup> Byron wished to show readers his commitment to the Horatian mode by including the original Latin text alongside his own

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<sup>10</sup> See Henry Brougham, 'Hours of Idleness: A Series of Poems, Original and Translated', *The Edinburgh Review*, 11 (January 1808), 285-289.

<sup>11</sup> John Clive, *Scotch Reviewers: The Edinburgh Review, 1802-1815* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), pp. 151-165; *British Romanticism and the Edinburgh Review: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. by Duncan Wu and Massimiliano Demata (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Quintus Horatius Flaccus, *Horace: Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, ed. by H.R. Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 443.

composition, even if this did not materialise: 'Recollect that the Hints must be printed with the Latin otherwise there is no sense' (BLJ, VIII, 79).<sup>13</sup> The poem itself would only be published posthumously (CPW, I, 426). The poet's main aim in both *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* and *Hints from Horace* is to emphasise how the contemporary literary age had degraded from the classical and Augustan 'golden age' of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the traditional dichotomy between 'Romanticism' and Classicism, with the latter representing 'respect for restrained formalities of balance and proportion' and the former a 'zest for unfettered expression of emotion', *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* certainly reiterates classicist discourse.<sup>14</sup> As he states in the preface to *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*: 'my object is not to prove that I can write well, but, *if possible*, to make others write better' (CPW, I, 228; 12-13). Accordingly, his poetic assault is described entirely in Greco-Roman terms in the preface:

As to the *Edinburgh Reviewers*; it would, indeed, require a Hercules to crush the Hydra; but if the Author succeeds in merely 'bruising one of the heads of the serpent', though his own hand should suffer in the encounter, he will be amply satisfied (CPW, I, 229; 46-49).

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<sup>13</sup> Byron to John Murray. 16 February 1821.

<sup>14</sup> Harry Blamires, *The Age of Romantic Literature* (Harlow: Longman, 1990), p. 22.

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On numerous occasions during *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* the text dwells on a glorious past corrupted by the explosion in publishing in the early nineteenth century:

Time was, ere yet in these degenerate days,  
Ignoble themes obtained mistaken praise,  
When Sense and Wit with Poesy allied,  
No fabled Graces, flourished side by side,  
From the same fount their inspiration drew,  
And, reared by Taste, bloomed fairer as they grew. (CPW, I,  
232; 103-8)<sup>15</sup>

These ideals ('Sense', 'Wit' and 'Taste'), he states, come from a long tradition of learning which Byron traces back to the classics via the Augustan authors he thoroughly admired – Pope, Dryden, Congreve and Otway (CPW, I, 232; 109-116). Nevertheless, Byron's contemporaries, much to his horror, still insisted on creating new notions of poetry and cultural norms which conflicted with the classical norms he cherished: 'Thus saith the Preacher; "nought beneath the sun | Is new", yet still from change to change we run' (p. 233; 129-30).<sup>16</sup> Byron accepts that there is a self-evidently glorious classical past with its aesthetic laws which should be praised, referenced and uncritically followed to the letter. Anything besides this received tradition he dismisses as the mere product of a modern world obsessed with degraded innovations in style; with quantity, not

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<sup>15</sup> For publication figures, see William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, pp. 551-664.

<sup>16</sup> Byron is paraphrasing Ecclesiastes 1. 9.

quality. The attacks on classical ideals are perceived by Byron as deluded attempts to dethrone the well-established ancient notions of knowledge (aesthetic, historical, and philosophical) in general.

This point was also the subject of criticism by Brougham in his 1808 review of *Hours of Idleness*. Besides the personal attack at Byron's constant reliance on his youth and noble title in *Hours of Idleness*, the critic also rebukes Byron's over-dependence on the classics and on traditional poetic subjects:

We would entreat him to believe, that a certain portion of liveliness, somewhat of fancy, is necessary to constitute a poem; and that a poem in the present day, to be read, must contain at least one thought, either in a little degree different from the ideas of former writers, or differently expressed (Brougham, p. 286).

Byron understood the criticism of his work by *The Edinburgh Review* as an example of the change for the worse in poetic attitudes in the country, accusing the periodical of being at the forefront of what he considered the degradation of taste. Accordingly, Byron's riposte involves a systematic enumeration of the poetical vices committed by his contemporaries. For instance, Walter Scott is a man of 'undoubtedly great [...] genius', but who 'write[s] for hire [...] by a repetition of black-letter Ballad imitations' (CPW, I, 402); Robert Southey is also depicted as a 'Ballad-monger' (p. 235; 202); Wordsworth is '[t]hat mild apostate from poetic rule' (p. 236; 236); and Coleridge 'takes a Pixy for a Muse' (p. 237; 260):

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Yet none in lofty numbers can surpass

The bard who soars to elegize an ass:

So well the subject suits his noble mind,

He brays the Laureat of the long-ear'd kind! (CPW, I, 237;  
261-4)

All the authors are chastised for writing on topics which differ from the classical norms which Byron accepts and praises. Most importantly, the attack on poems dealing with medieval tales, folk ballads (as those by Scott and Southey) and the simple existence in the countryside (such as those by Wordsworth and Coleridge) are a flat rejection of the new poetics which surfaced in detriment to the classical mentality upheld by Byron.

Intellectual discussion did not only take place in the realms of poetic aesthetics and periodical culture, but was rather part of a larger discursive battle concerning the knowledge of the past in general. The Society of Antiquaries of London, for instance, was frequently vilified in the press for emphasising the study of the history of the British Isles to the detriment of knowledge of ancient Greek and Roman history. A satirical image by George Cruikshank, entitled *The Antiquarian Society* (1812), exemplifies the dismissal of the study of non-classical subjects. The caricature portrays a meeting of The Society of Antiquaries of London whose members pour over a vast selection of mundane objects which are considered as relics by them. A coal-scuttle is labelled as an 'Ancient Shield'; three jars of pickled cabbage, beans and gooseberries are 'Funeral Urns'; a trough for feeding pigs is categorised as a

'Roman Sarcophagus' and an ordinary chamber pot is deemed to be a 'Roman Vase' (see Fig. 1, Appendix).<sup>17</sup> Rosemary Sweet argues that these negative depictions are not solely the consequence of antiquarians being perceived as gullible with their sources and studies, but also because the taste of the times 'admire[d] the aesthetic qualities of classical antiquities and architecture, rather than the "ruder" specimens of domestic antiquity' which were then admired by the Society ('Founders', p. 55). The caricature makes evident the process of exclusion performed by the dominant classical discourse of the times: those engaged in non-classical studies are not supposed to have their own discourse (and subsequent field of study) at all. Moreover, Cruikshank can only engage and satirise the Society of Antiquaries via the mediation of a discursive environment thoroughly dominated by an obsession for classic themes, authors and relics; the joke is that the objects are regarded as poor examples of classical artefacts rather than objects in their own right. As discussed below regarding Southey's epics and their non-classical subjects, the archaeological study of the British past which was not connected to ancient Rome was sneered upon.

A similar cultural attack is observed in Byron's writings concerning the poetry of his age. If *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* and *Hints from Horace* are to be taken as manifestos, then Byron would certainly agree with the

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<sup>17</sup> Reproduced in Rosemary Sweet, 'Founders and Fellows', in *Making History: Antiquaries in Britain, 1707-2007*, ed. by Sarah McCarthy, David Gaimster and Bernard Nurse (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2007), pp. 53-67 (p. 67). For a recent study of caricature in the 'Romantic' period, see Ian Haywood, *Romanticism and Caricature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

apparent sentiments of Cruikshank's satire. As he saw it, the antidote to the degradation in taste and knowledge was the return to well-established classical attitudes:

The time has been, when yet the Muse was young,  
When HOMER swept the lyre, and MARO sung,  
An Epic scarce ten centuries could claim,  
While awe-struck nations hailed the magic name:  
The work of each immortal Bard appears  
The single wonder of a thousand years. (CPW, I, 235; 189-194).

The longevity of Homer and Virgil's ('Maro') works in the Western literary canon is accepted as the self-evident proof of their superiority over the degraded works published in the late 1790s and early 1800s. Byron is responding to the 'proliferation of epics in England' during his lifetime, which he considered to devalue the poetic form as a whole.<sup>18</sup> Byron upholds a classical standard of the epic work as indelibly linked to a nation, its historical period of composition and imbued with moral doctrines: for example Camões's *The Lusiads*, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* (CPW, I, 235; 203). As a contrast, he enumerates Robert Southey's epic poems and the quick succession in which they were published: *Joan of Arc: An Epic Poem* (1796), *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801), *Madoc* (1805) and *The Curse of Kehama*

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<sup>18</sup> Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 158.



(1810) – the last published one year after *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* ('A fourth, alas! were more than we could bear') (p. 236; 228). Byron attacked Southey not only because he disliked Southey's poetry, but because of the content of their prefaces. In them, Southey disagreed with the classical tradition and attempted to create innovations in epic poetry. The preface to *Madoc* was particularly ill-received by Byron. Southey writes:

[The poem] assumes not the degraded title of Epic; and the question, therefore, is not whether the story is formed upon the rules of Aristotle, but whether it be adapted to the purposes of poetry.<sup>19</sup>

The naming of all epics as being 'degraded' seemed to have incensed Byron and his classical sensibilities:

Why is Epic degraded? and by whom? Certainly the late Romantics of Masters Cottle, Laureate Pye, Ogilvy, Hole and gentle Mistress Cowley, have not exalted the epic Muse, but as Mr. Southey's poem 'disdains the appellation', allow us to ask – has he substituted anything better in its stead? (CPW, I, 403).

Byron dismissed Southey's remarks on epic poetry as literary bravado. Two years later *The Edinburgh Review* voiced opinions not entirely different from Byron's regarding Southey's *The Curse of Kehama* and his other epics:

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<sup>19</sup> *Robert Southey: Poetical Works 1793-1810*, ed. by Lynda Pratt, 5 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2004), II, 6.

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During the last fifteen years he has put forward (besides the present work), three very long poems, – no one of which, we think, can be said to have succeeded. That they have all had some admirers, we do not mean to dispute: nay, there are many who pass for tolerable judges in such matters, who think they have had a very strange and unaccountable success: But the author, and his admirers, and his booksellers, are not by any means of that opinion; and we, for our parts, have no hesitation in saying, that they have not had nearly so much success as it appears to us that they deserve. There have been three editions, we believe, of Joan of Arc – two of Thalaba – and one only of Madoc, – though the last has been six years in the hands of the public, – and of a public which has called, during the same interval, for more than ten editions of the Farmer's Boy, and five or six, if we do not mistake, of the Wanderer of Switzerland.

This, we think, is pretty testimony against the *taste* of a poet, whose *genius*, we believe, was never lowered, even among those who neglect him, to a comparison with that of Mr Bloomfield, or Mr Montgomery.<sup>20</sup>

Francis Jeffrey's (1773-1850) review evidences Southey's lack of poetical success and implies that, even though his commercial failure is undeserved, the

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<sup>20</sup> Francis Jeffrey, 'The Curse of Kehama', *The Edinburgh Review*, 17 (February 1811), 429-465 (p. 431).

new epic conventions he trumpeted are the reason for it ('pretty testimony against the *taste* of a poet'). This shows that Byron's crusading sentiments against the Scottish periodical as expressed in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* are mostly related to the personal attacks he had received rather than the championing of new poetic ideals which Byron erroneously attributed to the periodical. Byron in fact changed his opinion of Francis Jeffrey after *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* was positively reviewed in *The Edinburgh Review* in 1812. He subsequently attempted to suppress the scathing verses directed at Jeffrey in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*.<sup>21</sup>

*English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* is not only replete with literary feuds, but it also praises the modern authors whom the poet considered his allies. These were not only those he considered to be against the degradation of taste, but also those with whose authorial experiences he empathised. James Montgomery (1771-1854) (author of *The Wanderer in Switzerland* (1806)), for instance, is also admired for the criticism that he, like Byron, received from *The Edinburgh Review*:

With broken lyre and cheek serenely pale,  
Lo! sad Alcaeus wanders down the vale!  
Though fair they rose, and might have bloomed at last,  
His hopes have perished by the northern blast:

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<sup>21</sup> Jane Stabler, 'Against Their Better Selves: Byron, Jeffrey and the *Edinburgh*', in *British Romanticism and the Edinburgh Review: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. by Duncan Wu and Massimiliano Demata (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), pp. 146-67 (p. 150).

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Nipped in the bud by Caledonian gales,

His blossoms wither as the blast prevails!

O'er his lost works let *classic* SHEFFIELD weep:

May no rude hand disturb their early sleep! (CPW, I, 242;  
418-25)

Byron in the excerpt directly references Montgomery's 'The Lyre', a highly classical composition on the sorrows of poets:

Where the roving rill meander'd

Down the green, retiring vale,

Poor, forlorn Alcaeus wander'd,

Pale with thought, serenely pale[.]<sup>22</sup>

Byron morphs Montgomery into the distressed poet Alcaeus of 'The Lyre', given how *The Edinburgh Review* had dismissed *The Wanderer in Switzerland* as the hysterical work of a young mind, if not of someone suffering from 'debility':

[The poem's] chief ornaments are ejaculations and points of admiration; and, indeed, we must do Mr Montgomery the justice to say, that he is on no occasion sparing of his ohs and ahs. [...] Medical writers inform us, that spasms and convulsions are usually produced by debility; and we have generally observed, that the more feeble a writer's genius is,

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<sup>22</sup>James Montgomery, *The Wanderer of Switzerland, and Other Poems* (London: 1806), p. 81. Place of publication is provided for books published pre-1900; place of publication and publisher for books published after that date.

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the more violent and terrific are the distortions into which he throws himself.<sup>23</sup>

Like James Montgomery, Byron's allies against the perceived degradation of taste are mostly those he considered to follow classic poetic conventions: Campbell, Rogers, Cowper, Burns, Gifford, Sotheby, MacNeil, White, Crabbe, Shee and Wright (CPW, I, 254-6; 799-890). Though diverse in their subjects, the vast majority of the poets praised by Byron wrote lengthy heroic couplets inspired by the works of John Dryden (1631-1700) and Alexander Pope (1688-1744), which pleased the taste of the period in their form and register. William Sotheby (1757-1833) and his *The Battle of the Nile* (1799), for instance, praises the British naval triumph against the French in 1798: 'Nelson! a nation's voice thy name shall raise; | Applauding senates consecrate thy praise'.<sup>24</sup> Samuel Rogers's (1763-1855) *The Pleasures of Memory* (1792) and Thomas Campbell's (1777-1844) *The Pleasures of Hope* (1799) are polite meditations composed within an eighteenth century classicist tradition:

Blest Memory, hail! Oh, grant the grateful Muse,  
Her pencil dip't in Nature's living hues,  
To pass the clouds that round thy empire roll,  
And trace its airy precincts in the soul.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> [Anonymous], 'The Wanderer of Switzerland, and Other Poems', *The Edinburgh Review*, 9 (January 1807), 347-54 (p. 351).

<sup>24</sup> William Sotheby, *The Battle of the Nile: A Poem* (London: 1799), p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Samuel Rogers, *The Pleasures of Memory* (London: 1792), p. 13.

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With thee, sweet Hope! Resides the heavenly light,  
That pours remotest rapture on the sight:  
Thine is the charm of life's bewilder'd way,  
That calls each slumbering passion into play.<sup>26</sup>

Other compositions acclaimed by Byron are more explicit in their classicism by not only conforming to formal patterns, but also by explicitly prescribing how future works should be written. Sir Martin Archer Shee's (1769-1850) *Elements of Art* (1809), for instance, is a didactic poem that argues the poet should revere and follow the guidelines established by ancient works:

From purer founts the youthful poet draws  
His inspiration in the Muses' cause;  
Castalia's sons surround him as he sings,  
Prescribes his flights, and exercise his wings;  
Before his eye in bright example rise,  
And hov'ring soar seductive to the skies.  
Maeonia's treasures – Maro's diamond mine,  
Enrich the humblest votaries of the Nine[.]<sup>27</sup>

The poet should be inspired by the 'purer founts' of Homer's epics ('Maeonia's treasures') and Virgil's *Aeneid* in order to add to Humanity's poetical tradition.

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas Campbell, *The Pleasures of Hope* (Edinburgh: 1799), p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Sir Martin Archer Shee, *Elements of Art* (London: 1809), pp. 16-18.

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Virgil, who was inspired by the *Iliad* and used it as his ‘diamond mine’, is an example to follow in Shee’s opinion.

Byron’s verses trumpeting Waller Rodwell Wright’s (1774/5-1826) *Horae Ionicae: A Poem Descriptive of the Ionian Islands and Part of the Adjacent Coast of Greece* (1809) succinctly echo Byron’s views on poetry and classical knowledge in general:

Blest is the man! who dares approach the bower  
Where dwelt the Muses at their natal hour;  
Whose steps have pressed, whose eye has marked afar,  
The clime that nursed the sons of song and war,  
The scenes which Glory still must hover o’er;  
Her place of birth, her own Achaian shore:  
But doubly blest is he, whose heart expands  
With hallowed feelings for those classic lands;  
Who rends the veil of ages long gone by,  
And views their remnants with a poet’s eye!  
WRIGHT! ’twas thy happy lot at once to view  
Those shores of glory, and to sing them too;  
And sure no common Muse inspired thy pen  
To hail the land of Gods and Godlike men. (CPW, I, 256;  
867-880)

Wright’s poem is honoured for visiting Greece and some of its celebrated sites, ‘[w]here dwelt the Muses at their natal hour’. *Horae Ionicae* is, essentially, a

travel poem written amidst the scenery which it describes, a path Byron would later take with his *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* cantos I-II (discussed below in chapter 2). For the moment, however, Wright is eulogised simply for his loose allusions to classical themes and his Latinate language:

Ye isles beyond the Adriatic wave!  
Whose classic shores Ionian waters lave;  
Ye plains of Greece! the Muse's ancient pride,  
Whose rising beauties crown the western tide[.]<sup>28</sup>

Byron in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* argues that a true poet is one who can turn into verse the received ancient knowledge and its cultural remnants: 'associate Bards! who snatched to light | Those Gems too long withheld from modern sight' (CPW, I, 256; 881-82). They are supposed, he claims, to praise '[t]he glorious Spirit of the Grecian Muse' (p. 257; 888); or another Greek or Roman theme as his own verse so abundantly does.

## **1.2 '[W]e search'd the classic page': schools and universities**

The reasons behind this predominance of classical themes are better elucidated with a brief survey of Byron's formal education. A student at Harrow and subsequently Cambridge, Byron received the typical education for someone of his rank. The curriculum at Harrow was essentially 'underpinned' by 'the classics': Greek and Latin taught by the study of ancient poets and

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<sup>28</sup> Waller Rodwell Wright, *Horæ Ionicae: A Poem, Descriptive of the Ionian Islands, and Part of the Adjacent Coast of Greece* (London: 1809), p. 3.



historians.<sup>29</sup> The curriculum at Cambridge, despite ‘narrowly’ focusing more on mathematics than Oxford, was still an ‘advanced public [school], teaching a relatively static curriculum and feeling no duty to extend existing subjects or to develop new ones by research’.<sup>30</sup> Alongside the great public schools such as Harrow, Eton and Westminster, ‘there was a multitude of often short-lived private schools, some scores of “proprietary” schools owned by shareholders’ which came into being due to the social changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution and the growing middle classes.<sup>31</sup> Not only the classics were taught at these new schools, but there was also an emphasis on arithmetic, since the children of merchants and manufacturers had to learn the skills of their future trades (Sanderson, pp. 31-32). Gradually, the type of education a pupil would receive was institutionally shaped in accordance to one’s social class: the ‘lower’ and ‘middle’ classes – as the workforce of the nation – were to study practical themes; whilst the aristocracy, clergy and gentry – as Britain’s destined leaders – were to receive an almost entirely classical education.<sup>32</sup> This tuition centred on texts from ancient Greece and

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<sup>29</sup> Fiona MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend* (London: John Murray, 2002), p. 41. Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Sanderson, *Education, Economic Change and Society in England 1780-1870*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 39, 42.

<sup>31</sup> Anne Digby and Peter Searby, *Children, School and Society in Nineteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1981), p. 11.

<sup>32</sup> For the education of the working classes and Sunday schools, see Eric Hopkins, *Childhood Transformed: Working-Class Children in Nineteenth-Century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 141. On working class literacy, see John Lawson and Harold Silver, *A Social History of Education in England* (London: Routledge, 1973), p. 233. See also Nicholas Carlisle, *A Concise Description of the Endowed Grammar Schools in England and Wales* (Bedford: 1818) for a historical survey of endowed schools in England in the period and its classical tuition.

Rome. Dissenting Academies in England also differed in their curricula in comparison to Oxford and Cambridge, since they provided a larger emphasis on teaching scientific knowledge in a similar way to the Scottish educational system at the time (Sanderson, pp. 23-25).<sup>33</sup>

Byron's education 'involved the memorising of grammatical rules and lines of verse, translation at snail's pace, and the composition of classical verse in tortuous patterns' (Digby and Searby, p. 38):

In the early nineteenth century three-quarters or four-fifths of a public schoolboy's time was spent on Latin and Greek, and ancient history and geography. All other subjects – mathematics, English, modern languages – were squashed into the remainder, along with a medley of options such as fencing and music. Regular scientific instruction did not begin till 1849 – at Rugby and Eton, and then only on a modest scale (p. 37).<sup>34</sup>

Byron's poetry can be clearly read as the product of this educational system as exemplified by the cultural capital embedded in the ancient themes to which he constantly alluded. Harrow, the '[s]weet scene of [the poet's] youth, | Seat of Friendship and Truth [...]' ('The Tear', CPW, I, 39; 37-38), is nostalgically addressed in numerous occasions in lines which show not only a personal

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<sup>33</sup> For a discussion of the Scottish universities and the whig interpretation of history, see pp. 146-48 below.

<sup>34</sup> For an account of the daily routines of a public school in the early 1800s, see P. H. J. H. Gosden, *How They Were Taught: An Anthology of Contemporary Accounts of Learning and Teaching in England, 1800-1950* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), pp. 76-81.

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allegiance to the institution, but also to its classic curriculum. 'On a Distant View of the Village and School, of Harrow, on the Hill', besides belonging to the poetic tradition of revisiting schools and the inherent nostalgia involved, also reveals the daily routine at the public school:<sup>35</sup>

Again I revisit the hills where we sported,

The streams, where we swam, and the fields, where we  
fought;

The school, where loud warn'd, by the bell, we resorted,

To pore o'er the precepts by the Pedagogues taught. (CPW,  
I, 138; 9-12)

What is striking in this excerpt is Byron's choice of terms when describing the teaching at Harrow in the last line: the students diligently 'pore o'er the 'precepts' laid down before them by their 'Pedagogues'. In other words, the pupils were expected '[t]o examine a book, map, etc., with fixed attention; to study or read earnestly or with intense concentration; to be absorbed in reading or study' a 'precept', 'a general command or injunction; a rule for action or conduct, *esp.* a rule for moral conduct, a maxim; *spec.* a divine command' (OED). Two things can be deduced regarding the pedagogy of the time: firstly, the emphasis on the attentive reading – if not memorisation – of texts; and secondly, the reverential tone towards those texts studied, as Byron refers to them as 'precepts' – a term semantically imbued with a sense of moral admiration of an almost theological nature. The texts studied are equated to

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<sup>35</sup> See, for instance, Thomas Gray (1716-1771), 'Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College' (1747).

‘maxims’ and this implies that one should accept and absorb those lessons uncritically, as if they were immutable truths bestowed by the past.

Consequently, Byron’s early poems often relish the classical education he received at Harrow, ‘the dear lov’d peaceful seat’ which provided him with ‘[t]he sacred intellectual shower’ (‘To E[dward] N[oel] L[ong] Esq.’, CPW, I, 119; 99, 106). The boarding school is frequently referred to as ‘the shrine of Truth’ (‘Childish Recollections’, CPW, I, 172; 411), a place where Byron and his peers ‘drain’d the font of antient lore, | Though, drinking deeply, thirsting still the more’ (CPW, I, 166; 253-54). Byron’s language treats the classics as a somewhat sacred form of knowledge which should be revered. The attentive reading of the classics was largely featured at the declamations of poetry and plays by Harrovians in the institution’s annual Speech Day event.<sup>36</sup> These encouraged the rhetorical *grandeur* of memorising and orating passages from the ‘antient’ ‘precepts’ taught at the institution. Indeed, this relish for the ancient past in the public schools was a means ‘to forge a bond’ between the higher classes of British society united under the ‘caste’ of educated gentleman, thus denying the lower social orders the cultural status assigned to those possessing of a classical education.<sup>37</sup> Or, to paraphrase Bourdieu, the possession and accumulation of cultural capital allows a member of a given group to acquire a

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<sup>36</sup> See Paul Elledge, *Lord Byron at Harrow School: Speaking out, Talking Back, Acting up, Bowing Out* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), esp. chapters 2, 3, 5.

<sup>37</sup> John Chandos, *Boys Together: English Public Schools 1800-1864* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 32-33.

‘social capital’, thus making it possible for him/her to ‘credit’ that capital in the form of social status and power (Bourdieu, pp. 248-49).

Even Wordsworth, who dedicates the first two books of *The Prelude* to his early reveries amidst the natural beauties of the Lake District, references classical history:

Sometimes, more sternly moved, I would relate  
How vanquished Mithridates northward passed,  
And, hidden in the cloud of years, became  
Odin, the Father of a race by whom  
Perished the Roman Empire: how the friends  
And followers of Sertorius, out of Spain  
Flying, found shelter in the Fortunate Isles[.]<sup>38</sup>

Mithridates VI (143-63 BCE) was the King of Pontus in Asia Minor who was engaged in a series of wars with Rome in the first century BCE. Wordsworth alludes to the myth that states that after being defeated, Mithridates moved to Sweden where his barbarian descendants would avenge him by overthrowing the Roman Empire six centuries later. This ‘[a]greeable but uncertain hypothesis concerning Odin’ is narrated by Gibbon in the first volume of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.<sup>39</sup> Sertorius (c. 123-

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<sup>38</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850: Authoritative Texts, Context and Reception* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), p. 39; 186-92. Quotation is from the 1850 text.

<sup>39</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 6 vols (London: 1776), I, 246.

72 BCE) was a Roman statesman and general who attempted to establish the independence of Hispania in the Iberian Peninsula from Rome. Wordsworth alludes to Plutarch's biography of Sertorius and the subsequent tradition of his followers retiring to the Atlantic islands, as was Sertorius wish had he not been assassinated.<sup>40</sup> Wordsworth was educated at Hawkshead Grammar School, which was in the eighteenth century one of the most successful schools in the north of England and that prized itself in sending many pupils to Cambridge every year.<sup>41</sup> The curriculum, in accordance to all grammar schools of the period, was 'the world of Rome and grammar of Latin' which had shaped all educated men into respectable professions since medieval times (Davies, p. 19). Therefore, it is no wonder that even the less classically-inclined Wordsworth was to depict his engagements with Roman history as a schoolboy.

A biographical anecdote of Byron's life whilst a pupil at Harrow exemplifies the classical predominance in schools at the time. When Dr Joseph Drury, Headmaster of Harrow (1784-1805), was replaced by Dr George Butler in April 1805, the seventeen-year-old Byron expressed his dissatisfaction by composing 'On a Change of Masters, at a Great Public School'. The two

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<sup>40</sup> Plutarch, *Rome in Crisis. Nine Lives by Plutarch: Tiberius Gracchus, Gaius Gracchus, Sertorius, Lucullus, Younger Cato, Brutus, Antony, Galba, Otho*, trans. by Ian Scott-Kilvert and Christopher Pelling (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2010), pp. 78-79.

<sup>41</sup> Hunter Davies, *William Wordsworth: A Biography* (Guernsey: Sutton Publishing, 1980), p. 18.

pedagogues are depicted with Latinised names and Harrow is effectively compared to ancient Rome:

Where are those honours, IDA! once your own,  
When Probus fill'd your magisterial throne?  
As ancient Rome, fast falling to disgrace,  
Hail'd a Barbarian, in her Caesar's place:  
So you, degenerate, share as hard a fate,  
And seat Pomposus, where your Probus sate. (CPW, I, 132;  
1-6)

Drury is transfigured to 'Probus', whilst Butler's pseudonym is 'Pomposus' and are further compared to Roman emperors. 'Pomposus' is compared to Theodoric ('a Barbarian'), Emperor of the Ostrogoths, who subjugated the Roman Empire in the fifth century CE, effectively marking the end of the Western Roman Empire.<sup>42</sup> Byron is hyperbolically pointing out that Harrow shall follow Rome's fate of decline and subsequent fall:

With him, the same dire fate, attending Rome,  
Ill-fated IDA! soon must stamp your doom;  
Like her o'erthrown, forever lost to fame,  
No trace of science left you, but the name. (CPW, I, 132; 15-  
18)

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<sup>42</sup> Byron is also paying homage to Charles Churchill (1732-64), who portrayed Samuel Johnson (1709-84) as 'Pomposo' in *The Ghost* (1763).

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This hyperbolic example crystallises the predominance of classical authors and ancient ‘facts’. The students at Harrow (‘Ida’) can only comprehend the present by translating it in terms of those ‘precepts’ so exhaustively taught at the public school.

Moreover, Byron’s initial antagonism towards Dr George Butler can be understood as an example of class prejudice. Dr Joseph Drury is hailed: ‘With him, for years, we search’d the classic page, | And fear’d the Master, though we lov’d the Sage’ (CPW, I, 162; 111-2). The former headmaster is stern yet thoroughly versed in the teaching of the classics. On the other hand, Butler’s efforts are reviled as pedantic:

Pomposus fills his magisterial chair;

Pomposus governs, – but my Muse forbear:

Contempt, in silence, be the pedant’s lot,

His names and precepts be alike forgot[.] (CPW, I, 162; 115-18)

It seems that Byron’s initial antipathy towards ‘Pomposus’ is not only a personal matter of internal school politics, but a social one.<sup>43</sup> His ‘Portrait of Pomposus’ illustrates this:

Just half a Pedagogue, and half a Fop,

Not formed to grace the Pulpit, but the shop;

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<sup>43</sup> Joseph Drury wanted to be succeeded by his brother, Mark Drury, as head of the school. The election of George Butler proved to be very unpopular not only with the former headmaster, but also with the students of the charismatic tutor (Byron included).



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The *Counter*, not the *Desk*, should be his place,  
Who deals out precepts, as if dealing lace;  
Servile in mind, from Elevation proud,  
In argument, less sensible than loud,  
Through half the Continent, the Coxcomb's been,  
And stuns you with the Wonders he has seen[.] (CPW, I, 172;  
1-8)<sup>44</sup>

The new headmaster is ridiculed in describing his lessons as if they were commercially dealt over the counter. George Butler was the son of a London schoolmaster (Revd Weeden Butler the elder (1742–1823)), whilst Dr Joseph Drury descended from a well-established gentry family and was educated at Westminster School. Since George Butler was educated in his father's school, to the aristocratic Byron the knowledge he imparted is equated to trade and the middle classes, as the above example makes clear. Underlining Byron's satire is the assumption that the education in the public schools should be taught by and to the upper classes; those from the lower classes cannot but deal with them in a philistine and artificially pedantic manner.

Classicist discourse is at the foreground of Byron's classist reading of the present. The upper classes are equated to the ancient Greeks in their culturally-elevated position as seen in this excerpt from *Hints from Horace*:

Unhappy Greece! thy Sons of ancient days  
The Muse may celebrate with perfect praise,

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<sup>44</sup> Emphases in the original.

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Whose generous children narrowed not their hearts

With Commerce, given alone to Arms, and Arts.

Our boys (save those whom public schools compel

To 'Long and Short' before they're taught to spell)

From frugal fathers soon imbibe by rote

'A penny saved, my Lad, 's a penny got.' (CPW, I, 307-8; 507-14)

Byron decries the money-making pragmatism of his age which he saw as detrimental to culture and education. In contrast, the ancient Greeks had not 'narrowed [...] their hearts | With commerce', but were rather strongly enamoured with the higher accomplishments of 'Arms and Arts'. Excepted from this state of affairs are the boys educated in the English public schools. Nonetheless, Byron hyperbolically states that they are imbued with lessons of how to pronounce Latin and Greek ('The Long and Short') even 'before they are taught to spell' English.<sup>45</sup> The poet denounces the philistinism of those without a public school education – and this scorn is unmistakably levelled in terms of social class – drenched in classical tropes while simultaneously mocking the

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<sup>45</sup> 'Long and short' is metonymically derived from how to pronounce the vowels in both Latin and Greek, to signify the languages themselves. In its original context, this collocation would go as follows: 'But the English are accused not only of departing from the genuine sound of the Greek and Latin vowels, but of violating the quantity of these languages more than the people of any other nation in Europe [...]. The falsification of the harmony by English scholars in their pronunciation of Latin, with regard to essential points, arises from two causes only: first, from a total inattention to the length of vowel sounds, making them long or short merely as chance directs; and secondly, from sounding double consonants as only one letter'. John Walker and William Trollope, *A Key to the Classical Pronunciation of Greek, Latin, and Scripture Proper Names*, 9th edn (London: 1830), p. vi.

complete dominance of ancient languages and history in the curricula of Harrow and the other public schools. In that aspect, the poem participates in the discussions regarding the classical curriculum in the schools and universities during the first half of the 1800s and its perceived usefulness for society at large (see pp. 77-79 below). However, these moments of self-criticism are rare amongst the poet's early writings, since for the most part he is engaged in trumpeting his own social position and defending his classical education.

Byron went to Trinity College, Cambridge after Harrow. The curriculum in Oxford and Cambridge were similar to those in the public and grammar schools, dominated by the static learning of Latin and Greek texts (Sanderson, p. 42). 'History' and other academic disciplines were not yet institutionalised.<sup>46</sup> The contemporary idea of the discipline of history, as taught and discussed in universities, was only established in Britain in the 1870s (Harrison, Jones and Lambert, p. 18). Despite being renowned for its teaching of mathematics, 'in contrast with Oxford and the public schools, where the classics dominated', Cambridge still functioned with a traditional curriculum with regards to the teaching of Humanities.<sup>47</sup> This was certainly the case with

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<sup>46</sup> Robert Harrison, Aled Jones, and Peter Lambert, 'The Institutionalisation and Organisation of History', in *Making History: An Introduction to the History and Practices of a Discipline*, ed. by Peter Lambert and Phillipp R. Schofield (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 9-25 (p. 14). See also George G. Iggers, 'The Professionalization of Historical Studies and the Guiding Assumptions of Modern Historical Thought', in *A Companion to Western Historical Thought*, ed. by Lloyd Kramer and Sarah Maza (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 225-42.

<sup>47</sup> Jonathan Smith and Christopher Stray, *Teaching and Learning in Nineteenth-Century Cambridge*, ed. by Jonathan Smith and Christopher Stray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Library, 2001), p. 2.

Trinity.<sup>48</sup> Overall, both Cambridge and Oxford were ‘havens of scholasticism’, where the emphasis was on storing knowledge, the classical curriculum most specifically, rather than advancing research.<sup>49</sup> According to Martha McMackin Garland, not even that was rigorously pursued:

In fact, at least during the first half of the nineteenth century, intellectual improvement was not the essential point of an undergraduate education at Oxbridge. Instead of rigorous scholarship, what was expected of and for students was more of a socialization process. Young men of the wealthier classes were sent there to become acquainted and acquire social skills (aptitude at public debate or talent at recognizing good port ranked high) and to make connections that would prove valuable in later life, when they assumed their roles in the leadership elite of their country.<sup>50</sup>

Prior to the reforms of the 1850s, Oxbridge did not demand much from its upper class students. Given the institutions’ exclusiveness, their role was mostly to ‘educate future leaders of society, young men whose financial situation would make it unnecessary for them to get and keep a job or to practice a profession’ (Garland, ‘Newman’, p. 271). It was this perceived

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<sup>48</sup> Christopher Stray, ‘A Parochial Anomaly: The Classical Tripos 1822-1900’, in *Teaching and Learning in Nineteenth-Century Cambridge*, ed. by Jonathan Smith and Christopher Stray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Library, 2001), pp. 31-44 (p. 34).

<sup>49</sup> David Boyd Haycock, *William Stukeley: Science, Religion and Archaeology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002), p. 33.

<sup>50</sup> Martha McMackin Garland, ‘Newman in His Own Day’, in *Rethinking the Western Tradition: Idea of a University*, ed. by Frank M. Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 255-81 (p. 268).

atmosphere of intellectual stagnation that began to be questioned by the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century.

In *The Edinburgh Review* of October 1809, Sydney Smith (1771-1845) most vehemently criticised the dominance of classics in the English educational system. His argument is developed from the following quotation from Richard Lovell Edgeworth's (1744-1817) *Essays on Professional Education* (1809):

The principal defect in the present system of our great schools is, that they devote too large a portion of time to Latin and Greek. It is true, that the attainment of classical literature is highly desirable; but it should not, or rather it need not, be the exclusive object of boys during eight to nine years.

Much less time, judiciously managed, would give them an acquaintance with the classics sufficient for all useful purposes, and would make them as good scholars, as gentlemen or professional men need to be. It is not requisite, that every man should make Latin or Greek verses; therefore a knowledge of prosody beyond the structure of hexameter and pentameter verses is as worthless an acquisition, as any which folly or fashion has introduced amongst the higher classes of mankind.<sup>51</sup>

Arguing that the knowledge of the ancient texts and history is the product of a 'folly or fashion' dictated by the upper classes, he suggests that there should

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<sup>51</sup> Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Essays on Professional Education* (London: 1809), p. 47.  
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be made available to the young a more varied and pragmatic tuition in the future. Sydney Smith's tone is more aggressive:

[T]here never was a more complete instance in any country of such extravagant and overacted attachment to any branch of knowledge, as that which obtains in this country with regard to classical knowledge. A young Englishman goes to school at six or seven years old; and he remains in a course of education till twenty-three or twenty-four years of age. In all that time, his sole and exclusive occupation is learning Latin and Greek: he has scarcely a notion that there is any other kind of excellence; and the great system of facts with which he is the most perfectly acquainted, are the intrigues of the Heathen Gods: with whom Pan slept? – with whom Jupiter? – whom Apollo ravished?<sup>52</sup>

The products of the English educational system are described as having been taught nothing but irrelevant knowledge of ancient culture. They are trained 'in a style of elegant imbecility, utterly unworthy of the talents with which nature has endowed them' (Sydney Smith, p. 48). This state of affairs, he argues, would not be a problem if classical education was not dictated by the most renowned institutions in England that educated the future leaders of the country: 'a nobleman, upon whose knowledge and liberality the honour and welfare of his country may depend, is diligently worried, for half his life, with

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<sup>52</sup> Sydney Smith, 'Essays on Professional Education', *The Edinburgh Review*, 15 (October 1809), 40-53 (pp. 45-46).

the small pedantry of longs and shorts' (p. 50). Responding to these criticisms, Edward Copleston (1776-1849) defended the prevalence of classical knowledge in terms of its morals and inherent intellectual challenge:

The knowledge too, which is thus acquired, expands and enlarges the mind, excites its faculties, and calls those limbs and muscles into freer exercise, which, by too constant use in one direction, not only acquire an illiberal air, but are apt also to lose somewhat of their native play and energy. And thus, without directly qualifying a man for any of the employments of life, it enriches and ennobles all. Without teaching him the peculiar business of any one office or calling, it enables him to act his part in each of them with better grace and more elevated carriage.<sup>53</sup>

The study of the classics provides the pupils with the intellectual foundation for any chosen career by exercising their brains and also imbues them with solid morals and taste. These notions are 'better to assume as indisputable, than to embarrass the present argument with any new attempt to prove them' (Copleston, p. 113). Byron's defence of classic themes and tropes in his early poetry, in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* and in *Hints from Horace* can be read as part of the discourse of the educational status quo evidenced by Copleston. This gradually changed with time. As the critical and reformist

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<sup>53</sup> Edward Copleston, *A Reply to the Calumnies of the Edinburgh Review against Oxford* (Oxford: 1810), pp. 111-12.

discourses eventually prevailed over traditionalist ones, one can see those changes manifested in Byron's writing.

### 1.3 '[F]rom out the schoolboy's vision'

These changes were subtle and scattered. For example, *Don Juan* (1818-1823) both upholds the classical education of the English public school, while criticising it. In one of the poem's many digressions, Nero and the burning of Rome intrude into the narrative:

When Nero perish'd by the justest doom

Which ever the destroyer yet destroy'd,

Amidst the roar of liberated Rome[.] (CPW, V, 199-200; 961-63)

Not only is this celebrated event of classical history versified, Byron also adds a note to his for his readers to follow it up if they are so inclined ('See Suetonius for this fact') (CPW, V, p. 703). In canto III after stanza 86, the *ottava rima* metric scheme is interrupted and followed by a Greek lyric of sixteen stanzas and six lines each, known as the 'Isles of Greece' passage. The lyric is delivered by a hireling poet who is described as 'being paid to satirise or flatter' and a 'turncoat' for having adopted the politics of '[a]n eastern antijacobin' in exchange to 'praise' (pp. 185-86; 623, 641, 627-28). In short, Byron satirises Robert Southey. The first stanza is as follows:

The isles of Greece, the isles of Greece!

Where burning Sappho loved and sung,



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Where grew the arts of war and peace, –

Where Delos rose, and Phoebus sprung!

Eternal summer gilds them yet,

But all, except their sun, is set. (CPW, V, 188; 689-94)

This lyric is replete with references to Greek myths and its ancient history. Written as if from the perspective of a nineteenth-century Greek, the passage voices Greece's despair under Ottoman rule by contrasting it to the country's glorious past (CPW, V, 700-701). The grandeur of the poet Sappho and the island of Delos, the birthplace of the god Phoebus (Apollo), have faded with time. The 'Spartan dead' can no longer revive the valiant Greek spirit against the Persians as it happened in the battle of Thermopylae (p. 190; 728-30). Miltiades, the 'tyrant of the Chersonese', 'freedom's best and bravest friend' fails to reignite the Greek memory of Marathon in comparison to the country's subjugation in Byron's eyes (p. 191; 755-60).

As evidenced by the Southey-inspired character of the poet who delivers the lyric, these encomiums to classical knowledge are scattered in a poetry dominated by a tongue-in-cheek and critical attitude. The epigraph to *Don Juan* is taken from Horace's *Ars Poetica*, ('Difficile est proprie communia dicere'), which Byron had previously translated as 'Tis no slight task to write on common things' in *Hints from Horace* (CPW, V, 670; CPW, I, 296; 181var). Though in direct reference to Horatian poetical laws, the mock-heroic epic notions championed in *Don Juan* partake in the change in attitude towards epic conventions that he had criticised so violently ten years earlier in *English Bards*

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*and Scotch Reviewers*. The ‘*in medias res*’ of *Ars Poetica* is ironically referred to as a modern ‘turnpike road’, as if the poet were to mechanically pay a literary toll in order to be admitted into epic composition at the beginning of the first canto:

Most epic poets plunge in ‘*medias res*,’

(Horace makes this the heroic turnpike road)

And then your hero tells, whene’er you please,

What went before – by way of episode,

While seated after dinner at his ease,

Beside his mistress in some soft abode,

Palace, or garden, paradise, or cavern,

Which serves the couple for a tavern.

That is the usual method, but not mine –

My way is to begin with the beginning; [...] (CPW, V, 10; 41-50)

Instead of telling Juan’s story from an intermediary stage in the hero’s adventure, Byron decides to start with his birth and his parents’ background. The classical notions he absorbed in his younger years still loom in his discursive practice, but are engaged with in a much more critical manner than that of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* and *Hints from Horace*.

This is particularly evident when the poet mentions Juan’s formal education in the first canto. The hero’s mother, Donna Inez, is depicted as

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interested into her son's studies, inasmuch as those 'should be strictly moral' (CPW, V, p. 21; 308). The subjects which he was taught even suffered a certain censorship on her part, 'lest he should grow vicious' (p. 21; 320). However, this proved to be a contentious issue with regards to Juan's study of '[t]he languages, especially the dead' (p. 21; 313):

His classic studies made a little puzzle,

Because of filthy loves of gods and goddesses,

Who in the earlier ages made a bustle,

But never put on pantaloons or boddices;

His reverend tutors had at times a tussle,

And for their Aeneids, Iliads, and Odysseys,

Were forced to make an odd sort of apology,

For Donna Inez dreaded the mythology.

Ovid's a rake, as half his verses show him,

Anacreon's morals are a still worse sample,

Catullus scarcely has a decent poem,

I don't think Sappho's Ode a good example,

Although Longinus tells us there is no hymn

Where the sublime soars forth on wings more ample;

But Virgil's songs are pure, except that horrid one

Beginning with '*Formosum Pastor Corydon.*'

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Lucretius' irreligion is too strong

For early stomachs, to prove wholesome food;

I can't help thinking Juvenal was wrong,

Although no doubt his real intent was good,

For speaking out so plainly in his song,

So much indeed as to be downright rude;

And then what proper person can be partial

To all those nauseous epigrams of Martial? (CPW, V, 21-22;  
321-44)

The older Byron, far from being reverential to the classical authors as he was in his younger years, challenges the consideration that the dominant classicism of his age provided youths with good moral lessons. Even though the stanzas most specifically ridicule Donna Inez's prudishness, and by implication the pious cant of his age more generally, his satire makes evident that the classics also possessed subversive themes. Juan's classical education is marked by the exasperated attempts of his tutors to fence off the more sensual aspects of Greek mythology. The Greek gods and goddesses are always naked in their myths, which directly undermined Donna Inez's efforts at safeguarding a virtuous upbringing for her son. Even the classical authors have their moments of subversion. Ovid, Catullus, Sappho and Anacreon's verses show quite immoral lessons in their descriptions of love and lust. Even Virgil, though normally 'pure' in his writings, presents the schoolboy with his 'horrid' composition of the Second Eclogue, which deals with the unrequited love of

the shepherd Corydon for Alexis. Lucretius is too 'irreligious' and Juvenal's satires are 'downright rude' in their language. Byron then presents the reader with an anecdote from his schoolboy days: the 'best editions' with which he was taught had the 'grosser parts' '[e]xpurgated by learned men' with the intent of safeguarding the pupils' morals (CPW, V, 22; 344-7). However, the omitted verses were gathered at an appendix at the end of each volume, which *de facto* saved the schoolboys 'the trouble of an index' for the more controversial parts, thus undermining the original goal of the omissions (p. 23; 348-60). *Don Juan* in this excerpt contends the opposite of Copleston, who argued in his defence 'that the history of those early times presents us with a view of things "nobly done and worthily spoken;" that the mind and spirit which breathed then, lives still, and will for ever live in the writings which remain to us' (Copleston, p. 113).

Canto III continues the epic parody from its first line ('Hail, Muse! *et cetera.*') and references, most specifically, Homer's *Odyssey* (CPW, V, 161; 1). Juan finds himself living in Greece with Haidée after the shipwreck of canto II. Her father Lambro is depicted as an ominous 'piratical papa' who was away sailing the seas, enslaving and selling a series of prisoners in his nautical plundering (p. 165; 97-136). His return home is contrasted to that of Ulysses in the *Odyssey*:

The approach of home to husbands and to sires,

After long travelling by land or water,

Most naturally some small doubt inspires –

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A female family's a serious matter;  
(None trusts the sex more, or so much admires –  
But they hate flattery, so I never flatter;)  
Wives in their husband's absences grow subtler,  
And daughters sometimes run off with the butler.

An honest gentleman at his return  
May not have the good fortune of Ulysses;  
Not all lone matrons for their husbands mourn,  
Or show the same dislike to suitor's kisses;  
The odds are that he finds a handsome urn  
To his memory, and two or three young misses  
Born to some friend, who holds his wife and riches,  
And that his Argus bites him by – the breeches. (CPW, V, 167-  
68; 169-176)

Byron states that the most probable outcome of one's long absence is the opposite of Ulysses's fate. Lambro returns to his abode only to find himself taken for dead and his heir/daughter squandering his fortune upon turning his land into 'a place of pleasure' (CPW, V, 173; 306). Byron's mordant satire of Ulysses's return is a critique of the classicist discourse which was thoroughly dominant in the early 1800s. By the late 1810s and early 1820s, Byron was openly lampooning the classical 'facts' and moral lessons which he and his contemporaries had been so exhaustively taught in their youth.

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Byron's criticism of the classical was not only confined to his more mature writings. Despite being proud of his privileged education in his youth and reverent to the classics, the young Byron also critically commented on the state of the Cambridge during his attendance. In 'Thoughts Suggested by a College Examination' (1806), Byron disapproved of the ossified historical knowledge he and his peers were taught at the university:

Happy the youth! in Euclid's axioms tried,  
Though little vers'd in any art beside;  
Who, scarcely skill'd an English line to pen,  
Scans Attic metres, with a critic's ken.  
What! though he knows not how his fathers bled,  
When civil discord pil'd the fields with dead;  
When Edward bade his conquering bands advance,  
Or Henry trampled on the crest of France;  
Though, marv'ling at the name of Magna Charta,  
Yet, well he recollects the laws of Sparta;  
Can tell what edicts sage Lycurgus made,  
Whilst Blackstone's on the shelf, neglected, laid;  
Of Grecian dramas vaunts the deathless fame,  
Of Avon's bard, rememb'ring scarce the name. (CPW, I, 92-93; 9-22)

The eighteen year old Byron lambasts his Alma Mater for its classical fixation. Understanding of ancient Greece is described as not only omnipresent but

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detrimental to a better historical comprehension of the state of Britain in the early nineteenth century. The poet and his peers are to pour over 'Attic metres', memorise 'the laws of Sparta', the 'edicts sage Lycurgus made' and be acquainted with 'Grecian dramas'. At the same time, they are deprived of understanding the importance of Magna Carta to Britain's laws and its subsequent place in world history; the wars with France led by Edward III and Henry V; and the Civil War in the seventeenth century. The students of 'Granta's sluggish shade' are to know the laws laid out by Lycurgus but ignore those by Sir William Blackstone (1723-1780), who authored the *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-9) (CPW, I, 93; 50). Therefore, students do not have enough knowledge of their own national history nor do they understand how the present is shaped by it. Even Shakespeare ('Avon's bard') is deemed as neglected in favour of ancient Greece and its authors. Robert Southey, while a pupil at Westminster school, is similarly critical in regards to the overabundance of Latin and Greek in his own education:

Collins, if yet remembrance can remain

If friendship still may plead, nor plead in vain

If yet this hand is dear – attend – attend

And lay aside your Homer for your friend.

Still still does study with unceasing rage

Devour the Grecian and the Roman page?

Still shall the classics feed your greedy eyes



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Whilst Ossian on the shelf neglected lies,  
Whilst Gibbon with a careless look you see,  
And Spenser's only read by Rough and me.<sup>54</sup>

In this letter to a school friend, Southey depicts the neglect suffered by British authors (Ossian, Gibbon and Spenser) in favour of the 'Grecian and Roman page[s]' that students were to pore over.

Byron's attitudes towards Cambridge during his first year there have a great deal to do with his own personal life, given that he was lonely and missed his friends from Harrow.<sup>55</sup> However, it is also possible to analyse the poet's attitudes in light of a challenge to the historiographical discourse taught in schools and universities at the time. The depiction of the university in the letters he wrote during his first year is one of an intellectually lethargic environment:

College improves in every thing but Learning, nobody here seems to look into an author ancient or modern if they can avoid it. The Muses poor Devils, are totally neglected, except by a few Musty old *Sophs* and *Fellows*, who however agreeable they may be to *Minerva*, are perfect antidotes to the *Graces*. Even I (great as is my *inclination* for *Knowledge*) am carried away by the Tide, having only supped at Home

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<sup>54</sup> Robert Southey, *New Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. by Kenneth Curry, 2 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), I, 1. Robert Southey to Charles Collins. [Unknown day and month] 1792.

<sup>55</sup> See Leslie A. Marchand, *Byron: A Portrait* (London: John Murray, 1971), p. 35.

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twice, since I saw your Father, and have more Engagements  
on my hands for A Week to come. (BLJ, I, 80).<sup>56</sup>

In the upcoming months, he would write to his solicitor – John Hanson – in an  
even more frank tone:

[...] this is the *Devil*, or at least his principal residence, they  
call it the University, but any other appellation would have  
suited it much better, for Study is the last pursuit of the  
Society; the Master [William Lort Mansel] eats, drinks, and  
Sleeps, the Fellows *drink, dispute and pun*, the *employments*  
of the under Graduates you will probably conjecture without  
my description. (BLJ, I, 81).<sup>57</sup>

Tell Mrs. H. that the predicted alteration in my Manners &  
Habits has not taken place. I am still the Schoolboy and as  
great a *Rattle* as ever, and between ourselves, College is not  
the place to improve either Morals or Income. (BLJ, I, 85).<sup>58</sup>

Byron also confides to his mother on the state of the university and the  
dissipation in which he spent most of his time at the institution: 'improvement  
at an English University to a Man of Rank is you know impossible, and the very  
Idea *ridiculous*' (BLJ, I, 89).<sup>59</sup> Byron not only perceived the retrograde teaching  
in Cambridge, he also acknowledged how someone of his rank was only  
supposed to inherit classical knowledge. University life was simply a rite of

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<sup>56</sup> Byron to Hargreaves Hanson. 12 November 1805.

<sup>57</sup> Byron to John Hanson. 23 November 1805.

<sup>58</sup> Byron to John Hanson. 13 December 1806.

<sup>59</sup> Byron to Mrs Catherine Gordon Byron. 26 February 1806.

passage for a young nobleman before taking his role in British society: whether in the army, or politics, or simply to live off their estate. Again to paraphrase Bourdieu, the schools and universities were the dispensers of social capital to the ruling classes.

In one of his letters in his first year in university, the poet had already stipulated what the future reserved for him. He was to leave the institution then go travelling:

Now I sincerely desire to finish my Education, and having been some Time at Cambridge, the Credit of the University is as much attached to my Name, as if I had pursued my Studies *there* for a Century, but believe me it is nothing more than a Name, which is already acquired; I can now leave it with honour, as I have paid every thing, and wish to pass a couple of Years abroad, where I am certain of employing my Time to far more advantage and at much less expence [sic], than at our English Seminaries (BLJ, I, 89).<sup>60</sup>

Passing ‘a couple of years abroad’ is what Byron effectively did, though not as soon as 1806. After spending the necessary time in Cambridge to ‘[attach] to [his] Name’ the ‘Credit of the University’, the poet set off in his aristocratic Grand Tour in 1809, where he would complete his education and, as shown in the next chapter, continue his dialogue with the historiographical discourse of classical history by personally visiting the places he had studied so exhaustively.

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<sup>60</sup> Byron to Mrs Catherine Gordon Byron. 26 February 1806.

## 2. Travelling to the Past

‘In contemplating antiquities,’ says Livy, ‘the mind itself becomes antique’.<sup>61</sup>

What can he tell who treads thy  
shore?

No legend of thine olden time,  
No theme on which muse might  
soar

High as thine own in days of yore,  
When man was worthy of thy  
clime. (CPW, III, 44; 142-46)

Besides his early poems, the ancient world is nowhere more prominent in Byron’s poetry than in those writings which are entwined with his travels. This chapter discusses two themes which are related to his travel writing: firstly, the usage Byron makes of the places he traverses (both physically and rhetorically) as the locus from whence he can expound his education on the historical themes dear to him and to his contemporaries. As already discussed in chapter one, this is a way of paying allegiance to the dominant classical discourse of his times, which invariably leads to poetical meditations on the decay of those civilisations. Secondly, this chapter will explore the extensive lengths to which Byron goes in his poems to assure his readers that his poetry is ‘factually’ accurate. This is mainly achieved by referencing authorities in the verses and by appending footnotes to explain and expand on them. The question of physical legitimacy is of utmost importance. As Stephen Cheeke argues, Byron is not only interested in presenting his received knowledge of the past as

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<sup>61</sup> Joseph Forsyth, *Remarks on Antiquities, Arts, and Letters During an Excursion in Italy, in the Years 1802 and 1803*, 2nd edn (London: 1816), p. 148.

accurately as possible to the reader, but he was also fascinated by the historical connection only attainable by being present at the actual physical spots he visited (Cheeke, p. 6). This is particularly relevant when one considers the moments when Byron attempts to ‘test’ his received education in an almost empirical fashion – for instance, by weighing the veracity of a battle’s classical account by surveying the topography of the place where the event took place. Furthermore, the texts which Byron wrote during his travels cannot be properly understood without being read in the broader and well-established tradition of travel literature. It is in the plethora of travelogues, travel narratives, descriptions of tours and letters from abroad that one finds these intersecting themes of received general knowledge and the search for accuracy and legitimacy most prominently.

‘Travel writing’ is an all-encompassing term which comprises those publications related to the theme of travel.<sup>62</sup> Academic disciplines comprehensively divided in archaeology, history and geography did not exist in the early nineteenth century. Rather, these different themes and scopes were intrinsically entwined in the texts of the period. Travel literature in the 1800s is no exception to this rule, since it encompasses all of these themes in an age which is, essentially, epistemologically different from ours.<sup>63</sup> Descriptive works

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<sup>62</sup> Jan Borm, 'Defining Travel: On the Travel Book, Travel Writing and Terminology', in *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, ed. by Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs (Farnham: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 13-26 (p. 13).

<sup>63</sup> Amanda Gilroy, *Romantic Geographies: Discourses of Travel 1775-1844* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 1; Tim Youngs, and Glenn Hopper, *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, ed. by Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs (Farnham: Ashgate, 2004), p. 3.

of foreign lands provided the means by which the audience could not only satisfy their curiosity about other places (as perhaps would still be the case today), but also as creators of knowledge – whether historical, geographical, philological – together with books which we would consider to be unequivocally historical such as David Hume’s *History of England* and Edward Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. This chapter deals with the historical knowledge indelibly present in Byron’s writings as the texts describe the environments visited. The historical knowledge presented in travelogues follows a tradition which can be traced back to antiquity. The very first works of ‘history’ were essentially first-person narratives of places traversed by their authors that included not only the past events they collected via local oral traditions, but also observations on other peoples’ lifestyles and societal mores. The *Histories* by Herodotus is the archetypical example, since the Greek historian was not only interested in the events of – and those leading up to – the Greco-Persian wars, but also in describing the civilisations he encountered throughout his travels outside the Hellenic world in the fifth century BCE. In academic terms, this historical methodology was still, at least partially, present in the early 1800s with travel literature being its main exponent. It was only with the institutionalisation of history and other disciplines in the humanities – starting around the late Victorian period – that we have the stark distinctions between a work of history and one of, say, geography (Harrison, Jones and

Lambert, pp. 14-20).<sup>64</sup> This entangled and highly complex discursive environment should be foregrounded in order to understand Byron's travel writings at the level of ideas and discourse regarding the conceptualisation of history in the early 1800s. Several of his works can be read as part of the well-established corpus of travel literature and its fixation with recounting and cataloguing the history and social observations of the places visited and/or traversed. Byron's compositions, with their appended notes and the examinations found in his letters can be firmly located in a theme common to travel writers: how there is an amalgamation of the place *to* which one goes in its actual physical, objective attributes and how these locations are also indelibly surrounded by an 'imaginative' reality with its layers of tradition, history and myths. This cultural baggage, the place where the traveller hails *from*, is inseparable from the locations approached by the traveller.<sup>65</sup> As a result of a fixation with a past that does not quite live up to the material realities of the present, the theme of the inexorable passing of time and ultimate historical decay is most prominent not only in Byron's poetry, but in travel writing in general. '[T]he comparison between a glorious past and a degraded present' is a constant theme in this chapter, as discussed below.<sup>66</sup> It is this constant cultural tension that one finds in Byron's travel writings, where

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<sup>64</sup> For a brief discussion of the history/geography duality, see Katherine Clarke, *Between Geography and History: Hellenistic Constructions of the Roman World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), pp. 1-6. See also Iggers, p. 225.

<sup>65</sup> Robert Eisner, *Travelers to an Antique Land: The History and Literature of Travel to Greece* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> Elizabeth A. Bohls and Ian Duncan, eds, *Travel Writing, 1700-1830: An Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 3.

the cultural struggle between the received general knowledge and the questions of cultural accuracy and legitimacy are brought to the fore.

## 2.1 Byron's Grand Tour

*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is unquestionably the most travel-oriented of Byron's texts. The poem's first two cantos were largely composed during Byron's Grand Tour to the Levant in 1809-11, and published in the succeeding year (1812). The poem's abundance of travels and foreign locations was such that a reviewer from the *Anti-Jacobin* protested that the poem's subtitle – 'A Romaunt' – was misleading, since the composition did not contain interesting events nor a hero, but merely presented the reader with one 'wandering over the world, without any fixed object'.<sup>67</sup> The reviewer argued that the subtitle should have been 'Sketches of scenery in Spain, Portugal, Epirus, Acarnia, and Greece' instead (*Anti-Jacobin*, 'Childe Harold's', p. 344). Byron's ironic and deliberate mingling of genres confused the poetical expectations of these early reviewers, since the composition lacked the trumpeting of chivalry and medieval knights as expected in a 'romaunt'.<sup>68</sup> The travelling locations – from Portugal to Ottoman-ruled Greece – were chosen by Byron and his friend John Cam Hobhouse (1786-1869) out of convenience, given that the 'Continent [was] in a fine state!' (BLJ, I, 206) amidst the destructive and uncertain forces

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<sup>67</sup> [Anonymous], 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, a Romaunt; and Other Poems', *Anti-Jacobin Review and True Churchman's Magazine*, 42 (August 1812), 343-365 (p. 344).

<sup>68</sup> David Duff, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 155-56.



unleashed by the Napoleonic wars.<sup>69</sup> Their post-academic education, the role of the Grand Tour, would have to do without visiting the aristocratic saloons and art galleries in France, Switzerland, Germany and, above all, Italy, as was the custom for those living in the preceding century.<sup>70</sup>

The Grand Tour as a traditional cultural practice was fully established by the late 1700s and, especially after the end of the Seven Years War in 1763, the number of Englishmen visiting the Continent increased dramatically (Hibbert, p. 39). The role of this travelling phenomenon was not only to send out young gentlemen to train as ‘diplomats, public servants and soldiers’ whilst on the Continent but also as the means by which one could ‘[impart] taste, knowledge, self-assurance and polished manners’ to them. By proxy, the Grand Tour had ‘become accepted as an invaluable alternative, or supplement, to a university education’ (p. 18). Though a destination of travellers since the pioneering tours promoted by the Society of Dilettanti in the 1760s, Greece only became a popular excursion after the occupations of Italian territories in 1796 by Napoleonic forces (Tregaskis, p. 7). This pragmatically reinvigorated route to the Levant proved to be very fruitful for young Englishmen to rejoice in their historical knowledge of Greece, so exhaustively studied by them at school, and to exult, as one prominent travel writer in the late eighteenth century put it, in the ‘antient virtuosi’ of places ‘filled with monuments of

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<sup>69</sup> Byron to Mrs Catherine Gordon Byron. 22 June 1809; Christopher Hibbert, *The Grand Tour* (London: Thames Methuen, 1987), p. 220.

<sup>70</sup> Hugh Tregaskis, *Beyond the Grand Tour: The Levant Lunatics* (London: Ascent Books, 1979), p. 4.

Athenian glory'.<sup>71</sup> It was mostly under these conditions that those visiting Greece published their travel texts concerning the history and society of the region. By 1809 there already was a booming market for books written by travellers to the Levant, and Byron and Hobhouse's tour was part of an ongoing tradition of 'Cambridge Hellenists': graduates who visited and published travelogues on the East in the previous decades. These authors were, for the most part, interested in 'classical topography, the practice of identifying the modern locations of ancient sites, and describing and measuring the ruins of classical antiquity', as all travel writers attempted to outdo and prove those previously published wrong in their theses and descriptions.<sup>72</sup>

As *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* takes the reader to Greece, it is no surprise that the knowledge of that ancient civilisation and its classical culture is so prominent in the poem. Canto I starts with a fully-fledged Homeric introduction, albeit tongue-in-cheek, as Byron pays his allegiance to the ancient muses:

Oh, thou! in Hellas deem'd of heav'nly birth,  
Muse! form'd or fabled at the minstrel's will!  
Since sham'd full oft by later lyres on earth,  
Mine dares not call thee from thy sacred hill:

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<sup>71</sup> Richard Chandler, *Travels in Greece: Or, an Account of a Tour Made at the Expence of the Society of Dilettanti* (Oxford: 1776), p. 37.

<sup>72</sup> Nigel Leask, 'Byron and the Eastern Mediterranean: *Childe Harold* II and "the Polemic of Ottoman Greece"', in *The Cambridge Companion to Byron*, ed. by Drummond Bone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 99-118 (p. 103).

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Yet there I've wander'd by thy vaunted rill;

Yes! sigh'd o'er Delphi's long-deserted shrine,

Where, save that feeble fountain, all is still;

Nor mote my shell awake the weary Nine

To Grace so plain a tale – this lowly lay of mine. (CPW, II, 8;  
1-9)

The 'form'd or fabled' muse is invoked to start the poetic composition. Following the theme of degradation (as he saw it) of poetry in the early 1800s as discussed in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, Byron recognises how the muse is 'sham'd full of oft by later lyres on earth'. Despite modestly acknowledging he is no exception to this rule ('this lowly lay of mine'), he places great importance on his physical presence on the spot of where was once the oracle of Delphi. This reason alone makes it possible for Byron to state his higher cultural position in comparison to his contemporaries and acceptable for him to summon the muse in the first place. Moreover, the line on Delphi is expanded with a long note, where Byron describes and ponders on the famous location he witnessed first-hand in 1809. The note states that the 'little village of Castri stands partly on the site of Delphi' with a brief description of the geography surrounding the spot, as it was customary for the writers of travels to the Levant to do (CPW, II, p. 187).

Most interestingly, however, is the reference to classical authority in order to comprehend the geographical attributes of the region. Byron alludes to a few caves close to a nearby monastery, 'leading to the interior of the

mountain; probably to the Corycian Cavern mentioned by Pausanias' (p. 187). Pausanias, the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE Greek geographer and author of *Description of Greece* is uncritically accepted by Byron as the authority on the geography of the region. The centuries between the second and nineteenth century seem as almost irrelevant regarding the geographical knowledge of the region, given the sheer domination of classical knowledge and of ancient history in general present in the educational system at the time. Furthermore, the overall tone of despondency over the decayed remains of Greece dominates the poetry, given that the realities of the region in the 1800s failed to match the grandeur of the past in the traveller's mind. This theme is shared by many a travel writer. John Galt (1779-1839), for example, addresses the subject in his *Letters from the Levant* (1813):

Sometimes I think that I ought to make an apology to you for paying so little attention to the localities of this country; but I have not conscience enough to pretend to any other interest in the objects around me, than that vague awakening of the imagination which is inspired by my belief of the appearance of things having been once very different. Greece has been so long ruined, that even her desolation is in a state of decay, and, like her field after winter, the frame of her society begins to show symptoms of revival.<sup>73</sup>

Hobhouse writes how the 'noble masterpieces still retain their grandeur and their grace' but as a 'melancholy spectacle', since one sees 'not only the final

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<sup>73</sup> John Galt, *Letters from the Levant* (London: 1813), p. 126.

effects, but the successive progress of devastation, and, at one rapid glance, peruse the history of a thousand ages'.<sup>74</sup>

Accordingly, thoughts of Greece – ancient and modern – pervade most of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* cantos I and II. Before reaching the Levant, canto I takes the reader across the Iberian Peninsula, as Harold (and Byron) crossed Portugal and Spain on their way to the Mediterranean. The narrative concerning these countries and of 'Spain's dark-glancing daughters' (p. 31; 609) is suddenly interrupted in stanza 60 by the sight of Parnassus:

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!  
What marvel if I thus essay to sing?  
The humblest of thy pilgrims passing by  
Would gladly woo thine Echoes with his string,  
Though from thy heights no more one Muse will wave her  
wing. (CPW, II, 31; 612-20).

The mountain, seat of the Muses in Greek mythology, is literally described as 'soaring' its way into the composition. Byron's physical presence at the

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<sup>74</sup> John Cam Hobhouse, *A Journey through Albania; and Other Provinces of Turkey in Europe and Asia, to Constantinople, During the Years 1809 and 1810* (London: 1813), p. 290.

geographical location is placed on an indelibly higher cultural position than those who were to write on the subject with nothing but the ‘fabled landscape’ depicted in their poetry. Accordingly, he adds a note following the mention of the mountain: ‘These stanzas were written in Castri (Delphos), at the foot of the Parnassus, now called Λιακुरα – Liakura’ (p. 280). The claim to legitimacy is made evident by the note, as if these verses should be viewed as higher cultural expressions than others, given that they were written on the spot. Moreover, the reader is once again reminded that Castri is the modern name of the location nearby ancient Delphos, and Byron uses the opportunity to also write the modern name given to Parnassus by the inhabitants of the region in the Cyrillic alphabet before eventually presenting his readers with its Westernised spelling.

Ancient Greece is described as setting off frenzied dreams of poets and general enthusiasts of the historical period. Indeed, Byron’s language betrays a sense of utmost reverence which can be only paralleled to a religious ritual. The texts of Greece, relentlessly taught to English schoolboys, are ‘man’s divinest lore’ (CPW, II, 32; 622) and virtually worshipped:

When I recount thy worshippers of yore

I tremble, and can only bend the knee;

Nor raise my voice, nor vainly dare to soar,

But gaze beneath thy cloudy canopy

In silent joy to think at last I look on Thee! (CPW, II, 32; 625-29).

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These lines point to a sense of cultural piety and modesty triggered by the knowledge of the Greek past and its culture. There is nothing left for the writer to feel than being grateful for his physical presence by the base of the mythical mountain. Once again, this notion is echoed by many a travel writer who also visited the Greek spots. For instance, Edward Dodwell:

[A] classic interest is breathed over the superficies of the Grecian territory; that its mountains, its valleys, and its streams, are intimately associated with the animating presence of the authors, by whom they have been immortalized. Almost every rock, every promontory, every river, is haunted by the shadows of the mighty dead. Every portion of the soil appears to teem with historical recollections; or it borrows some potent but invisible charm from the inspirations of poetry, the efforts of genius, or the energies of liberty and patriotism.<sup>75</sup>

Ultimately, Byron's digression from the poem's narrative in Spain is an inescapable intrusion of the location from where he writes. It could not be otherwise, Byron states, given that others before him have written on the 'hallow'd' Greeks without ever visiting the Mediterranean: 'Shall I unmov'd behold the hallow'd scene, | Which others rave of, though they know it not?' (CPW, II, 32; 632-33). His verses, he implies, are more poetic and 'factually' legitimate than those which were hypothetically written in, say, a library in

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<sup>75</sup> Edward Dodwell, *A Classical and Topographical Tour through Greece: During the Years 1801, 1805, and 1806*, 2 vols (London: 1819), I, p. iv.

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England with nothing but books to support their composition. The physical presence on the spot provides the author with a certain knowledge provided by the haunting of the remnants of the past:

Though here no more Apollo haunts his grot,  
And thou, the Muses' seat, art now their grave,  
Some gentle Spirit still pervades the spot,  
Sighs in the gale, keeps silence in the cave,  
And glides with glassy foot o'er yon melodious Wave. (CPW,  
II, 32; 634-48)

The theme of attaining historical knowledge by being physically present on the spot when writing, as Stephen Cheeke clarifies, is also a 'classical commonplace' which can be traced to the works of antiquity – like the Roman philosopher and statesman Cicero (1<sup>st</sup> century BCE) (Cheeke, p. 198, n6). Byron is not only claiming a communion with the place's past by standing on the actual spot, but also showing his allegiance to a classical theme which he internalised via his Harrow/Cambridge education and its predominance of the study of ancient cultures.

This obsession with classical Greece finds its epitome in canto II, as Byron reaches the '[l]ands that contain the monuments of Eld' (CPW, II, 44; 952). The reader is greeted by a plethora of references to ancient Greece and its celebrated authors. As in the previous canto, it also starts with a Homeric introduction, as Byron addresses Athena:

Come, blue-eyed maid of heaven! – but thou, alas!  
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Didst never yet one mortal song inspire –  
Goddess of Wisdom! here thy temple was,  
And is, despite of war and wasting fire,  
And years, that bade thy worship to expire:  
But worse than steel, and flame, and ages slow,  
Is the dread sceptre and dominion dire  
Of men who never felt the sacred glow  
That thoughts of thee and thine on polish'd breasts bestow.  
(CPW, II, 44; 1-9)

Once more, Byron broods over the ruinous state of the country in the early 1800s in comparison to its former ancient glories. He attacks those who were engaged in plundering the Parthenon – most notably Lord Elgin (1766-1841) – who managed to complete the destruction of the site in succession to the centuries of war and decay. The theme of being on the spot and feeling ‘the sacred glow’ of history is again invoked and Byron essentially labels Elgin and the other plunderers of the site as philistines who cannot embrace the beauties of the Greek past. In the appended note, he expands on this theme:

We can all feel, or imagine, the regret with which the ruins of cities, once the capital of empires, are beheld[.] But never did the littleness of man, and the vanity of his very best virtues, of patriotism to exalt, and of valour to defend his country, appear more conspicuous in the record of what Athens was, and the certainty of what she now is. This theatre of contention between mighty factions, of the

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struggles of orators, the exaltation and deposition of tyrants, the triumph and punishment of generals, is now become a scene of petty intrigue and perpetual disturbance, between the bickering agents of certain British nobility and gentry (CPW, II, 189).

The glory of the Athenian past, as evidenced by Byron's enumeration of political struggles and heated public debates, descends to an archaeological plundering mainly motivated by greed. Once the location of glorious battles and other important historical events, modern day Athens is merely reduced to where 'petty' fights between members of the British upper classes and their 'bickering agents' about the possession and removal of marbles take place. As evidenced by Byron's language, the spoliation of the Parthenon and other ancient sites is carried on in a shamefully competitive manner which neglected the preservation of the ruins plundered. To Byron, these agents effectively sealed the fate of Greece to an irredeemably shameful present. 'Sylla could but punish, Philip subdue, and Xerxes burn Athens; but it remained for the paltry Antiquarian, and his despicable agents, to render her contemptible as himself and his pursuits' (CPW, II, 190). The contempt that Byron feels towards Athens in the early nineteenth century is partially explained by a comparison between the celebrated past he exhaustively studied in Harrow and Cambridge and the farcical present dominated by the plundering of the country's antiquities. In addition, Byron's perception of the appropriation of the remnants of the ancient past in terms of commercial transactions only fuelled his contempt for

his contemporaries for not indulging in the absorption of the glorious events of Greece.

Ironically, the antiquarianism of Elgin and the others is not dissimilar to the classical discourse which obsessed over the 'facts' of antiquity as existent in Byron's poetry and annotations. Despite being critical of his contemporaries for not feeling a historical connection by being on the famous spots of antiquity or by attempting to attain this connection by spoiling the historical site, Byron for the most part rejoices in dropping scattered references to ancient Greek culture. Given the disappointing state of the country under the Ottoman rule in the 1800s, Byron finds solace in dealing with Greece as '[a] school-boy's tale, the wonder of an hour!' (CPW, II, 44; 15). Literally, what that means is a self-conscious allusion to his Harrow/Cambridge education deeply dominated by classical languages and history. In this aspect, Byron is trumpeting his social upbringing and claiming for himself the status of a gentleman who has been on the Grand Tour and could subsequently publish a travel narrative.

## **2.2 Schoolboys amidst ruins**

Vast parts of the second canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* read like a tour-guide to the famous locations in Athens, as Byron describes the many 'broken arch[s]' and 'ruin'd wall[s]' (CPW, II, 46; 46) alongside his knowledge of Greek myths, ancient poetry and historiography. John Murray, in fact, published a pocket-sized edition of Byron's poems so that travellers could comfortably

experience the verses alongside the classical sites visited.<sup>76</sup> Throughout the poem's narrative, as Byron meditates on the fall of ancient empires and the inevitability of historical change, he alludes to a myriad of events in Greek history, ancient or not. For instance, Byron alludes to Alaric (p. 48; 119), 'the Gothic King' (p. 192), and his plundering of the region in the past, the Spartan knights who died in Thermopylae during the Peloponnesian War (p. 68; 693-701), the Oligarchy of the Thirty in Athens (69; 702-10), the Greco-Persian Wars (p. 73; 828-45), and many other examples. Historical 'facts' appear entwined with the mythological and the topographical, thus giving the history of Greece a strong sense of remoteness and reverence:

Yet to the remnants of thy splendour past

Shall pilgrims, pensive, but unwearied, throng;

Long shall the voyager, with th' Ionian blast,

Hail the bright clime of battle and of song;

Long shall thine annals and immortal tongue

Fill with thy fame the youth of many a shore;

Boast of the aged! lesson of the young!

Which sages venerate and bards adore,

As Pallas and the Muse unveil their awful lore. (CPW, II, 74;

855-73)

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<sup>76</sup> Keith Hanley and John K. Walton, *Constructing Cultural Tourism: John Ruskin and the Tourist Gaze* (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2010), pp. 87-88.

In the utter impossibility of experiencing the glorious past, Byron finds solace in writing about it and the scenery which surrounded him in a haughty tone. Ancient Greece is only available through a sense of amazement towards ruins and the scattered and systematic references to the textual works of antiquity, famous conquerors and battles. This was criticised by William Hazlitt (1778-1830), who considered this historical attitude too traditional and lacking in innovations in feeling and thought:

[H]is *Childe Harold* contains a lofty and impassioned review of the great events of history, of the mighty objects left as wrecks of time; but he dwells chiefly on what is familiar to the mind of every school-boy, has brought out few new traits of feeling or thought.<sup>77</sup>

*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, he continues, is a work permeated by a 'lofty and philosophic tone' in which Byron approaches 'the crumbling monuments of time, [...] the great names, the mighty spirit of antiquity. The universe is changed into a stately mausoleum' (*Spirit of the Age*, p. 119). Hazlitt disapproves of the historical commonplaces contained in Byron's poetry as the products of a mere schoolboy's mind. Ultimately, the image with which one is left, Hazlitt argues, is one of a past divorced from the present and reduced to the level of a 'stately mausoleum'. Hence the equation of classicism to schoolboys: Hazlitt derides it as a sign of intellectual immaturity and lack of

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<sup>77</sup> William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age* (1825; repr. Menston: Scholar Press, 1971), p. 119.

originality. Nonetheless, regarding the study of the classics in general, Hazlitt seemed to agree with its supremacy in the curriculum in England at the time. Like the majority of his contemporaries, he considered the classics as not solely as 'an exercise of the intellect' but as a tool 'in softening and refining the taste'.<sup>78</sup> Ancient Rome and Greece should, in fact, rightly be revered:

Rome and Athens filled a place in the history of mankind,  
which can never be occupied again. They were two cities set  
on a hill, which could not be hid; all eyes have seen them,  
and their light shines like a mighty sea-mark into the abyss  
of time (Hazlitt, 'On Classical Education', p. 27).

His criticism of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is about *how* Byron chose to celebrate the deeds and 'facts' of antiquity, not about the subject itself. According to Hazlitt, Byron was not as innovative as one would have hoped and simply repeated his schoolboy knowledge as if divorced from the surroundings he experienced.

Contrary to what Hazlitt argued, however, it would be unjust to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* cantos I and II to entirely pigeonhole the text as a school exercise of a British peer keen on expounding his knowledge of Greek history. Byron criticised this distance on the part of the traveller – including himself – who only saw the painstakingly studied ancient past in detriment to the

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<sup>78</sup> William Hazlitt, 'On Classical Education', in *The Round Table Vol. 1* (Edinburgh: 1817), pp. 26-32 (p. 26).

realities of the Greeks living in the early nineteenth century. As he expressed in a lengthy note appended to stanza 73:

Of the ancient Greeks we know more than enough; at least the younger men of Europe devote much of their time to the study of the Greek writers and history, which would be more usefully spent in mastering their own. Of the moderns, we are perhaps more neglectful than they deserve; and while every man of any pretensions to learning is tiring out his youth, and often his age, in the study of the language and of the harangues of the Athenian demagogues in favour of freedom, the real or supposed descendants of these sturdy republicans are left to the actual tyranny of their masters, although a very slight effort is required to strike off their chains. (CPW, II, 202)

One should pay more attention to *modern* Greece, Byron argues, than to obsess with its ancient history, even though that is a dominant characteristic of his own writing. Most importantly, the youth should not solely study the classical Greek texts dealing with ‘freedom’ for the sake of it, but rather act in accordance with the lessons taught by the past. That meant aiding the modern Greeks in their plight against the Ottoman Empire. As discussed in the next chapters, that is consistent with a whig narrative of history which saw Britain as inheriting and perfecting the notion of ‘liberty’ from the ancient Greeks and Romans. With regards to ancient Greece to those visiting the Levant in the early 1800s, Byron is essentially rebuking the travellers who treated the region as a

way to simply confirming their received historical knowledge, as if one could travel to the ancient past by being physically present on the spot. Byron criticises how this attitude ignored the social conditions of those living in the region.

Byron's critical attitude is evident when he directly engages with the travel writers of his times. Even before Byron went on his Grand Tour, he references Sir William Gell's (1777-1836) topographical work in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*:

But should I back return, no tempting press

Shall drag my Journal from the desk's recess: [...]

Of Dardan tours let Dilettanti tell,

I leave topography to rapid GELL;

And, quite content, no more shall interpose

To stun the public ear – at least with Prose. (CPW, I, 261;  
1024-25, 1033-36)

Byron makes a direct reference to the Society of Dilettanti and their travels to Greece since the 1760s. The travel literature which the Dilettanti published upon their return from the continent aimed to improve the arts and taste of the nation. As already discussed in the previous chapter, Byron's verses function as a means by which he aimed to defer to the dominant classical culture of his time by effectively claiming his allegiance to the 'Grecian Taste



and Roman Spirit', as ran one of the Dilettanti's mottoes.<sup>79</sup> By the time Byron wrote these lines, 'Rapid Gell' – who was to lead the Society of Dilettanti's expeditions in the following years – had already published two works: *The Topography of Troy, and its Vicinity: Illustrated and Explained by Drawings and Descriptions* (1804) and *Geography and Antiquities of Ithaca* (1807). Byron's initial note to the line reads:

Mr. Gell's Topography of Troy and Ithaca cannot fail to ensure the approbation of every man possessed of classical taste, as well for the information Mr. G. conveys to the mind of the reader, as for the ability and research the respective works display (CPW, I, 418).

Those possessing 'classical taste' could not fail to approve and rejoice in Gell's topographical works, simply because they make reference to the places and texts with which every gentlemen with an education similar to Byron's would be thoroughly familiar. However, the note radically changes in the fifth edition of the poem, published after his return from the Levant in 1811. Byron writes:

'Rapid', indeed! he topographized King Priam's dominions in three days! – I called him 'Classic', before I saw the Troad, but since have learned better than to tack to his name what don't belong to it (CPW, I, 418).

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<sup>79</sup> Bruce Redford, *Dilettanti: The Antic and the Antique in Eighteenth-Century England* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2008), p. 3.

Finally, coming across a copy of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* in 1816, Byron could not resist writing on the margins of the text and counterbalance some of the thoughts originally expressed in that poem, as published by McGann in the commentary section of his edition of the poem (CPW, I, 396). Byron found it necessary to explain why he changed his mind in the appended notes: 'Passed first [Ithaca] in 1809. Visited both [Troy and Ithaca] in 1810-1811. – Since seeing the plain of Troy my opinions are somewhat changed as to the above note – Gell's survey was hasty and superficial' (CPW, I, 418). Gell's works go from being a must-read for 'every man possessed of classical taste', to a 'hasty and superficial' survey. What prompted such a change of thought is, quite straightforwardly, the fact that Byron had physically been to the classic locations in question: walking and pondering amongst the ruins, plains and landscapes related to the Homeric epics. Seeing the plain of Troy first-hand had the effect of overturning his initial enthusiasm for Gell's topographies. Moreover, the physical locations and, most importantly, the present affairs of Greece and the country's inhabitants in the early 1800s prompted Byron to revise the enthusiasm he inherited from his schoolboy years for references to antiquity.

Byron's friend Francis Hodgson (1781-1852) wrote a review of Gell's works in the *Monthly Review* in 1811. Hodgson rebukes the topographical writer for his excessive 'classical affectation' by writing about the places in the Levant by using their ancient names as if the more than two millennia separating the Homeric epics and the early 1800s had not happened, and thus

confusing the travellers who were to ask for directions from the inhabitants of the place.<sup>80</sup> Following Byron's comments – who was diligently playing the part of the knowledgeable informant – Hodgson challenges the topographer's assertions: ultimately, the criticism levelled at Gell was that he paid too much attention to the received knowledge concerning the regions topographed in detriment to their present realities, as one who was to walk on the actual spots would undoubtedly discover. At times Gell seemed to fantasise, Hodgson argues, that he was still writing about the ancient Greeks as if he were to have met them in the flesh:

When the author talks, with all the *reality* (if we may use the expression), of a Lempriere, on the stories of the fabulous ages, we cannot refrain from indulging a momentary smile; nor can we seriously accompany him in the learned architectural detail by which he endeavours to give us, from the Odyssey, the ground plot of the house of Ulysses, – of which he actually offers a plan in drawing! (Hodgson, pp. 377-78).

Hodgson warns the readers to take Gell's travel books with a pinch of salt. Despite his pretences of achieving works of an encyclopaedic nature by enshrouding his prose in the matter-of-fact style of the author of *Bibliotheca*

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<sup>80</sup> Francis Hodgson, 'The Geography and Antiquities of Ithaca', *Monthly Review*, 65 (August 1811), p. 381. The review is erroneously attributed to Byron in the entry to Sir William Gell in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. For a history of this erroneous attribution see [Byron] *The Complete Miscellaneous Prose*, ed. by Andrew Nicholson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. xxvi-xxvii.

*Classica; or, A Classical Dictionary* (1788), John Lemprière (c. 1765-1824), they do, in fact, at times descend into academic wishful thinking. Rather, Hodgson argues the author is unashamedly giving vent to a historiographical discourse obsessed with ancient Greek history and culture entirely divorced from the realities one would encounter on the ground; as shown in the following excerpt:

[N]otwithstanding the lapse of twenty centuries, and so many revolutions, it is very gratifying to observe [...], that no other country affords so many traces of ancient manners, or recalls so frequently the recollection of its former inhabitants.<sup>81</sup>

Byron also criticises travel writers for neglecting modern Greece and the country's inhabitants in detriment to the country's ancient past. Reading through the travel books of the period, it becomes evident that the theme of decay amongst the modern Greeks – their historical degradation as a civilisation – is a recurring one. William Eton (1762-1835), writing in the late 1790s, argues that the Greeks were only dominated by the Turks due to their own fault for falling in a state 'of debasement and superstition' which led to 'a race who had graced and dignified society' to be 'slaughtered without distinction and without mercy, or subjected to a captivity still worse than slaughter'.<sup>82</sup> Charles Sonnini (1751-1812) also mentions 'that Superstition, the

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<sup>81</sup> William Gell, *The Itinerary of Greece* (London: 1810), p. ii.

<sup>82</sup> William Eton, *A Survey of the Turkish Empire*, 2nd edn (London: 1799), p. 346.

child of Ignorance and Slavery, great tarnishes their [the Greeks'] lustre'.<sup>83</sup> John Galt concludes that the modern Greeks 'are the slaves of the Turks. It is not, however, the slavery of individual servitude, but the degradation of an inferior cast' (Galt, p. 141). Others are even blunter in their conclusions. Thomas Thornton (c. 1776-1814) pessimistically asks if the modern Greeks, 'lost even to the love of liberty or the faculty of employing it [...] can [...] suddenly recover from the stupor of so tremendous a fall, and emulate the virtues of their remote and illustrious ancestors?'.<sup>84</sup> Cornelius de Pauw (1739-1799), writing in the 1780s, goes even further:

Occupied alone in reading legends, and disputing about absurdities, they neglected the elements of trade, of arts, and of sciences, until their conjectures in Theology rendered them absolutely childish. So far from being excited by patriotism, or the love of glory, they are now a burden to the earth, and a disgrace to their ancestors, whose very tombs they neither know nor remember.<sup>85</sup>

Byron, on the whole, agrees about the degraded condition of the modern Greeks in relation to their past. However, his conclusions are somewhat different from those of the writers above. The Greeks' 'depravity', he argues,

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<sup>83</sup> Charles S. Sonnini, *Travels in Greece and Turkey* (London: 1801), p. 7. The original in French was published in the same year.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas Thornton, *The Present State of Turkey; or, a Description of the Political, Civil, and Religious Constitution, Government, and Laws, of the Ottoman Empire* (London: 1807), p. 69.

<sup>85</sup> Cornelius de Pauw, *Philosophical Dissertations on the Greeks*, 2 vols (London: 1793), I, 69-70. The original in French was first published in 1787.

'is to be attributed to causes which can only be removed by the measure [Sir William Gell] reprobates' (CPW, II, 200). In other words, their decayed condition is the *consequence* of their subjection to Ottoman rule and not vice-versa. In an essentially liberal attitude, Byron reprimands his fellow travellers for their judgemental arguments against the modern Greeks:

'They are ungrateful, notoriously, abominably ungrateful!' – this is the general cry. Now, in the name of Nemesis! for what are they to be grateful? Where is the human being that ever conferred a benefit on Greek [sic] or Greeks? They are to be grateful to the Turks for their fetters, and the Franks [Westerners] for their broken promises and lying counsels: they are to be grateful to the artist who engraves their ruins, and to the antiquary who carries them away; to the traveller whose janissary flogs them, and to the scribbler whose journal abuses them! This is the amount of their obligations to foreigners (CPW, II, 201).

François Pouqueville (1770-1838), writing in the same decade as Byron, makes a similar point. The unhappy and perceived debasement and bad manners of the Greeks, he argues, is the result of Turkish dominion: '[b]ut who is not, alas! well aware how much the iron rod of despotism debases nations, as well as individuals?'.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> François Charles Hugues Laurent Pouqueville, *Travels in the Morea, Albania, and Other Parts of the Ottoman Empire* (London: 1813), p. 125. The original in French was first published in 1805.

When dealing with the common theme of the degraded present in comparison to the glorious past, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* closely follows tropes in the larger discursive environment of travel writing. Yet, Byron also inhabits the discursive grid of deference to the classics whilst simultaneously criticising it and attempting to move beyond the shortcomings of travel literature.

### **2.3 The poet and the matter-of-fact scholar: Byron and Hobhouse**

This ambivalent position of simultaneous acceptance and critique is best illustrated by an examination of the intellectual relationship between Byron and his travelling companion John Cam Hobhouse. A dichotomy between the two friends is traditionally accepted: Byron as the 'Romantic' poet and Hobhouse as the 'indefatigable antiquarian', always keen to espouse his dominion over the historical traditions of his times.<sup>87</sup> This depiction of the two can be traced as far back as Victorian times. In an excerpt from Trelawny's account of his acquaintance with Byron (*Records of Shelley, Byron, and the Author* (1878)), he is thus portrayed speaking of Hobhouse and their tour to the Levant:

Travelling in Greece, Hobhouse and I wrangled every day. His guide was Mitford's fabulous History. He had a greed for legendary lore, topography, inscriptions; gabbled in *lingua franca* to the Ephori of the villages, goatherds, and our

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<sup>87</sup> Caroline Franklin, *Byron: A Literary Life*, Literary Lives (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 106.

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dragoman. He would potter with map and compass at the foot of Pindus, Parnes, and Parnassus, to ascertain the site of some ancient temple or city. I rode my mule up them. They had haunted my dreams from boyhood; the pines, eagles, vultures and owls, were descended from those Themistocles and Alexander had seen, and were not degenerated like the humans; the rocks and torrents the same. John Cam's dogged perseverance in pursuit of his hobby is to be envied; I have no hobby and no perseverance. I gazed at the stars, and ruminated; took no notes, asked no questions.<sup>88</sup>

Byron is portrayed riding amidst the scenery nonchalantly, gazing and brooding at the stars. Hobhouse, on the other hand, is depicted as obsessed with his hobby of doggedly cataloguing the 'legendary lore, topography, inscriptions' of the region. Trelawny's book, published originally in 1858 (then titled *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron*) and re-published as a revised edition twenty years later, enforces the myths surrounding Byron's life during the Victorian period. The otherworldly aura of one who lived life to the full and died young proved to be a much more appealing biographical portrait than that of one who shared his friend's matter-of-fact obsessions with the history and geographical locations who 'had haunted [his] dreams from boyhood' (Cheeke, p. 42-3). In fact, the difference between the two friends was

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<sup>88</sup> Edward John Trelawny, *Records of Shelley, Byron, and the Author* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973 [1878]), pp. 82-83.



that Byron chose to vent this knowledge not as a book of travel, but in verse – with its many appended explanatory notes.

Contrary to the accepted dichotomy popularised by Trelawny, Byron and Hobhouse shared the same ethos regarding the descriptions of the places they had both traversed as can be elucidated by the letters they exchanged. As Hobhouse was in 1811 finishing his travelogue – *A Journey through Albania, and other Provinces of Turkey* (1813) – he asked his fellow traveller to clarify some doubts concerning his theses. Byron had, after all, spent more time touring the region and was by then the employer of two Greek servants:

Then there are a thousand points into which I ought to have enquired, and the want of knowing which considerably confuses me – Exemp: Gra: Are the Chimeriotes Greeks or Albanians? That is, are they *Arnaots* in their original language who know Greek, and are Christians, or are they Greeks? is their native tongue Greek? I wish to know the same respecting the Souliotes whom however, I suspect do not wear the Albanian dress & do not speak Albanian – Then, how many inhabitants are there supposed to be in Joannina? Is there a place called Bonila near it? Is Bèratt on the banks of the river that runs under Tepèllenè? how many hours is it from Tepèllenè, and is it ever called Arnaot Beh-grat? or Ber-at? Was Ibrahim Pasha ever Pasha of Scutari? These questions I state because I think it very likely that you may be able to answer every one of them, and if you can, either

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by your own knowledge or by some credible tale of Signor

[Demetrius Zografos, Byron's Greek servant].<sup>89</sup>

Byron answers every one of the questions in his reply (BLJ, II, 113-14).<sup>90</sup> Underlying the exchange between the two friends is how they could with their publications (Byron was still preparing *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* by then) fill the academic vacuum regarding *modern* Greece, given the overwhelming dominance in the study of ancient Greek in the academic discourse of the time, as shown in chapter one. Byron published a lengthy note with specimens of the Romaic language alongside his impressions on the state of Levant in 1809-11 and a critique of an article of the *Edinburgh Review* on the subject (CPW, II, 199-217). In it, he lists contemporary Romaic authors and transcribes two excerpts written in modern Greek from two dramatic compositions before providing the reader with his own translations. These papers, minutely written in the style of the travelogues of his contemporaries and 'offered to the scholar only', caused a certain amount of anxiety on Hobhouse's part (CPW, II, 217). Replying to his friend's complaint that Byron would be stealing the spotlight on the theme with his publication (since *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* was published first), Byron replied: 'is not the field wide enough for both? I declare to you most sincerely that I would rather throw up my publication entirely than be the

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<sup>89</sup> *Byron's Bulldog: The Letters of John Cam Hobhouse to Lord Byron*, ed. by Peter W. Graham (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1984), p. 83. Hobhouse to Byron. 1 October 1811.

<sup>90</sup> Byron to Hobhouse. 13 October 1811.

means of curtailing a page of yours. [...] The Devil's in it, if there is not a field for both' (BLJ, II, 135).<sup>91</sup>

Both Byron and Hobhouse, himself a graduate of Westminster School and Cambridge, shared an enthusiasm for ancient history. This finds its pinnacle in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* canto IV (1818), as Byron effectively delegated to the latter the vast majority of the appended notes to the verses. These were later expanded by Hobhouse and published as a book – *Historical Illustrations of the Fourth Canto of Childe Harold* (1818). Written after their tour of the Italian peninsula in 1817, canto IV finally addresses the traditional preoccupations of the travel writers who undertook the Grand Tour; namely, the history, ruins and antiquities of the decayed Roman civilisation. Rome is celebrated at the same level of ancient Greece, with the overall tone of reverence dominating the verses:

Oh Rome! my country! city of the soul!  
The orphans of the heart must turn to thee,  
Lone mother of dead empires! and controul  
In their shut breasts their petty misery.  
What are our woes and sufferance? Come and see  
The cypress, hear the owl, and plod your way  
O'er steps of broken thrones and temples, Ye!  
Whose agonies are evils of a day –

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<sup>91</sup> Byron to Hobhouse. 3 December 1811.

A world is at our feet as fragile as our clay. (CPW, II, 150; 694-703)

Besides the overall tone of despair regarding the ruinous state of the ancient civilisation, the poetry abounds with numerous references to Roman history, as Byron visited the spots which were so familiar to him as a student at Harrow and Cambridge. Visiting the decayed remains of Rome provided, as in Greece, a way for the English ‘gentlemen of taste’ to confirm their classical education.<sup>92</sup> In this aspect, Byron and Hobhouse followed in the footsteps of earlier travel writers who urged those undertaking the tour of Italy to ‘[take] care to refresh [their] Memory among Classic Authors [...] and to compare the Natural Face of the Country with the Landships [sic] that the Poets have given us of it’.<sup>93</sup> Or, as another writer put it, ‘[f]amiliar acquaintance or rather bosom intimacy with the ancients is evidently the first and most essential accomplishment of a *classical* traveller’.<sup>94</sup> Hobhouse summarises how abundance in classicism ultimately acts as cultural lens through which to view locations in Italy:

He will have already peopled the banks of the Tyber with the shades of Pompey, Constantine, and Belisarius, and the other heroes of the Milvian bridge. [...] Even the mendicants of the country asking alms in Latin prayers, and the vineyard

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<sup>92</sup> Clare Hornsby, *The Impact of Italy: The Grand Tour and Beyond*, ed. by Clare Hornsby (Rome: British School, 2000), p. 3.

<sup>93</sup> Joseph Addison, *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* (London: 1753), pp. 11-12. First edition published in 1705.

<sup>94</sup> John Chetwode Eustace, *A Classical Tour through Italy*, 3rd edn, 3 vols (London: 1815), I, 5.

gates of the suburbs inscribed with the ancient language,  
may be allowed to contribute to the agreeable delusion.<sup>95</sup>

As the excerpt above shows, those travelling to the Italian Peninsula were supposed to be acquainted with not only the poetry and literature of the Latin authors, but also with the history of ancient Rome as expressed in these texts. This created the 'agreeable delusion' of travelling to the past; to the ancient places which so thoroughly dominated the teaching and mentality of the period. Similarly to Sir William Gell in his *Topography of Troy*, Hobhouse rejoices in the pretence of sharing the sites with the ancient inhabitants of the Italian peninsula. However, in stark contrast to Gell, Hobhouse was fully aware that it was the sheer dominance of the classical discourse in one's mind that created the 'delusion' of travelling to the past.

Accordingly, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* IV abounds with numerous references to Roman history. As the poetry guides the reader through the Italian peninsula, Byron mentions the battle near Lake Trasimeno ('Thrasimene's lake') during the Second Punic War (217 BCE), when Hannibal defeated the Romans in a successful ambush (CPW, II, 145; 550-67). Other allusions to Roman history included in the poetry are Caesar's murder by Brutus (pp. 144, 151; 523-31, 730-38), the events surrounding the life of the general Scipio, who was responsible for the defeat of the Carthaginians (and thus bringing an end to the Punic Wars in 202 BCE) (p. 143; 506) and the general

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<sup>95</sup> John Cam Hobhouse, *Historical Illustrations of the Fourth Canto of Childe Harold* (London: 1818), p. 49.

Sulla's ('Sylla') military victories against the enemies of Rome and his time as a dictator, after having '[a]nnihilated' the Roman senate (p. 152; 739-56). The verses also trumpet some of the Roman authors familiar to every schoolboy in the early 1800s – Cicero ('Tully'), Virgil and Livy – who are not deemed worthy of the decay of the city as witnessed by Byron (p. 151; 734-5). Byron also makes reference to Rome's foundation myth: the she-wolf who nursed the brothers Remus and Romulus as he observed a decayed statue of the scene (presumably the one described as being struck by lightning by Cicero) (p. 153; 784-92). When writing on the ruins of the Roman Forum, Byron mentions two Roman emperors – Titus and Trajan – as he attempts to decipher which of the two are depicted in the decaying ancient columns (p. 161; 982-90). The stanzas concerning the Colosseum also bring, alongside a poetic rendering of the scenery, a discussion of gladiatorial battles and the inhumanity behind these festivals (p. 171; 1243-78). At moments, Byron adopts a tone of exasperation as he finds it impossible to properly place the references of his historical knowledge to the actual physical locations he encountered:

Chaos of ruins! who shall trace the void,  
O'er the dim fragments cast a lunar light,  
And say, 'here was, or is', where all is doubly night? (CPW, II,  
151; 718-20)

Contrary to sailing (the metaphor used by Byron), which can be methodically done by following the stars on the night sky, pursuing historical knowledge around the decayed remnants of Rome is portrayed as an imprecise endeavour:

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But Rome is as the desert, where we steer

Stumbling o'er recollections; now we clap

Our hands, and cry 'Eureka!' it is clear –

When but some false mirage of ruin rises near. (CPW, II, 151;  
726-29)

Needless to say, most of the references to the history of 'the lofty city' (CPW, II, 151; 730) are accompanied by Hobhouse's notes. These are, for the most part, travelogues on the physical spots which the poetry describes and also provide a compendium of references on the subjects there approached. For instance, expanding on the battle near Lake Trasimeno, Hobhouse not only recounts the battle by critically engaging with Livy's and Polybius' texts, but also by guiding the readers towards the exact spot where the historical events occurred and minutely describing the topography of the region where the two armies met. Hobhouse also criticises a fellow traveller's account for confusing lake Bolsena with Trasimeno only because the former happened to be on the traveller's route from Siena to Rome (CPW, II, 245-47).<sup>96</sup> The possible location of the general Scipio's tomb is also mentioned – 'at Literum [...] near the sea-shore' (p. 239); the character of general Sulla is briefly discussed and Hobhouse comes to the conclusion that, regarding his actions in overthrowing the Roman Senate, 'what had been mistaken for pride was a real grandeur of soul' (p. 249). On the note appended to the statue of the she-wolf nursing its foster-children,

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<sup>96</sup> Hobhouse criticises Jean-Baptiste Mercier-Dupaty, *Travels through Italy: In a Series of Letters Written in the Year 1785* (London: 1788), p. 128. Original in French published in the same year.

Hobhouse writes a treatise in trying to decipher ‘whether the wolf now in the conservators’ palace is that of Livy and Dionysius, or that of Cicero, or whether it is neither one or the other’ (p. 250). Regarding the gladiatorial battles, Hobhouse expands on the theme, explaining their logic – ‘[t]he wounded combatant dropped his weapon, and advancing to the edge of the arena, supplicated the spectators [for his life]’ – before mentioning how these ancient festivals are no different than the Spanish bull-fights he had witnessed alongside Byron in the year 1809 (pp. 258-59).

Similar to the travel writers who published books about their tours of Italy, the abundance of references to ancient history are entwined with the notion of being on the actual historical spots as a claim to ‘factual’ legitimacy. Moreover, physical presence at the locations recurrently creates numerous examples of digressions on the meaning of the passing of history and the rise and fall of mighty Rome and other imperial powers, including Britain.<sup>97</sup> These themes of decay and the inexorable transient nature of history, exacerbated by the conflated grandeur of the classical knowledge previously acquired, are most prominent in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage IV* and it finds parallels in travel literature. Byron’s verses frequently alert the reader to ‘[p]ass not unblest the Genius of the place’ (CPW, II, 147; 604) and engage in that historical magic of communion with the site; to ‘become a part of what has been, | And grow unto the spot, all-seeing but unseen’ (p. 170; 1241-2). John Chetwode Eustace

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<sup>97</sup> The role of Britain in world history will be addressed in the next two chapters (regarding the whig interpretation of history).



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(1761-1815) utilises the same tone in his travelogue to Italy. 'As the traveller paces along her streets, spacious, silent, and majestic,' he writes, 'he feels the irresistible genius of the place working in his soul, his memory teems with recollections, and his heart swells with patriotism and magnanimity' (Eustace, III, 267). The fantasy of sharing the same location with the ancients is a theme common to Byron, Hobhouse and most travel writers in Italy. Jean-Baptiste Mercier-Dupaty (1746-1788), writing on the spot which was once the Roman Forum, rejoices in thinking how '[t]he air in which I am now breathing is that in which Cicero enchanted all ears with his eloquence' and 'Horace and Virgil here recited their immortal verses!' (Mercier-Dupaty, pp. 129-30). Similarly, Byron rejoices in imagining that he shared with the ancient Romans – 'The Roman saw these tombs in his own age, | These sepulchres of cities [...]' (CPW, II, 139; 402-3) – the sight of the ruinous state of the Greek cities near Corinth. It becomes the role of the writer to provide the reader with that knowledge of the ancients and the remains of their empire by attempting to relive/revive and despond over those glorious events in their works:

But my soul wanders; I demand it back  
To meditate amongst decay, and stand  
A ruin amongst ruins; there to track  
Fall'n states and buried greatness, o'er a land  
Which *was* the mightiest in its old command,

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And is the loveliest [...] (CPW, II, 132; 217-22)<sup>98</sup>

And yet, even amidst the state of desolation and decay encountered at the spot, Byron still considers Rome's 'wreck a glory' and the city's 'ruin graced | With an immaculate charm which cannot be defaced' (CPW, II, 133; 233-34).

Contrary to Eustace and other travel writers, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* IV presents a despondent and yet non-judgemental view of the ruins of modern Rome. For instance, as he versifies on the ruins of the Palatine, Byron philosophically ponders the quiet desolation of the place and its decay as he hears nothing but the 'owlet's cry' (CPW, II, 159; 948) at night around the hills:

Cypress and ivy, weed and wallflower grown

Matted and mass'd together, hillocks heap'd

On what were chambers, arch crush'd, column strown

In fragments, chok'd up vaults, and frescos steep'd

In subterranean damp, where the owl peep'd,

Deeming it midnight: – Temples, baths, or halls?

Pronounce who can; for all that Learning reap'd

From her research hath been, that these are walls –

Behold the Imperial Mount! 'tis thus the mighty falls. (CPW, II, 159-60; 955-63)

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<sup>98</sup> Emphases in the original.

Byron's endeavours in placing and naming the ruins of the Palatine correctly are ultimately discarded as an impossible and meaningless task. The remains of the great past are acknowledged not so much as a means by which he chose to vent his classical knowledge, but mostly as a way for Byron to ponder the passing of time in general and the inevitability of imperial decay by observing Rome's fate.<sup>99</sup> Contrary to the treatment levelled at the modern Greeks in canto II for their decadence, Byron spares the modern Italians of moral judgment. Therefore, he distances himself from those travel writers who rebuked modern Rome and its inhabitants for not living up to their idealised notions. For instance, Eustace notes how, apart from a few exceptions, classical ruins 'are rare' and that 'we shall find little more than tottering walls and masses of brick' in Rome (Eustace, I, 60-61). Joseph Forsyth (1763-1815) warns that travellers expecting the grandiose of Roman antiquity 'will be infallibly disappointed' by the city (Forsyth, p. 123). 'Whichever road you take,' he continues, 'your attention will be divided between magnificence and filth' (p. 124). Eustace is even more damning: '[s]o far have the modern Romans forgotten the theatre of the glory and of the imperial power of their ancestors' they have 'degrade[d]' the sight of the Forum to be called '*Campo Vaccino*' (the Cow-field) (Eustace, I, 374).<sup>100</sup> It seems that Byron's refusal to judge the

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<sup>99</sup> Paul Douglass argues that the influence of Volney's (1757-1820) *The Ruins* (1791) in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* IV is present but that Byron does not reach the same radical conclusion (that ruins serve as proof of the demise of tyranny in world history) as the French author. See Paul Douglass, 'Paradise Decomposed: Byron's Decadence and Wordsworthian Nature in *Childe Harold* III and IV', *Byron Journal*, 34 (2006), 9-19 (pp. 14-15).

<sup>100</sup> This reference to the Forum's 'degraded' modern name is mentioned by many travel writers, e.g. Mercier-Dupaty, p. 151; Hobhouse, 1818, p. 243.

nineteenth-century Italians for their state of decay in comparison to his rebuttal concerning the Greeks is related to the latter's subjugation to the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, the birth of European thought – as embodied by ancient Greece – as conquered by the Turkish was the main reason for this conclusion. The Italian peninsula, on the other hand, did not provide the traveller with a similar dramatic context, given that its fragmented territories were divided amidst a multitude of powers throughout the years before and after the Napoleonic Wars: the Papal State, Revolutionary France and the Austrian Empire.

Accordingly, Byron's brooding over the decayed remnants of Roman grandeur finds a philosophically detached tone in accordance with thoughts of universal history and the acceptance of a linear march of time. This theme of a progressive temporal march shall be addressed in the following chapters dealing with whig historiography, whereby the notion of 'liberty' is interpreted as created in the ancient world and gradually inherited and perfected by succeeding civilisations until it finds its pinnacle in the burgeoning British empire in the early nineteenth century.

### 3. Inheriting the Past

It should indeed be the endeavour of men who have inherited liberty from their ancestors, to transmit the possession unimpaired to their descendants.<sup>1</sup>

The constant referencing of classical civilisations during Byron's lifetime is not solely the manifestation of a culture dominated by the knowledge of the classics and which obsessed over the physical locations of antiquity. It also informs a broader historiographical discourse which perceived the entirety of history as a linear march through time. From this perspective, the world of antiquity plays the role of forefather to the burgeoning British empire of the early 1800s. Little by little, a notion of historical inheritance which not only perceived and interpreted the present via the lens of antiquity, but which saw the present as the natural continuation of past events, was forged. In this historical narrative Britain was taken as the new Rome or Athens by not only keeping the best attributes of these cultures, but by effectively improving and spreading them into the modern world. This chapter and the next deal with this teleological reading of the past as it relates to Byron's writings. What follows is a discussion of this teleological, whiggish interpretation of history during the turbulent times after the French Revolution. There was a permeating anxiety, at least from Byron and his Whig peers in parliament, in trying to engage with those events by using a progressive terminology.<sup>2</sup> Simultaneously, this

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<sup>1</sup> John Russell, *The Life of William Lord Russell* (London: 1820), p. 174.

<sup>2</sup> This thesis uses both the words 'whig' (in lower case) and 'Whig' (capitalised). The former is used as a shorthand for 'teleological' and is synonymous with 'whiggism' and 'whiggish'. 'Whig' is more specific: it alludes to the politicians and their families who

discourse also sought to rebuke the actions taken by the revolutionary Jacobins and *sans-cullotes* against the historically-established dominant classes as radical and homicidal.

In contrast to the fixation with the classics explored in the previous chapters, the whiggish reading of the past is much harder to pinpoint in terms of the institutions and literary culture which harboured and propagated such discourse. As shown above, the classicist bias was related to the schools and universities of the time and the burgeoning travel literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In its turn, the whig interpretation inhabits a much more complex discursive sphere in which the inherited historical layers and the political are entwined in an environment where historical meaning is created and reproduced.

### **3.1 The classical inheritance**

Sir Herbert Butterfield, in his seminal essay *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931), rebuked the historians of his generation for falling prey to an unconsciously teleological reading of the past. These, he argued, looked towards the past with a sense of finality and thus produced ‘a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present’, which read past events

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were (or professed to be) in the Whig party and, therefore, in opposition to the Tories. As it becomes clear below, it was possible to be a Tory who read history in a whiggish way. Indeed, the main argument put forth here is that the Tory-led government of the period elaborated a whig account of British history which left the Whigs – as a party – at pains to formulate a coherent and relevant discourse in opposition. Hence the distinction between the two.

as ‘converg[ing] beautifully upon the present’.<sup>3</sup> The whiggish historian, he argues, instils a sense of causality to the history s/he writes as if this notion of causation was self-evident in historical events. He argues that this conclusion is forced upon the past *by* the historian and not the other way around. Throughout the 1700s and 1800s, whenever one finds digressions regarding the passing of time and the inexorable march of history through the ages by British writers, one sees judgments of value regarding the role played by Britain in those centuries in relation to past civilisations. The parallels almost invariably reach towards ancient Greece and Rome – due, in part, to the predominance of classical learning discussed in the previous chapters – and how Britain at the dawn of the modern age came to inherit and perfect the notions created by these two cultures. In other words, British history is read through a whiggish interpretation of history in Butterfield’s terms. Britain is perceived as the sole inheritor of the philosophy and political traditions of ancient Greece and Rome.

The travel writers discussed in the previous chapter not only engaged with the ‘facts’ of Roman and Greek history but also approached this theme of progressive inheritance. John Chetwode Eustace in his *Classical Tour through Italy* (1815) largely digresses on the Greek and Roman inheritance bestowed upon Britain in the early 1800s. Rome was a civilisation ‘in the hands of Providence, the instrument of communicating to Europe, and to a considerable portion of the globe, the three greatest blessings of which human nature is

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<sup>3</sup> Sir Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London: W.W. Norton, 1965), pp. v, 12.

susceptible — Civilization, Science, and Religion’ (Eustace, I, 343-44). Because of these traits, ancient Rome can be rightly taken to be ‘the metropolis of the world, by a new and more venerable title, and [assume], in a most august sense, the appellation of the “Holy City,” the “Light of Nations,” the “Parent of Mankind”’ (p. 346). Eustace eulogises the Roman civilisation as bequeathing the modern world its most important institutions. The Greeks are perceived as inferior to the Romans:

The Greeks, more lively and ingenious, but at the same time changeable and fantastic, appear, when compared to the Romans, as children put in contrast with men; and Virgil has most philosophically as well as poetically struck off the characters of the two nations, when to the acuteness and subtlety of the Greeks he grants superiority in the arts and sciences, while to Roman firmness and wisdom he consigns the sceptre of the universe (III, 268-69).

The subtext is clear from these two excerpts: Greece came first and created the Western standards of ‘arts and sciences’, whilst the Romans with their ‘firmness and wisdom’ came to dominate the ancient world. In assimilating Greek ideals and by implication perfecting them, Rome is perceived as ‘the Parent of Mankind’. An historical progression of development through time is accepted at face value.

With that historical advancement in mind, Edward Dodwell in his *A Classical and Topographical Tour through Greece* (1819) explains to the reader:



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When Greece monopolized the learning of the world, our island was in a state of barbarism: at present the case is reversed; Apollo, and the Muses, have fled from Greece to Hyperborean climes, and England is the favoured seat of useful knowledge and elegant erudition (Dodwell, p. 167).

Britain is upheld as being the most advanced civilisation in the world's history for possessing the most up-to-date culture and learning. This narrative of the past shows how societies, from the dawn of civilisation to the early 1800s, have risen and fallen in a steady succession and each has bestowed its own advancements upon humankind. Ancient Greece has been followed by the Roman Empire. Rome, following its demise in the West brought forth by a series of barbarian invasions, has continued its politico-juridical traditions under Charlemagne. These traditions are followed centuries later by the Renaissance. British history, from the Magna Carta to the burgeoning global empire of the 1700s/1800s (with the settlement of 1688-89 playing a pivotal moment), has played its role in the grander scheme of the human race towards 'liberty'. As John Millar (1735-1801), author of *An Historical View of the English Government* (1787), states:

The British government is the only one in the annals of mankind that has aimed at the diffusion of liberty through a multitude of people, spread over a wide extent of territory. The ancient republics of Greece and Rome comprehended little more than the police of a single city; and in these a great proportion of the people, so far from being admitted

to a share in the government, were, by the institution of domestic slavery, excluded from the common rights of men.<sup>4</sup>

It was through ‘concurrence fortunate events’, he continues, that ‘our Saxon forefathers, originally distinguished as the most ferocious of all those barbarians who invaded the Roman provinces, have been enabled to embrace more comprehensive notions of liberty’, thus making it possible for them ‘to sow the seeds of those political institutions which have been productive of such prosperity and happiness to a great and populous empire’ (Millar, p. 5). British history is presented as a fortunate gift to the world with its preservation of the sacred ‘notions of liberty’. Britain, it is implied, not only preserved those notions from ancient Greece and Rome, but perfected them and took upon itself to diffuse them ‘through a multitude of people’. The superiority of modern Britain over its ancient predecessors is understood as self-evident, given that Greece and Rome ‘comprehended little more than the police of a single city’ in contrast to Britain’s global dominions. Furthermore, these civilisations could only exist with the advent of slavery. Millar argues that Britain, in its enlightened ways, did not need to maintain its power with ‘domestic slavery’ and, upon correctly understanding ‘the common rights of men’, achieved its worldwide dominion with free labour and entrepreneurship.

According to the standard Whig account, the most important contribution that Britain bestowed upon the world was the ‘tempered popular

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<sup>4</sup> John Millar, *An Historical View of the English Government* (London: 1787), pp. 4-5.

liberty' which came into fruition during the upheavals of the 1600s.<sup>5</sup> The Whigs considered themselves to have salvaged the people's civic liberties from the monarchy's whimsical rule, and they read the events of the second half of the 1600s in terms of a grim growth of the powers of the Crown which ought to be resisted. Accordingly, 'the events of 1688-89 and the institutions that emerged from those events were models of how a prosperous and free people might preserve political liberty and the autonomy of private property owners against tyrannical rule'.<sup>6</sup> The Glorious Revolution ultimately 'altered the balance of king-in-parliament in parliament's favour' and thus safeguarded 'liberty' from monarchical despotism (Krey, p. 304). The Whig John Russell (1792-1878) upheld the Revolution in his *An Essay on the History of the English Government and Constitution* (1823). According to the author, the highest point in human history a society can achieve is the 'union of liberty with order' and he sees the 'most celebrated governments of ancient and modern times which have succeeded best in combining [these traits] are Sparta, Rome, and England'.<sup>7</sup> He concludes:

Of these, I have no hesitation in saying England, since 1688,  
is the most perfect. Indeed, it is evident to any one who  
reads the history of Sparta and Rome, that their institutions

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<sup>5</sup> Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 5. Pincus argues that the traditional Whig account was set out in Macaulay's *History of England* (1849) (see pp. 151-60 below).

<sup>6</sup> Gary Stuart de Krey, *Restoration and Revolution in Britain: A Political History of the Era of Charles II and the Glorious Revolution* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 252.

<sup>7</sup> John Russell, *An Essay on the History of the English Government and Constitution: From the Reign of Henry VII to the Present Time*, 2nd edn (London: 1823), pp. x-xii.

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were intended for small communities, contained in the neighbourhood of a single city, and that the very force and strength which their form of government produced, tended, by increasing the commonwealth, to destroy the laws and manners which gave them birth. Not so with England; she does not reject wealth; she does not reject commerce; she does not even reject extended empire from the plan of her constitution; she rejects nothing but continental greatness, and an overgrown military establishment (John Russell, p. xii).

The Revolution of the late seventeenth century marks the ripening of the notions of 'liberty' and its subsequent spread around the globe.<sup>8</sup> Russell considered it to be 'the mighty stock' that inspired the French Enlightenment, the American Wars of Independence and the French Revolution (p. xv). That sense of self-aggrandisement can also be argued regarding the Whigs themselves, since they were the ones at the vanguard of the 1688-89 settlement. In fact, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries they claimed ownership of such events and consequently took for themselves the role of defending the 'people' and their civic rights: 'the Whigs believed that they, and they alone, had saved the parliamentary process, and they knew that the cost

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<sup>8</sup> John Russell discusses the different types of 'liberty' in his book: civil, personal and political liberty. The first is concerned with the 'security of person and of property'; the second, the right of a person to do that which is 'harmless' ('as speaking or writing', if not abused); and the third, the people's right 'to control their government; or take part in it' (p. 115). According to him, the successful combination of these three is the greatest legacy bestowed by the Glorious Revolution.

had been high'.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, 'History gave them a proprietorial attitude to Parliament' and as 'Parliament' translated as 'liberty' against monarchical despotism, the Whigs could claim propriety of 'liberty' by proxy (Mitchell, *The Whig World*, p. 19).<sup>10</sup> By successfully curtailing the power of the king, the Whigs claimed to speak on behalf of the 'people'; even though the notion of 'people' for the Whig in the 1600s and 1700s consisted of the members of the propertied classes: the aristocracy and gentry who had political rights in Britain at the time. As Kathryn Chittick explains, 'in any eighteenth-century discussion of legal rights in Britain, the People [as understood in terms of universal suffrage] constitutionally speaking did not exist'.<sup>11</sup> As an anonymous Whig wrote in 1819, those behind the deposition of James II made sure that the revolution was 'not effected by an indignant and enraged multitude, but was slowly prepared by the most virtuous and best informed amongst the higher and enlightened classes of people'.<sup>12</sup> The Whigs made sure that the march of 'liberty' through time was successful in a civilised and contained way by leading it away from monarchical absolutism on the one hand and the radicalism of the mob on the other.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Leslie Mitchell, *The Whig World: 1760-1837* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005), p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> John Russell could also claim this proprietorial attitude on a personal level, given that his ancestor William Russell (1639-1683) was executed when conspiring against Charles II in the Rye House Plot (and henceforth deemed as a martyr by the Whigs). See Lois G. Schwoerer, 'William, Lord Russell: The Making of a Martyr, 1683-1983', *Journal of British Studies*, 24 (1985), 41-71 (p. 41).

<sup>11</sup> Kathryn Chittick, *The Language of Whiggism: Liberty and Patriotism, 1802-1830* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> [Anonymous], *A Short Defence of the Whigs* (London: 1819), p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> This teleological reading of the past is not only related to the ideas of 'liberty', but any historical methodology which takes the present as the self-evident culmination of

### 3.2 '[W]e are not of those, who cannot distinguish between resistance and rebellion'

In his sermon *The Principles of the Revolution Vindicated* (1776), Richard Watson (1737-1816) states how the Glorious Revolution was the event which matured the civil principles of 'liberty' in the world. The dissolution of the monarchy from 1649 to 1660 was, in fact, considered as an abomination which, thankfully in Watson's view, was short-lived. Monarchical representation is depicted as the best system which every nation should aspire to accomplish:

Thanks be to God, that as on this day we were freed from Republican Tyranny, and restored to that form of government, which justly excites the envy of every modern nation, and which no ancient nation, in the opinion of the greatest Politician of Imperial Rome, ever enjoyed.<sup>14</sup>

Britain is portrayed as not only the most envied nation in the late eighteenth century for its system of government, but as the best to have ever existed throughout human history. Not even the highly-studied ancients, Watson argues, had envisaged such an efficient and free political system. The country's historical superiority is due to the dialectical balance between the Crown on the one hand and the masses on the other. The Whigs are described as those

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the past in any issue. The case here discussed is the 'prototypical "Whig interpretation of history"' that Butterfield considers in his essay. See Abraham D. Kriegel, 'Liberty and Whiggery in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *Journal of Modern History*, 52 (1980), 253-78 (p. 255).

<sup>14</sup> Richard Watson, *The Principles of the Revolution Vindicated: In a Sermon Preached before the University of Cambridge, on Wednesday, May 29, 1776*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: 1776), p. 7.

who made such an arrangement possible and who effectively maintained such a peaceful settlement:

[W]e are not of those, who cannot distinguish between resistance and rebellion; for we venerate the principles of the Revolution[.] [...] [If the bond between King and Parliament is to be broken,] we are of opinion that the people may conscientiously resist the usurpation of the Crown, even to the altering of the Succession itself (pp. 8-9).

‘Resistance’ and ‘rebellion’, he argues, are two completely separate entities. The former implies a course of action which is safeguarded by an entirely legal apparatus: the British Constitution and the ideals of ‘liberty’ which have been perfected since the signing of the Magna Carta. The settlement of 1688-9 is one of the events which was safeguarded by law, even though it consisted of the alteration ‘of the Succession itself’. Watson envisages how the masses could take the government into their ‘own hands’:

[This would only happen] if the Nobility, forgetting the duty they owe the people in return for the rank and distinction they enjoy above the other members of the community, should ever abet the arbitrary designs of the Crown: – if the Commons should become so wholly selfish and corrupt, as to be ready to support any Men and any Measures; – if lastly, the King should be so ignorant of his true interest, or so ill advised, as to use such degenerate Parliaments as the tools of a Tyrannic Government (p. 11).

Watson schematically portrays the hierarchy of power in Britain. The 'Nobility' is described as having a 'duty' to 'the people' in preserving everyone's liberties against the Crown as a trade-off for their social status. The House of Commons should maintain their allegiance to the House of Lords – as the latter was more politically prominent in the period – and refrain from supporting 'any Men and any Measures'; implying those more radically-leaning. Finally, the monarch should oversee the government and abstain from swaying parliamentary decisions based on his/her whims alone. If any of those conditions should be violated, 'the people' ought to take matters into their own hands. Writing before the French, and in the same decade as the American Revolutions, Watson's depiction of the 'people' is an abstract one. As those events unfurled into radicalism after 1793, Watson's responses changed accordingly as he attempted to uphold his Whig convictions. As the French Revolution descended into radicalism, Watson accordingly ceased to praise the 'people' as an amorphous and neutral entity:

Now a republic is a form of government, which, of all others,  
I most dislike – and I dislike it for this reason; because of all  
forms of government, scarcely excepting the most despotic,  
I think a republic the most oppressive to the bulk of the  
people: they are deceived in it, with the show of liberty; but



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they live in it, under the most odious of all tyrannies, the tyranny of their equals.<sup>15</sup>

For a traditional Whig such as Watson, the notion of a British government without a monarchy was anathema:

[The principles] on which the [1688-89] Revolution was founded, and the present reigning Family seated on the Throne of these kingdoms, are, in my judgment, principles best calculated to protect the liberty and property of the subject, and to secure the honour and happiness of the Sovereign.<sup>16</sup>

It is the duty of the Whigs to maintain the principles of the Glorious Revolution: the monarchy kept in check on the one hand and the ‘people’ on the other.

Overall, the Revolution of 1688-89 was perceived by Whig politicians and whig historians as preserving Britain from absolutism and permitting ‘the evolution of parliamentary government and personal liberties in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’ (Krey, p. 199). There are a few characteristics ubiquitous to the appellation of ‘Whig’. To be deemed a ‘Whig’ in British society in the eighteenth, and for a large part of the nineteenth, century was not only to be the political opposite of a ‘Tory’, it also implied a whole range of cultural assumptions. Namely, Whigs were deemed to possess

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<sup>15</sup> Sermon delivered in 1793. Published in Richard Watson, *Charges and Sermons* (London: 1815), p. 475.

<sup>16</sup> Sermon delivered in 1798. Published in Richard Watson, *Charges and Sermons*, pp. 126-27.

a natural enthusiasm for progressive ideas, to profess a love for ‘liberty’ and to interpret the past in a teleological way (Mitchell, *The Whig World*, pp. 5-7). The academic tradition emanating from Scottish universities in the 1700s enlarged this historical narrative by bolstering it with a philosophical framework that further granted the whig interpretation of history’s claims to legitimacy with a veneer of academic rigueur.<sup>17</sup> The main example of this intellectual tradition is Adam Smith’s *Wealth of the Nations* (1776). The book, beyond its most celebrated eulogy of the free market, set out to comprehend how society advanced from barbarism to the freer conditions of the author’s own historical period, notably dominated by manufactures and commerce. This is what Millar argued: ‘[c]ommerce and manufactures [diffused] a spirit of liberty among the great body of the people’ from the age of the Saxons to the rise of the House of Stuart in the 1600s (Millar, p. 3). Given their possessive attitude towards the notion of ‘liberty’ in British history, it is not a surprise that a more progressive Whig family would venture to send their children to study in either Glasgow or Edinburgh University, alongside the usual destinations of Oxford and Cambridge.

After all, it was in the Scottish institutions that the likes of Smith and Millar taught and spread their ideas. It was in Scotland that young men from Whig families went to receive an education into the enlightened ways of whig

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<sup>17</sup> J. G. A. Pocock calls this trend in historical thinking the Scottish ‘scientific’ whiggism. See J. G. A. Pocock, ‘The Varieties of Whiggism from Exclusion to Reform: A History of Ideology and Discourse’, in *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 215-310 (pp. 252-53).

thinking which sought to tread the middle-ground between the enraged and homicidal mob and the equally evil tyranny of monarchies. As *The Edinburgh Review*, the main Whig periodical of the Regency era, wrote in 1805 about the French Revolution: '[a]mong the many evils which the French revolution has inflicted on mankind, the most deplorable [...] consists in the injury it has done to the course of rational freedom, and the discredit in which it has involved the principles of political philosophy'.<sup>18</sup> The radicalism of the Jacobins and the *sans-culottes* across the Channel injured the rational progressive ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment, which prescribed historical progress in a whiggish – that is, contained and peaceful – way towards an enlightened, polite and commercial society.

A prime representation of the overarching whig narrative of history can be found in the four relief carvings set in the apse of Holkham Hall in Norfolk.<sup>19</sup> These represent from left to right, and thus mirror the whiggish notion of linearity in human history, 'a philosopher, a general from ancient history, and a Grand Duke of the Renaissance, finally relating their achievements to the historic signing of the Reform Act in England in 1832'.<sup>20</sup> The stately home was the property of Thomas William Coke, the First Earl of

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<sup>18</sup> [Anonymous], 'Memoires D'un Temoin De La Revolution; Ou Journal Des Faits Qui Se Sont Passé Sous Ses Yeux, Et Qui Ont Preparé Et Fixé La Constitution Française', *The Edinburgh Review*, 6 (April 1805), 137-61 (p. 137). The article is an English review of a French work of that title.

<sup>19</sup> These sculptures were brought to my attention in Mitchell, *The Whig World*, p. 19. They were sculpted from c. 1555 to 1840.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Angelicoussis, *The Holkham Hall Sculptures: A Guide and Catalogue Holkham Hall Collection Guide* (Wells-next-the-Sea: 1997), p. 57.

Leicester (1754-1842) who, as a stereotypical Whig, had the four sculptures commissioned or purchased in order to mirror his political beliefs. At the onset of the historical narrative on the far left, there is *The Trial of Socrates* by Richard Westmacott (1775-1856) (Fig. 2, Appendix). Socrates is depicted as soberly arguing his case to the jury who sentenced him to death. Regularly portrayed as the father of Western thought due to his elucidations on the concepts of justice, reason, courage and piety, it is no wonder that the Athenian philosopher would have been placed at the beginning of the representation of Coke's whiggish political beliefs. As explained above, the whig narrative of history relies on the temporal maturing of the concept of 'liberty', and this is heavily indebted to the philosophy of ancient Greece and its universal concept of ethics as proposed by Socrates and his pupil Plato. To the right of Westmacott's panel is *The Death of Germanicus*, by Thomas Banks (1735-1805) (Fig. 3, Appendix). Germanicus was the nephew of the Roman Emperor Tiberius and gained his name due to his campaigns against the Germanic tribes in the first century CE. The sculpture represents the Roman commander in his dying moments surrounded by his family and followers, who vow to avenge his death (Angelicooussis, p. 58). In whig historiography, the theme of Roman expansion is regularly perceived as the beneficial spreading of higher notions of civilisation and liberty to the barbaric tribes living in the outskirts of the Empire. Overall, a work of art depicting a Roman theme succeeding one which deals with a Greek fits squarely within the whig notion of civilisations carrying the baton of liberty through history. The third work of art from the left is Stoldo

Lorezi's (1534-83) *Cosimo I Receiving Tribute from the Towns of Tuscany* (Fig. 4, Appendix). The inclusion of a Renaissance work of art (which was throughout the nineteenth century admired as if sculpted by Michelangelo) is one example of the traditional Western concept of the Renaissance in world history (p. 58). As this historiographical tradition states, after roughly one millennium engulfed in the dark ages, Europe once again found its way towards the enlightened ways of philosophy and the arts by seeking inspiration from the ancients. This revival in the Western philosophical traditions, and its concept of 'liberty' playing its primordial part in world affairs, continued its growth through the centuries until it reached Britain in the early 1800s.

This is the subject of the fourth and last sculpture, *The Signing of the Magna Carta*, by Sir Francis Chantrey (1781–1841) (Fig. 5, Appendix). Despite its title, the main subject behind the sculpture is the passing of the Reform Act of 1832, which attempted to reform Parliament by abolishing 'rotten boroughs' (constituencies with a disproportionate amount of seats in relation to the number of voters) and the unequal distribution of seats throughout the country. Inscribed at the bottom of the work of art, one finds the names of all the Whigs involved in the event. The Prime Minister Lord Grey (1764-1845) is depicted as defiantly proposing/demanding the king's signature on the document. The king, flanked by Henry Bathurst, the Bishop of Norwich (1744-1837), is depicted as surprised and yet reluctantly acquiescing to Grey's request. The bishop is depicted as sternly directing the monarch's attention to the charter in front of him (p. 59). This work of art encapsulates perfectly the

theme of historical inheritance and the reading of history under a specific discursive guise. First of all, the deliberate parallel established between the Reform Act of 1832 and the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215 explicitly shows a coherent narrative in the process of 'liberty' developing through history. The signing of the Magna Carta marked the moment when the king's power was first bound to Parliament and the laws of the country. In accordance to the Whigs, the delimitation of his power carried through the ages with other important events – such as the settlement of 1688-89 – and 1832 is considered as yet another moment in that inexorable march of 'liberty'. In addition, the nineteenth-century MPs are all portrayed as wearing classical robes and medieval shields and swords. This suggests that, despite the particularities of historical events, there is an underlying theme which is common to all ages: the constant battle between 'liberty' and tyranny, and the ultimate victory of the former.

As the timespan of those sculptures attest, the Whigs and their whiggish historical discourse remained pervasive many decades before and after Byron's death in 1824. In fact, one could argue that Byron missed the pinnacle of the Whig historical achievement in the nineteenth century: the Reform Act of 1832 and its indelible teleological historical reading as exemplified by Chantrey's work of art. As an active participant in the whig discourse – though more via his biographical myth than writings – Byron is an important influence in the latter half of the nineteenth century and beyond. The historian Thomas Macaulay (1800-59), who postulated his

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historiographical ideas in a whiggish manner, considered Byron a significant component in the history of his century.<sup>21</sup> To him, Byron's 'project' in fighting for Greek independence was 'the last and the noblest of his life'.<sup>22</sup> Macaulay considered Byron's political actions as his biggest contribution to the historical march of 'liberty':

His political opinions, though, like all of his opinions, unsettled, leaned strongly towards the side of liberty. He had assisted the Italian insurgents with his purse; and if their struggle against the Austrian government had been prolonged, would probably have assisted them with his sword. But to Greece he was attached by peculiarities. He had, when young, resided in that country. Much of his most splendid and popular poetry had been inspired by its scenery and by its history (Macaulay, 'Lord Byron', p. 551).

In fact, the historian hails Byron as having the same historical significance as Napoleon Bonaparte:

Two men have died within our recollection, who, at a time of life at which few people have completed their education,

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<sup>21</sup> The historian Michael Bentley considers Macaulay (alongside Thomas Carlyle) as representative of a 'Romantic' tradition in historiography. According to him, Macaulay attempted to break free of the overly factual Enlightened tradition and embraced a more literary endeavour in their narratives. See Michael Bentley, *Modern Historiography: An Introduction* (Oxford: Routledge, 1999), pp. 25-26. As shown below he does espouse more sophisticated views on history but he also inherited and perpetuated whig themes.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: With Notices of His Life', *The Edinburgh Review*, 53 (June 1831), 544-72 (p. 552).

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had raised themselves, each in his own department, to the height of glory. One of them died at Longwood [Napoleon], the other at Missolonghi (p. 552).

Macaulay does not specify what is understood by the 'liberty' with which Byron was aligned. One can only comprehend what it is not: the tyranny of the Ottoman Empire in Greece and the despotic Austrian rule over some of the Italian republics in the 1810s-20s. In that sense, the historian corroborated a historiographical narrative that read the events which had Byron's involvement as propagating a 'whiggish' sense of 'liberty' through history.

Macaulay developed his philosophical views on history three years prior to his essay on Byron. In a review of an historical book in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1828, he presented a lengthy exposition on Western historical thought and its most prominent historians. Beginning with Herodotus, historical knowledge is portrayed as gradually being perfected by the succeeding generations. Thucydides, for example, is considered to have a better style and methodology than his predecessor.<sup>23</sup> The author of *History of the Peloponnesian War* is preferred by Macaulay over some of his successors – such as Xenophon, Arrian, Polybius and Plutarch – though these have also introduced advancements to the discipline (Macaulay, 'The Romance of History', pp. 339-41). After the fall of the Roman Empire, the nineteenth-century historian voices the traditional view that the Dark Ages was a period

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'The Romance of History', *The Edinburgh Review*, 47 (May 1828), 331-67 (pp. 336-37).



which did not see any advances in thought: '[t]he waters were troubled; but no healing influence descended. The agitations resembled the grinnings and writhings of a galvanised corpse, not the struggles of an athletic man'. This was only broken with the invasions of the 'Northern nations' (p. 357). It was only then that the understanding of the past could once again move forward towards a more enlightened stage: the historian's own point of view in the early 1800s.

Macaulay is ambiguous with regards to British inheritance of the ancient historical tradition and to the country's place in the world. He implies the inheritance bestowed by the Greeks and Romans upon the moderns was paramount. However, he states the vast superiority of Britain over ancient Greece and Rome by overemphasising their differences through time:

The English have been so long accustomed to political speculation, and have enjoyed so large a measure of practical liberty, that such [ancient] works have produced little effect on their minds. We have classical associations and great names of our own which we can confidently oppose to the most splendid of ancient times. Senate has not to our ears a sound so venerable as Parliament. We respect the Great Charter more than the laws of Solon. The Capitol and the Forum impress us with less awe than our own Westminster Hall and Westminster Abbey, the place where the great men of twenty generations have contended, the place where they sleep together! The list of warriors and

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statesmen by whom our constitution was founded or preserved, from De Montfort down to Fox, may well stand a comparison with the Fasti of Rome. The dying thanksgiving of Sidney is as noble as the libation which Thræsea poured to Liberating Jove: and we think with far less pleasure of Cato tearing out his entrails than of Russell saying, as he turned away from his wife, that the bitterness of death was past (Macaulay, 'Romance of History', pp. 345-46).

As Mary Lu MacDonald and Linda E Connors state in their study of the role of the British nineteenth-century historiography in engendering national identities, it 'was customary with English historians' to use 'England' to '[stand] for the whole of the United Kingdom'.<sup>24</sup> Macaulay, synecdochically and anglocentrically, refers to the whole of the British institutions as 'English' in disregard of the Scottish, Welsh and Irish peripheries. For Macaulay, the British institutions and events are not only comparable to those of antiquity but effectively presented as superior. Two dramatic deaths from Rome are paralleled to the two Whig martyrs from the English Civil War: Algernon Sydney (1623-1683) and William Russell (1639-1683). As made explicit by Macaulay, their deaths are connected to those of the Roman senators and their struggle against the political usurpation of the Senate. The historian unequivocally states that the fate of the politicians in the 1600s reverberates more robustly

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<sup>24</sup> Mary Lu MacDonald and Linda E Connors, *National Identity in Great Britain and British North America, 1815–1851: The Role of Nineteenth-Century Periodicals* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), p. 124, n2. See also pp. 188-89 below for Byron's engagement with his own English and Scottish identities.

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amongst the English public than those of ancient Rome. Macaulay reiterates the whiggish sentiment that the present is inherently superior to the past, by overemphasising the superiority of British advancements in the concept of 'liberty' in detriment to those inherited from ancient Greece and Rome. The modern historians are superior to the ancients:

[Modern historians know how] to distinguish what is local from what is universal; what is transitory from what is eternal; to discriminate between exceptions and rules; to trace the operation of disturbing causes; to separate those general principles which are always true and everywhere applicable (Macaulay, 'Romance of History', p. 358).

From their historical standpoint and consequent detachment from the past, the British historians possess a much better understanding of the historical process as a whole than their classical counterparts (pp. 358-59). However, what Macaulay fails to acknowledge is how this self-evident progression and evolution in thought is, in Sir Butterfield's words, a 'mental trick' of the whig historian (Butterfield, p. 12).

Even though indelibly whiggish, Macaulay's historiographical notions, are, however, much more sophisticated. This is what he argues towards the end of his essay:

In the same manner, men may know the dates of many battles and the genealogies of many royal houses, and yet be no wiser. Most people look at past times as princes look

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at foreign countries. More than one illustrious stranger has landed on our island amidst the shouts of a mob, has dined with the king, has hunted with the master of the stag-hounds, has seen the guards reviewed, and a knight of the garter installed, has cantered along Regent Street, has visited Saint Paul's, and noted down its dimensions; and has then departed, thinking that he has seen England. He has, in fact, seen a few public buildings, public men, and public ceremonies. But of the vast and complex system of society, of the fine shades of national character, of the practical operation of government and laws, he knows nothing ('Romance of History', p. 364).

Macaulay argues that to deal only with the great men, dates and battles is the same as visiting a country in the character of an upper-class traveller. That is not to *know* a country but rather only a few snippets of its totality. The person in question would not have learnt anything about the population, its nuanced characteristics and the socio-political structures of the country, a point which Byron criticised in his engagement with the travel writers to the Levant (see pp. 111-19 above).

Nonetheless, despite dabbling with much more refined notions of history (the excerpt above could be read as an argument for a social or cultural history), the historian still subscribed to a whig interpretation of events in his historical narratives. His magnum opus – *The History of England from the*

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*Accession of James the Second* (first two volumes published in 1848) – is considered to be the pinnacle of whiggish historiography:

[It is the] peak in a peculiarly English historiographical development shaped by a remarkable sense of separateness and pride[.] [What the historian offers is] an especially felicitous reconciliation of past, present, and future and that the English were wise enough to bring about the feat of venerating the past without binding too closely either the present or the future in the process.<sup>25</sup>

Despite professing not to write *History of England* by ‘merely [...] treat[ing] of battles and sieges, of the rise and fall of administrations, of intrigues in the palace, and of debates in the parliament’, there is only one theme for Macaulay in his *History*: the path of ‘liberty’ through time in the British Isles.<sup>26</sup> As Macaulay summarises:

[Under the 1688-89 settlement] the authority of law and the security of property were found to be compatible with a liberty of discussion and of individual action never before known; how, from the auspicious union of order and freedom, sprang a prosperity of which annals of human affairs had furnished no example; how our country, from a state of ignominious vassalage, rapidly rose to the place of

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<sup>25</sup> Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval & Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 250.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James II* (Leipzig: 1849), p. 14.

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umpire among European powers; [...] how, in Asia, British adventurers founded an empire not less splendid and more durable than that of Alexander (Macaulay, *History*, p. 13).

The excerpt above summarises all of the key points that any whig historian would follow to the letter: 'liberty' from the late seventeenth century onwards is considered to be the greatest achievement that the British have bestowed upon the world. The 'annals of human affairs' have no other magnificent example of such historical accomplishment, given how it was obtained with an 'auspicious union of order and freedom'. Finally, Macaulay implies that Britain is also to be congratulated for spreading such ideals to other peoples around the globe as part of the British Empire, an entity which he compares to that of Alexander the Great. However, one must keep in mind that Macaulay's *History of England* was written in the 1840s, a time in which this type of historical narrative was to have become not only the norm but a commonplace in historical writing (Kelsall, *Byron's Politics*, pp. 6-7). During Byron's lifetime in the early nineteenth century, the Whigs as a party struggled to form a coherent oppositional narrative to the Tory government. As argued below, the Tory government usurped the whig narrative of history – mainly for its nationalistic overtones – thus leaving the Whigs without an alternative historical discourse to the government's policies (pp. 6-7).

### **3.3 Contextualising whiggism: historical narrative and politics**

Byron professed to be a Whig on numerous occasions. He was a member of the Whig club at Cambridge, he had a close relationship with prominent Whigs like

Lord Holland (1773-1840) during his years of fame in London and he even mentioned his political allegiances in his poetry ('Tis that I still retain my buff and blue') (CPW, V, 8; 132).<sup>27</sup> It is no wonder that his poetical output frequently engages with a whiggish interpretation of history, given the proprietorial attitudes with which the Whigs dealt with the past, specifically with regards to the events of 1688-89. Towards the end of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809), Byron assesses that the writers of his age did not match their country's self-evident global superiority:

Oh! would thy Bards but emulate thy fame,  
And rise, more worthy, Albion, of thy name!  
What Athens was in science, Rome in power,  
What Tyre appeared in her meridian hour,  
'Tis thine at once, fair Albion! to have been;  
Earth's chief dictatress, Ocean's lovely queen:  
But Rome decayed, and Athens strewed the plain,  
And Tyre's proud piers lie shattered in the main;  
Like these thy strength may sink in ruin hurled,  
And Britain fall, the bulwark of the World. (CPW, I, 260; 997-1006)

Byron explicitly allocates to Britain the teleological role of inheritor of science, power and commerce. The British are bestowed with a philosophical

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<sup>27</sup> See Linda Kelly, 'Enter Byron', in *Holland House: A History of London's Most Celebrated Salon* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), pp. 68-77.

knowledge comparable to that of classical Athens and its illustrious thinkers, the military power of Rome and its honourable statesmen and the commercial might of Tyre (a Phoenician city – located today in modern Lebanon), famous for its market and commercial routes in the Mediterranean throughout antiquity. It is clear enough that Britain is perceived as the historical point of convergence of these three attributes at once. It is no wonder that Byron calls it 'Earth's chief dictatress, Ocean's lovely queen' in a boastful tone. Not only that, but British prominence in world affairs in the early nineteenth century, as perceived by the whig reading of the past, bestowed upon it a moral duty of leading and protecting history from the regressive powers of ignorance and despotism. Britain is 'the bulwark of the World', as it perceives itself as inheriting/perfectioning a long tradition of historical advances in the championing of 'liberty'. And yet, the poem voices a cautionary note regarding the fate of the preceding civilisations. Given the appalling cultural quality (as Byron saw it) of his contemporary writers, it would not come as a surprise if the country were to follow the fate of Athens, Rome and Tyre: a slow descent into a ruinous state. Considering how the themes of whiggish progressivism and the acknowledgement of historical patterns of decline and fall are essentially entwined in the verses, it is perhaps understandable that readings of Byron's work in the light of a whig interpretation of history are 'oddly isolated in Byron studies' in favour of a 'Byronic' notion of history dominated by a gloomy sense of fatalism and historical decline (Cheeke, p. 10).



Following how Britain perceived itself as the inheritor and developer of 'liberty' in the early 1800s, it naturally becomes Britain's duty to spread this political process through the world towards other countries; these, it is implied, would have to follow the historical march. As an example, the onset of the French Revolution was originally met with enthusiasm by a great part of the Whigs (led by Charles James Fox (1749-1806) and Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816)) as France moved towards a government similar to the British one – a constitutional monarchy.<sup>28</sup> However, as the revolutionary process across the Channel descended into regicide, the establishment of a republic and expansionist wars, political opinion in Britain grew increasingly more conservative and caused a schism in Whig circles, most famously with the publication of Edmund Burke's (1727-1797) *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) (Mitchell, *Disintegration of the Whig Party*, pp. 157-58). After the declaration of war in 1793, this schism was aggravated and, from a Foxite perspective, the Pitt government started curtailing the liberties which the original Whigs had fought for in the past: Habeas Corpus and freedom of expression (p. 227).

As is the case with historical discursive formations in general, a discussion of the whig interpretation of history in the early 1800s is unavoidably entwined with political and nationalist ideologies. The original Whig idea of reading the past in terms of the present was slowly usurped by

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<sup>28</sup> Leslie Mitchell, *Charles James Fox and the Disintegration of the Whig Party, 1782-1794* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 155-56.

the Tories and the Burkean Whigs who had defected to the government as a means of nationalist rhetoric in the build-up and throughout the wars with France as, for example, exemplified by William Pitt's speech to the House of Commons after the execution of Louis XVI in 1793. Pitt mentions that it is Britain's role to 'crush and destroy' the 'principles' guiding the revolutionaries across the Channel.<sup>29</sup> He argues it in terms of a British duty, given that those 'principles' are 'so dangerous and destructive [to] every blessing this country [Britain] enjoys under its free and excellent constitution' which is only possible due to 'a mixture of monarchical government' (Pitt, II, 96). He continues:

We consider it as our first duty to maintain and reverence the British constitution, which, for wise and just reasons of lasting and internal policy, attaches inviolability to the sacred person of the Sovereign, though, at the same time, by the responsibility it has annexed to government, by the check of a wise system of laws, and by a mixture of aristocratic and democratical power in the frame of legislation, it has equally exempted itself from the danger arising from the exercise of absolute power on the one hand, and the still more dangerous contagion of popular licentiousness on the other (p. 96).

Pitt voices the traditional whiggish narrative concerning the settlement of 1688-89. The liberty enjoyed by Britain is due to the limitations of the Crown's

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<sup>29</sup> William Pitt, *The Speeches of the Right Honourable William Pitt in the House of Commons*, ed. by W.S. Hathaway, 4 vols (London: 1806), II, 96.

power on the one hand and the constant check on the mob's 'licentiousness' on the other. Moreover, the nationalistic tone is an example of how the rhetoric of patriotism slowly changed political sides from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Hugh Cunningham argues that, initially a radical stance in the 1700s, to be deemed as a 'patriot' by the second half of the 1800s was definitely to be a Tory.<sup>30</sup> During the war with France, the political discourse contained many 'patriotisms'. The word was in fact the semantic battleground between the government and radicals:

Patriotism was a political prize much fought over in the war years, and while in the circumstances of war, or at least of invasion threat, it became more associated with loyalty to government, it never lost its accompanying rhetoric of liberty, nor did radicals and others cease to invoke it in pursuit of their own ends (Cunningham, p. 15).

The whiggish discourse of 'liberty' and its considered supremacy as embodied by Britain was indelibly divided in this semantic battleground between conservatism and radicalism. As a result, it became increasingly difficult to establish an oppositional discourse to the government given that the government itself employed the same rhetoric historically attached to the Whigs and even the radicals. The Whigs at the time were essentially trapped between a "'Tory" reactionism' based on a whiggish reading of history and the

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<sup>30</sup> Hugh Cunningham, 'The Language of Patriotism 1750–1914', *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (1981), 8-33 (pp. 8-9).

radicalism of the masses, which was by this time punishable as ‘treason’ for siding with French revolutionaries.<sup>31</sup> Byron’s whiggism was fundamentally caught up in this dilemma. He sought an opposition to tyranny by constantly alluding to a love of ‘liberty’ and the ‘people’ against monarchical power. Simultaneously, he was constantly haunted by the violence and murderous deeds perpetrated by the French mob during the Terror:

But France got drunk with blood to vomit crime,  
And fatal have her Saturnalia been  
To freedom’s cause, in every age and clime;  
Because the deadly days which we have seen,  
And vile Ambition, that built up between  
Man and his hopes an adamant wall,  
And the base pageant last upon the scene,  
Are grown the pretext for the eternal thrall  
Which nips life’s tree, and dooms man’s worst – his second  
fall. (CPW, II, 156; 865-73)

For Byron, the unrestrained murderous excesses of the Terror are considered to have damaged the historical process of ‘freedom’s cause’. Writing in 1818 and witnessing the return of the monarchies, he considers that the events from 1793 and beyond were used as ‘pretext’ for the curtailing of liberties and an

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<sup>31</sup> Malcolm Kelsall, 'Byron's Politics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Byron* ed. by Drummond Bone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 44-55 (p. 46). For a study on the rise of conservatism and the anti-Jacobin novels in the period, see Matthew O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

overall regress within his whiggish sense of history. Byron shared with the Whig party the anxieties of obtaining a discursive middle-ground and his thoughts on the historical events presented in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* ascribed to this intellectual conundrum.

In canto II, Byron depicts Greece as 'the origin of civilisation which, in the conventional Whig accounts of the eighteenth century, spread through an imperial expansion justified by an enlightened understanding of civic freedom'.<sup>32</sup> In this discursive stance, Byron ponders on the modern character of the Greeks, and whether or not they were able to free themselves from Ottoman rule in a note to stanza 73:

To talk, as the Greeks themselves do, of their rising again to their pristine superiority, would be ridiculous; as the rest of the world must resume its barbarism, after re-asserting the sovereignty of Greece; but there seems to be no very great obstacle except in the apathy of the Franks [Westerns], to their becoming an [sic] useful dependency, or even a free state with a proper guarantee; – under correction, however, be it spoken, for many, and well-informed men doubt the practicability even of this (CPW, II, 202).

This excerpt summons up perfectly Byron's whiggism. He dismisses the idea of the more exalted Greeks who postulated a return to their 'pristine superiority'

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<sup>32</sup> Philip W. Martin, 'Heroism and History: *Childe Harold* I and II and the Tales', in *The Cambridge Companion to Byron*, ed. by Drummond Bone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 77-98 (p. 85).

of the past as 'ridiculous', for he takes it for granted a historical process which sees the ideal of 'liberty' as constantly perfecting itself throughout the march of time. Ancient Greece was the best embodiment of 'liberty' in the past, but history has moved forward and Byron naturally perceived, via a whiggish interpretation, Britain as the modern embodiment of 'liberty' during his lifetime. To postulate a return to the days of Athenian democracy would be, he argues, to move backwards in history and to the 'barbarism' of the past. The proposition of resuming the country's former glory, he concludes, would be the same as considering 'the existence of the Incas on [sic] the future fortunes of Peru' (p. 203).

What Byron effectively proposes is a Western intervention in the region to free Greece from the Turks. In fact, Greece should become a British colony:

The Greeks will never be independent; they will never be sovereigns as heretofore, and God forbid that they ever should! but they may be subjects without being slaves. Our colonies are not independent, but they are free and industrious, and such may Greece be hereafter. (CPW, II, 201)

The Greeks' glorious history is long past, and it is up to Britain – as the most powerful nation – to reach out to it and perform its *duty* to extend its more enlightened views of 'liberty' to the less fortunate peoples of the globe. This

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depiction of Britain as the home of 'liberty' in the early nineteenth century can be found in other parts of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*:

Yet I was born where men are proud to be,  
Not without cause; and should I leave behind  
The inviolate island of the sage and the free,  
And seek me out a home by a remoter sea. (CPW, II, 127; 69-72)

The verses imply that the British should be, '[n]ot without cause', proud of their freer society and they almost boast of its inviolable condition during the wars against Napoleon. Nonetheless, despite venting these whiggish and nationalist notions of history, Byron also admonishes that historical victory and glory are ephemeral, as Venetian decadence in the 1800s illustrates:

In youth she was all glory, – a new Tyre, –  
Her very by-word sprung from victory,  
The 'Planter of the Lion', which through fire  
And blood she bore o'er subject earth and sea;  
Though making many slaves, herself still free,  
And Europe's bulwark 'gainst the Ottomite;  
Witness Troy's rival, Candia! Vouch it, ye  
Immortal waves that saw Lepanto's fight!  
For ye are names no time nor tyranny can blight. (CPW, II, 129; 118-26)

The whiggish march of 'liberty' through history is clearly implied in this stanza. Venice's naval and political power in the sixteenth century is proclaimed as the direct successor to the civilisations that preceded it. Firstly, the Italian city is called 'a new Tyre', the commercial Phoenician city Byron had already alluded to in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*; and secondly, the Venetian naval victory against the Ottoman Empire in the battle of Lepanto (1571) is glorified alongside the Homeric account of the Greek victory against the Trojans. At once, Venice is trumpeted as inheriting both commercial trade and the maintenance of its liberties against the tyrannical menace coming from Asia Minor in two distinct historical periods. Moreover, underlying these themes of historical glory and triumph is the assumption that Britain directly succeeded Venice in its naval and commercial achievements in the early 1800s:

[...] and thy lot

Is shameful to the nations, – most of all,

Albion! to thee: the Ocean queen should not

Abandon Ocean's children; in the fall

Of Venice think of thine, despite thy watery wall. (CPW, II,  
130; 149-53)

Once again, Byron seems to nod at a possible intervention on the part of the 'Ocean queen' to free Venice, one of the 'Ocean's children', from Austrian dominion. However, history teaches that military power and influence is not eternal, and Britain should learn from the lessons taught by the former Venetian glory and its subsequent decay. And yet, by implying that Venice



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would be better off if freed from Austrian dominion by British forces, Byron accepts the whig interpretation of the history of Britain as the bulwark of 'liberty' at the world stage. The poem exhibits the unresolvable tension between historical meliorism and the patterns of decay envisaged in history: 'the island of the sage and the free' should not 'abandon' Venice to its decadent fate of foreign domination by exercising its imperial power to free it from the Austrian monarchy. Simultaneously, the Venetian decadence teaches the reader that power and influence is not eternal and, consequently, one could envisage the day when Britain's powerful status throughout the globe would also wither away.

#### 4. (Re)interpreting the Recent Past

This chapter further discusses the whig interpretation of history as it analyses Byron's attitudes to historical events which occurred during his lifetime; most specifically, the whiggish contradictions voiced in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* concerning the Peninsular Wars and the Battle of Waterloo and the criticism of Britain's imperialist endeavours in *The Curse of Minerva* in relation to the teleological reading of the past which legitimised these attitudes. Byron's anti-war rhetoric is also discussed, with the Siege of Izmail (1790-91) (as depicted in cantos VII and VIII of *Don Juan*) being its utmost example.<sup>1</sup> The chapter concludes that Byron, though still espousing an indelible whiggish attitude, evidences more sceptical historical notions towards the end of his writing career.

##### 4.1 The Peninsular Wars: Whig attitudes to the conflict

The first canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* largely deals with the Peninsular Wars of 1809-11, thus consciously participating in a political and cultural debate concerning Britain's involvement in the conflict. The political situation of Portugal, Spain, France and Britain in the 1790s was marked by a constant change in the foreign policies of these countries. In a short period of time the Iberian countries shifted allegiances between being Britain's or France's allies in the war. Spain initially went to war against the French revolutionary forces

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<sup>1</sup> The current spelling of the city ('Izmail') is adopted throughout the present thesis. The variant 'Ismail' is only used if part of Byron's original.

in 1793 alongside Britain. However, this changed in 1796 when the Spanish forces sided with France. This led Spain to war against Britain, which culminated with the British victory at Trafalgar in 1805. In 1806, Napoleon imposed a continental blockade across Europe with the objective of bankrupting the British economy and winning the war. As Portugal refused to obey, the Napoleonic forces threatened invasion. This was successfully achieved two years later after Spain allowed French armies to cross its own territory in order to conquer Portugal. Nonetheless, as the campaign ended, the French military maintained their position throughout the Spanish territory – including two strategic ports, Barcelona and San Sebastián, and four important fortresses – and thus effectively occupied the country.<sup>2</sup> Worsened by the ‘slow but ceaseless advance on Madrid in March 1808’, what followed was a Spanish popular insurrection against the invading French forces (Fraser, p. 27). This led Spain to once again side with Britain and the other coalition countries against Napoleonic France, which culminated in the sending of the British expeditionary force to the region and the start of the Peninsular Wars. It is this political background that Byron engages with in the first canto, specifically concerning the battles of Talavera and Albuera, which took place around the time Byron was crossing the region in his travels in 1809, and the Convention of Cintra (1808). As detailed below, the latter agreed on favourable

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<sup>2</sup> Ronald Fraser, *Napoleon's Cursed War: Spanish Popular Resistance in the Peninsular War, 1808-1814* (London: Verso, 2008), p. 9.

terms to the French after the British victory in the battle of Vimeiro in the same year (Martin, pp. 80-1).

In the poem, Byron portrays Britain as the Iberian countries' liberator. As he reaches Portugal, to whom 'Albion was allied' by then, the theme is one of ingratitude by the Portuguese. They should, the stanza states, show more appreciation to their British allies in the fight against the French (CPW, II, 16; 220):

And to the Lusians did her [Britain] aid afford:

A nation swoln with ignorance and pride,

Who lick yet loathe the hand that waves the sword

To save them from the wrath of Gaul's unsparing lord. (CPW,  
II, 16-17; 221-24)

On discussing the Convention of Cintra, Byron adopts a view which was thoroughly in accordance with the Whig party's discussions of the event. After defeating the French at the battle of Vimeiro, France and Britain 'closed an agreement (30 Aug. 1808) [...] which permitted [the French army] to leave Portugal without any hindrance and which even provided that English ships should carry the French soldiers back home' at Cintra (CPW, II, 277). Byron expresses his opposition to the event and satirises the 'brains (if brains they had)' who signed it (p. 20; 299). His tone is one of condemnation towards a treaty that stained the British military victory and put Britain in an embarrassing situation in Europe:

Britannia sickens, Cintra! at thy name;

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[...]

How will posterity the deed proclaim!

Will not our own and fellow-nations sneer,

To view these champions cheated of their fame,

By foes in fight o'erthrown, yet victors here,

Where Scorn her finger points through many a coming year?

(CPW, II, 20-21; 307, 310-14)

There is no doubt that the Convention proved a fertile ground for the Whigs to attack the Tories as either incompetent, exceedingly interventionist or both, depending on which Whig faction one considers. Lord Holland, for instance, considered that to fight alongside Spain 'was to fight for light against darkness, liberty against tyranny, Whig principles against despotism' and this is the political discourse which comes through the first canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.<sup>3</sup> Holland's opinion, however, was not representative of the majority of Whigs. The divergence of opinion on this issue oscillated from those against any form of intervention in the Iberian Peninsula and who actively advocated peace with France to those who criticised the government for failing to punish the French after the victories in Spain – such as Byron and Lord Holland (Roberts, pp. 122-24). The nationalistic appraisal of the British victory in Spain as yet another stepping stone in the march of 'liberty' through history inevitably placed Byron in agreement with the governmental rhetoric of the Tories as the whig historiography with its teleological idea was increasingly

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Roberts, *The Whig Party, 1807-1812*, 2nd edn (London: Frank Cass, 1965), p. 121.

used as an ideological strategy during the Napoleonic Wars to justify British interventionism in the continent with the objective of protecting the country's interests. As discussed below (see pp. 198-205), Byron's poetry participated in the whig discourse which attempted to oppose the increasingly nationalistic Tory rhetoric while simultaneously retaining the teleological narrative of the whig interpretation of history.

A Tory who voiced a similar position to Byron's was William Wordsworth. His pamphlet on the Convention of Cintra (1809) is a good example of the complex politico-historiographical discursive field through which the Whigs attempted to form a coherent oppositional discourse. He also criticised the government for not dealing with the defeated French adequately. By also referencing the classical past as a laudable inheritance, he describes the Spanish cause as 'the most righteous [...] since the opposition of the Greek Republics to the Persian Invader at Thermopylæ and Marathon'.<sup>4</sup> Historical 'liberty' and its glorious undertones is evoked in a such a way that Wordsworth describes how 'there was scarcely a gallant father of a family who had not his moments of regret that he was not a soldier by profession' and there was no single youth who did not feel the 'instantaneous dictates or the reiterated persuasions of an heroic spirit' upon learning of the wars in the peninsula (Wordsworth, *Prose Works*, I, 224-25). The Convention of Cintra, with its very

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<sup>4</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by W.J.B. Owen and J.W. Smyser, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 2008), I, 229.

generous terms of peace towards the defeated French, is rebuked by Wordsworth most vehemently:

[...] [T]he inferiority of the enemy had been proved; they themselves had admitted it – not merely by withdrawing from the field, but by proposing terms: – monstrous terms! and how ought they to have been received? Repelled undoubtedly with scorn, as an insult. [...] – nay, if they had been upon a level with an ordinary bargain-maker in a fair or a market, they could not have acted otherwise (*Prose Works*, I, 257).

Byron and Wordsworth opposed the government position on the Convention of Cintra from the same perspective, though from diverse political camps. Both poets agreed that the Tories did not satisfactorily deal with the defeated French forces in Spain and they should have pursued more damaging terms towards the Napoleonic army. Wordsworth opposed the terms of the Convention out of his patriotism, whilst Byron did so out of his allegiance to the Foxite Whig opposition led by Lord Holland. In this case, the whig historiographical discourse could be appropriated to criticise the government for excessively compromising with the defeated Napoleonic forces, a political position also endorsed by those on the other side of the political spectrum, such as Wordsworth. The changes in political discourse at the turn of the century show how the Whigs struggled to formulate an oppositional discourse based on the traditional whig interpretation of the past when the rhetoric of

nationalism was increasingly appropriated by political conservatism (as discussed above in pp. 161-64).

The depiction of the battles of Talavera and Albuera in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* canto I illustrates the Whig political conundrum. As Byron grandly describes the meeting of the 'three potent nations' on the battlefield (CPW, II, 25; 430), he tends to portray Britain as the bearer of 'liberty', only to simultaneously dismiss this narrative as inhuman and somehow biased:

Three hosts combine to offer sacrifice;  
Three tongues prefer strange orisons on high;  
Three gaudy standards flout the pale blue skies;  
The shouts are France, Spain, Albion, Victory!  
The foe, the victim, and the fond ally  
That fights for all, but ever fights in vain,  
Are met – as if at home they could not die –  
To feed the crow on Talavera's plain,  
And fertilize the field that each pretends to gain. (CPW, II,  
25; 441-49)

The stanza constantly adopts the governmental discourse as it portrays France as 'the foe', Spain as 'the victim' and 'Albion' as 'the fond ally | That fights for all, but ever fights in vain'. The message embedded in the description of the British army as the ally that 'ever fights in vain' is a discourse characteristic of a military power which perceives itself as the liberator in times of crises. However, the stanza does not fully embrace such a view as it finishes with the



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image of the crows feeding on the dead soldiers 'on Talavera's plain, | And fertilize the field that each pretends to gain'. The anti-war attitude voiced by Byron not only undermines the whiggish nationalist discourse of his time, but also the official discourse of the Tory government that presented Britain as the bearer of 'liberty' against Napoleonic oppression.

When acknowledging the enormous casualties suffered by the three armies, Byron depicts overarching historical discourses which overlook death and suffering in favour of ideals such as 'honour' or 'glory' as sophistry:

There they shall rot – Ambition's honour'd fools!  
Yes, Honour decks the turf that wraps their clay!  
Vain Sophistry! in these behold the tools,  
The broken tools, that tyrants cast away  
By myriads, when they dare to pave their way  
With human hearts – to what? – a dream alone.  
Can despots compass aught that hails their sway?  
Or call with truth one span of earth their own,  
Save that wherein at last they crumble bone by bone? (CPW,  
II, 25-26; 450-58)

As Peter J. Manning claims, Byron's poem 'not merely refuses to glorify the deaths of the common soldiers as patriotic sacrifices but also withholds mere sympathy by labelling them tools and potential criminals'.<sup>5</sup> And yet, in a note

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<sup>5</sup> Peter J. Manning, 'Childe Harold in the Marketplace: From Romaunt to Handbook', *Modern Language Quarterly: A Journal of Literary History*, 52 (1991), 170-90 (p. 179).

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to stanza 24, Byron praises Arthur Wellesley (later Duke of Wellington), the leader of the British forces throughout the campaigns: 'The late exploits of Lord Wellington have effaced the follies of Cintra. He has, indeed, done wonders: he has perhaps changed the character of a nation, reconciled rival superstitions, and baffled an enemy who never retreated before his predecessors' (CPW, II, 188). Therefore, despite Byron's criticism of the jingoistic discourse surrounding the campaign in the Iberian Peninsula, he still unashamedly holds the British general in high esteem for beating the French army for the first time since 1793. This would dramatically change one decade later; in the opening stanzas to *Don Juan* canto nine, Byron viciously attacks the commander of the British army:

Oh, Wellington! (or 'Vilainton' – for Fame

Sounds the heroic syllables both ways;

France could not even conquer your great name,

But punned it down to this facetious phrase –

Beating or beaten she will laugh the same) –

You have obtained great pensions and much praise;

Glory like yours should any dare gainsay,

Humanity would rise, and thunder 'Nay!' (CPW, V, 409; 1-8)

The post-Waterloo political landscape greatly changed Byron's views on the British field marshal. From doing 'wonders' in reconciling Spanish and Portugal against the French between 1808-14, Byron calls the Duke of Wellington 'Vilainton' in the early 1820s. Wellington is reviled for playing an essential part

in the propping up of monarchies after Napoleon's demise and, conversely, rolling back – from a whiggish point of view – the historical march of progress.<sup>6</sup> Feigning to speak for 'humanity', Byron prophesises how Wellington will be reviled by history. This is particularly true if one considers the political situation in continental Europe:

Though Britain owes (and pays you too) so much,

Yet Europe doubtless owes you greatly more:

You have repaired Legitimacy's crutch, –

A prop not quite so certain before:

The Spanish, and the French, as well as Dutch,

Have seen, and felt, how strongly you *restore*;

And Waterloo has made the world your debtor –

(I wish your bards would sing it rather better.) (CPW, V, 409;  
17-24)

The propping up of the European monarchies ('Legitimacy') is described as a precarious repair to their metaphorical crutch. Byron ironically italicises the word 'restore' in order to make it evident that the restoration of the old regimes is only possible by wars and their inevitable destructive forces. As discussed in the next chapter, Byron's writings from the 1820s, such as this, are

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<sup>6</sup> Philip Shaw most specifically notes how Lord Holland and Byron changed their initial reverential attitude to Wellington when the Allies tried and condemned Bonapartists (General de la Bédoyère (1786-1815) and Marshall Ney (1769-1815)) even before the signing of the Second Treaty of Paris in November 1815 (which sanctified these policies). Philip Shaw, *Waterloo and the Romantic Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 173-74.

the most politically controversial writings of his career and are more openly critical of British foreign policy and the construction of historical narratives in general. However, the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, written in 1809-12, are ambiguously placed between nationalist appraisal and critical awareness of the engendering of historical meaning and its shortcomings. This contradictory aspect of the text illustrates how it inhabits a pluralistic discursive grid which escapes attempts by the critic/historian to entirely pigeonhole it into a singular and coherent discourse.

In contrast to the war poetry published about the Peninsular Wars by his contemporaries, Byron's offers a far from straightforward political stance. William Tucker's *The Battle of Talavera: A Song*, published September 1809, is an example of the celebratory attitudes in the aftermath of the first military victory in almost fifteen years of war:

Britons rejoice! your valiant sons have wrought  
A mighty deed which breaks the Gaul's decree;  
Britons rejoice! your sons have nobly fought,  
Have won the cause, and made Iberia free! (chorus)<sup>7</sup>

John Wilson Croker's (1780-1857) poem *The Battles of Talavera* (1809) shares with Byron the honest depictions of war's brutality despite the author's

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<sup>7</sup> Betty T. Bennett, *British War Poetry in the Age of Romanticism 1793-1815* <[http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/warpoetry/1809/1809\\_10.html](http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/warpoetry/1809/1809_10.html)> [accessed 22/08/2012]

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Toryism – he was the Secretary to the Admiralty from 1809 to 1830 – and the celebratory goal of the composition:

Thousands shall fall of every force,  
English and French, and foot and horse,  
In mingled carnage piled. (VIII, 8-10)<sup>8</sup>

Contrary to the ambiguity present in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Croker's poem uses such realistic descriptions to praise and further emphasise the glories of the British conquest in the face of the brutal adversities faced against the French. Napoleon and his troops are constantly demonised by the verses – 'But, tyrant, thou, the cause of all | The blood that streams, the tears that fall' (Croker, IX, 1-2) – only to be met with their virtuous combatants in the shape of the British and the Spanish armies: 'Tho' empires at thy footstool cower, | Still Spain and England brave thy power' (X, 7-8). Overall, Croker's verse concludes that the horrors of war are acceptable in the supposedly glorious march of 'liberty' against tyranny. In that aspect, *Childe Harold Pilgrimage's* canto I, on the contrary, refuses to do so. Ambiguously, Byron criticises the war in the Iberian Peninsula while simultaneously praising Wellington's military achievements in 1809. This can be read alongside the divergent political positions amidst Whig politicians of the time, whereby the Byronic text exemplifies the fragmented discourse of the opposition. The very prominent Whig Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816) was an example of a favourable

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<sup>8</sup> John Wilson Croker, *The Battles of Talavera: A Poem* (London: 1810), p. 10.

voice regarding the intervention in the Iberian Peninsula. As he spoke in Parliament at the very outset of the debates in 1808:

Let Spain see, that we were not inclined to stint the services we had it in our power to render her; that we were not actuated by the desire of any petty advantages to ourselves; but that our exertions were to be solely directed to the attainment of the grand and general object, the emancipation of the world.<sup>9</sup>

Sheridan proposed an interventionist attitude entirely based on a whiggish discourse of history: Britain's role in human affairs is to emancipate the world. The political problem was that that was the government's position on the matter, thus leaving a large proportion of the Whigs seeking to advocate a proper oppositional policy. Samuel Whitbread (1764-1815) in his *Letter [...] to Lord Holland, on the Present Situation of Spain* (1808) attempted to do just that. In it, he states that though the '[Spanish] cause is indeed the cause of justice and humanity', he still believes that the British government should cease all hostilities against France 'on terms of equality and honour'.<sup>10</sup> Whitbread's position is one based on pacifism and dialogue, whilst simultaneously upholding the whig ideals of future 'liberty'.

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Diego Saglia, *Poetic Castles in Spain: British Romanticism and Figurations of Iberia* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Whitbread, *A Letter from Mr. Whitbread to Lord Holland, on the Present Situation of Spain*, 2nd edn (London: 1808), pp. 10-11.

Overall, the opposing political voices in Byron's writings not only betray his – and the Whigs' – difficulty in forging an oppositional discourse to the Tories during the Napoleonic wars, they also illustrate his ambivalence with regards to war in general. On the one hand, Byron recognised that it is by the means of warfare that the great march of 'liberty' (as the whiggish narrative would have it) is carried on through history; on the other, he refused to divorce the battles he described from the grim realities of death. Moreover, his writings not only criticised the political discourse adopted by the Whigs but also the whig interpretation of history as a whole. This is especially true with regards to the British interventionism in the early nineteenth century.

#### **4.2 Anti-war rhetoric**

*The Curse of Minerva* (written in 1811) has traditionally been approached as an example of Byron's attack on Lord Elgin's spoliation of the Parthenon, a theme which he also, and most famously, tackles in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* canto II. However, as McGann has noted, this overemphasis on the poem's more apparent theme has lost 'sight of [its] main subject': namely, Byron's criticism, in the third section of the *Curse of Minerva*, of British 'foreign and domestic policies' (CPW, I, 447). Byron's disapproval of British foreign policy presented in the poem is an invaluable opportunity to discuss both the themes of a whig historiographical narrative and the part played by the Scottish writers such as John Millar (see pp. 138-43 above) in corroborating British interventionism in world affairs.

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The character of the poet in *The Curse of Minerva*, whilst in the process of musing and treasuring ‘every trace | The wreck of Greece recorded of her race’ (CPW, I, 322; 71-72) is suddenly interrupted by the appearance of Minerva, the Roman counterpart of ‘Athena’ in the Greek tradition:

‘Mortal!’ (‘twas thus she spake) ‘that blush of shame  
Proclaims thee Briton, once a noble name;  
First of the mighty, foremost of the free,  
Now honoured *less* by all, and *least* by me:  
Chief of thy foes shall Pallas still be found –  
Seek’st the cause of loathing? – look around. (CPW, I, 323;  
89-94)

The goddess explains to the poet the reasons for her rage towards Britain. Lord Elgin’s actions in plundering the Parthenon and despoiling the relics of a civilisation which had somehow “[s]cap’d from the ravage of the Turk and the Goth’ (CPW, I, 323; 97) is the catalyst for her outburst. Minerva compares Elgin’s actions to those of a ‘filthy Jackall’:

So when the Lion quits his fell repast  
Next prowls the Wolf, the filthy Jackall last:  
Flesh, limbs and blood the former make their own,  
The last poor brute securely gnaws the bone. (CPW, I, 324;  
113-16)

Lord Elgin is depicted as the last one to contribute to the demise of the Greek civilisation. Albeit following the Goths and the Turks in their deeds, who had



both plundered the site in the past, Lord Elgin does so in the baser manner of a scavenging jackal who feeds on the leftovers of mightier predators.

However, there is more to *The Curse of Minerva* than Byron's outrage at British spoliation of the Parthenon. The treatment given to Lord Elgin in the poem spurs a discussion on the Scottish writers and the 'scientific whig' discourse bolstered by Scottish universities (see pp. 147-49 above). The poet, daring to reply to Minerva, clarifies:

'Daughter of Jove! in Britain's injur'd name,

A true-born Briton may the deed disclaim.

Frown not on England; England owns him not:

Athena! No; thy plunderer was a Scot. (CPW, I, 324; 125-28)

Perceiving retaliation towards the whole of Britain on the part of the goddess, the poet's voice attempts to safeguard England and guide the goddess to specifically blame Scotland, given that Lord Elgin was not English but Scottish. He explains the difference between the two countries in terms that the Greek goddess might understand, that is, through references to the ancient world:

Ask'st thou the difference? From fair Phyle's towers

Survey Boeotia; Caledonia's ours.

And well I know within that bastard land

Hath Wisdom's goddess never held command[.] (CPW, I, 324; 129-132)

The difference between England and Scotland is likened to that between Athens and Boeotia. Boeotia is a region north of Attica, paralleling the geographical location of Scotland and England. The former is a ‘bastard land’ which has never been subjected to the benign influence of the goddess of wisdom and civilisation. The character of the poet in Byron’s poem is drawing on the extensive history of antipathy between Thebes (the main polis in the region of Boeotia) and Athens, since there had been numerous wars between the two throughout antiquity. On the main conflicts reported by Herodotus (the Greco-Persian wars) and Thucydides (the Peloponnesian war), the vast majority of Boeotian cities sided with the attackers of Athens – Persia and Sparta, respectively.<sup>11</sup> It is no wonder that the Athenian depiction of those dwelling north of Attica – which Byron is using to criticise Scotland in *The Curse of Minerva* – is one of a people impervious to culture and of worthy political projects like the Athenian democracy.<sup>12</sup> The poet continues his low opinion of Scotland to the goddess Athena:

A barren soil where Nature’s germs confin’d  
To stern sterility can stint the mind,  
Whose thistle well betrays the niggard earth,  
Emblem of all to whom the land gives birth;  
Each genial influence nurtur’d to resist,

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<sup>11</sup> See John Buckler, ‘Boeotia’, in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. by Michael Gagarin and Elaine Fantham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 12-14.

<sup>12</sup> The *Curse of Minerva* is also inspired by Charles Churchill’s (1732–1764) xenophobic pastoral against the Scottish, *The Prophecy of Famine* (1763).

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A land of meanness, sophistry and mist:

Each breeze from foggy mount and marshly plain

Dilutes with drivel every drizzly brain,

Till burst at length each watery head o'erflows,

Foul as their soil and frigid as their snows[.] (CPW, I, 324-25;  
133-142)

The sterility of the Scottish soil creates difficulty not only for the growth of vegetation, but also serves as a metaphor for the intellectual development of its inhabitants. Doomed to possess a 'barren soil', the inhabitants of that country can only be subject to a lifetime of ignorance. The poet in *The Curse of Minerva* rejoices in the stereotyping of those born in Scotland: they are supposed to be extremely parsimonious or outright misers ('niggard'). The thistle, the country's heraldic emblem, is a telling sign of the barrenness of the soil beneath it. This can only determine, the poet addressing Minerva implies, a people marked by these same base traits in personality. The climate further contributes to these. The cold, mist and fog help to keep the land in eternal ignorance and impervious to the civilised traits which one was purportedly to find when crossing the border to the south. In short, Scotland is a 'land of meanness, sophistry and mist'. The charge of 'sophistry' is also a direct reference to the Scottish authors which legitimised the whig historical discourse. This '[d]ilutes with drivel the drizzly brain', and thus filling those taught the mysteries of the march of 'liberty' through history with nothing but the academic nonsense that would arise from a land marked by its barren intellectual climate. The implication is that a proper knowledge of history

would only be found at the English institutions, despite what some Whigs thought at the time. This presents a contradiction: regarding the differences between England and Scotland, the poet who engages in conversation with Minerva in *The Curse of Minerva* accepts a teleological reading of England as the epitome of enlightenment and 'liberty' through history. But he simultaneously considers Scotland – ironically the country where the most robust defence of such a reading was formulated and taught – to be a backwards and uncivilised land. This is particularly troublesome given that Byron spent the greater part of his childhood in Aberdeen.

Byron's relationship to his own Scottish heritage is a complex issue. As his biographer Phyllis Grosskurth states, '[I]ike many Scots before and after him, he made a conscious effort to shed his Scottish accent and was always to be disturbed if people detected any evidence of it in his speech' after moving to England to take his peerage.<sup>13</sup> In that aspect, Byron endorsed the Scottish attitude which, as Caroline Franklin argues, 'helped bolster the propriety of metropolitan standards of English over their own vernacular, whose literature became the purview of peasant poets such as Robert Burns and James Hogg or the province of antiquarians such as Scott and his friends', with the *Edinburgh Review* playing a pivotal part in this.<sup>14</sup> The Scottish Enlightenment defined

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<sup>13</sup> Phyllis Grosskurth, *Byron: The Flawed Angel* (London: Sceptre, 1997), p. 29.

<sup>14</sup> Caroline Franklin, 'Poetry, Patriotism, and Literary Institutions: The Case of Scott and Byron', in *Scotland, Ireland, and the Romantic Aesthetic*, ed. by David Duff and Catherine Jones (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2007), pp. 172-91 (p. 174).

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London's cultural hegemony in detriment to Scotland and its own perceived backwardness.

Later in life, however, Byron seemed to have recanted over his harsh judgment over Scotland, as he wrote in *Don Juan* canto X:

But I am half a Scot by birth, and bred

A whole one [...]

And though, as you remember, in a fit<sup>15</sup>

Of wrath and rhyme, when juvenile and curly,

I railed at Scots to shew my wrath and wit,

Which must be owned was sensitive and surly,

Yet 'tis in vain such sallies to permit,

They cannot quench young feelings fresh and early:

I 'scotched, not killed,' the Scotchman in my blood,

And love the land of 'mountain and of flood.' (CPW, V, 442; 135-36, 145-52)

Nonetheless, the *Curse of Minerva* shows no sign of the nostalgic and conciliatory tone present in *Don Juan* as the young Byron, still unsure about his social position with regards to his Scottish heritage, strived to forge his identity

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<sup>15</sup> The narrator addresses Francis Jeffrey, editor of *The Edinburgh Review*.

as a cosmopolitan English poet, something which had started in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*.<sup>16</sup>

Additionally, *The Curse of Minerva* is not only an attack on Scotland and its intellectual tradition, but also a critique of British international interventionism and the intellectual whiggism that justified such political actions. The whole discussion of the upholding and spread of 'liberty' by the British Empire rests on the uneasy position under which the Whigs were to find themselves after the events of the French Revolution and the subsequent war against France for the vast majority of twenty-three years (1793-1815). If Britain is the bulwark of 'liberty' in world history, how should the Whigs in opposition engage with the country's imperialistic endeavours in the name of this same 'liberty' they professed to uphold? The goddess in *The Curse of Minerva* enumerates and decries some of the British government's policies throughout the Napoleonic wars. Elgin's shameful behaviour, Minerva concludes, is not an exceptional instance of treachery nor an action typical of Scotland, but the behaviour of a 'lawless son' wont '[t]o do what oft Britannia's self had done' (CPW, I, 327; 211-12). In other words, the poem at this stage loses sight of the differentiation made earlier between England and Scotland and the apportioning of blame is no longer reserved to the northernmost

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<sup>16</sup> Michael P. Steier, 'Transgressing the Borders of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*', *Studies in Romanticism*, 47 (2008), 37-52 (p. 38). For a further discussion on the development of British/English/Scottish literature and its indelible questions of national identity, see Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). For Byron's Scottish nostalgia, see Drummond Bone, 'Byron, Scott, and Nostalgia', in *Byron and Scotland: Radical or Dandy?*, ed. by Angus Calder (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), pp. 119-31.

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country. Minerva's curse is squarely aimed at the whole of Britain and the goddess ignores the poet's reply in his attempt to distance himself and England from the likes of Elgin and his reprehensible actions abroad. The first example of such shameful disregard for the law and peace cited by Minerva is the bombardment of Copenhagen in the late summer of 1807:

Look to the Baltic – blazing from afar,  
Your old ally yet mourns perfidious war:  
Not to such deeds did Pallas lend her aid,  
Or break the compact which herself had made;  
Far from such councils, from the faithless field  
She fled – but left behind her Gorgon shield:  
A fatal gift that turn'd your friends to stone,  
And left lost Albion hated and alone. (CPW, I, 327, 213-220)

Britain pre-emptively bombarded the Danish capital for three days in order to prevent Napoleon from seizing the Danish fleet and use it in a possible attempt to invade the British Isles. Given that Denmark actively proclaimed its neutrality in the war between France, Britain and the other coalition forces, the bombardment was decried by Byron and many oppositional Whigs as a shameful unilateral act of war. Lord Grey, for instance, adopted the same tone as Minerva, arguing that the mere gain of ships was but “a poor compensation” for the loss of national character and the enmity of every other power in Europe

“which, I fear, must be the result of this act of violence and injustice”<sup>17</sup> ‘An Old Englishman’, in a letter to *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*, puts the Whigs’ stance on this event as thus:

I with you am ready to uphold “the antient rights and practices of England upon the seas,” and must cordially consign to execration that minister who shall waive one iota of them, but I am unable to found justification of the Danish expedition upon any “right,” nor, happily, does the British history afford an instance “in practice,” of a similar conduct to any neutral nation under the canopy of Heaven. [...] the government of Great Britain would become as despotic as that of Turkey, and our power from (heretofore as in happier times) protecting the freedom, would degenerate into the scourge of Europe: and form, not “a northern,” but a “universal confederacy,” grafted on the only principle that ever yet held a confederacy together; that of self-defence, and a common interest.<sup>18</sup>

Though proclaiming the British right to spread its power throughout the seas, the author decries the bombardment of a neutral nation. What the Danish war has accomplished, and here the author voices the same opinions as those present in *The Curse of Minerva*, is a betrayal of Britain’s role as the world’s

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in John Steven Watson, *The Reign of George III, 1760-1815* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 457.

<sup>18</sup> [An Old Englishman], ‘Danish War’, *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*, 12 (October 1807), 534-6 (pp. 534-35).



bulwark of 'liberty'. Rather, such actions are those of a despotic and warmongering power that wages war with the sole purposes of protecting its own national interests.

On the other side of the argument, those in favour of the government's naval movements in the Baltic dismissed these oppositional remarks as fantastical and utopian. As the main article in *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register* (which by this time tended to side politically with the government) argued that the Whigs opposition to events were anti-patriotic:

[...] [A]cting upon the principles of Adam Smith and his disciples of the *Edinburgh Review* [...], would have given up our maritime rights, as being nothing compared with the profits of trading with France and America. They were full of new projects of sham philanthropy, infused into their minds by the speculators from Edinburgh.<sup>19</sup>

Similar to the diatribe against the Scottish Enlightenment as expressed in *The Curse of Minerva*, the Whigs are dismissed as voicing their opinions as if they were divorced from reality. The discourse of the Establishment argued that they preferred to dwell in the philosophical ideas (what the poet in *The Curse of Minerva* called the 'drivel' which dilutes 'every drizzly brain') taught at the Scottish universities and spread by the *Edinburgh Review* in detriment to the pragmatic choices which must be carried out by governments during the course

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<sup>19</sup> William Cobbett, 'Summary of Politics', *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 12 (September 1807), 385-400 (p. 397).

of a war. Nevertheless, *The Curse of Minerva* implies that the generalized *modus operandi* of Britain's – with England at the forefront – imperialistic policies consists of nothing but the bullying of other nations.

Minerva's curse is further justified by decrying British actions in India at a time when the commercial dominion of the region was being established:

Look to the East, where Ganges' swarthy race  
Shall shake your tyrant empire to its base;  
Lo, there Rebellion rears her ghastly head,  
And glares the nemesis of native dead;  
Till Indus rolls a deep purpleal flood,  
And claims his long arrear of northern blood.  
So may ye perish! Pallas when she gave  
Your free-born rights, forbade ye to enslave. (CPW, I, 327;  
221-28)

Again the poem dwells on the conflicting dialogue of two opposing discourses, this time with regards to Britain's imperialist policies. Minerva mentions her gift of 'free-born rights' to the British people – in itself another whiggish reading of a mythic-teleological order – whilst simultaneously forbidding this goddess-given right to be used to 'enslave' other peoples. In its historical context, the first years of the 1810s saw a debate in the House of Commons concerning the role of the East India Company in the subcontinent. The company had hitherto engaged on a commercial basis with India and the British presence in the country had been largely set for that purpose. The initial policy

of the East India Company was to leave India undisturbed regarding the culture of the Indian population, but this changed from the 1800s to 1810s.<sup>20</sup> Following a series of parliamentary debates, an amendment to the East India Act allowed, for example, Christian churches to proselytise in India and effectively continued more vigorously the turning of India into a British colony (Butler, *Empire in the East*, p. 12). This period in British foreign policy in India is marked by a multitude of diverging positions regarding the role of the East India Company in the region: '[w]ords, eloquent and furious, swirled and smoked – on whether or not to admit missionaries, whether or not to use English, whether or not modern education in vernacular languages was possible'.<sup>21</sup>

Some oppositional voices, mostly within Whig ranks, were anxious that the on-going process of effectively annexing India as a colony in contrast to the hitherto solely commercial enterprises of the East India Company would result in 'CONSTITUTIONAL RUIN. The dissolution of the India Company [the loosening of the company's commercial monopoly in India and the branching out of its affairs] could not take place without bringing with it a *national bankruptcy*, and that must be followed by *military despotism*'.<sup>22</sup> This was

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<sup>20</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Byron and the Empire in the East*, Nottingham Byron Foundation Lectures (Nottingham: The University of Nottingham, 1988), p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> Robert E. Frykenberg, 'India to 1858', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume V: Historiography*, ed. by Robin W. Winks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 194-213 (p. 195); for a larger discussion of British rule in India up until the 1860s, see D. A. Washbrook, 'India, 1818-1860', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume III: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Andrew Porter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 395-421.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in William Cobbett, 'To the Thinking People of England, on the Affairs of the East India Company', *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 23 (February 1813), 161-72 (p. 162).

dismissed as ‘delirious’ by Cobbett and the sole reason he engaged with the argument was that it was ‘issued through the chief organ of the Whig faction’, the *Morning Chronicle* (Cobbett, ‘To the Thinking People’, p. 162). William Cobbett’s response comes from a more radical and anti-imperialist perspective:

[...] [W]ho can have failed to be filled with disgust at seeing it stated, in the documents and speeches of the opponents of the present measure, that its adoption would tend to introduce light and liberty into the enslaved countries under their sway? [...] of this I am very sure, that it cannot be intended to establish there any system of government more hateful to me than that which now exists there under the Company (Cobbett, ‘To the Thinking People’, p. 172).

Despite Byron’s whiggish participation in the discourse of imperialism which many of his Whigs contemporaries interpreted as Britain’s ‘manifest destiny [...] over the world’, Byron ‘regretted imperialism as the harbinger of social and cultural corruption, the nemesis of civic order’.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Minerva’s rebuking of Britain in *The Curse of Minerva* as an imperial power enslaving India voices a slightly more radical discourse – albeit with whiggish undertones – which exceeds the established line of the Whig party at the time and can be read as being similar to William Cobbett’s radicalism.<sup>24</sup> However, despite being critical

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<sup>23</sup> Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 16-17.

<sup>24</sup> It has been argued that the British imperial attitudes in India were deeply engaged with an enlightened (that is, Scottish) discourse of progress. But these policies

of the dalliances of the East India Company in *The Curse of Minerva*, Byron – alongside Southey and even Shelley – was not only in favour of future missionary missions in India but in fact presented in 1813, alongside the Home secretary Viscount Lord Sidmouth (1757-1844), the House of Lords petitions which sought to secure that aim in the colony.<sup>25</sup> As the ambiguous example of Wellington above, then, one finds this constant discursive fragmentation in Byron's writings concerning whiggish politics. The espousing of radical political tendencies is upheld in conjunction to the classic Whig attitude of finding a middle-ground between monarchical tyranny and popular demagoguery.

*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* canto III develops a more vigorous distrust of the whig interpretation of Britain as being the embodiment of 'liberty' in history. The victory over Napoleonic France in 1815 was trumpeted by the Tory government as a watershed moment towards a freer society comparable to the way in which the years of 1688-89 were traditionally approached by the Whig narrative. In the words of the then foreign secretary, Lord Castlereagh (1769-1822), Waterloo was 'a victory "against usurpation and [...] military despotism"' and 'the government had acted "on the principles of the Whigs of the Revolution"' (quoted in Shaw, *Waterloo*, p. 166). Thus, the government's

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'required an equilibrium between liberty and authority', with the imperialistic despotism considered to be a step into the 'liberty' of future times. Martha McLaren, *British India & British Scotland, 1780-1830: Career Building, Empire Building, and a Scottish School of Thought on Indian Governance* (Akron, Ohio: University of Akron Press, 2001), pp. 11-12, p. 168.

<sup>25</sup> Michael J. Franklin, 'General Introduction and [Meta]Historical Background [Re]Presenting "the Palanquis of State; or, Broken Leaves in a Mughal Garden"', in *Romantic Representations of British India*, ed. by Michael J. Franklin (London: Taylor & Francis, 2006), pp. 1-44. (p. 21).

official discourse essentially meant that they ‘could claim to be the true heirs of the Revolution [of 1688-89]’ rather than the Whig party (p. 166). Ultimately, by 1818, whiggish historiographical tendencies – given their indelible nationalistic overtones – had become the official rhetoric of the Tory government and it is no wonder that, to use Kelsall’s words, the Whig party during Byron’s lifetime ‘was not only fragmented, it was in danger of becoming a magnificent fossil’ (*Byron's Politics*, p. 30). Byron’s poetic voice, especially in the later cantos of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* – published 1816 and 1818, respectively – is essentially formed by this ‘fracture’ in ‘philosophical Whiggism’ (Franklin, *Byron*, p. 44). The historiographical discourse of his political sympathies is slowly usurped by the Tory government as the rhetoric of the Establishment, given the teleological aspects of the whig interpretation of history.<sup>26</sup>

This is better exemplified in Byron’s meditations on the battle of Waterloo. The response to the events in 1815 in Belgium was met by the British government with a jingoistic discourse which trumpeted the victory as the most important achievement in world history up until that point. As Lord Castlereagh announced in Parliament the day the news had reached the House, the victory was a great achievement ‘of such high-merit, of such pre-eminent importance as had never perhaps graced the annals of this or any other country

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<sup>26</sup> ‘There are but two sentiments to which I am constant, – a strong love of liberty and a detestation of cant and neither is calculated to gain me friends’. Marguerite Countess of Blessington, *Conversations of Lord Byron with the Countess of Blessington* (London: 1834), p. 390.

till now' (quoted in Shaw, *Waterloo*, p. 3). The following year he categorised Waterloo as a victory 'against usurpation and [...] military despotism' (p. 166).

Divergently, Byron dismisses the battle in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* canto III (1816) as a 'king-making Victory' (CPW, II, 82; 153), in reference to the restoration of the monarchical powers in Continental Europe after Napoleon's demise, as well as unveiling its brutality, with references to the 'red rain' which poured onto the battlefield, '[the] place of skulls, | The grave of France' (pp. 82-83; 151, 154-55). Indeed, what *Childe Harold Pilgrimage* canto III presents to the reader is an active dismissal of the post-war ideology trumpeted by the Tories at the time:

Fit retribution! Gaul may champ the bit,  
And foam in fetters; – but is Earth more free?  
Did nations combat to make *One* submit;  
Or league to teach all kings true sovereignty?  
What! shall reviving Thralldom again be  
The patched-up idol of enlightened days?  
Shall we, who struck the Lion down, shall we  
Pay the Wolf homage? proffering lowly gaze  
And servile knees to thrones? No; *prove* before ye praise!  
(CPW, II, 83; 163-71)

The stanza clearly ponders over the fate of 'liberty' in a world without Napoleonic France functioning as Britain's opposite. Yet once again, Byron's despair is an explicit example of a Whig mentality trying to find a middle-

ground between opposition to the Tory's victorious and nationalist language whilst intellectually attempting to formulate a whiggish historical discourse of an oppositional variety. The verses recognise that Napoleon was a tyrant and his imperialist forces were not the epitome of 'liberty'. On the other hand, Byron also criticises the idea that Napoleon's demise and the subsequent revival of the monarchies after 1815 played a part in the whiggish historical march. Quite on the contrary, he dismisses the return of the previously overthrown kings as mere 'patched-up idol[s]', quite at odds with 'enlightened days', when one should hope monarchies – at least in their more absolutist manifestations – were to have become a thing of the past. Byron refused to accept the events as a simple dichotomy of 'liberty' prevailing over tyranny as the Tories would have it, but rather argued it as one tyranny – Britain and its monarchical allies – prevailing over another: that of Napoleonic France. Thus, the 'Wolf' succeeds over the 'Lion' (Kelsall, *Byron's Politics*, p. 67).

Following the stanzas where Byron depicts the ball's disruption at Belgium by the battle (CPW, II, 84-86; 181-242), the victory is portrayed as a meaningless bloodbath that pays no heed to nationality, sides, or ideals:

The earth is covered thick with other clay,

Which her own clay shall cover, heaped and pent,

Rider and horse, – friend, foe, – in one red burial blent!

(CPW, II, 86; 250-52)

In Byron's struggle to find a proper oppositional voice against the discourse of the British government, 'whose veil | Mantles the earth with darkness, until



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right | And wrong are accidents [...]’ (CPW, II, 155; 833-35), he gives vent to historical despair. His disillusionment alludes to the impossibility of renewal of ‘liberty’ in Europe:

Can tyrants but by tyrants conquered be,  
And Freedom find no champion and no child  
Such as Columbia saw arise when she  
Sprung forth a Pallas, armed and undefiled?  
Or must such minds be nourished in the wild,  
Deep in the unpruned forest, ‘midst the roar  
Of cataracts, where nursing Nature smiled  
On infant Washington? Has Earth no more  
Such seeds within her breast, or Europe no such shore? (p.  
156; 856-64)

Europe is depicted as irretrievably corrupted, as no matter where the historical process leads to, the downfall of one tyranny can only be substituted by a new one. The poem implies that the march of ‘liberty’ can only come to life in the American continent; conversely depicted as pure and immaculate. ‘Freedom’ is an entity which comes into being amidst the wilderness of nature, with George Washington exemplifying this in the poem. To Byron in 1818, the future of Europe was an essentially bleak one. As he stated in the dedication to canto IV, an oppressive environment and the restriction of civil liberties, as a regress in the improvement of whiggish ‘liberty’, stained the entire continent. Contrary to the Tory argument that the world was a freer society after the war, Byron

claimed that Britain had also lost, for it 'acquired [...] a suspended Habeas Corpus' (CPW, II, 124; 119-20). These lines were, however, suppressed by Byron's editor William Gifford (1756-1826) for they contradicted the Tory nationalist discourse of a more enlightened society after the subjugation of Napoleon (p. 319).

Byron's despair and pessimistic view of the historical process is the result of the failure of the whig teleological discourse. As the years after Waterloo saw the immediate return of the autocratic regimes in Europe hitherto displaced by Napoleon's conquests and political influence, Byron has no discursive narrative to rely on. The result is the poetic despair with regards to the European context and which can only envisage a future in a new environment: the independent United States, for example. The domestic climate in Britain, dominated by the threat of revolution, the increasing discontent by the lower classes and the subsequent erosion of the individuals' political liberties, also collaborated to the poet's negative views with regards to the whiggish historical process and its meliorist attitudes.

Despite at times still accepting a whig narrative with regards to Britain – '[t]he inviolate island of the sage and the free' (CPW, II, 127; 64-73) – as the bastion of 'liberty' in history, Byron mostly shows a severe distrust of this nationalist discourse. Byron's verses verge on occasion towards a historiographical nihilism with respect to the British position in world events, something quite bold and controversial for the post-Waterloo mood of utmost national triumphalism. This distrust in historical processes in general manifests

itself most markedly when Byron deals with the theme of war. In particular, he often attacked the glorification of human conflict and chose to do so in order to unveil the carnage behind the deeds of warfare that inhabit the historical books written in the whiggish intellectual tradition. Perhaps the best example of such attitude is found in *Don Juan*, cantos VI and VII. It is here that one finds Byron's painfully frank depiction of the Siege of Izmail (1790-91) and the carnage surrounding that event as a way to demystify the idealistic notions of a march of 'liberty' and progress through time.

#### **4.3 The Siege of Izmail**

The Siege of Izmail was a dramatic event in the Russo-Turkish War of 1787-1792. Russia and the Ottoman Empire were engaged in warfare for vast periods of time in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The disputed territories were those surrounding the Black Sea, ranging from Georgia in the east to the Balkans in the west.<sup>27</sup> The town is situated in Crimea and it borders Romania to the south. Izmail was important to the Russian offensive in the region for it provided a stronghold on the Danube river and the Russian victory was significant for it weakened the Ottoman position in the region, which was fiercely contested between the two empires at the time.<sup>28</sup> As narrated by Castelnau and in *Don Juan*, the siege was dramatic for it culminated in a house-

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<sup>27</sup> George C. Kohn, *Dictionary of Wars* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2006), p. 106.

<sup>28</sup> David Stone, *A Military History of Russia: From Ivan the Terrible to the War in Chechnya* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006), pp. 87-88.

to-house resistance by the Turkish army who only surrendered after two-thirds of their garrison was slaughtered.

The Izmail cantos in *Don Juan* not only provide an excellent example to discuss the glorification of war in the whig interpretation of history, but also Byron's preoccupation with historical accuracy, as discussed in the first two chapters of this thesis. The issue of accuracy could not be made more evident by Byron; he starts the preface to cantos VI, VII and VIII by making it clear that '[t]he details of the Siege of Ismail [...] are taken from a French work, entitled "Histoire de la Nouvelle Russie"' and emphasises that 'some of the incidents' narrated 'really occurred' – including the saving of the infant by Juan as depicted in canto VIII; this really occurred to the Duc de Richelieu (1767-1822) during the battle (CPW, V, 295). Furthermore, Byron appends the relevant chapter of Gabriel de Castelnau's *Histoire de la Nouvelle Russie* to the cantos. He thus provides his readers with the 'facts' of the battle to prove how 'factually' accurate he had been in describing the events of the siege in poetic form.<sup>29</sup> Castelnau himself is also heavily indebted to another source. He explicitly mentions how he quotes 'word for word' from a manuscript written by a 'Russian lieutenant-general involved in [the Izmail] campaign and the following one' (Castelnau, p. 187) thus also making explicit the 'factual'

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<sup>29</sup> I have consulted the relevant chapters from Castelnau's work – Gabriel Castelnau, *Essai Sur L'histoire Ancienne Et Moderne De La Nouvelle Russie*, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Paris: 1827), II. Volume 2 was first published in 1820 in the original French. I have taken the liberty in translating it freely from the original as I deemed necessary.

accuracy of his work by relying on the accounts of a primary witness of the events described.<sup>30</sup>

Insofar as the ‘factual’ details of the events are concerned, Byron doggedly follows the French text even though the tone and the conclusions reached regarding the battle are diametrically opposed. Byron mentions how Izmail ‘is placed | Upon the Danube’s left branch and left bank’ and ‘stands some eighty versts from the high sea, | And measures round of toises around three’ (CPW, V, 339-40; 65-66, 71-72), which is taken almost verbatim from Castelnau’s book. This is further evidenced by the use of the Russian (‘verst’) and French (‘toises’) measurements (Castelnau, pp. 201-2). The details of the assault are minutely taken from Castelnau’s text and his primary manuscript: the way that the Russians attacked by crossing the river Danube and thus profiting from a lack of Turkish forces on that location (CPW, V, 341; 97-104), and the position of the Russian cannons on ‘[a]n Isle near Ismail’ and the pursued objectives behind these military manoeuvres (p. 344; 177-92). Once again, Byron draws heavily on Castelnau’s text, as these two stanzas are essentially translations in versified form of one paragraph from the historian’s work (Castelnau, p. 203). The reader is then presented with the intricacies of the battle: ‘The Russian batteries were incomplete | Because they were constructed in a hurry’ and thus translated into heavy losses in the battle (CPW, V, 345; 201-208). This was followed by other military blunders during the

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<sup>30</sup> Castelnau’s first witness was the same man who saved the infant during the battle: Armand Emmanuel du Plessis, Duc de Richelieu (CPW, V, 719).

crossing of the Danube (p. 345; 209-24). The invasion over the river and the Turkish response is, though depicted in the jocose tone characteristic of *Don Juan*, thoroughly presented insofar as the war's numbers and events are concerned (pp. 345-46; 225-32). Given their blunders and lackadaisical invasion, the Russian forces retreated after the ensuing stalemate (p. 346; 233-40). The Turkish then pursued the retreating forces and were by their turn slaughtered as they tried to cross the river (p. 346; 241-8). These six stanzas are based on one paragraph from Castelnau's text (Castelnau, pp. 203-4), with the minutiae of the battle painstakingly acknowledged by Byron:

But so it was; and every preparation

Was made with all alacrity: the first

Detachment of three columns took its station,

And waited but the signal's voice to burst

Upon the foe: the second's ordination

Was also in three columns, with a thirst

For glory gaping o'er a sea of slaughter:

The third, in columns two, attacked by water. (CPW, V, 352;  
393-400)

Once again this is accurately taken from Castelnau's pages, where the reader learns of the three detachments in the Russian army and their respective division in columns: 'the first attack was composed by three columns [...]', 'three other columns, intended for the second attack [...]' and 'the third attack over the water [...] consisted of two columns' (Castelnau, p. 207). Regarding the

‘accuracy’ that Byron was striving for, he penned these lines in the following canto:

(I don’t much pique myself upon orthography,  
So that I do not grossly err in facts,  
Statistics, tactics, politics and geography) – (CPW, V, 387;  
586-88)

However, as it is evident by the ‘thirst | For glory gaping o’er a sea of slaughter’ lines in the fiftieth stanza of canto VII, Byron subverts Castelnau’s triumphant tone. Whereas the French historian mainly reports the deeds and the deaths that ensued from the conflict matter-of-factly and essentially rejoices in the glories of warfare, Byron, on the contrary, is keen to expound the horrors and carnage that ensues from war. He ‘looks upon the siege of [Izmail] with a cynical eye, one attuned to man’s glorification of war ratified by cant’.<sup>31</sup> The author of *Histoire de la Nouvelle Russie* has nothing but praise for the battle: ‘the assault to Izmail is one of the boldest amongst similar events; it gives an exact idea of the nation behind it, of the general who commanded it and it honours all the military men who took part in it’ (Castelnau, pp. 206-7). As a result, the battle of Izmail is portrayed as yet another event which contributed to the inevitable march of human development through history. Castelnau is not interested in the suffering unleashed by war on those involved in it, but can only relate the deeds of the battle in relation to the detached

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<sup>31</sup> David Walker, “‘People’s Ancestors Are History’s Game’”: Byron’s *Don Juan* and Russian History’, *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 36 (2003), 149-64 (p. 160).

narrative of the march of 'liberty' through time: its events and those involved in it are recounted in terms of their 'glory', 'chivalry' and 'honour'. Effectively, the siege is celebrated as the triumph of European forces, enveloped in a Christian crusading spirit, against the Turkish 'infidel'. It is the celebration of civilisation – as understood in the whiggish sense of the term – over non-European barbarism. The siege, 'in its darkness and horror (which Castelnau does not wholly underplay)', also constitutes 'the last throes of barbarism before the final advent of enlightened Russian civilisation' and of Alexander the First, who succeeded Catherine the Great, the Russian monarch during the time of the Russo-Turkish war of 1787-1792.<sup>32</sup> In contrast, for Byron '[t]his is no romantic and idealistic battle for higher principles, fought by a moral and ethical aristocratic elite according to chivalric rules' (Walker, p. 159). Rather, Byron's account deals with the meaningless carnage suffered by the ordinary people who took part in the battle and the vanity or cupidity of those involved in the assault. As a result, the Siege of Izmail is not a worthy event in world history towards a more prosperous future.

Those serving in the war are either depicted as passive and clueless of the events surrounding them, or as cynically taking part in it for self-aggrandisement and material compensation. A great number of foreigners

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<sup>32</sup> Peter Cochran, 'Byron and Castelnau's History of New Russia', *Keats-Shelley Review*, 8 (1993), 48-70 (p. 53). Also see Cochran's article for a more extensive comparison of *Don Juan* and *Nouvelle Russie* with regards to the facts appropriated and subverted by Byron. For a minutely annotated side-by-side textual comparison between the two texts, see *The Works of Lord Byron. Poetry*, ed. by Ernest Hartley Coleridge, 7 vols (London: John Murray, 1924), VI, pp. 302-72.



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took part in the battle explicitly in pursuit of such mercenary goals. These soldiers are sarcastically depicted by Byron as ‘of much renown | Of various nations, and all volunteers’ (CPW, V, 342; 137-78):

Not fighting for their country or its crown,

But wishing to be one day brigadiers;

Also to have the sacking of a town;

A pleasant thing to young men at their years.

’Mongst them were several Englishmen of pith,

Sixteen called Thomson, and nineteen named Smith. (CPW,  
V, 342; 139-44)

These English war-profiteers are depicted as common people, thoroughly lacking in valour and personality. Their ambitions are either professional (‘to be one day brigadiers’) or strictly monetary (‘to have the sacking of a town’), while Byron’s choice of common surnames evidences their baseness and driven mostly by financial motives. ‘Jack Thomson and Bill Thomson’ (CPW, V, 342; 145) and the ‘Jacks and Gills and Wills and Bills’ (p. 343; 153) exemplify all that is wrong with modern warfare and the state of Europe in the aftermath of Waterloo: namely, a political climate dominated by political cant, governed by empty individualism and lacking in chivalric and honourable attitudes to history. Even Juan’s companion in the siege, Johnson, ‘heated by the hope of gain’ (p. 396; 822) later on in the poem urges his friend (who had by then decided to protect the child he had just saved) to hurry up and take part in the looting of Izmail with him:

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[...] but hark! now choose

Between your fame and feelings, pride and pity; –

Hark! how the roar increases! – no excuse

Will serve when there is plunder in a city: –

I should be loth to march without you, but,

By God! we'll be too late for the first cut. (CPW, V, 395; 803-8)

The urge to take the town as quickly as possible is not in order to advance the march of 'liberty' in its glory, nor even in pursuit of the Russians' objectives in the conflict. Rather, it is to be amongst the first to loot the spoils in the aftermath of the battle. War has been debased to a competing race to the bottom in pursuit of individualistic economic gain.

Byron's choice in attacking those taking part in the siege as lower-class individuals who lack chivalrous values cannot be entirely dismissed as a sniggering aristocratic reading of events – though *Don Juan's* satire most certainly retains this aspect. Contrary to Castelnau, Byron's poem refuses to depict the events surrounding Izmail solely in terms of detached military deeds. It also vehemently criticises those in charge of the siege: the generals, the Russian aristocracy and the Empress. As Vassalo argues, '[i]f the soldiers are somehow exonerated, the blame must be laid squarely on those capricious tyrants who, by imposing their will on the people, plunged the nation into war

thereby causing untold hardship and misery'.<sup>33</sup> Take, for instance, the following stanza:

'If' (says the historian here) 'I could report

All that the Russians did upon this day,

I think that several volumes would fall short,

And I should still have many things to say;'

And so he says no more – but pays his court

To some distinguished strangers in that fray;

The Prince de Ligne, and Langeron, and Damas,

Names great as any that the roll of Fame has. (CPW, V, 346-47; 249-56)

Castelnau's paragraph in question is as follows:

One will not attempt to convey all of the memorable events accomplished by the Russians during this campaign; one would have to compose volumes to recount all their deeds of arms and to specify all of their remarkable feats. Amongst the foreigners, the prince de Ligne has distinguished himself in his military merits; for the love of glory, he and his compatriots behaved like true French knights: the most

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<sup>33</sup> P. G. Vassallo, 'Casti's *Animali Parlanti*, the Italian Epic and Don Juan: The Poetry of Politics', in *Byron, Poetry and Politics: Seventh International Byron Symposium, Salzburg 1980*, ed. by Erwin A. Stürzl and James Hogg (Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1981), pp. 166-203 (p. 197).

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remarkable were the young duke of Richelieu and the counts  
of Langeron and of Damas (p. 204).

Note how Byron explicitly quotes Castelnau verbatim in the first four lines. However, Byron's aim for 'accuracy' is specifically poised to attack the detached narratives of war which ignore the deaths of the many thousands involved in conflicts whilst simultaneously praising those in charge of the soldiers. Byron criticises the elitism of the 'many things' which Castelnau could have said about the Russian deeds. Oblivious and desensitised to the fate of the ones actually doing the fighting, the French historian only dwells upon the aristocrats he deems worthy of praise for their 'military merits' and reads the war in glorious terms. For the historian, Ligne commanded the troops to victory in his 'love of glory' as a 'true French [knight]'. However, as is evident in the heavy sarcasm in the last line of Byron's stanza, who would indeed remember the names of Ligne, Richelieu, Langeron and Damas, let alone praise them for their supposed military brilliance and bravery? To consider the Siege of Izmail as a glorious event in human history would be as ridiculous as putting the prince of Ligne alongside important historical generals such as, say, Scipio or Pericles. Byron continues:

This being the case, may show us what fame *is*:

For out of these three '*preux Chevaliers*,' how

Many of common readers give a guess

That such existed? (and they may live now

For aught we know). [...] (CPW, V, 347; 257-61)

In contrast, the thousands of dead soldiers are forgotten to the historian and his readers. In Castelnau's words:

The historian skims through the least important facts and is contented in solely mentioning them without dwelling for too long in their description. This is his way to shorten the text and not to bore his readers; but it is his duty to minutely recount to his readers an action full of heroism (p. 207).

The soldiers' names and deeds are not only skimmed over as the 'least important' details of a given battle, but are also supplanted by the officers' acts 'full of heroism'. In fact, their sacrifices are only detachedly recorded in the gazettes – the published lists of the deceased in the battles. Byron admonishes the reader to '[t]hink how the joys of reading a Gazette | Are purchased by all agonies and crimes' (CPW, V, 403; 993-94). The gazettes are exposed as merely paying lip service to the grief of those directly or indirectly involved in conflicts, as he cites the anecdotal example of an acquaintance of his 'whose loss | Was printed *Grove*, although his name was *Grose*' (p. 370; 143-4). The narrator in *Don Juan* is despondent to learn that modern warfare can be summarised as nothing but anonymous organised murder: '[o]f all our modern battles, I will bet | You can't repeat nine names from each Gazette' (p. 347; 271-2).

The French émigrés involved in the Russo-Turkish wars are not the only personalities evoked by Byron. He also criticises the upper echelons of the Russian Empire and army. Alexandre Vasilyevich Suvorov (1730-1800), the Field Marshall in charge of the attack, is the obvious target. Byron's satire is twofold:

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on the one hand, he explicitly describes Suvorov's surprising lack of aesthetic finesse on the field (as exposed by Castelnau himself) and on the other he criticises the massacre unleashed by his troops by mordantly exalting Suvorov's great leadership skills and efficiency on the battlefield. His arrival at the camp to lead the Russian troops after the initial setbacks in their campaign is seemingly exalted by Byron:

[...] great joy unto the camp!

To Russian Tartar, English, French, Cossacque,

O'er whom Suwarrow shone like a gas lamp,

Presaging a most luminous attack [...] (CPW, V, 351; 361-64)

'Tis thus the spirit of a single mind

Makes that of multitudes take one direction, [...]

Such is the sway of your great men o'er little. (p. 351; 377-78, 384)

The stanzas at first seem to put forth a perfectly teleological view of Suvorov as a historical 'great man' who leads the historical process forwards towards a freer and enlightened future.

However, the subsequent stanzas thoroughly undermine the apparently this positive message and evidence Byron's sarcasm. Suvorov is also depicted as 'a little – odd – old man, | Stript to his shirt [...]' (CPW, V, 352; 391-92) who could easily be portrayed in both a fearful and comic manner:

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Suwarrow chiefly was on the alert,  
Surveying, drilling, ordering, jesting, pondering,  
For the man was, we safely may assert,  
A thing to wonder at beyond most wondering;  
Hero, buffoon, half-demon and half-dirt,  
Praying, instructing, desolating, plundering;  
Now Mars, now Momus; and when bent to storm  
A fortress, Harlequin in uniform (CPW, V, 354; 433-40)

Byron mocks Castelnau's contradictory portrayal of the man. According to the French historian, he was an educated gentleman, whose 'vast instruction' was often hidden to others out of modesty. He only engaged in those intellectual feats in order 'to overwhelm those he did not like, given that he spoke nearly all European languages' (Castelnau, p. 175). This is surprising given that he was criticised for being too permissive with his troops and would willingly mingle with those of lower military rank. Castelnau recounts how he dressed too-modestly around his subordinates and ate nothing but 'black bread and one onion' (p. 177). However, Castelnau deals with this in passing, given that the only thing that can be reproached in a general is to lose battles, which Suvorov did not do (p. 177). This is what Byron meant by the '[n]ow Mars, now Momus' phrase. Castelnau is at pains to eulogise the military achievements of the man whilst simultaneously acknowledging his ridiculous vicissitudes; he is at once the ideal personification of war and the carnivalesque epitome of debauchery and satire. Byron is quite fond of the anecdotal details during the Russian

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troops' training before the battle, recounting that Suvorov not only personally instructed his men in how to use their bayonets (CPW, V, 353; 407-8), but he also had dummies dressed as Turkish soldiers placed in the field for his men to charge:<sup>34</sup>

Also he dressed up, for the nonce, fascines

Like men with turbans, scymitars and dirks,

And made them charge with bayonet these machines

By way of lesson against actual Turks;

And when well practised in these mimic scenes,

He judged them proper to assail the works;

At which your wise men sneered in phrases witty:

He made no answer; but he took the city. (CPW, V, 353; 417-24)

However, the vindication bestowed upon Suvorov's military conquests in the final couplet is tongue-in-cheek. For Byron, his victories can be summarised in one word alone: carnage. Suvorov's men had 'a thirst | For Glory gaping o'er a sea of slaughter' (CPW, V, 352; 398-99) and the general himself was a detached, pompous and dehumanised figure who philosophises on 'the noble art of killing | For deeming human clay but common dirt' (p. 355; 460-1):

'So now, my lads, for Glory!' – Here he turned

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<sup>34</sup> Byron is so fond of this that he appended a note to the line: 'Fact: Souvaroff did this in person.' (CPW, V, 724). Castelnau also appends a note to this showing his aristocratic disapproval: 'Did he not have a lower officer in his army to do these lesser and mundane functions on his behalf?' (Castelnau, p. 208).



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And drilled away in the most classic Russian,  
Until each high, heroic bosoms burned  
For cash and conquest, as if from a cushion  
A preacher had held forth (who nobly spurned  
All earthly goods save tithes) and bade them push on  
To slay the Pagans, who resisted battering  
The armies of the Christian Empress Catherine. (CPW, V, 356-  
57; 505-12)

The heroic theme of Suvorov's eloquent discourse is revealed by Byron to be not only false, but hypocritical. The historical 'glory' trumpeted alluded to by the Russian general to his troops effects a convulsion in feeling on their part, but not for the deeds in themselves. Rather, the soldiers' 'heroic bosoms burned | For cash and conquest' and nothing else. By cleverly likening Suvorov's speech to a preacher who hypocritically tells his congregation to renounce earthly goods while concurrently amassing wealth via tithes, the poem attacks the cant intrinsic to the discourse of war. The evocation of a crusading spirit against the non-Christian Ottomans is exposed as being not only empty and hypocritical, but also as a manipulative tool in Catherine's tyrannical and imperialist desires. Suvorov is a vile example of the cant of the age, when wars are fought for petty reasons and notions such as 'glory' and 'heroism' are so abused in discourse that they lose their original meaning.

*Don Juan* essentially presents the reader with a distinction between the glorious battles of antiquity and the cynical ones of modern times:

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[...] – The work of Glory still went on

In preparations for a cannonade

As terrible as that of Ilion,

If Homer had found mortars ready made;

But now, instead of slaying Priam's son,

We only can but talk of escalade,

Bombs, drums, guns, bastions, batteries, bayonets, bullets,

Hard words, which stick in the soft Muses' gullets. (CPW, V,  
360-61; 617-24)

War is debased from the glorious Homeric accounts to the modern descriptions of his day, dominated by the un-poetic words of modern warfare: 'cannonade', 'bombs' and 'mortars'. The narrator self-consciously questions his own ability to compose on the theme of a modern siege that so thoroughly lacks the desirable attributes of a battle worthy to live through the ages: 'heroism', 'glory' and the triumph of 'liberty'. Simon Bainbridge argues that, despite the anti-war theme that underlines the Siege of Izmail cantos in *Don Juan*, the poem still hails the wars of the classical world.<sup>35</sup> The detached whig view of history is put forth in the poem's allusions to 'freedom's battles':

The drying up a single tear has more

Of honest fame, than shedding seas of gore.

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<sup>35</sup> Simon Bainbridge, "'Of War and Taking Towns': Byron's Siege Poems", in *Romantic Wars: Studies in Culture and Conflict, 1793-1822*, ed. by Philip Shaw (Farnham: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 161-84 (p. 162).

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And why? – because it brings self-approbation;

Whereas the other, after all its glare,

Shouts, bridges, arches, pensions from a nation, –

Which (it may be) has not much left to spare, –

A higher title, or a loftier station,

Though they may make Corruption gape or stare,

Yet, in the end, except in freedom's battles,

Are nothing but a child of Murder's rattles.

And such they are – and such they will be  
found.

Not so Leonidas and Washington,

Whose every battle-field is holy ground,

Which breathes of nations saved, not  
worlds undone.

How sweetly on the ear such echoes sound!

While the mere victor's may appal or stun

The servile and the vain, such names will be

A watchword till the future shall be free.

(CPW, V, 366; 23-40)

The 'freedom's battles' alluded in the poem are exempted from the awfulness of war. Alongside the glorious events of antiquity exemplified by Thermopylae and the death of Leonidas, Byron also cites the battles fought by George Washington as 'holy ground'. However, these laudable historical deeds 'were

difficult to find in the post-Waterloo world and Byron was often forced to look back in history to the actions of classical heroes such as Leonidas or forward to the New World exploits of Washington for his examples' (Bainbridge, 'Of war and Taking Towns', p. 162). In contrast, the whiggish view of advancing the spirit of 'liberty' through the ages is absent in Byron's interpretation of the events in Izmail. This is evident in the poem's treatment of the prince Potemkin (1739-91), who was in charge of the Russian military.

Alongside Suvorov, Potemkin – 'a great thing in days | When homicide and harlotry made great' (CPW, V, 348; 289-90) – also exemplifies the degradation of 'glory' and 'liberty' in modern Europe. The Russian prince is depicted as a sovereign who had 'mere lust of power to o'er-arch all | With its [sic] proud brow' (p. 349; 317-8). As might be expected, Castelnau portrays him as a brilliant, though flawed, man. The prince is 'a man of genius', handsome and virile (Castelnau, p. 154). He was a 'god of combat' who retained knowledge like no other (p. 155). His personal defects are attributed to his brilliancy: '[h]is spirit, strong and passionate was susceptible of great things, but it was constantly set back by the oddness and inconsequential acts of a wondering imagination' (p. 154). Castelnau's Potemkin was so avid for conquests and glory that after obtaining those he would fall into a mood of sluggishness and despondency (p. 156). His spirit was of such a higher order that without the pursuit of great obstacles he would fall into a state of indifference and mental dereliction (pp. 156-57). Byron retains Castelnau's god-like and vain rendition of the despot's personality. However, he does so

not in order to aggrandise his achievements and ambition, but to criticise his absolute power. Potemkin's order to his generals ('You will take Ismail at whatever price') (CPW, V, 349; 320), interpreted by monarchists as a sign of strength and laudable power, is given the opposite interpretation by Byron. The order exemplifies the megalomaniacal drive behind a prince who did not care about advancing 'liberty', but was solely interested in the imperial conquest achieved with the deaths of many anonymous soldiers:

The letter of the Prince to the same Marshal<sup>36</sup>  
Was worthy of a Spartan, had the cause  
Been one to which a good heart could be partial –  
Defence of freedom, country, or of laws;  
But as it was mere lust of power to o'er-arch all  
With its proud brow, it merits slight applause,  
Save for its style, which said, all in a trice,  
'You will take Ismail at whatever price.' (CPW, V, 349; 313-  
20)

The order to conquer a place 'at whatever price' would be considered heroic in circumstances such as the '[d]efence of freedom, country or laws' of Leonidas in Thermopylae. However, Potemkin's order to attack and conquer the city no matter what cost is portrayed as despotic and arbitrary and the Russian victory in the battle does not configure in the great chain of events towards a freer future. Rather, it is solely the greedy means by which the Russian Empire

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<sup>36</sup> Alexandre Vasilyevich Suvorov.

sought to establish a bigger influence in world affairs. Despite having criticised the soldiery – both Russian and foreign – involved in the Siege of Izmail for their greed, Byron's portioning of blame is reserved to those in charge of the attack:

And whom for this at last must we condemn?

Their natures? or their sovereigns, who employ

All arts to teach their subjects to destroy? (CPW, V, 393; 734-36)

The greatest tragedy of modern warfare is the anonymity of the countless dead who are sent to their doom by cant-spouting tyrants. 'History can only take things in the gross' (CPW, V, 365; 17) and any account of the Siege of Izmail cannot do justice to the horrors which were perpetrated during the campaign. Byron, still using Castelnau as his source, does not spare the reader of the details of the battle: one learns of the three hundred cannons and the thirty thousand muskets on the Russian side (p. 368; 89-90). However, contrary to Castelnau, Byron is disinclined to take the 'facts' of war 'in the gross' and attempts to describe the horrors of the battlefield graphically. In this aspect, the Izmail portion of *Don Juan* is comparable to the Waterloo stanzas in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* canto III. Don Juan and his friend Johnson march onwards: 'dead bodies trampling o'er, | Firing, and thrusting, slashing, sweating, glowing [...] (p. 370; 149-50), 'wallow[ing] in the bloody mire | Of dead and dying thousands [...] (p. 371; 153-4) and 'stumbl[ing] backwards o'er | A wounded comrade, sprawling in his gore' (p. 371; 159-60). After the Russian army took

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the city walls, the battle became even fiercer, since both armies disputed the city streets 'inch by inch [...]' (p. 388; 615):

The city's taken – only part by part –

And Death is drunk with gore: there's not a street

Where fights not to the last some desperate heart

For those for whom it soon shall cease to beat.

Here War forgot his own destructive Art

In more destroying Nature; and, the heat

Of Carnage, like the Nile's sun-sodden Slime,

Engendered monstrous shapes of every Crime. (CPW, V, 389-90; 649-56)

The descriptions of carnage find their epitome at this point in the poem, as Byron narrates a grotesque occurrence amidst the battle. As a Russian officer was treading '[o]ver a heap of bodies' (p. 390; 658), he had his Achilles tendon bitten, and 'made the teeth meet' (p. 390; 670) by a moribund Turkish soldier who still held his grip to the leg even after having his head severed from his body (p. 390; 670-2). The carnage is indeed 'an awful topic' (p. 392; 705), but Byron tells his readers – in the face of a misleading discourse which glorified war and dehumanised suffering – that it is his duty to 'sketch your world exactly as it goes' (p. 392; 712).

Needless to say, Castelnau's book deals with the conflict in a very different light. He is keen to applaud the Russian victory, taking the events 'in the gross' and commending the Russian army for winning the battle though

they were in fewer numbers: ‘for the first time, less than twenty-three thousand men attacked thirty-six thousand men in a fortified position and destroyed them; thus offering Europe the most beautiful military accomplishment that its annals can celebrate’ (Castelnau, pp. 218-19). The French historian unapologetically celebrates the military victory after giving his readers a list of the atrocities committed in Izmail:

Here, we see the old men with their throats slit, the mutilated and skinned women, their children still gripped to their mothers’ cold breasts. [...] The soldiers’ inebriety was not at this moment related to their [military] glory, but rather to a momentary fierceness put in place in order to satisfy their vengeance and cupidity (Castelnau, p. 216).

‘The conquest of Izmail’, he continues, ‘is one of the events that brings the most honour and bravery to the Russians and their perseverant character. The carnage that followed is indeed distressing, but one would be mistaken to attribute this to their national character’ (p. 217). Byron’s conclusion is the opposite one, for he considers the Siege of Izmail to be morally indefensible. However, he does so not from an anti-Russian perspective, but rather as an example to the overarching ills of war in general:

All that the mind would shrink from of excesses;

All that the body perpetrates of bad;

All that we read, hear, dream, of man’s distresses;

All that the Devil would do if run stark mad;



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All that defies the worst which pen expresses;

All by which Hell is peopled, or as sad

As Hell – mere mortals who their power abuse, –

Was here (as heretofore and since) let loose. (CPW, V, 402;  
977-84)

The horrors unleashed by the Izmail campaign are presented in an apocalyptic tone. In fact, the evils of warfare in this instance cannot be accurately presented by language. Instead, Byron leaves to the reader's imagination the conceptualisation of the worst excesses which can be committed by Humankind. Castelnuovo's eulogy of Izmail is exposed by Byron as nothing but cant. It is an example of a whiggish historical discourse which perceives the human march through time as a neutral and detached process which, to Byron's dismay, overlooks the human sufferings of those involved in historical events.

## 5. 'Behind' the Past

This chapter considers how far Byron's later writings show such a critical and reflexive approach to history. For example, the notion of history as an inexorable, neutral and acritical march of 'liberty' through time (the whiggish interpretation) appears alongside a more 'modern', as Foucault and Bann put it, historical discourse (see pp. 16-19 above).<sup>1</sup> This 'history' is thus dominated by the idea of hidden forces which act 'behind' the historical process which, to various extents, determines the outcome of human existence. Additionally, the very notion of history as a specific discourse with its own self-representations and agendas is also discussed by Byron.

In *The Age of Bronze* (1823), for instance, Byron takes a subtly radical stance, dealing with the discourse of class and the primacy of the financial markets (and the supposed Jewish conspiracy behind them) in the outcome of human events. The drama *Cain* (1821), in fact, can be read as an exploration of the creation of narratives and the ever-present role of power in those discursive creations. Byron's tackling of the diverse and contradictory discourses of Creation are shown to be valuable examples of how the past is necessarily shaped by an agenda. The play's reception is also analysed in terms of how it was appropriated by radicals as a form of overthrowing the established order of its time. Finally, the chapter ends with a comparison between Byron's satire *The Vision of Judgment* (1822) and the text which

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault defines the 'outer limits' of this shift in historical thinking as occurring between 'the years 1775 and 1825', see Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 239.

prompted it, Southey's *A Vision of Judgement* (1821). The question posed in both texts is regarding the legacy of George III (1738-1820), and how historical discourse will represent the late king's life and achievements. The section of the chapter looks into two opposing political sides: Southey's Tory, governmental narrative from a staunch whiggish standpoint and Byron's Whig oppositional narrative. It becomes evident, then, that the creation of a past narrative is always dominated by a discursive struggle which operates 'behind' the events narrated.

### **5.1 The discourse of class and the 'Jews and jobbers'**

*The Age of Bronze* is a satire written between December 1822 and January 1823 and published in April of that year. The poem addresses the Congress of Verona (October – December 1822), which assembled the European powers of the day to discuss the political future of the continent after the events of the Napoleonic wars and Napoleon's definitive demise in 1821 (CPW, VII, 120). Most specifically, the Congress of Verona, according to Frederick L. Beaty, 'was convened primarily because the French wanted the consent of their European allies to intervene militarily in Spain' and put Ferdinand VII (1784-1833), who had been ousted by Spanish liberal forces, back in power.<sup>2</sup> In order to achieve this, it would need 'to overthrow a constitutional regime there and re-establish the autocratic rule of the Bourbon monarch Ferdinand VII' (Beaty, p. 171). In other words, it was another attempt by the great monarchies to restore their

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<sup>2</sup> Frederick L. Beaty, *Byron the Satirist* (Dekalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1985), p. 171.

powers and to suppress the revolutionary ideals set in motion from 1789 onwards. As Beaty states, the 'Holy Alliance' of Russia, Prussia and Austria were in agreement with regards to the intervention in Spain, whereas Britain was opposed to it (p. 171). Nonetheless, all of the monarchical powers were in agreement regarding the maintenance of their powers and the suppression of popular movements which might endanger their position. This is the historical background that Byron criticises in *The Age of Bronze*.

As Byron wrote to Leigh Hunt after the completion of *The Age of Bronze*:

[*The Age of Bronze* was] calculated for the reading part of the Million – being all on politics &c. &c. &c. and a review of the day in general – in my early English Bards style – but a little more stilted and somewhat too full of “epithets of war” and classical & historical allusions[;] if notes are necessary they can be added (BLJ, X, 81).<sup>3</sup>

Byron's mention of his 1809 satire in his letter to Hunt is misleading. Even though similar in its satirical tone, metric and rhyming pattern, *The Age of Bronze* is far more radical – at least in regard to its politics – than *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. Both texts do share a certain tone of despondency for an age and a sense of irritability regarding the mediocrity, in Byron's view, of his own time. However, as discussed in chapter one, Byron's nostalgic feelings

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<sup>3</sup> Byron to Leigh Hunt. 10 January 1823.

in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* are mostly connected to the aesthetics of classical knowledge that were under attack in 1809 in his view. Byron's attack in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* was against the 'literary sinners' of his age: specifically the writers and reviewers who disparaged the classical tradition in the name of the emerging aesthetics on the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries. He had, according to Nina Diakonova, 'been a zealous follower of eighteenth-century traditions' in his early satire, whereas in *The Age of Bronze* the more mature Byron 'was both disciple and iconoclast, rising from classicist abstractions to a realistic satirical portrayal of social psychology and the laws of its evolution'.<sup>4</sup> The text presents a vigorous critique on 'the hard commercial spirit of the age and its fierce hatred of freedom' which dominated the landscape in post-Napoleonic Europe (Diakonova, p. 56). The title of the poem suggests, besides a retreat in historical development, a fall from a worthier 'age of silver', which was led by much greater public figures (Pitt, Fox and Napoleon) than his contemporaries (Beaty, p. 173). Though marked by an unmistakable yearning for past decades, *The Age of Bronze*, contrary to *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, does not embrace a return to the past. *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* is not only a thoroughly conservative poem in its aesthetic values, but also in its social ones (see pp. 54-59 above). Byron's wistful attitude towards the classical past in that poem is accompanied and legitimised by an ever-present sense of literary entitlement

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<sup>4</sup> Nina Diakonova, 'The Age of Bronze and the Traditions of Classicism', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 41 (1992), 49-58 (p. 56).

and rank. Literature, the poem argues, should only be written by the higher classes and solely as a means to pass one's time.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Byron in the beginning of his writing career decried the professional author as a vulgar means of procuring one's income: 'To JEFFREY go, be silent and discreet, | His pay is just ten sterling pounds per sheet' (CPW, I, 231; 69-70). This is nowhere as evident as when he attacks the poets of his own age who lived by their pen. The brothers Amos and Joseph Cottle (c. 1768-1800 and 1770-1853, respectively) are vilified not only for their verses but for not having an aristocratic background (they were both booksellers):

Oh! Pen perverted! Paper misapplied!

Had COTTLE still adorned the counter's side,

Bent o'er the desk, or, born to useful toils,

Been taught to make the paper which he soils,

Plough'd, delv'd, or plied the oar with lusty limb,

He had not sung of Wales, nor I of him. (CPW, I, 241; 405-10)

He even appends a note to the lines: 'Mr. Cottle, Amos, or Joseph, I don't know which, but one or both, once sellers of books they did not write, and now writers of books that do not sell, have published a pair of Epics' (CPW, I, 406). The excerpt implies that the Cottle brothers should know their place: they are solely fit for manual labour and small transactions over a counter, not to be authors of verse. The poem suggests that such a role should be filled by an

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<sup>5</sup> For the popularisation of reading in Britain in the 1700s and 1800s, see William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation*, pp. 103-21.

aristocrat to the likes of Byron who would write with no regard to the financial outcome of his or her literary endeavours. To an aesthetically-trained classicist such as Byron, there is nothing more vulgar than someone who would 'write for food, and feed because they write' (p. 246; 553).

In contrast, the yearning for the past in the *Age of Bronze* is not for an idealised era of social conformity and classical aesthetics, but rather for the characters and events of previous decades connected to social upheaval and revolution. William Pitt and Charles James Fox, for example, are eulogised by Byron as the unrivalled political characters of the recent past:

All is exploded – be it good or bad.

Reader! remember when thou wert a lad

Then Pitt was all; or, if not all, so much,

His very rival almost deemed him such. (CPW, VII, 1; 9-12)

Byron remembers the days of his youth (both politicians died in 1806 when Byron was still a student at Cambridge) and the 'dashing sea | Of eloquence' (CPW, VII, 1-2; 15-6), which the political 'Athos and Ida' (p. 1; 15) of their day battled in Parliament.

Most importantly, Byron eulogises the memory of their other famous contemporary – Napoleon and his meteoric career. The French Emperor is contrastingly depicted as both a ruthless force as well as favourably for being against the traditional values which were in the process of being resurrected by monarchical powers in 1822-23. Napoleon – 'the modern, mightier far, |

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Who, born no king, made monarchs draw his car' (p. 2; 43-4) – is rebuked for not only losing his stake in human affairs, but for the paltry way for which he took his exit from the central stage of European politics. Instead of complying with an idealised view of historical events and battles, of dying in the battlefield championing great deeds, Napoleon was deposed and exiled to 'yon lone isle' of St Helena (p. 3; 53). There he spent his last days 'between a prison and a palace' pathetically 'squabbling o'er disputed rations' and '[o]'er petty quarrels upon petty things' which his captors doled out to him (p. 3; 73, 58, 61).

Nevertheless, Byron still praised the greatness of the man who had stirred his imagination. A whole section of *The Age of Bronze* is dedicated to praising the emperor's military and political deeds. Byron enumerates the many conquests of the French conqueror: the crossing of the Alps in 1800 (CPW, VII, 5; 135), his expedition to Egypt in 1798-9 (pp. 5-6; 141-50), the double conquest of Madrid (March and December 1808) (p. 6; 151-2), the two victories in Vienna (1805 and 1809) and in other localities of the Austrian and Prussian empires (p. 6; 153-160). The disastrous Russian campaign of 1812-13 is eulogised as the inevitable result of the Napoleonic fiery spirit which, like Icarus, aimed for great heights too ambitiously:

Sublimest of volcanos! Etna's flame

Pales before thine, and quenchless Hecla's tame;

Vesuvius shews his blaze, an usual sight

For gaping tourists, from his hacknied height:

Thou stand'st alone unrivalled, till the fire



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To come, in which all empires shall expire. (CPW, VII, 6-7,  
179-84)

Napoleon, like Pitt and Fox, is celebrated for his personal greatness. This implies to the reader in the 1820s not only the absence of great political personalities, but also the generalised barren political landscape in post-Waterloo Europe. European history is doomed to go backwards to a time of monarchies and to trample over its recent revolutionary past.

Despite the great emphasis on nostalgia for the great events and men of the Regency, history's redeeming features in *The Age of Bronze* are not set in the past but rather in the future. In that aspect, the poem reveals a stark contrast with *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* and its retrospective stance. Napoleon's dramatic rise and fall, Byron prophetically states, will continue to inspire and change the political landscape towards the end of absolutism:

What though his name a wider empire found  
Than his ambition, though with scarce a bound;  
Though first in glory, deepest in reverse,  
He tasted empire's blessings and its curse;  
Though kings, rejoicing in their late escape  
From chains, would gladly be *their* tyrant's ape[.] (CPW, VII,  
4; 93-98)

The social and political movements started by the French Revolution and championed by Bonaparte's empire did not disappear with time. Indeed, though France lost its empire, the 1789-1815 upheavals set in motion a future

‘wider empire’ infinitely more ambitious than what had been envisaged by Napoleon, as *The Age of Bronze* prophesises a future free of absolutism: ‘But be it as it is, the time may come | His name shall beat the alarm like Ziska’s drum’ (CPW, VII, 5; 129-30). John Zizka of Troznov (1360-1424) was a ‘Bohemian Hussite leader who fought the imperialist faction all his life’ and who, ‘[a]ccording to legend, on his deathbed [...] ordered that his skin be used to make a drum which would lead his troops into battle’ (p. 122). Like Zizka’s drum, Napoleon’s name and memory, as the deposer of monarchies and triumphant champion of ‘liberty’, will, in the poem, lead on the fight against the tyranny of kings. *The Age of Bronze* ultimately presents Napoleon as the harbinger of historical change despite acknowledging his own despotic rule as emperor. Though ultimately defeated, the revolutionary ideals he championed are seen to live on and inspire the future generations to rise against the reinstated monarchies of the 1810s/1820s.<sup>6</sup>

So far, this historiographical discourse is not entirely alien to the whig interpretation of history discussed in previous chapters, though it is perceived from a French perspective. One can still observe a notion of a providential line of causality through time which will inevitably lead on to ‘liberty’. Perhaps Byron is more critical of monarchies in general, although he never explicitly advocates an alternative, republican or otherwise. In fact, the yearning for the past is solely related to the subjugation of the divine monarchical powers in the

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<sup>6</sup> As shown in the previous chapter, these sentiments are contrary to the whiggish notions of *Childe Harold Pilgrimage’s* canto I and its appraisal of Wellington’s victories in the Peninsular Wars against the French.

1789-1815 period, something which was being reversed in the political landscape of post-Waterloo Europe. Notwithstanding, the text does espouse a somewhat more radical political discourse than the whiggish account of history by attacking and exposing the themes of socio-economic class and adopting the anti-Semitic discourse of a supposed financial grip held by Jews on human affairs.

The theme of class warfare is nowhere more prominent in Byron's works than in section XIV of *The Age of Bronze*. In it, Byron vehemently attacks the landowners – the 'uncountry gentlemen' (CPW, VII, 18; 569) – who profited from the high prices of corn and the rent during the wars against Napoleon. After the war ended, they heavily lobbied Parliament to grant them a series of subsidies in order to maintain the high profits they enjoyed in times of war:

True, blood and treasure boundlessly were spilt,

But what of that? the Gaul may bear the guilt;

But bread was high, the farmer paid his way,

And acres told upon the appointed day. (CPW, VII, 19; 586-89)

Byron's criticism is mostly based on the insensitivity towards the many who lost their lives fighting the Napoleonic forces shown by the landed gentry: '[t]he last to bid the cry of warfare cease, | The first to make a malady of peace' (CPW, VII, 18; 570-71). Byron vilifies them for not only gaining wealth with the lives of their compatriots but also by further exploiting them after the conflict in keeping prices up. They are accused of using Parliament solely to uphold their self-interest. Indeed, Parliament passed a law in 1815 – the Importation Act –

which barred the importation of the cheaper grains from abroad unless the price of wheat reached £4 or above in the United Kingdom.<sup>7</sup> This effectively meant that the price of British bread was a lot higher than it was marketed internationally, since the British producers held the monopoly and could set the high prices that they aimed for. As Longmate notes, the £4 threshold which ought to be reached before importation was possible, ‘when translated into the cost of a loaf’, was so high that it would have meant ‘real hardship’ for the population at large (Longmate, p. 9). However, the landowners were still disgruntled by the prices of their produce in times of peace, given that they were even dearer during the war (wheat had reached an all-time high of £7.3s.2d in March 1801) (p. 6). It is in this context in the early 1820s that landed proprietors further pressured Parliament to relieve their predicament – for they aimed for the same level of profits they had achieved during wartime – and Byron’s scathing response in *The Age of Bronze*. The government stepped in and acquiesced to their demands after a series of parliamentary debates.<sup>8</sup> This explains Byron’s scornful tone in *The Age of Bronze*, where he lays bare the greed and selfish interests of the aristocracy and landed gentry. Most importantly, what Byron’s poem does is to challenge on a discursive level the neutral perspective of the whig interpretation which considered the historical march as an inevitable and peaceful process and consider the economic aspects

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<sup>7</sup> Norman Longmate, ‘The Price of Corn’, in *The Breadstealers* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1984), pp. 1-10 (p. 6).

<sup>8</sup> [Anonymous], ‘Measures for the Relief of Agricultural Distress’, *Edinburgh Annual Register*, 15 (January 1822), 72-115 (pp. 74-75). For a thorough collection of the economic debates in Parliament in 1819-1823, see Barry Gordon, *Political Economy in Parliament, 1819-1823* (London: Macmillan Press, 1977).

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operating 'behind' historical events. History is depicted as being manipulated by the powerful as they hold governments to ransom with their political and economic power.

At his most vitriolic in *The Age of Bronze*, Byron delivers a series of verses rhyming with 'rent':

See these glorious Cincinnati swarm,  
Farmers of war, Dictators of the farm!  
*Their* ploughshare was the sword in hireling hands,  
*Their* fields manured by gore of other lands;  
Safe in their barns, these Sabine tillers sent  
Their brethren out to battle – why? for Rent!  
Year after year they voted cent. per cent.  
Blood, sweat, and tear-wrung millions – why? for Rent!  
They roared, they dined, they drank, they swore they meant  
To die for England – why then live? for Rent!  
The peace has made one general malcontent  
Of these high-market patriots; war was Rent!  
Their love of country, millions all mis-spent,  
How reconcile? by reconciling Rent!  
And will they not repay the treasures lent?  
No: down with every thing, and up with Rent!  
Their good, ill, health, wealth, joy, or discontent,

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Being, end, aim, religion – Rent, Rent, Rent! (CPW, VII, 20;  
616-33)

This seminal excerpt starts with a reference to ancient history. ‘Cincinnati’ ironically alludes to the Roman statesman Cincinnatus (fifth century BCE). According to tradition, Cincinnatus was working his small farm when he was appointed dictator with the purpose of rescuing the surrounded Roman army in Mount Algidus. After defeating the enemies of the republic and restoring order, it is said that he totally relinquished his power and returned to the simple life of the farm.<sup>9</sup> As McGann puts it, Byron uses the example of Cincinnatus as a ‘byword of disinterested patriotism’ whilst ‘devoted to his farm’ (CPW, VII, 128). However, contrary to the Roman statesman, the British farmers presented here are the ‘Dictators of the farm’ and are only interested in war not as a means to further the interests of the country, but because it provides them with larger profits. Byron takes the causality between war and high rents to its logical conclusion and explicitly denounces the landlords’ greed and lack of empathy towards their fellow countrymen. The imagery of the fields being ‘manured by gore’ is displaced from the battlefields of continental Europe to the English countryside. Whilst ‘safe in their barns’, the proprietors ‘sent’ a multitude of British subjects to die with the full knowledge that the continuation of hostilities meant that their profits would continue to be inflated. The poem thus exposes the political cant of war and refuses to dissociate the carnage perpetrated by British and Napoleonic forces in

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<sup>9</sup> See Livy 3.26-9. Livy, *The Early History of Rome: Books I-V of the History of Rome from Its Foundations*, trans. by Audrey De Séincourt (London: Penguin, 2002), pp. 226-30.

continental Europe from provincial life in the British Isles. Looking back after the end of hostilities, the whole purpose of war is explicitly denounced as a means to provide landowners with an inflated rent and increase in their profits. Byron also depicts them as damaging the times of peace ('The peace has made one general malcontent | Of these high-market patriots; war was Rent!'), as the prices of wheat and other agricultural products plummeted, dragging the rent prices with them. Byron puns on the word 'reconcile' to drive his point home: 'How reconcile? by reconciling Rent'. The reconciliation, the peace between the European powers, is equated with the reconciling of the landowners' finances.<sup>10</sup> Byron is here criticising the greed of those lobbying Parliament to have their interests safeguarded at the expense of the majority of the British population, who suffered a much worse ordeal throughout the Napoleonic Wars.

Interestingly, Byron viciously attacked the landowners while he was himself turning into a landed aristocrat. Even though he had sold the Newstead Abbey estate – and indeed his main source of income was the rent charged from farmers that leased parts of the property – in late 1817, he had just inherited the Wentworth Estates after the death of his mother-in-law, Judith Noel Milbanke in 1822 (Marchand, *A Portrait*, p. 275). Byron's dealings with regards to his finances are just as one would expect of any other landowner. This is evidenced when one looks into his correspondence. For instance, when

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<sup>10</sup> Reconciliation: '*Bookkeeping*. The action or practice of rendering one account consistent with another by balancing apparent discrepancies' (OED).

Byron left for his Grand Tour in 1809 he had instructed his mother to raise the rent, since, as Mrs Byron put it, 'malt, corn, cattle wheat etc is treble the price that they were at the time this estate was valued'.<sup>11</sup> When inheriting the Noel property, Byron was eager to tell his solicitor John Hanson to act immediately on the matter in order to safeguard his newly-acquired property:

I further wish to have *my* rights ascertained – even if we go into a Court of law for that purpose. – The Arbitrators are men of honour and I understand from them *distinctly* that the Estates were under *my* controul [sic] – and I will not be dictated to by Dr. Lushington – or any one else (BLJ, IX, 177).<sup>12</sup>

In fact, the only concern he shows towards the farmers are in relation to the distress which would be caused to them in a possible survey to ascertain the value of the rent charged; if it should be raised or not:

As to going to the expence [sic] of surveying an estate – from which we shall be but too lucky to obtain any *rent at all* – It seems to me – at *present* – a kind of insanity – and even a *shame* to distress the farmers further at such a moment (p. 177).

Byron's anxieties on this matter are understandable. According to Hanson, 'the gross Rental of the Wentworth Estates, as handed over to us, is £6336 a year'.

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<sup>11</sup> John Beckett and Sheila Aley, *Byron and Newstead: The Aristocrat and the Abbey* (London: Associated University Presses, 2001), p. 146.

<sup>12</sup> Byron to John Hanson. 20 June 1822.



After all expenses were deducted, Byron was entitled to £2,500 a year, which brought his total income to around £6,000, plus the (roughly) £2,000 a year he made by his pen.<sup>13</sup> The newly-acquired properties increased Byron's wealth by 25% overnight (Marchand, *Portrait*, pp. 366-67). Apart from Wentworth, Byron also had the Rochdale Estate in Lancaster. This mining land did not provide him with an income, since he spent many years in Chancery Lane Court to prove that it was legitimately acquired by his ancestors. He finally managed to sell it in the end of 1823 for a very low price, given the bad reputation that it had gathered with the more than a decade it spent in judicial limbo (Graham, p. 70). The paradox is perhaps better understood if the issue is approached as a *discursive* discussion rather than a *biographical* one. To seek to answer: how is it possible for an aristocratic landowner to write in an almost radical vein in early nineteenth-century Britain? The present chapter is guided by the acknowledgment of the multitude of political discourses in post-Waterloo Europe and by observing how they are voiced through Byron's poetry; not rarely contradictorily.

It is not only the grip of the landed classes on historical events that is evoked in *The Age of Bronze*. The summation of the whole existence of the landed gentry in terms of their financial gains and profits – their entire '[b]eing, end, aim, religion' – is followed by an anti-Semitic outburst in the poem. After attacking the ruling classes and the power over historical affairs they exert from

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<sup>13</sup> The days of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* and the notion of writing solely for pleasure without financial gains were long behind Byron by 1822.

their manor houses, Byron aims his satire at the grip held by the financial markets by making fair usage of a common nineteenth century trope – the profit-obsessed Jew:

Thou soldst thy birthright, Esau! for a mess:

Thou shouldst have gotten more, or eaten less;

Now thou hast swilled thy pottage, thy demands

Are idle; Israel says the bargain stands. (CPW, VII, 20; 634-37)

In this aspect, Byron vents the well-established anti-Semitic discourse which was so much *en vogue* amidst the politics of the nineteenth century in all sides of the political spectrum.<sup>14</sup> William Cobbett serves as a good example of this burgeoning literature, which decried the Jewish population as the root of historical evil. In 1805, he wrote against the 'Pitt system' of government that was 'ruining the country':

The system of upstarts; of low-bred, low-minded sycophants usurping the stations reserved by nature, by Reason, by the Constitution, and by the interests of the people, to men of high birth, eminent talents, or great national services; the system by which the ancient Aristocracy and the Church have been undermined; by which the ancient gentry of the kingdom have been almost extinguished, their means of

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Scrivener, "'Zion Alone Is Forbidden': Historicizing Antisemitism in Byron's the *Age of Bronze*", *Keats-Shelley Review*, 43 (1994), 75-97 (p. 76).

support have been transferred, by the hand of the tax gatherer, to contractors, jobbers, and Jews.<sup>15</sup>

The anti-Semitic discourse of portraying the Jew as a puppet-master ‘behind’ history is expounded by Cobbett in 1805 from a conservative point of view. The Jews were seen to usurp the social positions ‘reserved by nature [...], Reason’ and ‘by the Constitution’ to the higher orders of British society. As already discussed in the last chapter, the *Political Register* was at its inception a publication of thorough conservative tendencies, but which changed towards the radical spectrum with the years. Nonetheless, after 1819 Cobbett’s anti-Semitism was still present in his writings in the periodical (Osborne, p. 88). By then, the publication’s politics had become less conservative and, insofar as economics were concerned, it can be placed within a somewhat radical leftist discourse. Cobbett’s politics were extremely complex – perhaps even more so than Byron’s. Cobbett shared several ideals with the Tories. He too was ‘rooted in the country’, ‘disliked “big business”’ and ‘feared revolution’.<sup>16</sup> He states: ‘[w]e want *great alteration* but we want *nothing new*. Alteration, modification to suit the times and circumstances; but the great principles ought to be and must be the same’ (Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, p. 9). On the other hand, he was a radical, and championed ‘manhood suffrage and for something very much like the Chartist programme’ (p. 10).

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<sup>15</sup> William Cobbett, 'Parliamentary Censure on Lord Viscount Melville', *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 7 (April 1805), 597-8 (pp. 597-98). John W. Osborne, 'William Cobbett's Anti-Semitism', *The Historian*, 47 (1984), 86-92 (p. 87).

<sup>16</sup> William Cobbett, *Rural Rides: Selections from William Cobbett's Illustrated Rural Rides 1821-1832* (London: Fraser Stewart, 1984 [1822-6]), p. 9.

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Nevertheless, Cobbett's opinions on the Jews sit squarely amidst his hatred of the urban, financial and 'new' in opposition to his love for the countryside, rural production and 'old' England. Written serially in the 1820s and published in book format in 1830, Cobbett's *Rural Rides* contains several anti-Semitic opinions that he gathered during his travels in the English countryside. For instance, upon perceiving the rural labourers drinking beer at a public house, he muses on the beverage's price:

It is an exchange of beer for sweat; but the tax-eaters get, after all, the far greater part of the sweat; for, it were not for the tax, the beer would sell for three-halfpence a pot, instead of fivepence. Of this threepence-halfpenny the Jews and Jobbers get about twopence-halfpenny (Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, p. 44).

Most importantly, the anecdotal examples Cobbett gathered around the country are used as the self-evident reality – in his perspective – of the Jew being a parasitic presence in the country's finances:

The jews and jobbers pay the turnpikes, to be sure; but, they get the money from the land and labourer. They drain these, from John-a-Groat's House to the Land's End, and they lay out some of the money on the Brighton roads! (p. 73).

The 'jews and jobbers' are depicted as exploiting the labourers across the United Kingdom and profiting at the expense of the poor. Cobbett all too

quickly extrapolates the immediate examples he came across into an overarching view of the state of the nation and its immediate history:

If I had time, I would make an actual survey of one whole country, and find out how many of the old gentry have lost their estates, and have been supplanted by the Jews, since Pitt began his reign. I am sure I should prove that, in number, they are one-half extinguished (pp. 74-75).

The disappearance of the gentry and their financial woes are squarely blamed on the Jews and their grip on the financial markets:

[The estates] are *called* [the gentry's]; but the mortgagees and annuitants receive the rents. As the rents fall off, sales must take place, unless cases of entails; and, if this thing go on, we shall see acts passed to *cut off entails*, in order that the Jews may be put into full possession. Such, thus far, will be the result of our 'glorious victories' over the French! (p. 75).

According to the pamphleteer, though the gentry still had their properties on paper, they were so much in debt to creditors that their income would go straight to the latter. Cobbett argues that if that state of affairs were to continue and lead to its logical conclusion, the 'Jews' (the term is used almost exclusively as a shorthand for 'urban creditors') would take possession of the land. For the editor of the *Political Register*, such an occurrence could only mean the downfall of the English countryside, given that foreigners would

replace the historical owners of English lands – as it is the wont of the anti-Semitic discourse to depict the Jew as a parasitic ‘other’.

This anti-Semitic discourse is similar to that present in *The Age of Bronze* with its robust criticism of the financial markets operating ‘behind’ the scenes of historical events. England is decried for being an indebted nation and for its over-reliance on Jewish creditors:

There Fortune plays, while Rumour holds the stake,

And the world trembles to bid brokers break.

How rich is Britain! not indeed in mines,

Or peace, or plenty, corn, or oil, or wines;

No land of Canaan, full of milk and honey,

Nor (save in paper shekels) ready money:

But let us not to own the truth refuse,

Was ever Christian land so rich in Jews?

Those parted with their teeth to good King John,

And now, ye kings! they kindly draw your own;

All states, all things, all sovereigns they controul,

And waft a loan ‘from Indus to the Pole.’ (CPW, VII, 22; 670-79)

The state of the British economy is criticised by Byron for having lost its agrarian and industrial production in detriment to the financial services of the City. The ‘paper shekels’, the financial credits not based on actual material goods similar to the contemporary governmental bond, are the country’s only source of

wealth. What dates the excerpt is Byron's insistence in identifying the owners of such credits: the Jews. Byron, for instance, even alludes to King John's (1167–1216) 'torture of Abraham of Bristol' (CPW, VII, 129). According to the story, when Abraham refused to pay his debts to the crown, the king 'had seven teeth extracted' from him, 'one for each day for a week, until he submitted' (p. 129). Indeed, Byron not only references the anecdote but actually laments that the kings were by the 1820s the ones being tortured by the Jewish. He depicts the Jews as working behind the scenes as the puppeteers of history. In that aspect Byron is voicing the same concern as Cobbett, who was critical of the way that the country had relied, since the days of Pitt, heavily on 'a financial élite which owed no allegiance to the nation'.<sup>17</sup> Needless to say, 'the Jews' are often presented as a synonym for this 'financial élite'.

As the verses progress, the Jews are further depicted as casting a world-wide net of political control through their seemingly endless source of easy credit:

The banker – broker – baron – brethren, speed  
To aid these bankrupt tyrants in their need.  
Nor these alone; Columbia feels no less  
Fresh speculation follow each success;  
And philanthropic Israel deigns to drain  
Her mild per centage from exhausted Spain.

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Spence, *The Birth of Romantic Radicalism: War, Popular Politics, and English Radical Reformism, 1800-1815* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1996), p. 29.

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Not without Abraham's seed can Russia march,  
'Tis gold, not steel, that rears the conqueror's arch.  
Two Jews, a chosen people, can command  
In every realm their scripture-promised land: –  
Two Jews keep down the Romans, and uphold  
The accursed Hun, more brutal than of old:  
Two Jews – but not Samaritans – direct  
The world, with all the spirit of their sect. (CPW, VII, 22; 680-93)<sup>18</sup>

The Jews are depicted as colluding with the resurrection of monarchies in post-1815 Europe by providing them with the financial means to keep their political powers – which were, in Byron's view, 'bankrupt' claims to legitimacy – in the continent. For instance, Austria can only subjugate the Italian peninsula because of the vast amounts of money lent by the Rothschild family (CPW, VII, 129). Were it not for the Jews, Byron's text suggests, there would be no wars, as the Russian example can attest: 'Not without Abraham's seed can Russia march, | 'Tis gold, not steel, that rears the conqueror's arch.' The Jewish scheming was not only restricted to European countries either, as they lent to nations across the globe: even the United States ('Columbia') cannot be free from the '[f]resh speculation[s]' of Jewish creditors. The Jewish are depicted as lending credit to both sides on the conflict, thus furthering the charge that they

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<sup>18</sup> The 'two Jews' in the poem are, according to Jerome McGann, 'probably' Baron Nathan Rothschild (1777-1836) and Baron James Rothschild (1792-1868).



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are unscrupulous. They are not only devoid of national allegiances but of ethics in general:

What is the happiness of earth to them?

A Congress forms their 'New Jerusalem,'

Where baronies and orders both invite –

Oh, holy Abraham! dost thou see the sight?

Thy followers mingling with these royal swine,

Who spit not 'on their Jewish gabardine,'

But honour them as portion of the show –

(Where now, oh, Pope! is thy forsaken toe?

Could it not favour Judah with some kicks?

Or has it ceased to 'kick against the pricks?')

On Shylock's shore behold them stand afresh,

To cut from nations' hearts their 'pound of flesh.' (CPW, VII,

22; 694-705)

The poem's immediate subject – the Congress of Verona of 1822 – is represented as a 'New Jerusalem' to the Jews of Europe. Byron's bitterness towards the Jews is not so much because of their Jewishness *per se*, but rather because he perceives them to be propping up the European monarchies ('these royal swine') with the sole purpose of financial gains in mind. By representing the monarchies as 'royal swine', he furthers his attack on the lack of ethics on the part of the Jews, for they would freely deal with them in the name of profit. Byron finishes off the stanza by referring to *The Merchant of Venice*. Byron

alludes to Shakespeare's Shylock as shorthand for the greedy and vindictive trope of the Jew who is only interested in their 'pound of flesh' to the detriment of everything else.

Byron's anti-Semitism is a complex issue. As has been argued by Matar, 'Byron was tolerant and admiring' of the Jewish through history, whereas his views on the contemporary Jews in London were marked by 'antipathy'.<sup>19</sup> The anti-Semitism of *The Age of Bronze* in fact contradicts Byron's previous dealings with Jews. For instance, he worked with Isaac Nathan (1790-1864) – a Jewish composer – in the writing of *Hebrew Melodies* in 1815. Some of those compositions' most unfavourable reviews were unmistakably anti-Semitic in their content, as if the most famous poet in England at the time were lowering himself by lending his name 'to an explicitly Jewish project' (Scrivener, p. 76). Therefore, it is curious that one would find such racist sentiments in Byron's poetry. It seems that he was voicing in his poetry the all-pervasive discourse of anti-Semitism that one would find in Britain in the early nineteenth century. Indeed, the poem's representations of the Jews 'violated no social taboo but were rather part of the satirical repertoire of types and images satirists regularly drew upon' (Scrivener, p. 77). The stereotype of the Jew as a money-grubbing and vile character operating behind the scenes was (and is) used and abused as an easy and lazy shorthand for tackling the new economic, political and social order before its proper comprehension was achieved: the

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<sup>19</sup> N. I. Matar, 'The English Romantic Poets and the Jews', *Jewish Social Studies*, 50 (1988), 223-238 (p. 230).

then-emergent capitalist production (p. 96).<sup>20</sup> As Cobbett used the Jewish trope as a scapegoat for his qualms with the times he saw himself living in, so did other writers on the radical side of the political spectrum. Marx, for instance, wrote on the subject in a 1840s short essay entitled 'The Jewish Question'. In it, the German philosopher *de facto* equates Judaism with capitalism.<sup>21</sup> Marx is interested in the (as he sees it) 'every-day Jew', not the 'Sabbath Jews'. The former is always employed in 'huckstering' and his 'secular God' is money. An emancipation of the Jews (the theme which prompted the writing of the piece) is actually for Marx an '[e]mancipation from huckstering and from money, and therefore from practical, real Judaism would be the self-emancipation of our epoch'.<sup>22</sup> The German philosopher saw a certain Judaification of society insofar as its 'secular God' (money) was universalised as the means and end to society as a whole. He states: '[T]he practical Jewish spirit has become the practical spirit of Christian nations. The Jews have emancipated themselves in so far [sic] as Christians have become Jews' (Marx, p. 90). The emancipation of the Jews, he concludes, would be the emancipation of the whole of society from Judaism as the religion of money and huckstering. Though not going as far as Marx, Byron's verses in *The Age of Bronze* also equate capitalism and Judaism. Curiously, Byron is hardly critically perceived as an anti-Semite even from a

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<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of the ideological tenets of anti-Semitism and its shortcuts, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 48-49, pp. 125-26.

<sup>21</sup> Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer, 'Homo Judaicus Economicus: The Jew as Shylock, Parasite, and Plutocrat', in *Antisemitism: Myth and Hate from Antiquity to the Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 119-73 (p. 157).

<sup>22</sup> Karl Marx, 'On the Jewish Question', in *Selected Essays* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1926; repr. 1968 [1844]), pp. 40-97 (p. 88).

subsequent Jewish perspective. Despite these anti-Semitic excerpts, those who translated his poetry into Hebrew and Yiddish did not refer to any of Byron's controversial passages. Rather, they chose a very specific selection of poems which, quite interestingly, depicted Byron in terms of a 'Jewish self-image [...] consisting primarily of intellectual elitism, moral integrity and, except for the Zionists, a diasporan existence'.<sup>23</sup> This shows how the multi-layered discourses of a writer can, in hindsight, be appropriated in order to construct his or her image according to a clearly-defined ideological agenda. To the Jewish translators of Byron, his anti-Semitism is silently ignored in favour of a polished – and not altogether erroneous – view of his life and works which complimented Jewish identity from the nineteenth century onwards.

*The Age of Bronze* therefore shows a historical discourse more attuned to the economic forces acting 'behind' the march of time, acting in direct contrast to the neutral 'whiggish' interpretation of history. Another example of such a change in perspective is the questioning of the creation of historical narratives themselves, as the question of power is evoked more explicitly and questions such as 'who writes history?' and 'with what aim?' are brought to the fore.

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<sup>23</sup> Sheila A. Spector, *Byron and the Jews* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), p. 6.

## 5.2 *Cain* and discourse

Byron's *Cain* predominantly deals with how the issue of power enforces a discursive narrative. The play is a portrayal of the Biblical events surrounding the murder of Abel by his older brother Cain.<sup>24</sup> Byron's drama is of particular interest to this thesis due to its clear representation of a power struggle between divergent accounts of events. For instance, the character of Cain is faced with the dominant narrative as inherited from God – propagated via his parents, brother and sisters – and the enticingly diverse one put forth by Lucifer. The tension between these two conflicting discourses lasts throughout the three acts until the play's tragic ending. In this sense, *Cain* is an important text to consider when discussing the creation of a narrative insofar as it shows that there is no such a thing as a neutral and apolitical view when writing about any subject. This is because the notion of an essentialist and providential narrative is vehemently dismissed in *Cain*. What is left is the conception of an all-pervasive power struggle 'behind' the narration of a certain given event. Byron also uses the play as a discursive battleground between the dogmatic story of Creation as portrayed in the Bible versus the burgeoning scientific account of his times. As he makes evident in the text, he was interested in approaching the geological discoveries of his contemporaries (Georges Cuvier's work being the most prominent) in order to put the biblical discourse under

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<sup>24</sup> See Genesis 4. 1-15.



and scepticism.<sup>25</sup> He is not satisfied with the 'official' discourse which explains his existence in the post-Edenic Earth, as he seeks to better comprehend the events which led to his state of wretchedness. From the outset he is reprimanded by Adam for speaking 'serpent's words' in his act of blasphemy (CPW, VI, 233; 34) and requested by Eve to repent for his sins:

EVE. [...]

Behold thy father cheerful and resign'd,

And do as he doth. (CPW, VI, 233; 50).

Cain is coerced to apply himself to the constructed narrative imposed by God and repeated by his family. His refusal to accept the divine discourse is admonished early in the play and that leaves him searching for a suitable counter-hegemonic discourse in order to satisfy his sceptical curiosity and thirst for knowledge. After being left on his own on stage, he voices some of his questions and the dissatisfaction he feels with the dogmatic explanations given by his parents:

CAIN. [...] The tree was planted, and why not for him?

If not, why place him near it, where it grew,

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<sup>25</sup> Terence Allan Hoagwood, 'Skepticism, Ideology, and Byron's *Cain*', *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, 15 (1991), 171-80 (pp. 173-74). Hoagwood's arguments are built on specific readings of classical philosophy (especially on the theme of scepticism) and Marxist philosophy by referencing the various conceptualisations of 'ideology' within Marxist scholarship. This chapter works with a similar critique of received knowledge. However, it works with a post-Foucauldian notion of constructed meanings (often abbreviated by the word 'discourse') (see pp. 16-23 above). Within Marxist analysis, also see Raymond Williams's concept of 'hegemony' in Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, pp. 108-20.

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The fairest in the centre? They have but

One answer to all questions, 'twas *his* will,

And *he* is good.' How know I that? Because

He is all-powerful must all-good, too, follow?

I judge but by the fruits – and they are bitter –

Which I must feed on for a fault not mine. (CPW, VI, 234; 72-79)

Cain's questioning of God's will is a poignant one. The deity is 'all-powerful' but the firstborn questions if he is indeed 'all-good' as his parents have told him on numerous occasions. As Edward E. Bostetter argues, 'God stands for the very real tyranny of a social and political hierarchy that justified its acts by appeal to divine authority, and Cain is the rebellious intellect who insists upon questioning the justice of divine and therefore social decrees'.<sup>26</sup> Cain's resistance in accepting God's discourse invites an alternative narrative to fill the discursive gaps opened up by Cain's constant questioning.

Lucifer is introduced in the middle of Act I, Scene I. Lucifer's discourse functions as a counter-hegemonic version of events which goes against Adam and Eve's – and therefore God's – and strengthens Cain's scepticism with inside knowledge of the mysteries which he so desperately seeks. Cain describes the knowledge he inherited from his family's discourse and the seraphs':

LUCIFER. [...] He conquer'd; let him reign!

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<sup>26</sup> Edward E. Bostetter, *The Romantic Ventriloquists: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), p. 287.



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CAIN. Who?

LUCIFER. Thy Sire's Maker, and earth's.

CAIN. And heaven's

And all that in that in them is. So I have heard

His seraphs sing; and so my father saith.

LUCIFER. They say – what they must sing and say, on pain

Of being that which I am – and thou art –

Of spirits and of men. (CPW, VI, 236; 130-137)

Cain depicts how he is influenced by a single narrative which reverberates all around him in the post-Edenic world. Lucifer's response hints at God's tyrannical side and implies that the version of events repeated by those around Cain is in fact enforced by the use of arbitrary power and violence. Throughout the play, the 'sacred original' is an inside knowledge of things not available to Cain and his family via the inherited tradition bestowed by God, but only through Lucifer's subversive discourse. Since Adam and Eve were not only banished from Eden but made mortal, and also bequeathed mortality upon their yet unborn offspring when plucking the fruit from the tree of knowledge, such argument rings true to Cain. Lucifer is sceptical of God's supposed acts of creation and love, given how the deity created beings and their propensity to suffering only to amuse himself:

[...] to make eternity

Less burthensome to his immense existence

And unparticipated solitude! (CPW, VI, 237; 149-151)

He goes even further and makes the same point about Christ's crucifixion:

[...] perhaps he'll make

One day a Son unto himself – as he

Gave you a father – and if he doth

Mark me! – that Son will be a Sacrifice. (CPW, VI, 237; 163-66)

Christianity's pivotal event, the Passion of Christ, is referred to as another example of God's sadistic nature. Lucifer's prophetic words about the future messiah are diametrically opposed to how Christians interpret Jesus's execution. What Lucifer argues is that God in his eternal wretchedness creates, re-creates and destroys out of boredom and wickedness. According to *Cain's* Lucifer, Jesus's sacrifice is solely the outcome of God's tyrannical whims. Perhaps not unsurprisingly, these lines were omitted, without Byron's consent, from the initial editions of *Cain* (CPW, VI, 657). Byron's publisher, John Murray, justified this omission to Byron in a letter dated 25 September 1822:

I did, certainly, omit in the published Copies of *Cain* the lines quoted by your Lordship, I could not venture to give them to the public, and I even hoped that when their omission should be discovered, you would feel surprise rather than dissatisfaction.<sup>27</sup>

Byron did not object to the omissions, but rather to Murray's method:

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<sup>27</sup> *The Letters of John Murray to Lord Byron*, ed. by Andrew Nicholson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), p. 442.

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I have no objection on *your* account to omit those passages in the new *Mystery [Heaven and Earth]* [...] or the passage in *Cain* – but why not be open and say so at *first* – you should be more strait-forward [sic] on every account (BLJ, X, 12).<sup>28</sup>

This example illustrates the power behind discourses in early nineteenth century Britain. Murray openly omits the potentially blasphemous passage and takes it for granted that Byron would agree with him, which he does. As already discussed previously in this thesis, Byron could be highly deferential to tradition and the dominant thought of his day (classical history being a key example of this, see first chapter above). With regards to *Cain* it seems that Byron gave, to a certain extent, free rein to his composition up to the point when it conflicted with his publisher's editorial policies with regards to religion and politics. Despite Byron's acceptance of Murray's omissions in the publication, *Cain* still presents a vigorous critique of the established discourses of his age and their ubiquitous power. In Hoagwood's words, '[t]he play is [...] not a critique of an ideology, but rather a critique of ideology itself' (p. 177).

Still in Act 1 Scene 1, Cain enumerates to Lucifer how he receives his teachings from those around him. He finds them to be very dissonant from his own opinions:

CAIN. [...] My father and my mother talk to me

Of serpents, and of fruits and trees: I see

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<sup>28</sup> Byron to John Murray. 9 October 1822.

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The gates of what they call their Paradise  
Guarded by fiery-sworded cherubim,  
Which shut them out, and me: I feel the weight  
Of daily toil, and constant thought: I look  
Around a world where I seem nothing, with  
Thoughts which arise within me, as if they  
Could master all things: – but I thought alone  
This misery was *mine*. – My father is  
Tamed down; my mother has forgot the mind  
Which made her thirst for knowledge at the risk  
Of an eternal curse; my brother is  
A watching shepherd boy, who offers up  
The firstlings of the flock to him who bids  
The earth yield nothing to us without sweat;  
My sister Zillah sings an earlier hymn  
Than the birds' matin; and my Adah, my  
Own and beloved, she too understands not  
The mind which overwhelms me: never till  
Now met I aught to sympathise with me.  
'Tis well – I rather would consort with spirits. (CPW, VI, 237-  
38; 170-191)

The image of the 'fiery-sworded cherubim' guarding the doors to the forever-lost paradise evidences how God's will is enforced through coercion and



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Thou art my worshipper: not worshipping

Him makes thee mine the same. (CPW, VI, 242; 315-19)

The dualism which is presented to Cain reinforces the impossibility of being a subject without the guidance of a – or any, for that matter – discourse. Even resisting the power imposed by those around him to accept the narratives laid out by God and his family, Cain has to inevitably accept Lucifer's worldview and version of events.

Lucifer's arguments to Cain are intensified during the second act, when he takes him to 'The Abyss of Space'. In this ethereal environment, Cain and Lucifer float through the air while Lucifer shows Cain things he could not possibly have grasped solely by accepting the narrative he hears from his parents and siblings:

LUCIFER. Believe – and sink not! doubt – and perish! thus

Would run the edict of the other God,

Who names me demon to his angels; they

Echo the sound to miserable things,

Which knowing nought beyond their shallow senses,

Worship the word which strikes their ear, and deem

Evil or good what is proclaim'd to them

In their abasement. [...]

[...] / will not say

Believe in *me*, as a conditional creed



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God's infinite love is referred to as something which is only said by Adam without any proof. When faced with the 'mighty phantoms' of the dead floating around him in Hades, Cain doubts God's acts of unconditional goodness even further (CPW, VI, 260; 44).

The act ends with Lucifer telling Cain to be more sceptical as a form of improving his existential endurance after gathering the knowledge of death:

LUCIFER.

Back

With me, then, to thine earth, and try the rest

Of his celestial boons to ye and yours.

Evil and good are things in their own essence,

And not made good or evil by the giver;

But if he gives you good – so call him; if

Evil springs from *him*, do not name it *mine*,

Till ye know better its true fount; and judge

Not by words, though of spirits, but the fruits

Of your existence, such as it must be.

*One good* gift has the fatal apple given –

Your *reason*: – let it not be over-sway'd

By tyrannous threats to force you into faith

'Gainst all external sense and inward feeling:

Think and endure, – and form an inner world

In your bosom – where the outward fails;



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So shall you nearer be the spiritual

Nature, and war triumphant with your own. (CPW, VI, 274-75; 450-466)

Lucifer's farewell speech is particularly cunning for he implies to Cain that, contrary to God's Manichean narrative, his discourse is neutral and solely based on 'facts'. 'Good' and 'evil' are things in themselves and not the work of a dual battle between himself and God. By this point in the play, Cain is already well-acquainted with the deity's deeds which could be deemed as evil and that Lucifer had taken no part in. As Peter Schock argues:

[Byron] first destabilizes the traditional role of Satan as author of evil. Then, with this accomplished, Byron introduces Lucifer into the biblical drama as skeptical commentator who unsettles Christian myth – as if, in the reflexive irony of this work, he were speaking on the yet unwritten text of Genesis.<sup>29</sup>

Lucifer admonishes Cain to not 'be over sway'd | By tyrannous threats' which can 'force you into faith | 'Gainst all external sense and inward feeling' (CPW, VI, 275; 460-62). In other words, he argues that one can be impervious to a discursive practice by harbouring a sceptical and ultimately independent frame of mind – albeit an advice which is imbued by his own Luciferean discourse and its own inherent exercise of power. Lucifer not only shows Cain the mysteries of death and the Earth's past, but also instils in him his own version of events

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<sup>29</sup> Peter A. Schock, 'The "Satanism" of Cain in Context: Byron's Lucifer and the War against Blasphemy', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 44 (1995), 182-215 (p. 198).

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with his own specific agenda and methods of power and coercion. Lucifer tells Cain to shun the outward powers of argumentation and count on his own knowledge of things. Ironically, Lucifer's advice can be used to undermine his own point, as the sceptical and combative spirit which he introduces to Cain can also be used to question his own counter-hegemonic version of events.

In the final act, Cain returns to Earth and to his daily routine amidst his family. It is then that Cain's espousing of Lucifer's discourse is found to be even more dissonant with his kin's views:

CAIN. [...] but now I feel

My littleness again. Well Said the spirit,

That I was nothing!

ADAH.                   Wherefore said he so?

Jehovah said not that. (CPW, VI, 278; 68-69)

[...]

ABEL. Why then commune with him? he [Lucifer] may be

A foe to the Most High.

CAIN.                   And friend to man.

Has the Most High been so – if so you term him?

ABEL. *Term him!* your words are strange to-day, my brother.

(CPW, VI, 278, 281; 68-69; 169-70)

Adah questions the validity of Lucifer's words, since God did not say that humans were insignificant in the much larger history of the Earth. Abel even fails to understand Cain's speech altogether. The notion that something said by

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God is a mere version of a certain event (*'Term him!'*) is met with puzzlement: 'your words are strange to-day, my brother'. God's hierarchical place as the Truth-bearer is blindingly accepted as self-evident by Abel. In contrast, Cain's scepticism and acceptance of parts of Lucifer's challenging discourse sound unfamiliar to his brother's ears.

Towards the end of the final act, Cain and Abel offer their respective sacrifices to God. Contrary to his brother's, Cain's speech to God is imbued with scepticism and defiance:

CAIN [*standing erect during his speech*]. Spirit! whate'er or  
whosoe'er thou art,

Omnipotent, it may be – and, if good,

Shown in the exemption of thy deeds from evil;

Jehovah upon earth! and God in heaven!

And it may be with other names, because

Thine attributes seem many, as thy works: –

If thou must be propitiated with prayers,

Take them! If thou must be induced with altars,

And softn'd with a sacrifice, receive them!

Two beings here erect them unto thee.

If thou lov'st blood, the shepherd's shrine, which smokes

On my right hand, hath shed it for thy service

In the first of his flock, whose limbs now reek

In sanguinary incense to thy skies;

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Of it the sweet and blooming fruits of earth,  
And milder seasons, which the unstain'd turf  
I spread them on now offers in the face  
Of the broad sun which ripen'd them, may seem  
Good to thee, inasmuch as they have not  
Suffer'd in limb or life, and rather form  
A sample of thy works, than supplication  
To look on ours! If a shrine without victim,  
And altar without gore, may win thy favour,  
Look on it! and for him who dresseth it,  
He is – such as thou mad'st him; and seeks nothing  
Which must be won by kneeling: if he's evil,  
Strike him! thou art omnipotent, and may'st, –  
For what can he oppose? If he be good,  
Strike him, or spare him, as thou wilt! since all  
Rests upon thee; and good and evil seem  
To have no power themselves, save in thy will;  
And whether that be good or ill I know not,  
Not being omnipotent, nor fit to judge  
Omnipotence, but merely to endure  
Its mandate; which thus far I have endured. (CPW, VI, 284-  
85; 245-279)

Cain depicts a God who is petty, for although he is the all-powerful, he still demands altars with sacrifices made in his honour. As Edward E. Bostetter has argued, 'what irritated Byron with Christian apologists like Hodgson was their rationalizations of evil into good, their refusal or inability to see the hypocrisies to which they lent themselves' (p. 259).<sup>30</sup> This is particularly true in Cain's allegation that God, given his omnipotence and infinite abilities to do as he will, can spare or strike down beings as he sees fit. His defiance is particularly poignant because Abel's offering of a sacrificed sheep ('whose limbs now reek | In sanguinary incense to thy skies') are silently accepted in detriment to Cain's gathered fruits. Lucifer's voice in *Cain* – and Cain's subsequent argument in this final speech – is a reminder that God's presumably benevolent design is entirely based on a circular and discursive practice alone.

The argument that good and evil are human traits in themselves and not respectively attached to God and Satan is what particularly incensed the vast majority of reviewers of the play. For instance, the *Brighton Magazine* feared 'the evil that may be produced by [*Cain's*] impiety'.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the *Eclectic Review* of May 1822 could not 'conceive of its having originated in any other source than the most hardened and callous impiety'.<sup>32</sup> Even *The Edinburgh Review*, a progressive periodical preferred by the aristocratic Whigs, criticised it:

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<sup>30</sup> Byron and Hodgson held an extensive correspondence about religion, through which Hodgson attempted to convince Byron of his more orthodox Christian values.

<sup>31</sup> [Anonymous], 'Cain, a Mystery', *Brighton Magazine*, 1 (January 1822), 72-9 (p. 79).

<sup>32</sup> [Anonymous], 'Cain, a Mystery', *The Eclectic Review*, 17 (May 1822), 418-427 (p. 423)

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[...] [W]e regret very much that it should ever have been published. It will give scandal and offence to pious persons in general – and may be the means of suggesting the most painful doubts and distressing perplexities, to hundreds of minds that might never otherwise have been exposed to such dangerous disturbance.<sup>33</sup>

According to *Quarterly Review* (July 1822), the play consisted of ‘the promulgation of opinions, which, as Christians, as Englishmen, and even as men, we were constrained to regard with abhorrence’.<sup>34</sup> The vast majority of negative reviews approached *Cain* from this moral perspective, accusing Byron of being blasphemous and controversial. This evidences the power of an established and hegemonic discourse which attempts to banish dissent and its resulting dissonant views. One of the few favourable reviews of the play was published in *Monthly Magazine* in February 1822, which sought to dispute that moralistic stance. It argued that the accusation of *Cain* being blasphemous ‘is sheer nonsense; and it deserves no other reply’, asserting that:

The work is not free, to be sure, of allusions to questions of the greatest difficulty and moment; but when a poet, in the person of Cain or Lucifer, adverts to the old puzzlers of necessity and free-will, the origin of evil, and other

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<sup>33</sup> [Anonymous], 'Sardanapalus, a Tragedy', *The Edinburgh Review*, 36 (February 1822), 413-52 (p. 437).

<sup>34</sup> [Anonymous], 'Marino Faliero, Doge of Venice, an Historical Tragedy.-2. Sardanapalus, a Tragedy.-3. The Two Foscari, a Tragedy.-4. Cain, a Mystery', *Quarterly Review*, 27 (July 1822), 476-524 (p. 476).

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venerable and inevitable dilemmas, it is ridiculous to assume an inquisitorial tone, and to convert a few passages of a speculative metaphysical character, into a serious charge of blasphemy and irreligion.<sup>35</sup>

But that was an exceptional review in a multitude of negative ones. The *Edinburgh Review* went so far as to define the literary roles which should be occupied by literature and philosophy in general:

We therefore think that that poets ought to fairly to be confined to the established creed and morality of their country, or to the *actual* passions and sentiments of mankind; and that poetic dreamers and sophists who pretend to *theorise* according to their feverish fancies, without a warrant from authority or reason, ought to be banished the commonwealth of letters. In the courts of morality, poets are unexceptionable *witnesses*; they may give in the evidence, and depose to facts whether good or ill; but we demur to their arbitrary and self-pleasing summing up; they are suspected *judges*, and not very often safe advocates, where great questions are concerned, and universal principles brought to issue (*The Edinburgh Review*, 36, p. 438).

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<sup>35</sup> [Anonymous], 'News from Parnassus No. XIV', *Monthly Magazine, or, British Register*, 53 (February 1822), 10-5 (p. 10).

This suggests that poets should be banned from attempting philosophical discussion. Byron's *Cain*, then, is vilified for going against the grain of 'the established creed and morality of [its] country' and 'the *actual* passions and sentiments of mankind'. Here is an example of the prevailing discourse cloaking itself with the supposedly neutral (apolitical and lacking in power) standpoint of the 'established' mores of one's age: 'the *actual*' interests and opinions of humankind are mentioned in passing, as if they are already understood and taken for granted. Ultimately, the article suggests that poets should not deviate from those tenets, given how their role is one – it is assumed – merely related to aesthetics and the beauty of their verses.

Curiously, the polemics set forth in *Cain* were mostly confined to the realm of morals as they are discussed by the characters of Cain and Lucifer in the play. Reviewers in the 1820s did not pay much heed to Byron's usage of George Cuvier's (1769-1832) research and how this could be used against the hegemonic biblical account of Creation. Cuvier was a French zoologist and statesman, and his work was of great importance in the establishment of the sciences of comparative anatomy: he was deemed as 'the father of palaeontology'.<sup>36</sup> His research on fossils shed some light on the life forms of the planet's geological past, and this inspired many to think about the consequences those discoveries would have upon the narrative in the book of Genesis and throughout the Old Testament. Cuvier argued that the Earth's

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<sup>36</sup> Ralph O'Connor, 'Mammoths and Maggots: Byron and the Geology of Cuvier', *Romanticism*, 5 (1999), 26-42 (p. 27).



history was marked by a series of natural catastrophes which radically changed not only the surface of the planet but also led to a series of mass extinctions. This scientific tradition was known as Catastrophism. Another exponent of Catastrophism was the Count de Buffon (1707-1788). A predecessor of Cuvier and influential on his works, Buffon introduced in his *The Theory of the Earth* (1749) and *Histoire Naturelle, Générale et Particulière* (1749-1788, 36 vols) the theory that the Earth was much older than a literal interpretation of the Bible and that the Earth underwent a series of geological stages. According to him, a 'comet had struck the sun obliquely and knocked off a mass of material which separated according to the laws of gravitation' and consequently 'becoming our planetary system'.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, the orthodox biblical account of a divine Creation *ex nihilo* was to be found lacking even many decades before the publication of *Cain*. Cuvier, via his fossil discoveries, continued Buffon's work in a new direction. 'A new world had been disclosed, a world no longer existing but nevertheless one whose fauna could be, so to speak, revived and classified'.<sup>38</sup>

Byron was keen to expand on the Catastrophist theories that inspired the writing of *Cain*. This is how he approached the subject to his friend Thomas Moore:

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<sup>37</sup> Francis C. Haber, *The Age of the World: Moses to Darwin* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), p. 114.

<sup>38</sup> William Coleman, *Georges Cuvier, Zoologist: A Study in the History of Evolution Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 109.

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I have sent him [John Murray] another tragedy – “Cain” by name – [...]. It is in the Manfred, metaphysical style, and full of some Titanic declamation; – Lucifer being one of the dram. pers., who takes Cain a voyage [sic] among the stars, and, afterwards, to “Hades,” where he shows him the phantoms of a former world, and its inhabitants. I have gone upon the notion of Cuvier, that the world has been destroyed three or four times, and was inhabited by mammoths, behemoths, and what not; but *not* by man till the Mosaic period, as, indeed, it proved by the strata of bones found; – those of all unknown animals, and known, being dug out, but none of mankind. I have, therefore, supposed Cain to be shown, in the *rational* Preadamites, being endowed with a higher intelligence than man, but totally unlike him in form, and with much greater strength of mind and person. You may suppose the small talk which takes place between him and Lucifer upon these matters is not quite canonical.

The consequence is, that Cain comes back and kills Abel in a fit of dissatisfaction, partly with the politics of Paradise, which had driven them all out of it, and partly because (as it is written in Genesis) Abel’s sacrifice was the more acceptable to the Deity. [...] (BLJ, VIII, 215-16).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Byron to Thomas Moore. 19 September 1821.

However, despite this flippancy and bravado regarding the ‘not quite canonical’ theme as he mentioned to Moore, Byron’s tone in the play’s preface is quite different. He implies that Cuvier’s discoveries do not necessarily undermine the biblical accounts of Creation:

[The discoveries of] bones of enormous and unknown animals found in them, is not contrary to the Mosaic account, but rather confirms it; as no human bones have yet been discovered in those strata, although those of many known animals are found near the remains of the unknown (CPW, VI, 229).

In other words, Byron safeguards himself from charges of blasphemy, given that he says that the discoveries do not go against religious orthodoxy as narrated in Moses’s account in the Pentateuch.<sup>40</sup> He also states that the ‘rational beings much more intelligent than man, and proportionably [sic] powerful to the mammoth’ that ‘peopled’ the ‘pre-Adamite’ world ‘[are], of course, a poetical fiction to help him [Lucifer] to make out his case’ (CPW, VI, 229-30). In fact, Byron’s construction of a ‘pre-Adamite’ world in the play is quite ambivalent. On the one hand, Byron is quite keen to be as scientifically ‘factual’ as possible, particularly as he based the second act on Cuvier’s and other Catastrophists’ research. On the other hand, he deliberately creates a fiction of an Earth peopled by superior beings:

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<sup>40</sup> For an overview of blasphemy in modern Great Britain, see David S. Nash, *Blasphemy in Modern Britain: 1789 to the Present* (Farnham: Ashgate, 1999).

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LUCIFER. Living, high,  
Intelligent, good, great, and glorious things,  
As much superior unto all thy sire,  
Adam, could e'er have been in Eden, as  
The sixty-thousandth generation shall be,  
In its dull damp degeneracy, to  
Thee and thy son; – and how weak they are, judge  
By thy own flesh. (CPW, VI, 261; 68-73)

Byron understates what his 'poetical fiction' regarding the existence of loftier beings that preceded humans means in relation to orthodox religious discourse. By dismissing the existence of intelligent beings in the 'pre-Adamite' world as mere creations of his imagination, Byron sidesteps a source of criticism to his play. Indeed, the vast majority of damning reviews focused on Lucifer's outbursts in *Cain* against the Christian God and the deity's actions in the Old Testament, as shown above. The reviewers seemed to dismiss Byron's creation as mere fanciful poetic licence and chose instead to ignore it. The reason for this was that the reviews also accepted the science of Catastrophism as presented in the play and had no issues with it from a religious perspective. Following this depiction of the position of Humankind in the history of the planet and the universe, Lucifer explains what Catastrophism is and how these ancient beings came to be extinct:

LUCIFER. By a most crushing and inexorable  
Destruction and disorder of the elements,

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Which struck a world to chaos, as a chaos

Subsiding has struck out a world: such things,

Though rare in time, are frequent in eternity. –

Pass on, and gaze upon the past. (CPW, VI, 262; 80-84)

Following Cuvier and other scientists, the poem depicts how the world was engulfed in catastrophic natural accidents through time. These are 'rare in time' but 'frequent in eternity'. Byron approaches Cuvier's ideas more clearly in *Don Juan* canto IX:

But let it go: – it will one day be found

With other relics of a 'former world,'

When this world shall be *former*, underground,

Thrown topsy-turvy, twisted, crisped, and curled,

Baked, fried, or burnt, turned inside-out, or drowned,

Like all the worlds before, which have been hurled

First out of and then back again to Chaos,

The Superstratum which will overlay us.

So Cuvier says; – and then shall come again

Unto the new Creation, rising out

From our old crash, some mystic, ancient strain

Of things destroyed and left in airy doubt:

Like to the notions we now entertain

Of Titans, Giants, fellows of about



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LUCIFER. Yea, or things higher.

CAIN.                                      Ay? and serpents too?

LUCIFER. Wouldst thou have men without them? must no  
reptiles

Breathe, save the erect ones? (CPW, VI, 257; 168-173)

The passage rewrites the biblical account. It suggests that there could be many worlds in the universe also peopled by men and containing their own gardens of Eden, and thus it both confirms and accommodates the biblical account. It does not negate the story of Genesis and God's role in the Creation, but rather multiplies it infinitely throughout the universe:

CAIN. [...] Why, I have seen the fire-flies and fire-worms

Sprinkle the dusky groves and the green banks

In the dim twilight, brighter than yon world

Which bears them. (CPW, VI, 256; 123-25)

CAIN. Thou hast shown me wonders; thou hast shown me  
those

Mighty Pre-Adamites who walk'd the earth

Of which ours is a wreck; thou hast pointed out

Myriads of starry worlds, of which our own

Is the dim and remote companion, in

Infinity of life: thou hast shown me shadows

Of that existence with the dreaded name

Which my sire brought us – Death; thou has shown me much  
– (CPW, VI, 271; 358-365)

From this cosmic distance, planet Earth, humankind and its religious systems are depicted as insignificant as fireflies in the 'dim twilight'. Earth and all of its culture and history is a mere 'dim and remote companion, in | Infinity of life' throughout the vast universe around it. Not only that, but the creation of Adam and Eve is not the beginning of intelligent life on Earth either, given that they followed the 'Mighty Pre-Adamites' who were wiped out by natural catastrophes as argued by Cuvier.

It might be expected that depicting God's creation of Adam and Eve as not the beginning of intelligent life on the planet (or even in the universe) would create a theological backlash from the conservative sections of society. Rather, the disapproval they showed towards *Cain* was, as already shown, mostly confined to Lucifer's language and relativism regarding God's actions and the challenge to the deity's goodness as argued by Lucifer. Contemporary awareness of the tension between religious and scientific discourse is largely inherited from mid- to late nineteenth century thought, particularly by the positivism of Auguste Comte (1798-1857) and Ernst Mach (1838-1916).<sup>41</sup> It was only after these European trends in rational thought and the later theories of evolution as proposed by Charles Darwin (1809-1882) that more virulent discussion from both sides of the argument arose.<sup>42</sup> In fact, the Catastrophist

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<sup>41</sup> Margaret J. Osler, 'Religion and the Changing Historiography of the Scientific Revolution', in *Science and Religion: New Historical Perspectives*, ed. by Thomas Dixon, Geoffrey Cantor, and Stephen Pumfrey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 71-86 (p. 72).

<sup>42</sup> For a good summary of the teleological history of positive thought regarding the rise of science to the detriment of religion, see Osler, pp. 72-79.



theories of the early nineteenth century were, for the most part, accepted by Christians and the reading public at large:

[Cuvier himself] was by temperament cautious and conservative and by conviction a devout Christian. [...] Only by gratuitous overestimation of the strength and limits of the influence of Christian doctrine on Cuvier's scientific beliefs can the historian trace his opposition to species transformation exclusively or preponderantly to the dogma of his Church (Coleman, p. 4).

Therefore, Cuvier's and other Catastrophists' theses did not pose a challenge to the canonical Christian discourse. Instead, it seemed to accommodate the orthodoxy of the biblical account, as even the terminology used ('pre-Adamites') makes evident. This is what Francis C. Haber means in his description of how '[g]eological discoveries were puffing up a mammoth camel to be squeezed through the eye of the Christian needle of eschatology' (p. 209). The science of the time lodged itself, comfortably or not, alongside the Christian discourse. Buffon, for instance, enlarged the age of the Earth into seven epochs spanning hundreds of thousands of years each. This was quickly correlated to the seven days of Creation in the book of Genesis by Christians, thus opening up the possibility of interpreting the Biblical 'days' as a metaphor for much longer time periods.<sup>43</sup> Buffon's 'seventh epoch, which corresponds to

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<sup>43</sup> Arthur McCalla, *Creationist Debate: The Encounter between the Bible and the Historical Mind* (London: Continuum International Publishing, 2006), pp. 56-57. As shown by McCalla, it is only by contemplating existence without an intelligent designer

the geologically modern world and the appearance of human beings, covers precisely the last six thousand years and thus agrees with the biblical chronology' (McCalla, p. 57). This effectively claimed to geology the events preceding the appearance of humankind while simultaneously leaving the whole of human existence to 'the province of Scripture' (p. 57). Far from an irrevocable clash between science and religion, the scientific discourse of the period was in fact dominated by an interdependence between those two spheres of knowledge. Even the tendency to 'pigeon-hole' what is 'science' and 'religion' comes into question, alongside concepts such as 'conflict' and 'harmony'.<sup>44</sup>

The British scientist William Buckland (1784–1856) is a strong example of the convergence between Creationism and Catastrophism. Buckland was a geologist in Oxford as well as Dean of Westminster and enjoyed being from 1820 to 1830, as Charles Coulston Gillispie states, the 'most talked-about scientist in Britain' for 'he exploited and extended Cuvier's methods very ably, and he returned natural history to the explicit service of religious truth'.<sup>45</sup> Of

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and lacking a benevolent goal – i.e. after Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection – that the Creationist debate in the nineteenth century achieves the polemical divide we encounter today between Religion and Science; see pp. 116-21.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Dixon, 'Introduction', in *Science and Religion: New Historical Perspectives*, ed. by Thomas Dixon, Geoffrey Cantor, and Stephen Pumfrey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 1-19 (p. 3). The seminal work which started challenging the notion of an inherent clash between science and religion engaged with by Osler is John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>45</sup> Charles Coulston Gillispie, *Genesis and Geology: A Study in the Relations of Scientific Thought, Natural Theology, and Social Opinion in Great Britain, 1790-1850* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 98. For a comprehensive collection of scientific texts in the 'Romantic' period, see Tim Fulford, ed., *Romanticism and Science, 1773-1833*, 5 vols (London: Routledge, 2002). For a study into the

particular relevance is his lecture entitled *Vindiciae Geologicae; or, the Connexion of Geology with Religion Explained* (delivered in 1819 and published the following year). In it, Buckland set out to 'shew that the study of geology has a tendency to confirm the evidences of natural religion; and that the facts developed by it are consistent with the accounts of the creation and deluge recorded in the Mosaic writings'.<sup>46</sup> When analysing his vast collection of fossils and reading his fellow Catastrophists, he did not question his own Christianity. On the contrary, he saw 'the most admirable proofs of design and intelligence originally exerted at the Creation':

[...] [T]hat structure is evidently the result of many and violent convulsions subsequent to its original formation. When therefore we perceive that the secondary causes producing these convulsions have operated at successive periods, not blindly and at random, but with a direction to beneficial ends, we see at once the proofs of an overruling Intelligence continuing to superintend, direct, modify, and control the operations of the agents which he originally ordained (Buckland, pp. 18-19).

Buckland's interpretation of the series of convulsions and catastrophes suffered by the planet is one of teleological serenity: he presupposed that the

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relationship between exploration, science and literature in the early 1800s, see Tim Fulford, Debbie Lee, and Peter J. Kitson, *Literature, Science and Exploration in the Romantic Era: Bodies of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>46</sup> William Buckland, *Vindiciae Geologicae ; or, the Connexion of Geology with Religion Explained in an Inaugural Lecture, Delivered before the University of Oxford, May 15, 1819* (Oxford: 1820), p. ii.

'pre-Adamite' world was not marked by a series of random destructions, but rather by the meticulous work of God. Far from being a challenge to the Christian account of life, the science of his day could be used to corroborate the Bible and strengthen the faith of his contemporaries. This shows why the 'science versus religion' theme is not found in the reviews of *Cain*.

What caused a stir in the reactionary sections of British society regarding Catastrophism in *Cain* was, in fact, the reception and usage made of the play by radicals. The periodical *The Republican* (1819-26), published by Richard Carlile (1790–1843), shared the same enthusiasm for science as Byron. However, it considered science to be a tool to be used in destroying religion.<sup>47</sup>

An anonymous review states:

This moment is only the morning of science, and when those sciences have arrived at meridian splendour controversy may cease. Notwithstanding the Gothic Priestcraft of the day, Chemistry will have to boast of more than Davy, and Cuvier, and Thompson, and Chaptal, and Lavoisier, and Black; and Physic, of more than Brown, and Cullen, and Darwin, Boerhaave, and Hunter, and Harvey, and Lawrence, and Bichat: in Astronomy, we shall have more like Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and Flamstead, and Herschell [sic], and Phillips. These are the men who have

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<sup>47</sup> Stephen L. Goldstein, 'Byron's "Cain" and the Painites', *Studies in Romanticism*, 14 (1975), 391-410 (pp. 391-92).

overturned Bible Astronomy and Bible Geology, and who have added myriads of worlds to the planet we inhabit.<sup>48</sup>

Contrary to *The Republican*, there are limits to the new science that Byron introduced in the play. Byron was certainly no radical: he introduced then-contemporary scientific concepts in the play, but, as Goldstein points out, 'he was unable to do to away completely with the Bible cosmogony because neither his science nor his skepticism was sweeping or radical enough for him to do so' (Goldstein, p. 406). Some had seen things in that light in the early 1800s Britain, but not Byron and the overwhelming majority of his reviewers.

### **5.3 '[W]e learn the angels all are Tories': *The Vision of Judgment***

*The Vision of Judgment* was also deemed to be radical by reviewers in the 1820s. Like its predecessor *Cain*, there was plenty of ambiguity regarding the poem's politics and its reception by the reading public at the time. In political terms, *The Vision of Judgment* is Byron's most polemical work. The poem was not only responsible for his break from the conservative publisher John Murray in favour of John Hunt (1775-1848), but also led to Hunt's subsequent arrest in 1824 for seditious libel.<sup>49</sup> *The Vision of Judgment* was written in 1821 and published the following year with the intent to counteract Robert Southey's *A Vision of Judgement* (1821) and the Poet Laureate's interpretation of the life and deeds of George III, who had died the preceding year (CPW, VI, 669).

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<sup>48</sup> [Anonymous], 'To the Editor of *the Republican*. On Prejudice and Black-Gothism', *The Republican*, 5 (February 1822), 141-2 (p. 141).

<sup>49</sup> Emrys Jones, 'Byron's Visions of Judgment', *The Modern Language Review*, 76 (1981), 1-19 (p. 10).

Southey's composition depicted George III in an extremely favourable and jingoistic vein, an approach which Byron cleverly exploited in his satire. As Emrys Jones states, Byron satirises and 'travesties' Southey's poem: '[h]e does not attempt to imitate the Laureate's style, but makes his plot appear ridiculous by presenting it in a completely different style, transforming the whole tone, feeling, and significance of the original work' (Jones, p. 1). Southey's poem eulogises the dead king and also espouses a teleological narrative of British history in accordance with the meliorism of the traditionally Whig historiography. Byron's poetic riposte portrays an antithetical view of the sovereign's reign and rejects the whiggish interpretation for its celebratory undertones in post-Waterloo Europe.

George III died on 29 January 1820 after living the past ten years of his life in total seclusion and trapped in a 'twilight world' due to his madness, blindness and deafness (DNB). As Poet Laureate since 1813, Southey felt that it was his duty to compose the official poem for the occasion. The composition not only functioned as the mouthpiece of the Establishment to voice the general grievance regarding the dead monarch, but was also used as a vehicle by Southey to express his 'long-standing literary and political concerns with his contemporary hopes and fears'.<sup>50</sup> The time of composition was marked by social unrest and a pervading sense of revolution. As Southey wrote in a letter

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<sup>50</sup> *Robert Southey: Later Poetical Works, 1811-1838*, ed. by Tim Fulford, Lynda Pratt, Rachel Crawford, Carol Bolton, Diego Saglia, Ian Packer and Daniel E. White, 4 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto Publishers, 2012), III, p. 517. Henceforth referenced (RSLPW, volume, page(s); verse line(s)).

of 1819 to the Whig politician Charles Wynn (1775-1850), '[t]he tendency of the age is plainly towards revolution, and that not in government alone, but in religion and in the institutions of property' (RSLPW, III, 520). Southey was by then keen to 'weather the [revolutionary] storm' in Britain by all means necessary, including censorship of the press (p. 521). He had hoped that *A Vision of Judgement* could fortify the, in his own words, 'preservative principles' which could safeguard the conservative ideals he championed. As he wrote to Wynn, Southey was in favour of 'the right of the Attorney General to prosecute radical publishers for blasphemous or seditious libel':

There are many preservative principles at work; and if the press were curbed, I believe that we should weather the storm. We are so duped by words and phrases in this country, that no statesman ventures to speak out upon the evils of the press, whatever he may think of them (p. 521).

It is with this context in mind that one must approach *A Vision of Judgement*. Southey attempted not only to eulogise the deceased king but also to evidence his political conservatism against the pernicious ideas he detected in the politics of the 1820s.

The poem's preface is where one finds Southey's more controversial opinions and which contains the 'Satanic School' jibe which incensed Byron to write his poetical riposte:

Men of diseased hearts and depraved imaginations [Byron,  
Moore and Shelley], who, forming system of opinions to suit

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their own unhappy course of conduct, have rebelled against the holiest ordinances of human society, and hating that revealed religion which, to make others miserable as themselves, by infecting them with a moral virus that eats into the soul! The school which they have set up may properly be called the Satanic School; for though their productions breathe the spirit of Belial in their lascivious parts, and the spirit of Moloch in those loathsome images of atrocities and horrors which they delight to represent, they are more especially characterized by a Satanic spirit of pride and audacious impiety, which still betrays the wretched feeling of hopelessness wherewith allied (RSLPW, III, 543).

Southey attacks the poetic works of his literary adversaries as being the voice of Satan and his demonic hordes. Conversely, his *A Vision of Judgement* acts as an antidote. In response to Southey, Byron's *Vision* adopts the voice of Satan, as Stuart Peterfreund argues, 'in ironic rejoinder to Southey's remarks about the "Satanic School" of poetry'.<sup>51</sup> Byron sardonically accepts the Satanic jibe directed at him and also ironically mentions how '[...] (for by many stories, | And true, we learn the angels all are Tories.)' (CPW, VI, 320; 207-8). Byron's poem demonstrates how the discourses of cant in post-Napoleonic Europe overly simplified the political landscape of the 1820s into a Manichean setting. Byron lambasts Southey's composition in his preface for '[its] gross flattery, the

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<sup>51</sup> Stuart Peterfreund, 'The Politics of "Neutral Space" in Byron's *Vision of Judgment*', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 40 (1979), 275-91 (p. 277).



dull impudence, and renegado intolerance and impious cant' (p. 309). These 'are something so stupendous as to form the sublime of himself – containing the quintessence of his own attributes' (p. 309). Byron continues his criticism by claiming that his satire is less blasphemous than Southey's composition, for he has treated the 'supernatural personages [...] more tolerantly. The way in which that poor insane creature, the Laureate, deals about his judgments in the next world, is like his own judgment in this. If it was not completely ludicrous, it would be something worse' (pp. 310-11). Put it another way, if not read as ridiculous, the reader ought to conclude Southey's *A Vision of Judgement* to be blasphemous. After all, Southey ventriloquises the voice of God, which was particularly problematic for contemporary society. Byron carefully avoided this in his composition and thus implied that Southey – whom had lumped Byron into a 'Satanic School of poetry' – was more impudent to religious themes than himself. '[T]he person of the Deity', he writes, 'is carefully withheld from sight, which is more than can be said for the Laureate, who hath thought proper to make him talk, not "like a school divine," but like the unscholarlike Mr. Southey' (p. 311). As it can be seen, the prefaces are used by both poets to settle their personal differences and attack each other publicly.

Southey's composition was met with scathing reviews in the vast majority of publications at the time, including conservative ones. The poem's unfavourable reception was due to its quality and choice of hexameters and not its nationalistic politics. As Joseph Phelan has shown, the classical hexameter has traditionally been perceived as not functioning well in English

language poetry and *A Vision of Judgement* – being a pioneer in its attempt at using hexameters at the time – attracted ridicule from all sides of the political divide in the periodical press.<sup>52</sup> Given the reverence and over-familiarity that classical compositions in Greek and Latin possessed in British literary culture, the attempt to mirror its metre and form was perceived to be in poor taste. In fact, there was only one flattering review of the poem, published by the conservative *Anti-Jacobin* in 1821. The reviewer notes how the work ‘is truly poetical; [its] ideas are simply grand; and the justice of the portraits flash at once upon the mind’.<sup>53</sup> The remaining reviewers had quite the opposite reaction to it. The *Literary Gazette* had ‘no words to describe the mixture of pity, contempt, and disapprobation, with which the perusal of this piece has filled us’ since it is nothing short than ‘a mass of absurdity’ in Southey’s endeavour to ‘torture hexameters in the form of English versification’.<sup>54</sup> The *Edinburgh Review* thought it to be not only unbecomingly self-adulatory but ‘incredibly absurd and extravagant, without one trait of originality or invention’.<sup>55</sup> *A Vision of Judgement* even enjoyed a strange appraisal by Southey’s friend William Taylor (1765-1836), who ‘read or pretended to read it

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<sup>52</sup> Joseph Phelan, 'The English Hexameter in Theory and Practice', in *The Music of Verse* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 45-87 (pp. 45-47).

<sup>53</sup> [Anonymous], 'A Vision of Judgement', *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Protestant Advocate*, 60 (June 1821), 325-33 (p. 333).

<sup>54</sup> [Anonymous], 'A Vision of Judgment', *The Literary Gazette*, 217 (March 1821), 161-3 (p. 161).

<sup>55</sup> [Anonymous], 'A Vision of Judgment', *The Edinburgh Review*, 35 (July 1821), 422-437 (p. 422).

as a covert act of ironic subversion' (RSLPW, III, 526). Taylor wrote to the Laureate:

I enjoyed the book exceedingly, and have been reading it with peals of laughter. [...] The idea is ingenious and happy, in writing the apotheosis of a king, to convert his red book into the book of life; and though there may be in this a little lurking profaneness, neither you nor I are likely to be shocked at that. Perhaps the irony is too covert; but probably you mean the Tories should be taken in.<sup>56</sup>

The theme and delivery of Southey's eulogy to George III was so absurd and ridiculous that the only way that it could make any sense was if it was read with an awareness of irony. Nonetheless, '[f]or the most part, opposition to the poem itself centred on the impropriety of depicting the mysteries of heaven and the judgement of the soul', an issue which was also criticised by Byron (RSLPW, III, 525).

Similarly, Byron's *The Vision of Judgment* was met with almost unanimous disapproval. As the poem was published in the first edition of *The Liberal, Verse and Prose from the South* (Byron, Shelley and Leigh Hunt's short-lived periodical venture), the reviews tended to appraise the poem alongside the vehicle in which it was published.<sup>57</sup> Such was the case with one of the few

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<sup>56</sup> John Warden Robberds, *A Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late William Taylor of Norwich*, 2 vols (London: 1843), II, p. 493.

<sup>57</sup> Quevedo Redivivus [Byron], 'The Vision of Judgment', *The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South*, 1 (1822), 15-39. For the literary partnership between the three men,

favourable reviews that appeared in one of the October 1822 editions of *The Examiner*. This periodical was also run by Leigh and John Hunt and it, naturally, praised its younger sibling. The reviewer clearly states how Byron's poem 'has avowedly been suggested by *another* Vision, but, as the reader will perceive, it avoids the supererogatory sin of *hexameters*'.<sup>58</sup> The publication concedes the bombastic nature of the composition, but defends the poem:

We cannot for a moment pretend not to foresee the horror which this Vision will excite in pious personages, among whom the original Vision excited no horror at all. It never occurs to critics of this class, that to make free with the presumed attributes of the Deity, and to deal out the judgments of omniscience in the propagation of solemn cant, nauseous flattery, and the most interested purpose, is, in any respect, indecent (*Examiner*, October 1822, p. 649).

*The Examiner* takes issue with the conservative reviewers' hypocrisy in relation to both poems. If Byron's poem was to be decried as blasphemous and impudent, they argued, so should Southey's. The reviewer claims, as does Byron in his preface, that Southey's performs an even worse blasphemy for making God speak in the verses (p. 649). One of the issues of *The Literary Gazette* of October 1822 exemplifies well the different receptions the poems received: Southey's *A Vision of Judgement* 'afforded so complete an

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see William H. Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and the Liberal* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960).

<sup>58</sup> [Anonymous], 'The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South. To Be Continued Occasionally. No. I', *Examiner*, 771 (October 1822), 648-52 (p. 649).

opportunity for scoffers and malignants to vent their humours and barb their sarcasms' given how it was composed with a 'ridiculous model'.<sup>59</sup> As the anonymous critic argues:

[T]he only difference between the two Poems is, that the one is apparently a well-meant piece of enthusiastic folly; and the other, a meditated attempt to embody spiteful passions, while episodically doing the accustomed work of a writer, whose every energy is directed to deteriorate and degrade humanity (*The Literary Gazette*, October 1822, p. 655).

Southey's poem, despite its aggressive preface, is still considered 'well-meant' because of its unashamed praise of the George III and the British deeds during his reign. Byron's, on the other hand, is accused of seeking to 'deteriorate and degrade humanity'. The reviewer also masks his opinions under the guise of benevolent neutrality – as Southey's God does in his panegyric:

We affect no cant, we speak the sentiments of no party, but we are as confident as that "day is day, and night, night," that we deliver the judgment of Britain when we assert, that these passages are so revolting to every good feeling, there is not a gentleman in the country who will not hold their author in contempt as unworthy of the character of a gentleman (*The Literary Gazette*, October 1822, p. 656).

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<sup>59</sup> [Anonymous], 'The Liberal', *The Literary Gazette*, 300 (October 1822), 655-8 (p. 655).  
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This sense of revulsion and contempt towards Byron's *The Vision of Judgment* is confirmed by all of the other negative reviews. For instance, *The Literary Register* (October 1822) thought it 'the most profligate and outrageous insult that was ever yet offered to the serious opinions of the majority of mankind'.<sup>60</sup> The periodical even refrains from printing excerpts from the poem because '[w]e dare not venture upon even the sublimities of a work which can only be seen in the light of hell, and with deadly and certain fascination to the young and susceptible eye' (*The Literary Register*, October 1822, p. 242). *New European Magazine* of October 1822 lambasted the composition as the work of a 'blackguard'. According to the magazine, Byron's sole intent in composing it was 'to vituperate and insult the Laws and Religion of the country which gave him birth, and from which the honours he has disgraced have been derived'.<sup>61</sup> Overall, reviewers tended to criticise Byron's *Vision* alongside Southey's. Indeed, the *Lady's Magazine* of March 1823 exemplifies this most succinctly:

Mr. Southey is a man of the most amiable dispositions, whose heart is, no doubt, imbued with deeply with the piety which he professes; but, like some of the gravest of our old divines, he made a little too free with subjects that ought only to be approached with reverence even by the believer.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> [Anonymous], 'The Liberal. Verse and Prose from the South', *The Literary Register*, 16 (October 1822), 241-3 (p. 242).

<sup>61</sup> [Anonymous], 'The Liberal', *New European Magazine*, 1 (October 1822), 354-63 (p. 356).

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Noon Talfourd, 'The Liberal. Verse and Prose from the South', *Lady's Magazine*, 2 (March 1823), 565-9 (p. 566).

According to this reviewer the worst sins of Byron's poem are not solely its profaneness (for Southey's poem was as equally guilty of it) but 'those against pure taste, and human feeling – against age, sorrow, and the sanctities of the grave': Byron's attacks on George III's reign and person (Talfourd, p. 566). Similarly, according to the *Literary Chronicle* of 19 October 1822 Byron's poem is 'a blasphemous parody of a profane piece of absurdity of the same name, by Mr. Southey'.<sup>63</sup> The reviewer, though praising Byron's satire of Southey's *A Vision of Judgement*, is critical of Byron's more vitriolic passages:

[Throughout *The Vision of Judgement*, one can find] many instances of the facility with which Lord Byron unites the sublime and the ridiculous; and we could really laugh at the vagaries of a man of lofty and commanding genius, did we not perceive the subtle poison lurking in every line (*The Literary Chronicle*, October 1822, p. 655).

Following on from this, the reviewer objects more emphatically to the passages regarding George III:

[The late king's] memory he insults, and whose melancholy afflictions are to him the subject of sport. A more diabolical and atrocious libel on the memory of any individual no human being ever penned; and we blush to think that a man – a nobleman of cultivated mind and extraordinary genius,

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<sup>63</sup> [Anonymous], 'The Liberal. Verse and Prose from the South', *The Literary Chronicle*, 179 (October 1822), 655-8 (p. 655).

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could betray such brutal, such cold-blooded malignity (*The Literary Chronicle*, October 1822, p.656).

Both *Visions* are, therefore, perceived as being in extreme bad taste for their free use of subjects which should not be fictionalised: the mysteries of the afterlife and divine beings. However, Byron's is execrated for its outspoken challenge to the memory of George III.

An analysis of the depictions of the late king and his deeds in the two poems clearly shows how antagonistic both compositions are and, most importantly, the two divergent histories they depict of the Georgian era. Southey's poem is unashamedly flattering in its portrayal of George III and his deeds. The poem is 'a tribute to the sacred memory of our late revered Sovereign' (RSLPW, III, 533). 'We owe so much to the house of Brunswick', Southey continues in the dedication, 'but to none of that illustrious House more than to Your Majesty, under whose government the military renown of Britain has been carried to the highest point of glory' (p. 533). The deceased king is first depicted – recalling John Milton – on a cloud going 'heavenward' to attend his trial by its gates (p. 569; 1). George III is depicted as pious and religious:

O Lord, in Thee have I trusted;

Thou art my hope and my strength! ... And then in profound adoration,

Crossing his arms on his breast, he bent and worshipp'd in silence. (RSLPW, III, 569; 8-10).



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On his way to the gates of heaven, the dead monarch meets with Spencer Perceval (1762-1812), the prime minister assassinated in the lobby of the House of Commons in 1812 (p. 570; 14). From him he learns of his son's, the Prince Regent, glorious deeds after his illness and rejoices on the British victory against Napoleon ('that man of blood, the tyrant, faithless and godless') (p. 571; 28). The Prince Regent is depicted as a valiant monarch:

With honour surpassing all that in elder time had adorn'd the  
annals of England,

Peace hath been won by the sword, the faithful minister  
answer'd.

Paris hath seen once more the banners of England in triumph

Wave within her walls, and the ancient line is establish'd.

(RSLPW, III, 570; 24-7)

The poem rejoices in the victory against the French revolutionary forces and the subsequent re-establishing of the Bourbons in 1815. George III also enquires about the social unrest which engulfed England during his untimely madness:

Is the spirit

Quell'd which hath troubled the land? and the multitude  
freed from delusion,

Know they their blessings at last, and are they contented and  
thankful?

(RSLPW, III, 572; 47-9)

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Perceval answers that the revolutionary spirit (the 'delusion') is unfortunately still present. Britain must fight against the 'Power of Evil' set loose by the events of the 1780s-90s:

Still it deceiveth the weak, and inflameth the rash and the  
desperate.

Even now, I ween, some dreadful deed is preparing;

For the Souls of the Wicked are loose, and the Power of Evil

Move on the wing alert. Some nascent horror they look for,

Be sure! some accursed conception of filth and of darkness

Ripe for its monstrous birth. (RSLPW, III, 572-3; 50-6)

It is curious to note how Spencer Perceval is the one to tell the king of the events which happened up until his death in 1820, given that George III had actually outlived him by eight years. The monarch's descent into madness in 1811 is treated by Southey as almost as his *de facto* death. Even worse, the king's condition is treated as a more dreadful fate than death, since the dead Perceval understands what has happened in the intervening years but the king – alive but mad, blind and deaf – does not.

George III's ascension to the gates of heaven in Byron's *The Vision of Judgment* is studiously the opposite of Southey's. The dead sovereign is not represented as a pious and religious figure. Instead, he is decrepit and aided by an equally decaying entourage:

[...] an old man

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With an old soul, and both extremely blind,

Halted before the gate, and in his shroud

Seated their fellow-traveller on a cloud. (CPW, VI, 319; 181-84)

In the entire poem the dead ruler is mostly devoid of action, and is represented by Byron as a pusillanimous presence: an accurate description of the last ten years of his life in total seclusion. Byron refers to 1820 as ‘the first year of freedom’s second dawn’ (CPW, VI, 314; 57) as he alludes to the uprisings in Spain and Portugal (p. 674).<sup>64</sup> These events were, in a whiggish vein, read by Byron as the continuation of the spirit of ‘liberty’ against the re-established monarchies after Napoleon’s defeat; for the Spanish and the Portuguese demanded from their respective monarchies a liberal constitution and the curtailment of powers in both countries.

The ‘judgement’ itself in the poems is the trial of George III by both demonic and celestial entities. Satan thus presents his reasons for the king’s damnation in Southey’s piece:

Freedom, Invaded Rights, Corruption, and War, and  
Oppression,

Loudly enounced were heard. (RSLPW, III, p. 577; 18-9)

Though ‘dysmay’d’ by the divine presence (which renders him ‘mute’) Satan produces two witnesses ‘[f]rom the souls on the edge of the darkness’ (RSLPW,

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<sup>64</sup> For a good overall summary of the revolutionary events in Europe at the time, see Jonathan Sperber, ‘In the Shadow of the Past, 1815-32’, in *Revolutionary Europe, 1780-1850* (New York: Longman, 2000), pp. 323-48.

III, 578; 21, 22, 25). The first accuser is John Wilkes (1727-97), publisher of the radical newspaper *The North Briton*, which was a prominent critic of the king and the government in the 1760s. Wilkes's arrest and persecution had galvanised the radicals in the country (p. 697). In the poem he is depicted as

[...] the firebrand

Whom the unthinking populace held for their idol and hero,

Lord of Misrule in his day. (RSLPW, III, 578; 36-8)

Though the voice of rebellion in his day, Wilkes is silenced by the presence of God and his angelic entourage and thus fails to present his testimony against the dead monarch. Accordingly, Southey depicts him as repentant and ashamed of his past (RSLPW, III, 578-9; 38-57). The second witness is another libeller: Junius, who anonymously published in the *Public Advertiser* from 1769 to 1772 a series of letters in favour of Wilkes and against the government of the time. Not only does he not speak, but he seems to be overcome with guilt:

Speechless the slanderer stood, and turn'd his face from the  
Monarch

Iron-bound as it was, .. so insupportably dreadful

Soon or late to conscious guilt is the eye of the injured.

(RSLPW, III, 580; 67-9).

After failing to provide his case to claim the king's soul (since '[h]ell hath been dumb in his [the king's] presence') (RSLPW, III, 582; 2), Satan becomes mad at his caitiffs, hurls them back to hell and leaves with his entire demonic

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hullabaloo (pp. 580-81; 70-89). His initial accusations disappear with him since he and his witnesses have failed to provide concrete prosecutions on the king.

Byron's demonic indictment of George III is certainly quite different. Satan extensively enumerates the reasons why George III's soul should be granted to his care:

'Look to the earth, I said, and say again:

When this old, blind, mad, helpless, weak, poor worm,  
Began in youth's first bloom and flush to reign,  
The world and he both wore a different form,  
And much of earth and all the watery plain  
Of ocean call'd him king: through many a storm  
His isles had floated on the abyss of Time;  
For the rough virtues chose them for their clime.

'He came to the sceptre, young; he leaves it, old:

Look to the state in which he found his realm,  
And left it; and his annals too behold,  
How to a minion first he gave the helm;  
How grew upon his heart a thirst for gold,  
The beggar's vice, which can but overwhelm  
The meanest hearts; and for the rest, but glance  
Thine eye along America and France! (CPW, VI, 325; 329-44)

George III, the ‘old, blind, mad, helpless, weak, poor worm’, is indicted by Satan to have left the United Kingdom upon his death in a much worse state than when he was crowned king in 1760. The poem suggests that not only was he a greedy ruler, but he committed atrocities in other countries: namely, the United States of America and France. Byron’s Satan presents a perfectly Foxite Whig opposition to the British foreign policies from the 1770s onwards. The American War of Independence was interpreted by Charles James Fox as a legitimate insurrection of its people against the taxation without representation by the British crown in its colonies.<sup>65</sup> The declaration of war against France in the 1790s was also perceived by Fox and some of his fellow Whigs as a unilateral act of aggression on the part of George III and the Pitt government which caused the Revolution to turn even more violent (Derry, pp. 361-71). Byron’s poem carries on Foxite Whig notions that it was *because* of the increasingly absolutist power of the British Crown and monarchies in general that the long wars of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries happened. Even though he was ‘a tool from first to last’, George III and his reign, marked by gore and treachery, will surpass the test of time (CPW, VI, 326; 345). As Satan continues:

‘[...] From the past

Of ages, since mankind have known the rule

Of monarchs – from the bloody rolls amass’d

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<sup>65</sup> John W. Derry, *Charles James Fox* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972), pp. 54-127.

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Of sin and slaughter – from the Caesar’s school,  
Take the worst pupil; and produce a reign  
More drench’d with gore, more cumber’d with the slain!

‘He ever warr’d with freedom and the free:

Nations as men, home subjects, foreign foes,

So that they utter’d the word “Liberty!”

Found George the Third their first opponent. Whose

History was ever stain’d as his will be

With national and individual woes? (CPW, VI, 326; 347-58)

*The Vision of Judgment* writes a hyperbolically negative history of the Georgian era. Not even ‘the worst pupil’ from ‘Caesar’s school’ could have achieved a reign more violent and bellicose. Byron’s poem accuses the king as being the first opponent of all the attempts, both domestic and internationally, in achieving a degree of ‘freedom’ from tyrannies and oppression. However, though his reign was thoroughly marked by war and despotism, Byron’s Satan concedes that George III lived a virtuous private life:

‘I grant his household abstinence; I grant

His neutral virtues, which most monarchs want;

‘I know he was a constant consort; own

He was a decent sire, and middling lord.

All this is much, and most upon a throne;

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As temperance, if at Apicus' board,  
Is more than at an anchorite's supper shown.

I grant him all the kindest can accord;  
And this was well for him, but not for those  
Millions who found him what oppression chose. (CPW, VI,  
326; 359-68)

Even though George III led a virtuous private life, his public role as a king dictated the consequences of oppression to those who happened to get in his way.

Imitating Southey's poem, Byron's Satan is invited to call for witnesses to make his case against the dead monarch (CPW, VI, 328; 407-8). Upon this request, the fallen angel summons an immense crowd which forms a chaotic 'cloud of witnesses' (p. 330; 458). The cloud, it turns out, consists of all the nationalities which George III's reign had influenced: English, Irish, Scottish, French, American, Spanish, Dutch, Danish and other unspecified populations (p. 330; 365-72; p. 331; 473-6). This cosmopolitan entourage is depicted as being incensed:

Ready to swear against the good king's reign,  
Bitter as clubs in cards are against spades:  
All summon'd by this grand 'subpoena,' to  
Try if kings mayn't be damn'd, like me or you. (CPW, VI, 331;  
477-80)



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In response to this, the defence – the Archangel Michael – tells Satan that he has abused the call for witnesses and clarifies that two testimonies will suffice (CPW, VI, 331-32; 481-504). Also following Southey's composition, Byron's Satan decides on Jack Wilkes and Junius to be his witnesses. However, contrary to *A Vision of Judgement*, the witnesses produced by Byron's prosecution are not silent. For instance, Wilkes states that he has already said what he thought of the king in life:

[...] – 'Some,'

Said Wilkes, 'don't wait to see them laid in lead,

For such a liberty – and I, for one,

Have told them what I thought beneath the sun.' (CPW, VI, 334; 549-52).

As it turns out, Wilkes forgives the king and wishes him to be absolved (CPW, VI, 553-68). At this stage in his testimony, it becomes apparent to Satan that Wilkes is a political turncoat. This is better understood after Satan observed his behaviour in hell:

'However, I knew what to think of it,

When I beheld you in your jesting way

Flitting and whispering round about the spit

Where Belial, upon duty, for the day,

With Fox's lard was basting William Pitt,

His pupil; I knew what to think, I say:

That fellow even in hell breeds farther ills;

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I'll have him *gagg'd* – 'twas one of his own bills. (CPW, VI, 335; 577-84)

The stanza shows how Wilkes socialises with William Pitt in hell. Amidst the infernal tortures at Belial's spit (the reader is presented with the image of the demon 'basting' William Pitt with the Whig politician's 'lard', which is a crude joke concerning Fox's weight), Pitt is portrayed as further corrupting Wilkes. Byron is satirising Wilkes's political attitudes from 1780 onwards. Wilkes did not only support Pitt's administration from 1783, but was also personally involved in fighting the political radicalism he had championed in the previous decades.<sup>66</sup> Pitt, ('[t]hat fellow') and Belial's pupil, is perceived by Satan as destabilising his dominion and he considers gagging the former prime minister (CPW, VI, 676). The irony is that it was under Pitt that the Habeas Corpus Suspension Act 1794 was passed and thus first gagged free speech in Britain during the wars with France.<sup>67</sup>

After this, Satan calls out for Junius in agreement with Southey's poem (CPW, VI, p. 335; 585). Given Junius' anonymity in real life, Byron, as Jerome McGann argues, 'plays with the theory that Junius was not *one* person but several working independently or in concert. In addition, Byron's representation of this view subtly suggests that Junius comprises the *vox*

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<sup>66</sup> John Wilkes was, for instance, in charge of the troops that defended the Bank of England against a mob during what has become known as the Gordon Riots (1780).

<sup>67</sup> John Ehrman, *The Younger Pitt: The Reluctant Transition*, 3 vols (London: Constable, 1983), II, 395.

*populi'* (p. 677). However, contrary to Wilkes, Junius is unrepentant of their writings regarding the king:

[...] – 'Canst thou upbraid,'

Continued Michael, 'George Rex, or allege

Aught further?' Junius answer'd, 'You had better

First ask him for *his* answer to my letter:

'My charges upon his record will outlast

The brass of both his epitaph and tomb.'

'Repent'st thou not,' said Michael, 'of some past

Exaggeration? something which may doom

Thyself, if false, as him if true? Thou wast

Too bitter – is it not so? in thy gloom

Of passion?' 'Passion!' cried the Phantom dim,

'I loved my country, and I hated him.

'What I have written, I have written: let

The rest be on his head or mine!' So spoke

Old 'Nominis Umbra;' and while speaking yet,

Away he melted in celestial smoke. (CPW, VI, 338; 653-68)

The author (or authors) who wrote under the pseudonym were 'highly opinionated, shrewd, ironic, vituperative, even arrogant individual(s) schooled

in classics and the law' (DNB). In the letters published between 1769 and 1772 they staunchly oppose the king and Parliament's increasing powers with regards to individuals' private and public rights. In Byron's poem, Junius is depicted as a shadowy and amorphous figure whose identity is impossible to establish, a mystery which is still unresolved to this day.<sup>68</sup> The designation of 'Nominis Umbra' is taken from the dedication to the 1772 edition of Junius's letters (*Stat nominis umbra*, 'he stands the shadow of a great name').<sup>69</sup> The character of the polemicist in the satire makes clear that George III never replied to his open letters and charges, thus implying that the king had indeed abused the powers of the Crown and oppressed his subjects throughout his reign. After Junius's departure, Satan is about to ask for more witnesses: George Washington (1732-1799), John Horne Tooke (1736-1812) and Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) (CPW, VI, 338; 669-71). Those three would witness against George III from an American perspective. This contradicts Southey's composition, for the Laureate had Washington fully absolve the king (and vice-versa) in his eulogy (RSLPW, III, 583-4; 23-50). Contrary to Byron, the conflicts involving the American independence and Britain are approached by Southey as having been harmonically solved with the passing of time.

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<sup>68</sup> For a thorough discussion on the identity of Junius and the many theories surrounding its mystery, see Francesco Cordasco and Gustave Simonson, *Junius and His Works: A History of the Letters of Junius and the Authorship Controversy* (London: Junius-Vaughn Press, 1986), pp. 265-400. McGann accepts (with Byron) that Junius was Sir Philip Francis (1740-1818). However, Cordasco and Simonson dismiss the 'Franciscan theory' in a detailed exposition throughout chapter 8 of their book (pp. 321-75).

<sup>69</sup> [Junius], *The Letters of Junius*, 2 vols (London: 1772).

Southey's *A Vision of Judgement* presents a thoroughly whig history of the British Isles. As Butterfield argues, the history offered is one in which the past events succeed one another and 'converge beautifully upon the present' (Butterfield, p. 12). Southey uses George III's arrival in heaven as a meeting place with his predecessors who aided Britain in becoming a successfully Protestant and imperial country in 1820. The king, '[o]ne who in righteousness reign'd, and religiously govern'd his people' (RSLPW, III, 589; 3), is first welcomed by 'Nassau the Deliverer' (p. 589; 4), William III of Orange (1650-1702), who delivered the Crown from the Catholicism of James II and consolidated the 1688-89 Settlement of the Glorious Revolution. The second king he encounters is 'the Stuart' Charles I (1600-49) (p. 589; 5) who was beheaded in the Civil War, followed by Queen Elizabeth I ('matchless Eliza') (1533-1603) (p. 589; 8) and her brother (Edward VI (1537-53)) who even dons a 'silvery halo' over his head (p. 589; 10-1). These are followed by Sir Edward of Woodstock ('the black prince') (1330-76), 'one of Edward III's commanders at the Battle of Crécy (26 August 1346)' (p. 698), and Edward III (1312-77) himself (p. 590; 12-6). Backtracking a further two centuries in history, Southey depicts Richard I (Lionheart) (1157-99), who is exalted for his victories in the Third Crusade (p. 590; 17-27) for the Christian victory against the infidels. Southey finishes his canon of noteworthy personages in the English monarchy with Alfred the Great (849-99) the 'King of Wessex' (p. 698) who 'founded our laws and our temples' (p. 591; 28). Since this solid foundation of law and religion, there was a slow but certain improvement in the English institutions

and their power on the world stage. Virtually all of the historical characters exalted by Southey had accomplished something with regards to Britain's increasing military power and with the establishment of the Reformed Church in the country. Those historical figures are described as being proud of the deeds of their successor George III: 'I could perceive the joy which fill'd their beatified spirits | While of the Georgian age they thought, and the glory of England' (p. 592; 42-3). The past monarchs and other notables witness from their ethereal abode the glories in which Britain was to find itself in the early 1800s. Southey's diorama of British monarchical history finds its apotheosis in the present in an unashamedly whiggish sense: all of past events in British history are depicted in Southey's eulogy as harmonically converging in the post-Waterloo historical landscape and thus bestowing upon Britain its earned position as the world's harbinger of 'liberty'. By systematically reading the reign of George III in a diametrically opposite attitude to Southey's, Byron's satire successfully evidences how the narrative presented by the Laureate is, in fact, a discursive construction with a historical agenda 'behind' it.

Though Byron intended *The Vision of Judgment* to be a poem 'in a Whig point of view', the composition was adopted by radicals as if corroborating their politics (BLJ, VIII, 229).<sup>70</sup> For instance, the poem was pirated by the radical publisher Carlile – who also published Shelley.<sup>71</sup> Carlile published

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<sup>70</sup> Byron to Thomas Moore. 1 October 1821.

<sup>71</sup> Paul Thomas Murphy, *Toward a Working-Class Canon: Literary Criticism in British Working-Class Periodicals, 1816-1858* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1994), p. 99.

both poets ‘because of their political and free-thinking ideas; on the level of argument, both were worth of publication’ (Murphy, p. 99). Cobbett also used Byron’s poem to vent his radical politics: his 24 January 1824 issue of the *Political Register* was dedicated to the poem and to John Hunt’s trial (p. 101). Cobbett argued that Hunt’s lawyer should have defended him ‘by arguing that Byron was absolutely right in his accusations, and that George III was a miserable failure as a king’ (p. 102). It is ironic that both publishers were to have printed Byron given how the poet, as an aristocrat with strong Whig tendencies, had much contempt for them and their causes. As Byron wrote to Hobhouse the year before composing *The Vision of Judgment*:

*I for one will declare off, I have always been (before you [Hobhouse] were – as you well know) a well-wisher to and voter for reform in Parliament – but as “such fellows as these who will never go to the Gallows with any credit” — such infamous Scoundrels as [Henry] Hunt and Cobbett – in short the whole gang (always excepting you B. & D.) disgust and make one doubt of the virtue of any principle or politics which can be embraced by similar ragamuffins (BLJ, VII, 62-63).*<sup>72</sup>

In his mind, the radicals of his times were beneath him and the political landscape to which he perceived himself belonging. Neither did Byron consider

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<sup>72</sup> Byron to Hobhouse. 29 March 1820.

the concept of 'democracy' a favourable one. Musing about Roman history in his journal in 1821, he wrote:

It is still more difficult to say which form of Government is the *worst* – all are so bad. – As for democracy it is the worse of the whole – for *what is (in fact) democracy?* an Aristocracy of Blackguards (BLJ, VIII, 107).<sup>73</sup>

Therefore, despite composing a poem which was taken by radicals as voicing their own subversive discourse, in Byron's point of view he was writing the middle-ground Whig stance of opposing kings whilst simultaneously excluding the lower classes from the political process altogether. Their inclusion would be, in Byron's own words, 'an Aristocracy of Blackguards'. It is no wonder that leftist writers would find it 'disappointing' that at the time of his most outspokenly critical work in the early 1820s, Byron would have abused the radicals of his times in a 'huffing-and-puffing vehemence of any true blue'.<sup>74</sup> In other words, he was a thorough Whig. In comparison, Southey's poem presents a staunch whiggish take on history (neatly from Bede to George III) which could have been written by a historian of the Whig party. This shows how the Whigs, as Kelsall has argued, were needing to form an oppositional narrative throughout the early 1800s, particularly given how the Tories in power claimed the nationalist rhetoric of history as their own (*Byron's Politics*, pp. 6-7). Even worse for a court Whig such as Byron, his *Vision of Judgment* was read and

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<sup>73</sup> 'My dictionary'. 1 May 1821. Emphases in the original.

<sup>74</sup> Craig David, 'Byron the Radical', in *Byron and Scotland: Radical or Dandy?*, ed. by Angus Calder (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), pp. 7-22 (p. 18).



appropriated by radicals as if it were expressing the subversive ideals which they propagated in their pamphlets.

Both compositions successfully show how the construction of historical narratives by poets plays a vital part in the 'creation' of the past. Byron's satire on Southey's eulogy *A Vision of Judgement* is a direct example of a text which not only evidenced the bias of the original composition, but of how history is written with an agenda 'behind' it in general. Byron used the same scenario and methods employed by the Laureate but did so in order to subvert his original intentions. Thus, the witnesses which effectively praised and subsequently acquitted George III of his deeds in life in Southey's poem are rewritten by Byron to damn the dead monarch and accuse him and his reign of committing a series of atrocities from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries.

## **Conclusion**

If the imagination is divine or autonomous, then a poem can say nothing that is simultaneously true and logical. Poetry contains ideas, but clear and distinct ideas are another matter (Woodring, p. 5).

As shown in this thesis, it is impossible to speak of a single Byronic historiographical discourse. Each chapter emphasises a diverse discourse present in Byron's writings. As argued in chapter one, Byron was an enthusiast for classical knowledge and dealt with it in an antiquarian way. This predominance of classical themes and 'facts' is the result of the type of tuition Byron and those of his social standing received in the early 1800s. He also criticised his own classicism, a trait which is read alongside the then-emergent discussion on the role of education. Chapter two further developed this argument by investigating this classical knowledge in relation to travel writing. Byron approached classical knowledge and oftentimes challenged it in his travels and subsequent forays into poetical travelogues, by comparing his received knowledge with the locations he had cherished and studied as a student at Harrow and Cambridge. Chapter three examined the notion of historical inheritance with which the whig interpretation of history dealt with Ancient Greece and Rome. It is argued that the Tory governments of the time usurped the Whigs' discourse which nationalistically perceived Britain as the bulwark of 'liberty' in world history, thus leaving the Whigs at pains to formulate a cohesive oppositional discourse. Byron, a Whig sympathiser in his

politics, critically engaged with the teleological narrative of the whig interpretation of history. Chapter four further discussed Byron's criticism of the whiggish discourse of history by analysing his (re)interpretations of some of the historical events of his lifetime and the anti-war rhetoric which underlines much of his work. Chapter five showed that Byron's later work portrays a more sceptical stance towards history's process through time. It is argued in the chapter that those writings published in the 1820s were more attuned to the processes which acted 'behind' history. History in itself was also evidenced as composed of narratives which not only lack neutrality, but which obey specific political agendas on the part of the historian. Byron's writings espouse many diverse discourses of history. By looking into the many subsequent and divergent readings of his work after his death, one can attest to the pluralistic nature of the discourses of history in the early 1800s present in Byron's *œuvre*.

For instance, Hazlitt's essay on Byron (see pp. 109-13 above) shows the change in attitudes that can occur posthumously. The critic received the news of Byron's death while writing the essay, which caused Hazlitt to include an addendum. Although not regretting what he had written, Hazlitt acknowledges how after an author's death his/her writings and life are inevitably seen in a different, even if distorted, light:

Death cancels every thing but truth, and strips a man of every thing but genius and virtue. It is a sort of a natural canonization. It makes the meanest of us sacred; it installs

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the poet in his immortality, and lifts him to the skies (Hazlitt, *Spirit of the Age*, p. 126).

Byron's death in Greece 'canonized' his reputation and also created the notion of his martyrdom for 'freedom': 'Lord Byron is dead: he also died a martyr to his zeal in the cause of freedom, for the last, best hopes of man. Let that be his excuse and his epitaph!' (p. 127).

The notion of Byron as a martyr that died for 'freedom' was the position taken up by the Chartists in the 1830s and 1840s. Byron's poetry, alongside Shelley's, was used by them not only as a major source of inspiration, but as a means to educate and stir fellow Chartists and the public at large to achieve their political goals.<sup>1</sup> It was not uncommon, for example, to have banners bearing Byron's verses in Chartist demonstrations. A contemporary witnessed the verses from *Don Juan* canto XI ('I have seen some nations like o'erloaded asses | Kick off their burthens – meaning the high classes') (CPW, V, 491; 671-72) being used in a procession in Newcastle in 27 June 1838 under the title 'REVOLUTION' (Collins, p. 19). Friedrich Engels in his *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845) wrote how Shelley and Byron were popular among the working classes:

Shelley, the genius, the prophet [...] and Byron, with his glowing sensuality and his bitter satire upon our existing society, find most of their readers in the proletariat; the

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<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 118.

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bourgeoisie own only castrated editions, family editions, expurgated in accordance with the hypocritical morality of today.<sup>2</sup>

Byron's image and myth was by then used as an inspiration to the whole Chartist movement in their struggle for their own 'liberty': their political rights.

Four decades later, Byron was perceived to belong to both the radical and the conservative parts of the spectrum. Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), when assessing Byron's legacy in the preface to his edition of Byron's works in 1881 argued that his waning popularity was due to the Victorian critical interpretation of Byron which did not take into account the contingencies and biases of contemporary politics in the early 1800s:

The time has come for him, as it comes for all poets, when he must take his real and permanent place, no longer depending upon the vogue of his own day and upon the enthusiasm of his contemporaries.<sup>3</sup>

Arnold, when addressing Byron's politics and his criticism of British philistinism, quotes his journal entry of 13 January 1821: 'Give me a republic. The king-times are fast finishing. There will be blood shed like water, and tears like mist; but the peoples will conquer in the end. I shall not live to see it, but I foresee it'

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<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, ed. by Victor Kiernan (London: Penguin Books, 2009 [1845]), p. 245.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism: Second Series*, ed. by S. R. Littlewood (London: Macmillan, 1969 [1881]), p. 102.

(Arnold, p. 115). However, Byron's republicanism is entirely created by Arnold.

The journal entry, in fact, reads as follows:

Dined – news come – the *Powers* mean to war with the peoples. The intelligence seems positive – let it be so – they will be beaten in the end. The king-times are fast finishing. There will be blood shed like water, and tears like mist; but the peoples will conquer in the end. I shall not live to see it, but I foresee it (BLJ, VIII, 26).<sup>4</sup>

Matthew Arnold's opinions on Byron are tainted by a Victorian moralism that interpreted Byron's life and works as being too iconoclastic. According to Arnold, Byron's poetry lacked the high seriousness and morality he expected poetry to endorse. This is further evidenced by Arnold's opinion that Wordsworth is a superior poet to Byron because the former 'has an insight into permanent sources of joy and consolation for mankind which Byron has not' (Arnold, p. 120). What poetry should strive for is to provide the reader with access to universal truths and values, something which he does not find in Byron's works. On the contrary, to Arnold, Byron's poetry constantly challenged those values and, consequently, diminished its importance in comparison to less iconoclastic poets such as Wordsworth.

In the same decade and from the opposite side of the political spectrum, Eleanor Marx Aveling (1855-1898) (Karl Marx's youngest daughter)

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<sup>4</sup> 'Ravenna journal'. 13 January 1821. Emphasis in the original.

and her partner Edward Aveling (1849-1898) wrote two lectures on Shelley's socialism. In stark disagreement with Matthew Arnold, they considered Byron too conservative. Following Karl Marx, they argued:

[T]hose who understand them and love them [Byron and Shelley] rejoice that Byron died at thirty-six, because if he had lived he would have become a reactionary bourgeois. They grieve that Shelley died at twenty-nine because he was essentially a revolutionist and he would always have been one of the advanced guard of socialism.<sup>5</sup>

Shelley should be mourned for having died before he could become the mature 'revolutionist' and socialist that he always was, whereas Byron's demise at thirty-six should be celebrated given that he would undoubtedly have become a reactionary if he had reached old age. This stance in Marxist thought would continue well into the twentieth century. Even Raymond Williams in the 1950s, in his *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*, suggested a distinction 'between the revolutionary principles of Shelley and the fine libertarian opportunism of Byron'.<sup>6</sup>

In 1910, the American Ambassador Whitelaw Reid (1837-1912) delivered a lecture on Byron on occasion of the establishment of a chair in English literature in the University of Nottingham:

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<sup>5</sup> Edward Aveling and Eleanor Marx Aveling, *Shelley's Socialism* (London: Journeyman Press, 1975 [1888]), p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), p. 31.

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The wild, often unreasoning love of liberty which pulsates through his work, and was consecrated in his death; and the enormous spiritual force which it and his genius gave him throughout Europe, made him a Social Solvent rather than a Regenerator of Society; a Solvent of stifling precedents and of arbitrary rule, rather than an Emancipator. Wherever his prodigious influence in that seething time extended, he unsettles things, but they have been the better since for his activities. He helped to start tendencies then which, under wiser guidance, before the end of the century had changed the face of Great Britain and of Europe. [...] That spring has come. His anticipations have been more than realised. He builded [sic] better than he knew when he set the solvent power of his verse to weakening old conventions and so much of the old political and social order. If we cannot credit him with seeking or foreseeing the real results, we must credit him at any rate with a brilliant share in making them possible.<sup>7</sup>

From the Ambassador's perspective, Byron was not a revolutionary figure or a conservative who stifled social change. Reid uses a liquid metaphor to describe Byron's influence in the nineteenth century: his writings worked as 'solvent' in aid of the social changes that took place after his death. Reid's sympathetic

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<sup>7</sup> Whitelaw Reid, *American Ambassador Lectures on the Poet: Byron Memorial Chair of Literature*, Nottingham Byron Foundation Lectures (Nottingham: The University of Nottingham, 1910), p. 7.



views certainly stem from Byron's admiration of Washington and the United States in the early 1800s (see pp. 202-03 and pp. 219-21 above). Though critical of Byron's excessive enthusiasm ('wild, often unreasoning love') for 'liberty', Reid shares a teleological optimism with whiggism inasmuch as he perceives his present day as the result of an inexorable development in human history with the victory over the 'old conventions', 'old political and social order'. However, with the power of hindsight, it is impossible to fail to contrast the Ambassador's optimistic address with the onset of war only four years after.

Indeed, after the First World War, and contrary to Reid's assessment of Byron's influence on the social changes of the nineteenth century, Byron's verses were read in an anonymous pamphlet entitled 'Byron as "Poet Laureate"' as exemplifying a patriotic mood after the victory against Germany and Austria-Hungary. According to the author, Byron's verses were 'strangely appropriate' to those involved in the conflict.<sup>8</sup> By reading *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* canto III, the pamphlet argues that Byron's stanzas on the ball in Belgium before the Battle of Waterloo could easily have been written about the eve of the German invasion in 1914. 'Byron was the Poet of Freedom' and, therefore, he was on the side of the Entente powers victorious in the conflict' ('Byron as "Poet Laureate"', p. 156). Byron would perhaps have deemed this reading of his poetry as the 'discourse of cant' of history's victors.

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<sup>8</sup> [Anonymous], 'Byron as "Poet Laureate"', in *Byron, the Poet: A Collection of Addresses and Essays*, ed. by Walter Alwyn Briscoe (London: Routledge, 1924), pp. 153-57 (p. 153).

Another popular reading is, as Cheeke puts it, the ‘deeply pessimistic or tragic mould [...] of Byronic gloom’ (Cheeke, p. 10). On this theme, Bertrand Russell in his *History of Western Philosophy* (1945) even gave Byron a whole chapter between those dedicated to Hegel (1770-1831) and Schopenhauer (1788-1860). Certainly influenced by his own times (he wrote the book during World War II), Russell considered that Byron’s ‘discontent’ and his ‘criticism of the government of the world’ led him to have bestowed a ‘Titanic cosmic self-assertion’ and ‘Satanism’ in Western philosophy.<sup>9</sup> This trend in ‘Byronism’ was (and is) certainly very influential in the Continent and around the globe.<sup>10</sup> This thesis argued that the Byronic historical pessimism is not an innate and ‘Satanist’ attitude on Byron’s part, but rather his reaction to the failures of the whiggish historiographical discourse. This attitude is more markedly present in the works written after 1815, when one sees the return of the autocratic and gerontocratic regimes throughout Europe after the demise of the Napoleonic alternative.

Vivian de Sola Pinto, also writing during World War II, highlights Byron’s ‘passion for actuality, a determination to face facts however unpleasant they might be, and [...] a passion for liberty, liberty for himself and also liberty for others’ in detriment of the gloomy aspects highlighted by

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<sup>9</sup> Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2000 [1945]), p. 676.

<sup>10</sup> For the poet’s reception in Continental Europe, both literary and political, see Paul Graham Trueblood, *Byron’s Political and Cultural Influence in Nineteenth-Century Europe: A Symposium* (London: Macmillan, 1981) and Richard A. Cardwell, ed., *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, 2 vols (London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2004).

Russell.<sup>11</sup> Pinto considers Byron's concept of 'liberty' more radical than his Whig counterparts, as evidenced by his political positions during his brief stint at the House of Lords (Pinto, pp. 14-16). He argues that in his later works 'the words "liberty", "freedom" and "free" have lost all the old Whig complacency and hypocrisy' to become 'heroic words full of life and energy, pointing to action' (p. 18). Pinto considers Byron to have given 'a new meaning and a new urgency to the word Liberty' (p. 22). Relieved that the war was near its end and that 'Fascism and Nazism [were] soon [to go] the way of the Bourbons and the Holy Alliance', Pinto hails Byron as an important figure in the long march of 'liberty' against 'tyranny' (p. 23). Even Winston Churchill's famous sentence from his maiden speech as Prime Minister ('I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat') is considered by Pinto to have been inspired by *The Age of Bronze* ('Blood, sweat, and tear-wrung millions – why? for Rent!') (CPW, VII, 20; 623) (p. 23).<sup>12</sup>

During the formalism of the 1960s, Byron's poetry tended to be sidelined in favour of the other 'Romantic' poets who most closely followed the characteristics of what 'Romanticism' was supposed to be (see pp. 9-13 above). As a result, the criticism of that decade, failing to find formal 'Romantic' aspects in Byron's poetry, was also inclined to focus on Byron's 'Romantic' persona. W. W. Robson, for instance, wrote in 1966 that Byron 'had not so much outgrown

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<sup>11</sup> Vivian de Sola Pinto, *Byron and Liberty*, Nottingham Byron Foundation Lectures (Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 1944), pp. 10-11.

<sup>12</sup> For other sources of inspiration for Churchill's speech, see Wolfgang Mieder, *The Politics of Proverbs: From Traditional Wisdom to Proverbial Stereotypes* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), p. 53.

[his 'Romanticism']', but also had 'come to see [it] for one acting part among others'.<sup>13</sup> In agreement with Arnold in the 1880s, Robson could not rank Byron's *Don Juan* as a 'high' work of literature:

[G]reat art cannot be made out of boredom with oneself, which is expressed as boredom with one's subject-matter; and the later cantos of *Don Juan*, which are the finest and most mature parts of the poem, are also, significantly, the parts in which that distaste, that boredom, is becoming a settled attitude (Robson, p. 300).

Byron's poetry sat uneasily among his fellow 'Romantic' poets for Byron, when writing in accordance to the values expected by the formalist critic, did so as an 'act' propelled by his boredom and, ultimately, disrespect for the writing of poetry in itself.

In the wake of the historicist 'turn' in Byron studies in the following decades (see pp. 23-37 above), Byron was, according to Kelsall, much more of a Whig in regards to his politics and worldview. This reading of Byron as a revolutionary force and friend of the people and 'liberty' was 'a phenomenon constructed by revolutionary enthusiasm' (*Byron's Politics*, p. 2). In fact, Byron failed in his endeavours as a man of political action in Greece; his endeavours in aiding the Carbonari in Italy 'snuffed out before [they] had begun' and his

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<sup>13</sup> W. W. Robson, 'Byron and Sincerity', in *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. by M. H. Abrams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975 [1966]), pp. 275-302 (p. 289).

brief career as a peer in the House of Lords ‘likewise terminated in nullity’ (p. 2). Even though hailed by the Chartists in the decades after his demise, one would find that in life Byron ‘achieved nothing for reform [...] and was the determined opponent of the very radical forces who selectively misread his poetry to support their cause. The life of Byron is of no political significance’ (p. 2). Others disagreed with Kelsall’s opinions. Michael Foot (1913-2010), for instance, consciously resituated and re-read Byron to be on the side of socialist politics. Speaking on the need for nuclear disarmament in the early 1980s, Foot read Byron’s poem ‘Darkness’ (1816) in its entirety as a poetic representation of the dystopian consequences of a nuclear holocaust.<sup>14</sup> Byron was, thus, recast as a pacifist by Foot, who was himself writing during the Cold War.

Therefore, inasmuch as Byron’s politics and subsequent historical attitudes are concerned, these are just a few examples of the myriad of diverse ‘Byrons’ which were engendered through the centuries. He was deemed a revolutionist and a conservative at once; the simultaneous champion of ‘liberty’, liberator of Greece and aristocratic defender of his own privileges. These very diverse and contradictory depictions of Byron as a subject of various politicised narratives of history are only possible because of the many discourses of history which his writings convey. It was due to Byron’s pluralistic espousal of discourses of history that he was hailed, for example, by both

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Foot, *Byron on the Bomb* (Cardiff: University College Cardiff Press, 1983), pp. 21-23. For Michael Foot’s views on Byron’s politics in general, see Michael Foot, *The Politics of Paradise: A Vindication of Byron* (London: Collins, 1988).

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Chartists in the 1840s and the anonymous pamphleteer quoted above, who read Byron as a patriotic voice against Germany in the First World War.

But to return to this thesis's epigrams, Percy Bysshe Shelley in his eulogy on the untimely death of John Keats portrayed Byron as 'The Pilgrim of Eternity':

Thus ceased she: and the mountain shepherds came,  
Their garlands sere, their magic mantles rent;  
The Pilgrim of Eternity, whose fame  
Over his living head like Heaven is bent,  
An early but enduring monument,  
Came, veiling all the lightning of his song  
In sorrow; from her wilds Ierne sent  
The sweetest lyrist of her saddest wrong,  
And Love taught Grief to fall like music from his tongue.

(Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Adonais*, XXX)

Even in life Byron was already the myth which he was to become after 1824. Shelley's depiction of his friend in 1821 is of an ahistorical entity that inhabits a place outside/above the historical process. The 'early but enduring monument' which the famous poet became implies an immutable archetype which would remain unscathed for the succeeding ages. Writing in the first year of his self-exile in 1816, Byron voiced this grandiloquent sentiment of geographical transience coupled with a sense of immortality:

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There, in a moment, we may plunge our  
years

In fatal penitence, and in the blight

Of our own soul, turn all our blood to tears,

And colour things to come with hues of  
Night;

The race of life becomes a hopeless flight

To those that walk in darkness: on the sea,

The boldest steer but where their ports  
invite,

But there are wanderers o'er Eternity

Whose bark drives on and on, and anchored  
ne'er shall be.

(CPW, II, 103; 662-70)

The Byronic poetic voice is a '[wanderer] o'er Eternity | Whose bark drives on and on' in its immortality and immutability. Nevertheless, and paying heed to McGann's challenge to 'Romanticism's' own self-representations, that poetic 'bark' is neither ahistorical nor conscious of its lack of 'anchored' meaning. Rather, Byron's works are criss-crossed by a multitude of historiographical discourses which simultaneously juxtapose, complement and contradict one another. That discursive 'pilgrimage' is not one of 'Eternity', but one of/by/through historiography. As seen above, the Byronic text is not destined to arrive on a single monolithic and essentialist singular discourse of history and the past as a whole. On the contrary, that 'pilgrimage' is enveloped by the

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endless and complex cultural practices which voices/forms the discontinuous and at times dissonant historiographical and pluralistic discourses which 'anchored ne'er shall be'.



Appendix

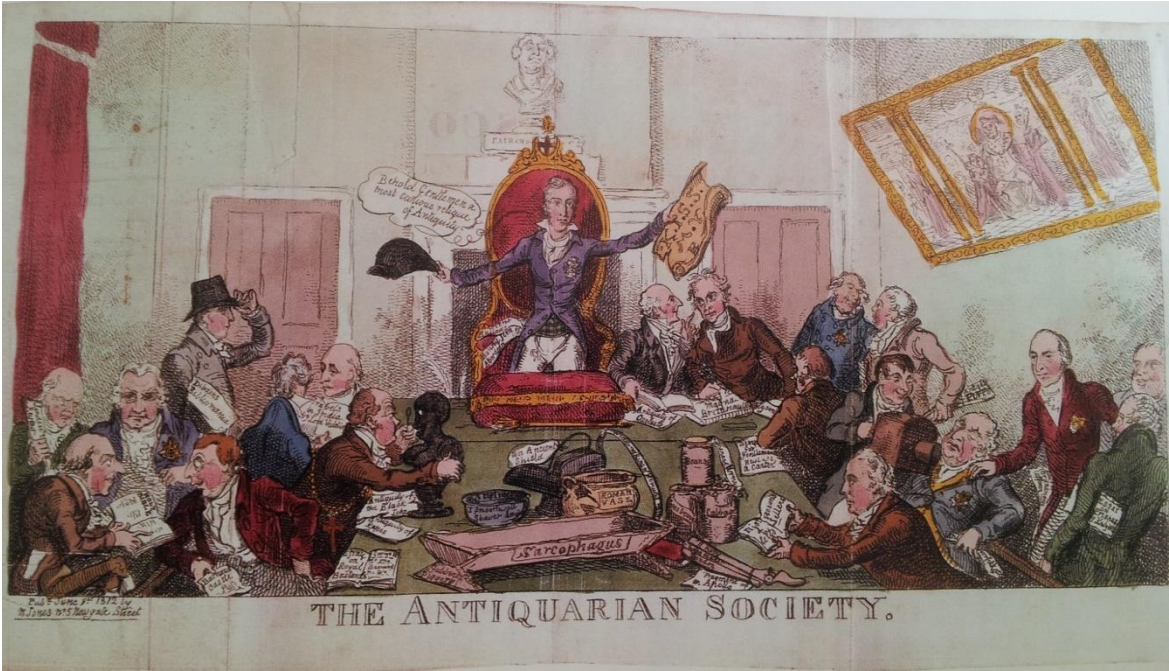


Fig 1. George Cruikshank, *The Antiquarian Society* (1812). Reproduced in Sweet, 'Founders and Fellows', p. 67.



Fig. 2. Richard Westmacott, *The Trial of Socrates* (1818-24).



Fig 3. Thomas Banks, *The Death of Germanicus* (c. 1774).



Fig. 4. Stoldo Lorenzi, *Cosimo I Receiving Tribute from the Towns of Tuscany* (c. 1555).



Fig. 5. Sir Francis Chantrey, *The Signing of Magna Carta (The Reform Act of 1832)* (1840)

All photographs – figures 2 to 5 – taken by me at Holkham Hall, Norfolk. A 360 degrees panorama of the Marble Hall can be accessed at [http://www.rodedwards.co.uk/files/20634/holkhamhallmarblehall/Holkham\\_Hall\\_Marble\\_Hall.html](http://www.rodedwards.co.uk/files/20634/holkhamhallmarblehall/Holkham_Hall_Marble_Hall.html) [accessed 24 July 2015]

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